The Civil Engineering Proposal:

A study employing genre analysis

A DOUBLE PLAN B PROJECT
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Abstract

Civil engineers often use proposals written in response to a Request for Proposal as a means of securing work, namely on public projects. While much research has been conducted on academic genres, such as the research article, less research exists on genres used in professional contexts, such as the civil engineering proposal.

This study employs the use of genre analysis to examine what makes civil engineering proposals successful. Two civil engineering proposals and the Request for Proposal to which they respond are explored, looking at the overall rhetorical structure and use of persuasive tactics. Specialist informants, both proposal reviewers and proposal writers, offer insights regarding the proposal writing process, the role of organization, and the use of persuasive tactics. The results suggest that in order to write a successful civil engineering proposal, civil engineer proposal writers must fully understand the problems associated with the proposed project and that clients and consultants must have established working relationships. The implications these results have for teaching are discussed as are areas for future research.
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Introduction

College composition courses, whether aimed at first language (L1) or second language (L2) students, often teach how to write texts for general academic purposes. Some ESL compositionists argue that the best way to prepare students for writing in any situation, whether personal, academic, or professional, is to provide students with general inquiry strategies and rhetorical principles that can be applied to a variety of situations (Benesch, 2001). When confronted with a new situation, however, such as entering the workforce, many students report the need to re-learn how to write (Woolever, 1989). In essence, these students, despite being armed with general strategies toward writing, have difficulty applying their general knowledge to the texts which occur within specific contexts.

In response to this issue, the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) movement calls for a more specific approach to teaching writing by linking it to specific disciplines rather than broad disciplinary areas (Spack, 1988; as cited in Benesch, 2001). This approach, like the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement which links writing to content-specific courses, helps to contextualize writing within a subject-specific community. By studying particular genres located within specific discourse communities, practitioners in ESP hope to provide students with better informed knowledge about the increasingly dynamic and changing situations in which they find themselves.

The impetus for this study began during my first semester co-teaching the writing portion of a civil engineering project management course, CE 4101. This course is part of a university-wide Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiative and is co-taught by an adjunct engineering professional, who focuses on the project management aspects of the course, and a writing specialist who focuses on the different types of writing likely to be encountered in the workplace.
The writing specialists are graduate student teaching assistants from either the department of Rhetoric or from the English as a Second Language program. Students in this course typically write a number of letters, to both internal and external audiences, and for different purposes, such as thanking a professional, or contesting a questionable ethical decision. Additionally, the students are asked to write a proposal document in response to a Request for Proposal (RFP). All documents are written within the context of an in-class case study project which is for the design and construction of a fictitious auto-parts depot.

In past semesters, prior to my involvement in the course, students evaluated proposals written in response to a RFP for a public transportation project and then wrote a similar document. Proposals written in response to an RFP are typical for civil engineers, who often work on publicly funded projects, such as transportation and transit projects. Other types of engineers, such as electrical engineers, may be less likely to encounter this type of proposal document. While this project management course is offered through the civil engineering department and most of the students are in fact majoring in civil engineering, there are some students who are not civil engineers. When my writing-specialist colleagues and I were discussing the proposal assignment, we acknowledged this fact and pondered over how to best approach this subject so that all students could benefit from the assignment. And while it is important for all students to gain knowledge and practice from their assignments, I didn’t want to lose sight of the needs of the civil engineering students, since they are the students to whom the course is primarily addressed. Additionally, while this course is comprised primarily of native speakers of English, there are non-native speakers of English as well. These concerns raised important questions for me including: What aspects of writing a civil engineering proposal will
be important for civil engineering students to learn? What makes a “successful” proposal in the civil engineering field? What will L2 learners need to know to write effective proposals?

In addition to co-teaching this engineering writing course, I have definite intuitions regarding the proposal writing process because of my background working as a landscape architect. It was while working professionally that I learned the process of proposal writing in response to an RFP. Additionally, I saw firsthand the consequences of writing and presenting a successful proposal; successful proposals gained my companies project work and secured my job.

As a result of the questions posed above and my own interests in and intuitions about the subject of proposal writing, this study explores the overall rhetorical structure of two civil engineering proposals written in response to a single RFP. Through the aid of both writers and reviewers of civil engineering proposals, I hope to gain insights into what strategies are found to be most effective in helping consultants win work. I will suggest that in order to write a successful civil engineering proposal, consultants (writers) must have a complete understanding of the problems associated with the proposed project and that further, clients and consultants must have established working relationships. Also, while the proposal is a persuasive document, it might be useful to approach the proposal as a research project in teaching situations. This study employs the use of genre analysis, as defined by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), to explore these civil engineering proposals. A review of this literature follows.

Literature Review

This literature summary first describes the role of genre analysis and provides a working definition of discourse community and genre, ideas central to the use of genre-based research. Further, examples of genre-based research in action are discussed as are criticisms of genre-
based research in teaching. Then, the civil engineering proposal is defined and contextualized within the working definitions of genre and discourse community. Following this contextualization is a review of instructional materials and conventions in proposal writing. Finally, a justification and presentation of the research questions is provided.

Genre Analysis

In his book, *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*, Swales (1990) begins to set the stage for using genre analysis as a way of analyzing texts to better inform English language teaching. While Swales' approach focuses on post-secondary academic English, this approach to language analysis can be extended to the use of language in professional contexts as well. For example, Bhatia has looked at legal and medical texts (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990).

Bhatia, who models his approach after Swales', suggests that genre analysis can provide significant insight into these often asked questions: "Why is a particular text written the way it is? Why do members of specialist communities write the way they do?" Bhatia, like Swales, advocates the use of genre analysis as a means of taking linguistic analysis from description to explanation. He suggests that it can provide insights into the underlying rationale, or explanation of socio-cultural, institutional and organizational constraints which influence particular genres while considering the conventionalized regularities in the organization of communicative events (Bhatia, 1993). In order to understand the genre-based approach to language analysis, one must first understand the concepts of discourse community and genre.

Discourse Community.

Discourse communities, as identified by Swales (1990), "have a broadly agreed set of common public goals; mechanisms of intercommunication among its members; uses its
participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback; utilizes and hence possess one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims; has acquired a specific lexis; and has a threshold of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise.” (pp. 24-27).

An example of a discourse community would be the students and faculty of the ESL program at this university. In this example, the people engaged in the community have common public goals; we are all interested in teaching English as a Second Language and/or engaging in research and training in the field of teaching English as a Second Language. Intercommunication occurs in a variety of forms including, but not limited to, classroom interactions, advisor/advisee meetings, forums, conference meetings and other types of correspondence such as email and listserves. Information and feedback are shared through these interactions. A number of different genres are common and used within the community, such as the research article or written lesson plan, which help to “articulate the operations of the discourse community” (Swales, 1990, p. 26). Members of the ESL community at large use specialized lexical terms such as TESL, ESL, and pedagogy, but our specific academic program includes even more specialized lexical terms that those outside of the community might not readily recognize such as MELP, CLA, ILES and ESL Forum. Finally, there is membership threshold, and a reasonable ratio of expert (faculty members) and novice (students) members within the community; one must gain acceptance into the community.

Discourse communities are integral to the study of genres because, in part, the people engaged in a discourse community help define the genres and how they are used, as we will see below.
Genre.

What then, is a genre? As defined by Swales (1990), genre “comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style” (p. 58).

A communicative event, as defined by Swales “is one in which language plays both a significant and indispensable role” (p. 45) and communicative purpose is what makes a communicative event a genre. While form, structure or audience expectations influence the construction of a genre, and are important to their study, they are not the foremost defining characteristic. Rather, as both Swales and Bhatia contend, it is the purpose(s) of the communicative event(s) which helps to define the form.

Further, expert members of the discourse community recognize the communicative purposes of communicative events, and help constitute the rationale for the genre. As Bhatia explains, the experience held by expert community members helps to shape a genre and give it a conventionalized internal structure (p. 14). This is important because expert members, who are more familiar with the communicative purposes which help to define the genre, are able to work within the conventionalized constraints to achieve their ends. The conventionalized aspect of genre is important because as Bhatia states, members “must conform to certain standard practices within the boundaries of a particular genre. “It is possible for a specialist to exploit the rules and conventions of a genre in order to achieve special effects or private intentions, as it were, but s/he can not break away from such constraints without being noticeably odd” (p. 14).
One example of genre is this Double Plan B paper. The communicative purpose of this paper is to present research findings and demonstrate to faculty members (expert community members) that I am able to perform research which meets the standards of our department. This paper can not be written in just any form; it must adhere to the conventions of a research paper that are recognized and defined by the experts in this academic community, and if I deviate from these norms, it will be, as Bhatia says, "noticeably odd".

It should be noted that if the communicative purpose of the Plan B project was different, I would engage in a different genre. For instance, if my primary communicative purpose was to demonstrate to faculty my abilities in teaching an ESL or second language course, I would engage in a portfolio project instead of writing a research paper for the Plan B requirement. The conventions of a portfolio project differ from the research paper; thus, as the communicative purpose changes, so does the genre.

My own work on this Double Plan B paper, a specific genre within this discourse community, exemplifies the relationship between genre and discourse community: If my paper is accepted by the experts in our community, I will gain full acceptance as more than a novice (that’s my hope!). In this sense, genre and discourse community work in concert with one another. Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) describe the importance genre holds in admitting members into a discourse community. "Genres are the media through which scholars and scientists communicate with their peers. Genres are intimately linked to a discipline’s methodology, and they package information in ways that conform to a disciplines norms, values and ideology. Understanding the genres of written communication in one’s field is, therefore, essential to professional success" (p. 4). They offer a telling example of a biologist whose paper was rejected by the journal on the basis of an underdeveloped literature review. Only after
conforming to the norms of the conventionalized genre, by providing a literature review complete with a chronology of events in other labs (in the discourse community) which justified the current research, was the paper accepted.

*Studies Employing Genre Analysis.*

Since the development of Swales’ and Bhatia’s work in genre analysis, genre-based research has been used widely in the field of ESP, most notably in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Flowerdew, 2000; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland, 2002). EAP, a branch of ESP (the other being English for Occupational Purposes), generally occurs within the context of academic settings and can address specific disciplines, such as English for Biology and English for Mathematics, etc. Swales’ work on research articles has been particularly influential within EAP and he suggests that research articles follow an hour-glass rhetorical structure, where author(s) move from general to specific information and then back to general information. This hourglass structure is central to his Create a Research Space (CARS) model. Typically, these articles are divided into four sections: Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion (IMRD). According to Flowerdew and Peacock (2001), many researchers have followed his lead by generating an increasing number of studies of abstracts, discussion sections, introductory textbooks, graduate seminars, conference presentations, and lectures.

In particular, Tarone, Dwyer, Geillette and Iceke (1998) conducted studies on the use of active and passive voice in astrophysics papers and argue that the astrophysics paper is markedly different than the “standard scientific’ experimental paper. Specifically, Tarone et al. suggest that the astrophysics paper does not, and furthermore, cannot, follow the typical hourglass rhetorical structure as suggested by Swales. Tarone et al. explain that unlike other areas of scientific research, astrophysics cannot conduct experiments in the same manner as in other
scientific communities. Therefore, in communicating the logical arguments used in astrophysics, these research papers call for a different rhetorical structure.

Likewise, in a study of mathematics articles, White (2004) discovered that apart from an Introduction at the beginning of each article, mathematic articles do not share the same IMRD structure of research articles as proposed by Swales. Furthermore, White asserts that mathematics articles lack the impersonality and use of passive constructions typically associated with the experimental research article. He explains that, given the inherently objective nature of mathematics, mathematicians are less concerned with coming across as subjective and are more concerned with engaging readers in following along with the mathematical process.

As mentioned above, genre-based research is more common in the field of EAP than EOP. Both of the academic studies described above underscore the importance of extending genre-based research beyond general disciplinary boundaries to more subject-specific disciplinary contexts. However, as described by Johns and Dudley-Evans, (1991), given EAP’s dominant force in the field of ESP, it seems that more research in non-academic contexts is needed.

Despite the relatively small number of studies available in EOP, McKenna (1997) offers a study of engineering analytic report writing within professional contexts. The purpose of McKenna’s study is to track “Real-World and Non-Real World themes to see how real-world phenomena are linguistically reconstrued into scientific concepts and data and then reconverted into real-world phenomena” (p. 192). As McKenna aptly points out, part of an engineer’s job is to rename and classify real-world entities or processes into scientific terms for their work as applied scientists; however, these scientific concepts are not easily recognizable or understood by laypersons. This is an important consideration because, according to McKenna, engineers,
unlike most authors writing science research articles, cross discourse boundaries to non-engineering, or non-expert, clients. Thus, one would expect engineers to reconvert scientific concepts into understandable terms for non-expert readers.

As McKenna finds, engineer-writers do sometimes define lexical choices, helping non-expert readers interpret scientific concepts, while in other cases, lexical choices are unclear to non-expert readers. Additionally, McKenna discovered that engineer-writers have difficulty organizing information by sections, often including information from as many as three different sections within the span of one paragraph. He attributes this shortcoming to engineers’ tendency to use narration to explain concepts and processes. To remedy this weakness, he suggests that if engineers “consciously oriented the subject-themes of each sentence to the hyper-theme of the paragraph and to the macro-theme of the report, greater semantic coherence would be inevitable” (p. 209). One wonders whether the same issues regarding lexical choices and organization will hold true in proposals written by engineers.

Pogner (1999) examined how a Danish engineer consultant writer and German engineer client reader collaborated to form a public document regarding energy. Pogner found that while both the consultant writer and client reader worked within the same engineering discourse community, they both had different views of audience expectations. For instance, the consultant writer gave thanks to the client in the written document, upon review, but the German reader client deleted these comments of thanks, declaring them unnecessary. Additionally, the consultant writer and client reader had differing views regarding the actual project problem; eventually the consultant writer agreed to change the text to reflect the client reader’s comments regarding this point.
Looking at what he terms the “self-promotion” genre, Bhatia (1993) provides insights into job application letters in both Asian and Western contexts. Bhatia states that the primary purpose of a job application in the West is to highlight relevant qualifications and experience, whereas in South Asia, the job application letter is used only to enclose the CV or resume and thus misses opportunities to convince readers of the applicant’s strengths. Furthermore, rather than using self-appraisal techniques, such as highlighting one’s credentials, Bhatia notes that Asian applicants may use strategies such as self-glorification, which lack credibility because they appear subjective and unsubstantiated, or adversary-glorification strategies, wherein the applicant attributes greatness upon the intended reader (for example, “...I intend to complete my further studies in my loving great country, United States of America.” Bhatia, 1993, p. 71.).

Genre-based research is helpful in identifying specific discourse community norms, as exemplified by Tarone et al. (1998) and White (2004), as well as trouble spots for certain types of writers and audiences, such as those identified by McKenna and Bhatia. As Hyland (2002) reports, there has been a growing trend in genre-based research to extend analysis beyond the actual text to the context in which these texts are created. For example, Tarone et al. enlisted the aid of an astrophysicist to glean more explanatory information regarding their findings, as did White of mathematicians. As they found, and as Bhatia (1993) and Hyland (2000) suggest, specialist informants can provide important insider insights that the researcher may not know, especially if he or she is unfamiliar with the discourse community in which the genre is being used. Likewise, by extending genre study deeper within the context in which an engineering report was being created, Pogner (1999) was able to glean information regarding how consulting engineers negotiate and create meaning within their discourse community. Thus, genre-studies are taking on ethnographic qualities as well.
Criticism of Genre Analysis and ESP

One of the greatest strengths of genre-based research is its potential to provide authentic learning materials for a more learner-centered approach to language teaching (Belcher, 2006). As Hyland (2004) states, genre-based research is beneficial to instruction because it is explicit and systematic in that it provides clear directives within a framework. Since it is needs-based, it addresses student concerns and empowers them to learn the patterns and conventions in which they are interested. Finally, since it provides a sound base understanding of genre conventions, it encourages students to challenge and think critically about these conventions. And while many ESP practitioners would argue for the usefulness of genre-based research in classroom settings, it is not without criticism. As Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998) note, some teachers worry that using genres promotes a prescriptive rather than descriptive approach to teaching. One potential danger is that learners will come to expect a rigid formula to meet writing needs. As a result, students may lack creativity in their approach to writing and feel constricted in how they express themselves (Hyland, 2004; Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998; Swales, 1990).

Additionally, there is concern that teaching genres out of context could be counter-productive (Hyland, 2004). For example, Flowerdew (2000) warns that while the use of genres in teaching is useful, ‘expert’ models might be misleading to students because they do not closely represent what is expected within a course. Prior (1998; as cited in Benesch, 2001), states that the well-structured genre-based activities which occur within EAP classrooms may not transfer readily to the complex situations students encounter outside of academe.

Finally, there is a general concern for the social, political and cultural implications there are in teaching ESL and ESP. Specifically, there is a concern that teaching genres promotes, or at least does not challenge, dominant discourses. Essentially, the study of genres, especially in
academic contexts, typically occurs in areas where English is the dominant power and culture; by teaching these genres, critical theorists argue that instructors "accommodate" students to the dominant culture (Benesch, 2001; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland, 2004). Pennycook (1994) encourages ESL instructors to examine these concerns critically and implores ESL teachers to engage in critical pedagogy wherein instructors move beyond the role of information transmitters and move into a role of showing students how standard forms or conventions of English developed and how these forms are linked to culture. Moreover, he encourages showing students that the standard forms taught represent only one set of possibilities, and that by understanding this set of possibilities, students can begin to negotiate and represent themselves with their own voice.

These concerns are important considerations when looking at specific genres, such as the civil engineering proposal. In addition to cautioning against prescriptive uses of genre-based research in teaching situations, these concerns point to the importance of fully considering the context in which the genre occurs so students can better understand and critically assess why, when and how they might want to use a particular genre.

*The Civil Engineering Proposal as Genre*

Before discussing the role of discourse community and genre in relationship to the civil engineering proposal, it is useful to describe the situational context in which the civil engineering proposal occurs. By doing so, it is easier to understand the communicative purpose of the proposal.

*The Communicative Purpose of a Proposal.*

Professionals in a wide variety of fields use the proposal as a way to gain something, whether it be funding for projects, authorization to perform work, or support for a proposed
project or plan. Proposals can be internal documents, to be read within a specific organizational context, or external documents addressed to an audience outside of the organization. The proposal document can be solicited, where an outside source requests proposals, or unsolicited, where it is initiated by someone who recognizes a specific need (Holtz, 1998; Houp, Pearsall, Tebeaux, & Dragga, 2006; Kliment, 2006; Lannon, 1997).

The civil engineering proposal is an external proposal written in response to a solicitation to perform engineering services. Clients, usually municipalities or other businesses, solicit proposals from prospective consultants, experienced engineers who will engage in the design and/or construction services, by issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP). By issuing an RFP, clients are able to compare the proposals of a number of competing consultants to determine which consultant best meets their needs (Holtz, 1998; Kliment, 2006). As stated by Holtz, the solicited proposal process, when well used, is an effective method for both the client and the consultant because it provides “the information necessary for sales arguments and for the client’s decision.” (p. 3).

The RFP typically provides some background information, describes the project expectations and required services, and sets out parameters for the proposal submission. The RFP will also explain how the proposals will be evaluated, usually by some sort of point system. As described by Kliment (2006), the RFP is usually evaluated based on how well proposers convey their understanding of the project or concept, their credentials and expertise, and their ability to meet the project requirements. If a budget is required, it too will be evaluated.

The primary objective, and communicative purpose of a civil engineering proposal, then, is to convince and persuade the client of a consultant’s ability and qualifications to carry out a specific civil engineering project. Therefore, in responding to the RFP, civil engineering firms
need to demonstrate their understanding of the client’s needs as well as their own expertise and knowledge in solving the task at hand.

*The Proposal as Genre.*

Looking back at Swales’ (1990) definition of genre as “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style” (p. 58). We can see that the civil engineering proposal can be identified as a genre in that it comprises a class of communicative events with the common communicative purpose of persuading a client of a consultant’s successful capabilities in carrying out a civil engineering project. This communicative goal is recognized by both the client and the consultant submitting the proposal, in keeping with Holtz’s (1998) description of the solicited proposal process. One could argue that civil engineering proposals are a genre in that the client, the parent discourse community, defines the structure and content of the proposal in the RFP requirements and to a certain degree, the consultant abides by these requirements in the written proposal.

When reviewing Swales’ definition of discourse community, we are reminded that discourse communities “have a broadly agreed set of common public goals; mechanisms of intercommunication among its members; uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback; utilizes and hence possess one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims; has acquired a specific lexis; and has a threshold of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise” (pp. 24-27). Here, one could argue that the civil engineering proposal occurs not *within one* discourse community, but rather
between two discourse communities, one a community of consultants, and the other a client community. This is similar to the view presented by McKenna (1997), earlier (p. 9). The consultant community is expert in engineering and has its own set of specific lexical terms, while the client community, who may not be expert in engineering, do not share the same lexical terminology. A new discourse community, or a hybrid community, containing both the client and consultant, seems to be created only when the consultant, members of an engineering discourse community, and the client, members of a municipal discourse community, agree to come together to reach the same public goal, that of working together on some sort of engineering project. As members of this new discourse community, the client and consultant engage in mechanisms to provide information and feedback, and take part in a number of different genres including, but not limited to, planning and public meetings, master plan documentation, and construction documentation.

We can see here, as in the example of this Plan B paper, that being able to follow the constraints within the conventions of a genre helps members gain access to discourse communities. In the case of a civil engineering proposal, by writing a proposal in accordance with the parent discourse community’s expectations as set forth in an RFP, a consultant can gain access to projects. While the proposal provides clients a basis from which to make a decision, it should be noted that clients do not generally choose a consultant based solely on a proposal. Rather, clients use the proposal as a means to narrow their choices and select a final consultant after conducting follow-up interviews (Kliment, 2006).

Proposal Writing Conventions

As both Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) described, the structure of genres is often conventionalized. The civil engineering proposal too, has established generic conventions which
Miller and Selzer (1985) suggest “guide writers in the development of their arguments” (p. 322). These conventions include, but are not limited to, the structural organization of a proposal, what type of information to include, and the use of persuasive moves to meet the proposal’s communicative purpose. Given that the proposal writing process is high-stakes, a growing number of how-to books directed at professionals exist and often, these conventions are taught in technical or business-communication courses. Despite this wealth of information, I was unable to find literature pertaining to the civil engineering proposal specifically. Thus, a review of literature relating to the general conventions of proposal writing, in general, follows.

As pointed out by Wahlstrom (2002) and Miller and Selzer (1985), proposal writing is often included as a stand-alone chapter among other professional writing documents such as letters of application, resumes, memos and reports within technical or business communication textbooks. These books usually provide a general overview of the proposal process, and an organizational model for proposals (See Appendix A). These models vary per book, with the professionally-oriented guidebooks providing a somewhat more comprehensive checklist than the textbooks, but all these books follow the same general patterns. First, proposal writers should offer a summary of the project, followed by a project description, complete with rationale and significance, a plan of work, and a summary of necessary resources. A summary of personnel slated to work on the project should be provided, followed by a budget and any appendices (Holtz, 1998; Houp et al., 2006; Kliment, 2006; Lannon, 1997; Sant, 2004).

In the case of proposals responding to an RFP, the RFP will sometimes (but not always) identify the required organizational structure of the proposal. As Houp et al. warn, “Writers are well advised to follow these instructions carefully to ensure that the proposal is not rejected during the initial screening process because it fails to follow the preparation guidelines.
stipulated” (p. 437). Meyers (1996; as cited in Lagerwerf & Bossers, 2002), however, claims that following the conventional standards may not always be most effective in improving proposal quality.

*Persuasion in Proposals.*

Looking beyond the overall organization of a proposal, it is important to consider other ways in which proposals reach their communicative purpose of convincing the reader that the proposer is best-suited for the job. While all sections of a proposal play an integral role in persuading the reader of a proposing consultant’s capabilities, “Unless your proposal establishes and demonstrates your understanding of the need clearly in the introductory portion (and in terms that do not require a great deal of technical expertise or mental gymnastics to understand), the client may decide that time is better spent on the next proposal.” (Holtz, 1998, p. 8). Therefore, it is important to identify how persuasion is used in proposals.

The importance of the first section of the proposal can not be underestimated. To demonstrate a thorough understanding of the problem, Kliment (2006) recommends that proposer’s pay keen attention to the client’s “hot buttons” which are underlying issues that may or may not be explicitly defined in the RFP, such as concern for environmental features, budget, public participation, concern for operating costs, innovation, minority participation, security and foreign languages (p. 58). Rarely will an RFP explicitly identify all of the underlying business needs for a particular project, but understanding these underlying concerns are integral to producing an effective proposal (Sant, 2004, p. 165). As Kaufman (1996) states, it is important to identify the project needs as “a gap between current and required results or a gap between what is and what should be, not a gap in means, resources, or processes.” (p. 32).
This needs assessment is important not only in conveying a more complete project understanding, but also in developing articulate responses and a client-specific project solution (Houp et al., 2006; Kaufman, 1996; Sant, 2004). All too often, proposers are too quick to jump to a solution without fully understanding the potential problems and needs (Kaufman, 1996). The danger in this is that proposers may miss opportunities to provide benefit and value statements to substantiate their understanding of the project problem and define their solution (Kaufman, 1996; Sant, 2004). By incorporating benefit and value statements into the response, Sant argues that a proposal will be more persuasive and client-centered (Sant, 2004).

Lagerwerf and Bossers (2002), in a study of business proposals, examined reader preferences of different styles used in proposals: informative, persuasive and personal. The researchers created three different versions of a management summary, proposal introduction, and section conclusion by creating informative, persuasive and personal versions. The informative version served as a baseline and was factual, impersonal (without the use of personal pronouns) and not persuasive, according to Lagerwerf and Bossers. The persuasive version was created by adding evaluative adjectives such as successful and non-technical arguments, such as recommended in lieu of proposed. The personal version used active voice in favor of passive and personal pronouns such as we and our. These modified sections were included within short proposals and participants were asked to compare the informative to the persuasive, and then, the informative to the personal. Lagerwerf and Bossers found that participants favored a more informative, impersonal and factual style to the persuasive style while there was no strong preference for an informative versus a personal style. In this study, participants recognized persuasive language as such and did not want to be influenced by it, but rather wanted to make
factual comparisons between each proposal. As Lagerwerf and Bosser explain, "a persuasive style in a business proposal is regarded as a disturbance of the reading goal" (p. 455).

Perhaps one explanation for aversion to persuasion in business proposals is an ineffective use of the tactic. As Sant (2004) identifies in his book, *Persuasive Business Proposals*, one common mistake is to make claims such as "best of breed", "world class", "industry leading", "uniquely qualified", "unsurpassed", and "100% customer satisfaction", but fail to substantiate or qualify the claims (p. 108). The problem with using these claims seems not to be the use of evaluative adjectives or non-technical arguments, but rather, the lack of qualifying evidence to substantiate the claims.

Thus far, I have described what genre analysis is and the importance discourse communities play in understanding the context in which genres occur. The studies described above show the value of employing genre analysis as a way to understand studies in both academic and professional contexts. And while there is relatively little research on the civil engineering proposal in particular, the brief descriptions of proposal writing conventions and means of persuasion as identified in textbooks, provide a starting point by which to analyze civil engineering proposals.

*Justification for this study*

As described at the outset of this paper, Woolever (1989) describes a gap between academe and industry, where increasingly, students entering the workforce feel they need to abandon their former writing instruction and re-learn how to write. While undergraduate writing courses prepare students well for communicating their ideas regarding inquiry and evaluation processing, they neglect issues important to workplace writers: organization for emphasis, formatting for readability, inclusion and exclusion of certain information, and appropriate and
varying tone. Miller and Selzer (1985) make an appeal for further research in nonacademic discourse communities, stating that little research has been done regarding “how working engineers and managers employ the conventions of identifiable discourse communities when they write reports, proposals, and other on-the-job documents” (p. 310). As described earlier, Johns and Dudley-Evans, (1991), make the call for more research in non-academic contexts, as well.

Despite the wealth of information regarding effective proposal writing found in textbooks and journal articles, there is little research regarding what makes civil engineering proposals, in particular, effective. The general overview and range of proposal types presented in textbooks does not reflect the complexity and diversity of proposal writing encountered in the workplace (Jablonski, 1999). Further, as pointed out in the study by Lagerwerf and Bosser (2002), what proves to be effective according to how-to and textbooks is not always deemed effective by proposal readers, the real decision-makers. And as Tarone et al. (1998) exemplified in their study of astrophysics papers, and White (2004) in his study of mathematic articles, what holds true for a broad discipline may not hold true in a more specific one.

Understanding what makes a proposal effective in the civil engineering field is especially important given that the proposal provides a gateway to obtaining more work. It is also important to understand this genre because immigrant engineers are playing an increasingly prominent role in the development of U.S. engineering companies; immigrant engineers established nearly 25 percent of engineering and technology companies founded in the past decade (Duke University, 2007). Furthermore, according to the University of Minnesota’s recommendations for Strategic Planning, the University of Minnesota is making it a priority to recruit immigrant and refugee students to reflect the changing demographics of the Twin Cities
and State of Minnesota (University of Minnesota, 2006). The State of Minnesota welcomed
15,466 immigrants in 2005 - more immigrants than in any year since 1980 - and ranked second
only to California in the number of new refugee arrivals (Minnesota Department of
Administration, 2005). When these statistics are coupled with the University’s position on
immigrant student enrollment, it seems likely that the number of L2 learners at the University
will increase in coming years. Thus, it is hoped that studies such as this can help inform both
ESL classes and WAC courses where the demographics will likely include more non-native
speakers of English. Additionally, given that many engineers hold negative attitudes toward
writing, it is hoped that studies such as this, coupled with college-level writing instruction, will
help prepare engineers for the realities of written communication in the workplace.

In an effort to understand what makes civil engineering proposals effective in order to
inform teaching decisions in the CE4101 course, to benefit both L1 and L2 learners, this study
seeks to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1 – What do experts in the community, both writers and reviewers, identify as
the principles of an effective civil engineering proposal for a public transportation project?

Research Question 2 – What is the overall structure of two civil engineering proposals and to
what extent does the Request for Proposal (RFP) determine the structure of the proposals?

Research Question 3a – What persuasive tactics are used in the Project Understanding section of
the two proposals?

Research Question 3b - What are the experts’ reactions to the identified persuasive tactics used
in the two civil engineering proposals?
Method

Participants

There were seven participants in this study; three municipal client reviewers, and four consultant writers. Throughout this study, reviewers will be referred to as either clients or reviewers; writers will be referred to as writers or consultants. As Bhatia (1993) suggests, it is helpful to enlist the help of discourse community participants as they may be able to provide insights which extend beyond my own. Since this genre occurs between discourse communities, I sought to gain perspectives from both proposal reviewers and proposal writers.

The reviewers were selected based on their employment in transportation or planning divisions of county or state agencies in the Twin Cities metro area. All contact information for the reviewers was publicly available on municipal websites. Reviewer participants R-1, R-2, and R-3 are all male county civil engineers who deal primarily with transportation development and planning. Each one has at least 25 years of experience in the civil engineering field. Reviewer R-1 works in a county adjacent to the metro area and reports that he does not review civil engineering proposals very frequently, while reviewer R-2 has extensive practice reviewing proposals and reports that the process used in his county is often sought after. Both reviewers R-1 and R-2 are primary contacts, meaning that they write the Request for Proposal (RFP) and that they are the primary client for the proposals they review. Reviewer R-3, however, does not usually serve as a primary client contact, but rather has more experience serving as a selection committee member who assists the primary contact in choosing a consultant. Reviewers R-1, R-2, and R-3 are all civil engineers by training, although none of them have received formal training in how to write an RFP or review a proposal, but rather learned these skills on the job.
The writer participants were chosen at random from a list of civil engineering firms listed in the metropolitan telephone book directory. A total of five engineering firms were contacted, but only two firms and a total of four writer participants agreed to provide input for this study. At each writer interview, two people were interviewed: a civil engineer and a representative from the marketing department. Since members of the marketing department and civil engineers collaborate in the proposal writing process, both people were interviewed. Writers W-1 and W-2 work for a mid-sized, regional engineering firm. The office they work out of is fairly new to the metro area and their main corporate headquarters are located out of state. Writer W-1 was formally educated as a civil engineer and has worked in the private sector for his entire career. He has roughly 25 years of experience, but after about 10 years became more interested in marketing and now splits his time between both marketing and engineering. Writer W-2 does not have an engineering background but has worked in engineering firms during her approximately 15-year career. Her role is to receive and review incoming RFPs, track all current and potential projects, and oversee the writing and distribution of all proposals.

Writers W-3 and W-4 also work in a regional engineering firm; their firm is based out of the Twin Cities and has been in business for over 50 years. W-3 is trained as a civil engineer and unlike other engineers at his firm, works with small communities in addition to larger metro-area municipalities. He also splits his time between the engineering and marketing departments of his firm. W-4 plays a marketing role in her firm. A summary of each participant is listed in Table 1.
Table 1. Summary of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Professional Role</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Writing/Reviewing Role</th>
<th>Approximate Years of Experience</th>
<th>Sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R - 1</td>
<td>County Engineer</td>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
<td>Writes RFP/Reviews Proposal</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R - 2</td>
<td>County Engineer</td>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
<td>Writes RFP/Reviews Proposal</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R - 3</td>
<td>County Engineer</td>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
<td>Reviews Proposals</td>
<td>25 -30</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W - 1</td>
<td>Engineering and Marketing</td>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
<td>Gathers, Writes Technical Proposal Information</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W - 2</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>German, Economics</td>
<td>Writes, Edits Proposal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W - 3</td>
<td>Engineering and Marketing</td>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
<td>Gathers, Writes Technical Proposal Information</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W - 4</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Writes, Edits Proposal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Interviews

In order to understand the general principles that make a proposal effective (research question 1), and to gain specific insights into the two proposals evaluated (research question 3b), a total of five face-to-face interviews were conducted. There were two sets of interview questions, one for proposal reviewers (Appendix B1) and one for proposal writers (Appendix B2).

Each interview consisted of approximately 45 questions regarding the RFP and proposal process, participants' background and role in the process, and their reactions toward questions specific to the two proposals being evaluated in this research. The interview questions were developed after the researcher conducted an analysis of two proposals and the RFP to which they both respond. When asked questions specific to the proposals being examined in this study, reviewer and writer participants were presented excerpts taken from proposals. Participants were
not shown the actual proposals or the corresponding RFP to protect the identity of both the
municipality who wrote the RFP as well as the consulting firms who authored the proposals.

Per the instructions of the Institutional Review Board for Human Subject Research, after
reading a consent form (see Appendix C), each participant granted consent to be interviewed
orally. To maintain participant confidentiality, any identifying information, such as names of
local businesses, cities, or people has been changed to a pseudonym or left blank. Each of the
five interviews lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and all interviews occurred at the participants’
offices. It should be noted that reviewers R-1, R-2, and R-3 were interviewed individually, while
writers W-1 and W-2 were interviewed together because they worked together in the same
office. For the same reason, writers W-3 and W-4 were interviewed together.

During all of the interviews, participants were first asked to describe their backgrounds
and then how the RFP/proposal process worked. By commencing the interview in this manner,
participants often answered questions from the interview sheet that had not yet been posed and,
based on discussions, opened up new questions for further exploration. Furthermore,
participants answered many of the questions in a general manner, often citing examples from
their most recent experience either reviewing or writing proposals. In general, the interviews
deviated from the script, resulting in very elaborate responses to some questions, and little to no
answers to others. All five interviews were recorded to an audio writer program, Audacity, on a
laptop computer using an external microphone sitting between the researcher and the
participants.
Data Analysis

Interviews.

All interviews were non-phonetically transcribed using Audacity and Microsoft Word. To answer RQ1, each interviewee's responses were color coded by the researcher according to the following principles which presented themselves throughout the course of the interviews a) relationships, b) audience awareness, c) experience (expertise and special insights), and d) organization and visual impact. After the researcher coded the transcripts, each participant's input was organized horizontally by theme in an Excel document so that all comments regarding relationships were in column A, all comments regarding audience awareness were in column B, and so forth. This allowed for a more straightforward comparison of the responses obtained in each interview. An example of how this data was organized is shown in Figure 1, below.

To complete RQ3b, the interviewees were shown excerpts of the persuasive tactics identified in the two civil engineering proposals in response to RQ3a. The interviewees' responses to each persuasive move are reported in the results section.

Figure 1. Example of organizing principles.
Comparative Analysis - Two civil engineering proposals and the RFP to which they both respond

To answer RQ2, which asks what the overall structure of two civil engineering proposals is and the extent to which the RFP determines the structure of the proposals, and RQ3a, which looks at experts’ reactions to the persuasive tactics used in two civil engineering proposals, the researcher evaluated two civil engineering proposals and the RFP to which they respond. The proposals and RFP are public documents and were previously being used for educational purposes in a civil engineering course at the University where the researcher is currently a teaching assistant. Both proposals were submitted in response to a transportation project north of the Twin Cities in November, 2003. Due to the time constraints and the scope of this project, this paper examines only two of a potential group of six proposals. One of these six proposals was missing pages, and therefore, was not considered as a potential proposal for examination. Of the remaining five proposals, the proposals chosen were what, upon a brief overview, were considered by the researcher to be the best (Proposal A) and the worst (Proposal B). Both of the chosen proposals appeared to use similar formatting and graphic styles, allowing for a somewhat controlled comparison. Proposal A was consistent in its use of headings and other details, such as punctuation whereas Proposal B used a variety of heading types and lacked attention to detail. Proposal A also seemed to provide sufficient project-specific information and included graphics and maps which were readable and relevant to the project; the graphics in Proposal B seemed more difficult to read or seemed less relevant to the project. By evaluating only two proposals, it was possible to take a more contrastive approach to the analysis.

In order to properly evaluate the overall structure of the proposals (RQ2), an examination of the RFP (Appendix D) was undertaken so that the project scope and proposal requirements
could be fully understood. After examining the RFP, each proposal was analyzed in order to describe its overall structure according to sections and pages per section and the degree to which these components reflected the information and requirements presented in the RFP.

Following this global description of the proposals’ structure, and to more completely address RQ1, the Project Understanding section of each proposal was explored and compared in detail. This section was chosen for evaluation because it is the first section of both proposals and therefore gives the first impression of how well a consultant writer understands the project and RFP. Moreover, this section was described primarily through prose, rather than spreadsheets or charts, and provided an equal basis for comparison. The researcher compared the organizational structure of the proposals to the organizational structure specified in the RFP to further determine the extent to which the RFP influences the structure of a proposal.

To answer RQ3a, which looks at experts’ reactions to the persuasive tactics used in two civil engineering proposals, the researcher first identified persuasive tactics within the Project Understanding. Based on the researcher’s previous experience writing proposals as a landscape architect, persuasive tactics were identified as ways in which consultants tried to exemplify a clear understanding of the project while positioning themselves as experts. The researcher looked for examples where writers restated information from the RFP, expanded upon information presented in the RFP, used key terminology, appealed to the client’s knowledge or used evaluative adjectives. After the persuasive tactics within the two civil engineering proposals were identified, experts were asked to give their opinions regarding the persuasive tactics during the interviews (see above).
Results

Research Question 1: *What do experts in the community, both writers and reviewers, identify as the principles of an effective civil engineering proposal for a public transportation project?*

The results presented in this section attempt to answer the first research question and are based on interviews with client reviewers (R-1, R-2, R-3) who write RFPs and review proposals, and consultant writers (C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4) who respond to RFPs in the form of a proposal. Again, clients will be referred to as clients, reviewers or client reviewers and consultants will be referred to as consultants, writers, or consultant writers.

As described earlier, clients typically write a Request for Proposal (RFP) as a means to solicit civil engineering expertise from a pool of civil engineering consultants. Clients define the project scope through the RFP and then distribute the RFP to a pre-selected group of consultants. Consultants respond to the request through a proposal which identifies their understanding of the project and showcases their expertise. In answering the first research question, six principles emerged from the interviews. The first two principles relate to the process of creating an effective proposal, while the remaining four principles relate to the evaluation of a proposal.

*Principle 1: Relationships established prior to the RFP submittal are important considerations in both developing a proposal and selecting a winning proposal.*

In both consultant writer interview sessions, the participants described a "go, no-go" process where first, the person from the marketing department receives the RFP and identifies the key aspects of the project and what services the client is seeking. Then, a group of engineers and marketing representatives discuss whether or not it is in the best interest of the firm to pursue the project. All of the writer participants noted that it is absolutely necessary to have an
established relationship with the client prior to receiving the RFP; further, consultants must know about the RFP prior to its distribution.

(1) W-4: If we just saw an RFP out there, and we didn’t know anybody in the community and it was just a public notice and it wasn’t sent to us, we would not waste our time responding to it. Because the way to win projects is when those relationships are in place, and starting from scratch, someone already has the leg up and it’s just sort of a wasted effort. (W-4, 54-55)

(2) W-4: When we receive an RFP, we don’t want that to be a surprise. We want that to be expected. And then, so there’s all that relationship building that happens prior to the RFP and then all that project specific leg work after. (W-4, 111-113)

(3) W-2: So I think, the majority of the proposals we go after, we have some type of relationship or knowledge of the client that we feel will set us apart from everybody. Otherwise we won’t even bother responding. (W-2, 322-328).

An established relationship is essential because it provides the consultant with an opportunity to meet with the client and gain special insights regarding a specific project, in turn helping consultants respond to the client’s specific needs or ‘hot-buttons’. Often times after the RFP is issued all answers in reference to questions regarding the RFP are made public to all consulting firms. For this reason, consultants often rely upon established relationships to learn more about projects prior to receiving an RFP.

Of course these relationships are also vital after the RFP is issued. Despite the fact that participant reviewers reported efforts to provide clear and detailed project information in the RFP, consultants (writers) often found the opposite to be true. Consultants often feel that the RFPs they receive do not provide a clear project description, making it difficult to provide a
pointed, client-centered response. In these instances, as writer W-4 describes, consultants rely upon relationships in order to clarify information in the RFP.

(4) W-4: Depending on the client, they might have spent a lot of time and have been very thoughtful in developing what they want to see back in the RFP, and then others, I don’t know, they just look on the internet for request for proposals, and ‘this one looks good’ and they download it and they do a find and replace for a city name, because it’s essentially what they want, but it’s not down to the detail because it asks for things that are irrelevant. Well it does [make writing the proposal difficult] and that’s when I think we count on, you know, who has a relationship with that client to say, “you know there was a something unusual in the RFP and we were wondering what you were expecting to get back in your response.” (W-4, 320-328)

Consultants are not the only ones who rely upon established relationships prior to the issuance of an RFP; clients also depend on these relationships both in determining to whom to send the RFP and in selecting a consulting firm. Client reviewers typically only issue RFPs to consultants with whom they have worked in the past or to consultants who are on state or municipality pre-qualified lists. Pre-qualified lists include firms who have the expertise necessary to carry out certain types of work and different municipalities use these lists differently. Some municipalities choose to disperse the available work among the different firms on the pre-qualified list, depending on the size of the project; others use the RFP/proposal process to choose a consultant.

(5) R-1: Well, the state does a pre-qualification and so we go off of that. They have a list on their website and we just pull that off. No [we don’t post to everyone on the MNDOT list], we have umm, maybe a half a dozen or more firms that we’ve used in the past and those are the ones that tend to stay on the list. If someone
is already doing a fairly large project for us already, then we might take them off
the list for that particular project and say, well, you've got work right now. You'll
pass on this one. (R-1, 70-76).

When selecting a consulting firm from a group of proposals, the reviewers all expressed
that they depended upon the experience of their fellow selection committee members when
making a decision, especially regarding past working relationships with proposing consultants.
In the examples below (6 and 7), reviewers R-1 and R-2 state that when fellow committee
member disclose information regarding their past working relationships and experiences with
proposing consultants it helps them make a more informed decision regarding the proposing
consultant.

(6)  R-1: Yes! Yes. That's part of their review, their experience with each of those
firms. It would be important to me if say, the City of ______ worked with so
and so and had a good experience with them, that would mean that's something I
didn't know when I first reviewed them and that would help me. (R-1, 164-170)

(7)  R-2: I really do like the discussion that happens with the panel because different
people have different experiences with a range of candidates. And wow, I didn't
know that. And also they point some stuff. I had not worked in that respect with
that particular person. (R-2, 712-714)

Relationships are a key component of the proposal process, from both client and
consultant perspectives. In fact, as consultant W-2 states, without relationships, a well-written
proposal will not be enough to win a project, primarily because without the existing
relationships, consultants will be unable to gain access to important information, and because
clients rely upon each others' perspectives regarding consulting firms.

(8)  W-2: The biggest thing in our industry, the project, I would say 60 to 70% of the
time, they have someone in mind before the RFP is even comes out. A lot of
people would like to believe that you submit a proposal and it's an even playing field. It's not the case. The proposal, if you have a previous relationship, can get you to there, can get you to the next level, but it's not going to open the door for you. It's all about relationships and networks and that kind of stuff. You could have the most beautiful, most well written proposal and not have ever talked to that client and you won't even make the short-list. And I hate to say that but the proposal isn't going to get you the job (W-2, 750-756)

**Principle 2: Audience awareness is a key component in developing an effective proposal and clients expect consultants to demonstrate audience awareness in completed proposals.**

The client is usually represented by a group of people who will be impacted by the proposed project. These people could be council-persons, county engineers, or project managers and their background, interests, and level of technical expertise may vary. In fact, as writers W-3 and W-4 reported, they believe that their clients' expertise varies, depending largely on the size of the municipality for which they represent. Writers W-4 and W-3 describe the expertise of their clients and how they might adjust their proposal responses accordingly; they spend more time explaining what clients will receive when the client has less expertise.

(9) **W-4:** It [client expertise] varies pretty widely. W-3: Yeah, it's huge. Most of my clients have zero. But then you get. You know, it's tough. Because you know some of these public works or city engineers they have such a broad background, they're not really focused, if they're going out for proposals it's because they don't have the expertise or because they don't have the time. It's one of the two. I'd say that generally speaking, it seems that larger communities seem to have more sophisticated staff and that have, they can tell when they get 5 responses and there's a huge variation in price. Now I think that sometimes with some of the outlying communities, I'm not sure that they understand. You
really have to spend more time I think explaining exactly what they're going to get
[when they don't have as much expertise]. (W-3, W-4, 233-242)

While a diverse selection committee affords clients an opportunity to obtain different
perspectives regarding proposing consultants, it forces consultants to consider a variable
audience with differing levels of expertise and background when writing their proposals. The
consultant must consider the various perspectives from which the audience is evaluating the
proposal and take their interests into consideration when writing the proposal. Therefore, it is
important for the consulting firm to write the proposal not only to the primary client contact, but
to all selection committee members so they can access the information, regardless of any
previous relationships or level of technical expertise. Furthermore, clients expect consultants to
cater the proposal to a variable audience as exemplified by client reviewer R-2:

(10) R-2: First, I'm not going to be the only one reading or interviewing. I don't think
they can overemphasize because they're really supposed to structure it so that
anyone could read and review that proposal. It might seem a little redundant
because I've worked with X person and he's really good with dirt and walls, right.
So I don't have to read Ron's resume, but Bob T from ____ might not [know
Ron]. (R-2, 704-710)

Although consultant participants are privy to this point, they also noted that identifying all the
potential proposal reviewers is no easy task, and poses challenges in providing a targeted
proposal.

(11) W-4: We better [know who is on the review panel]! Yeah, we ask. Sometimes a
RFP will identify that information. Otherwise. Yeah, we need to know. (W-4,
285-288)

(12) W-3: Yeah, but they're (client contact) not always forthright [in telling us who is
on the selection committee]. You know sometimes it will be a council decision
but it goes through staff first. Some communities always follow whatever their staff recommends and other communities; they can choose whether to listen to staff. It’s kind of hard to weed through all of that. And make sure you understand [what the client wants]. That’s really the challenge of the project, client service manager to figure that out. (W-3, 290-293).

Once consultants know who the audience is and what their specific concerns are regarding a project, they can then write an effective proposal response with pertinent information regarding their expertise (see Principle 3, pp. 37-39) and project specific insights (see Principle 4, pp. 39-40). Further, consultants can organize the proposal (see Principle 5, pp. 40-42) to assist the client in his or her review of the proposal and use visuals and layout techniques to improve the readability of the proposal document (see Principle 6, pp. 43-45). Client reviewers expect consultants to address Principles 3-6, and by doing so, consultants demonstrate a keen sense of audience awareness.

When presenting the information within a proposal, consultant participants expressed the importance of taking a client-centric approach, which focuses on the client’s needs first, versus a consultant-centric approach, which puts focus on the consultant’s expertise before the client’s needs. Regarding this concept, consultant participant W-2 said this:

(13) W-2: We do [want to show that we’re the experts] but we also have to be careful that you keep the client in mind when writing the proposal. What does the client want? You don’t know how many proposals, I’ve done a lot of debriefs, and how many proposals I’ve read that’s we, we, we, we, we [the consulting firm]. "We have this many people and they all do this. We’re second to none and we’re the best." And no place in the proposal do they talk about the project or talk about the client. It’s seems like that would be a no-brainer but even in the cover letters that people write, its’ all, “oh, we’re wonderful and thank you for the opportunity.”
Well, hello, be different. You need to focus on the client and they want to hear about themselves and what you can do for them, not necessarily that you've won 50 awards for this or that. That's not pertinent (W-2, 365-375).

It is important to note that participant W-2 is in the marketing department and despite her belief that writing in a client-centric manner is a “no brainer”, many people, primarily engineers, do still use a more “we”, or consultant-centric, approach.

(14) W-2: But we do have people [engineers] here who would like to, you know [write], ‘we’re the best team’ (W-2, 622)

The true value of taking a client-centric proposal writing approach, which takes the client’s specific project needs into consideration, is best exemplified in terms of projects awarded to the proposing consulting firm. As consultant W-4 reported:

(15) W-4: We found that to win work, we talk about what we understand about the clients project and then we talk about and how we personally are qualified to deliver that or how we’re going to approach getting the job done, but we’ve found that just talking about how we’ve done 20 other ways of doing water treatment plants, so we can do yours isn’t effective at winning work. We talk about, well, we understand the specific challenges in this project are, bam, bam, bam, and this how we’re going to go about solving them, is much more effective. (W-4, 74-79)

Principle 3: Clients seek a level of expertise which may or may not be above and beyond the clients’ own expertise.

As stated above, the clients’ technical expertise regarding the services requested by the RFP may vary. All of the client participants interviewed in this study reported that they consider two things crucial in a proposal submission: having expert consultants who demonstrate a clear understanding of what the RFP is asking for, and demonstrating how their expertise is relevant.
Reviewers expect writers to articulate special insights they hold regarding the project in question (Principle 4, pp. 39-40), and they expect writers to show how their expertise is relevant by citing past project experience.

As client reviewer R-1 put it, although the client may have expertise in the field and may have a general idea of what is necessary to complete a project, the client may not have detailed answers regarding the specific project identified by an RFP. Therefore, the client expects the consultant to demonstrate his or her expertise and understanding of what the project entails. Specifically, the client is expecting the consultant to have done some research prior to submitting a proposal, as described by client R-1:

(16) R-1: So, when we were sending this (the RFP) out, we want the consultant. They need to do the drainage part. They need to do the ponding. I don’t have all the answers! So, in order for them to prepare this proposal, they need to check with the city, check with the DNR, do some homework. You can ask me, but I won’t know because I’m new to the project myself. And that’s part of the...you guys are the experts. (R-1, 284-292)

Client reviewers stated that consultants can exemplify their expertise in a number of ways. One way is to provide examples of successful past projects which are similar to the proposed project. Clients also look to the work plan to evaluate how much experience a consulting firm has; if the hours allotted for specific tasks seem reasonable, it is likely that the consultant is experienced. As client R-3 stated, it is also helpful if consultants provide ideas they have learned from past projects:

(17) R-3: So, these guys aren’t just repeating they’re going to do this, they’ve actually thought about it and have a plan to do it. And the other thing I would expect is to bring in some ideas based on their experience on a national scene. [For
example.] In the city of Seattle they had a similar question and this is the
approach they used. If you can bring in some thought like this, and it worked in
this manner. If they can do some things like that, then you have some
confidence that they have some real experience and can guide you through
some pitfalls that others have fallen in.

The example above illustrates how consultants include information regarding expertise
within the proposal. When evaluating proposals, however, clients also consider the past
experience of specific staff members assigned to the project; thus, reviewers depend upon
previous knowledge of the consultant’s expertise, information that is not included within the
proposal itself but rather manifested in the collective knowledge of the review committee. This
concept is in keeping with Principle 1 (pp. 30-33), which states that clients depend upon
established relationships to determine whether or not a consultant has expertise.

Principle 4: Clients expect consultants to demonstrate knowledge of special insights
regarding the specific project at hand.

While it is important for consultants to demonstrate their expertise, as both clients and
consultants agree, being an expert is not enough to win a project. Given that clients distribute
RFPs to a list of consulting firms with whom they have worked in the past or who are on pre-
qualified lists confirming the consultants’ qualifications regarding certain work types (see
Principle 1, pp. 30-33), it is not surprising that consultants should all be expert enough for a
project. As consultants W-4 and W-3 stated, consultants cannot simply state that they are
experts and expect to win a proposal.

(18) W-4: Well, and we’re finding more and more that clients aren’t making decisions
based on technical stuff. I think. W-3: I think they assume that, if you get a
proposal, they assume you have the technical expertise. W-4: Yeah. And a lot
of the firms that we compete against are firms that are very similar to ours. They've been around for a long time, and they have good staff, and you can't win a proposal by saying, but we're more of an expert. You know, I mean, you just can't win on that. (W-3, W-4, 398-403)

Rather, as exemplified by the comments below by client reviewer R-2, successful proposals express special insights into the project which are above and beyond the information presented in the RFP. In addition to addressing any concerns spelled out in the RFP, clients are also looking for insights that they may not have considered. These insights are necessary to set one or two consultants apart from the competition. Client R-2 articulated this point below.

(19) R-2: What we really want to know is do you have any insights about this specific project. So, if they had more insight that showed a real understanding of the things that they would face during design and project development. It showed that they did their homework. In fact, this is why the two that stood out, stood out. Because a lot of consultant proposals start to look the same. It's like, God didn't I read this one 3 weeks ago on a different project? It's like the same thing. What you're really looking for is if they really read your RFP and if they actually spent a little bit of time looking at the project and the context of the project. And then develop a specific work plan for that project and not just a generic approach.

(R-2, 246-264)

The challenge for consultants is to identify what those special insights are and to then articulate them in the written proposal. One way for consultants to identify key aspects is to ask the potential client questions regarding the project after the RFP is issued. However, in an effort to provide equal opportunity to all consultants, clients generally make all questions and responses regarding the RFP available to all proposing consultants (see Principle 1, pp. 30-33). Therefore, it is difficult for a consulting firm to glean special information above and beyond
what is presented in the RFP, particularly information that other consultants do not have, after
the RFP is issued, pointing again to the importance of relationships as articulated in Principle 1.

Principle 5: Clients expect consultants to organize the proposal document in a certain
order.

Often times, an RFP will prescribe a specific order in which information is to be
presented in the proposal. Generally, this order refers to the sections of the proposal, such as
Project Understanding, Work Plan, Cost, etc. According to client reviewers, it is advantageous
for consultant writers to follow the global organization set forth in an RFP because it facilitates
the client’s review process. Clients typically review six or more project proposals at a time and,
in general, they find it easier to compare proposals if they are all organized in the same manner.
Representative of all client participants, client R-3 explained,

(20) R-3: Yes, [it should be presented in the same order as specified in the RFP]. I
think it makes it a lot easier. I mean, you may have half a dozen, you may have
8 proposals that are an inch, two inches thick. So people are trying to go through
that, they’ve got their regular, the rest of their work, so anything you can do to
make that easier for them to review and figure out what you’re saying is going to
be effective. If they have to search and you’re flipping pages, you will one, miss
things and two, you get frustrated and you’re just not going to score them very
high. Make it easy for the guys to know what you’re saying. (R-3, 169-174)

Sometimes though, the RFP does not prescribe an order in which information should be
presented in the proposal. In these instances, all client reviewers agreed that, in general, it is
preferable for a consultant to present information in the proposal in the same order as it was
presented in the RFP. Client R-1, who does not specify an order in his RFPs, finds that
consultants generally present information so that it parallels the order in which information was presented in the RFP and that this structure aids him in his review.

Within each section clients again find it helpful when consultants present their information in the same order as it was presented in the RFP. Both client reviewers R-2 and R-3 pointed out, however, that it may be advantageous for a consultant writer to present information in a different order if the consultant is able to show greater insight into the project by doing so.

(21) R-3: But, um, it's a positive thing if actually the consultant, has some ideas how to do things better or be more effective and provides some information on alternatives and is not totally hemmed in by what the RFP is asking for. And then to do that though, of course, you have to vary a little bit. But that would show that maybe they were thinking about it quite a bit, and maybe their national expertise, in fact their expertise and experience says, you know what you're asking for is good, but have you thought about this, because we think this would help you in what you're trying to accomplish. Now that's a pretty powerful thing if they can make that work. (R-3, 232-238)

Consultant writers too agree that, in general, it is preferable to present information in the same order as it is presented in the RFP to facilitate their clients’ review of the proposal. Yet they echo the sentiments of client R-3: sometimes it makes more sense to present the information in a different order. Making the decision to follow or deviate from the RFP, though, seems to hinge upon a keen sense of audience awareness, as exemplified in the comments by consultants W-3 and W-4.

(22) W-4: If they were also listed in order of importance for a successful project I would (follow the RFP). And I would assume that was the rationale behind the plan in the way they structured it. You know, unless it was mandated, we'd probably emphasize the critical components of the project upfront (if the order in
the RFP weren't listed in order of importance). W-3: Yeah, we'd follow the order.
W-4: It depends on the, if the client says, you know, we want to see this
addressed in this order. And if they didn't, then you know if there's permitting
and it's not going to be a challenge and they listed it first, I would say, yes, we're
going to get the permits and I would move that all the way to the end because it's
a given, it's a formality, it's not how I would encourage them to keep reading that
section.

Principle 6: Document layout and the use of supporting graphics and visuals facilitate
the review and selection of proposals.

Given the reading purposes of the client reviewer, and the fact that they are reviewing
multiple documents relating to the same topic, it is important that consultant writers not only
state their information in an easily understandable manner, but present it so as to facilitate the
reading task of the reviewer. This can be done by increasing the white space and breaking up the
text with pictures and graphics. All of the client participants, as represented by client R-2,
expressed the importance of this concept during the interviews.

(23) R-2: In fact one thing, sometimes it's really hard if they get, I wish I had one, if
they run the text all the way across the whole 8.5" x 11" page and shrink the font.
It's hard to read! Because I want to be able to read them fast. I'm not
necessarily reading it like I'm reading prose. We're getting very, we're trying to
plow through this stuff. You might have to read it more than once anyway. (R-2,
313-318)

While all the clients expressed the importance of readability, when asked if they were
concerned about the physical appearance of a proposal, they stated that it was not a major
concern. All the clients agreed, however, that the physical appearance does in fact leave a
positive impression upon them when they were asked to consider how they would respond to a
proposal that was presented as a written report without any graphics or color. A well-organized layout which facilitates reading and includes supporting graphics and color, for example, demonstrates the consultants’ commitment to the project and overall professionalism. Yet, as summarized below by client R-3, clients also reported that no matter how impressive a proposal looks, they try to evaluate the proposal as much as possible based on project specific content.

(24) R-3: I’m not real concerned with that but on occasion you see one that looks chintzy. It looks cheap. And you know, they’re going to be developing products for you. So it’s like. Um, you know, once again I try to go with content and not worry about that too much and everybody’s gotten pretty sophisticated with that really. I mean with the advent of computers and all the color and everything. It’s not like many years ago, it’s pretty easy to put together something. And once again, I’m not looking for something real slick, and if it’s too slick. Yeah, it’s like, it’s fine, but we still have content we have to worry about and if you try to wow us with this. I’m going to look at what you really say (R-3, 471-479)

Regarding the use of spreadsheets, charts, and graphs, both clients and consultants agreed that they are an excellent means to convey information easily. Consultant writer W-4 aptly explained that one of the benefits of using charts to communicate information is that the “concept is communicated instantly”. Likewise, it helps to facilitate the readability of the proposal document.

(25) W-4: Okay, these people work together all the time and they understand how to work as a team, that concept is communicated instantly [in a chart]. Umm, and I think it’s, this is a proof as compared to a statement. This is proof of that. And you know, ideally, that’s how we want to present the information. (W-4: 648-650)

As all of the reviewers described, providing graphics can be quite helpful in demonstrating expertise and knowledge, but on the other hand, as client R-1 expressed,
consultants need to be cautious when using graphics so as not to give the impression that they have the project problem solved. Client R-1 provided the example below from a recent proposal sent to his office, which illustrates the importance both graphics and a keen sense of audience awareness play in developing successful proposals.

(26)  R-1: So we said in our RFP that staging of the project is very important. All we ask is that you keep 2 lanes of traffic open in each direction. And how you get there, you guys figure it out. It was interesting because some laid it out, they've got nice fold out drawings, "here's stage three, and here's stage 2" they laid it out in here. We weren't asking for this level of detail in the proposal. Some decided to do it, and some just said, "well, we plan to have further workshops to discuss staging. And we plan to uh, using the parameters of the county as given keep the lanes open, we think we'll need this and this", but they don't lay it. Some laid it out more than others. Which they put a lot of thought to it. Which helped them give us their proposal and their fee, but it kind of hurts them because they say, "we've already got it figured out". A big part of our projects is the involvement. This goes through a business area, we want to keep people involved. So, that's what these workshops. We did pick the one with the staging workshops because that's been the process even to get to the point with the layout with the drawing. The businesses and public have been involved. So we're keeping them involved (R-1, 326-340)

To summarize, in response to RQ1, reviewers and writers identified six principles which are apparent in effective civil engineering proposal submissions. These principles are:

2) Relationships established prior to the RFP submittal are important considerations in both developing a proposal and selecting a winning proposal
2) Audience awareness is a key component in developing an effective proposal and clients expect consultants to demonstrate audience awareness in completed proposals.

2) Clients seek a level of expertise which may or may not be above and beyond the clients' own expertise.

2) Clients expect consultants to demonstrate knowledge of special insights regarding the specific project at hand.

2) Clients expect consultants to organize the proposal document in a certain order.

2) Document layout and the use of supporting graphics and visuals facilitate the review and selection of proposals.

The ways in which these principles are applied will be highlighted in answering the remaining research questions.

*Research Question 2 – What is the overall structure of two civil engineering proposals and to what extent does the RFP determine the structure of the proposals?*

In order to answer this question as it pertains to the two proposals, it is first necessary to have a clear understanding of what the RFP is requesting. Thus, a summary of the RFP is presented, followed by an analysis of the overall organization of the two examined proposals.

*The Request for Proposal.*

The Request for Proposal (RFP) analyzed in this study is a seven page, twelve-point font, single-spaced document which outlines the project scope and desired services for a county state highway. The RFP includes the following primary headings (See Appendix D):
Appendix is often considered supplementary; clients may or may not read it. While the overall structure of the proposals closely followed the RFP, a closer evaluation of the *Project Understanding* section showed that while Proposal A presented information in the same order as presented in the RFP, Proposal B presented information in a different order. Namely, Proposal B presented information regarding public participation earlier in the proposal than was presented in the RFP, perhaps as a way to highlight an important aspect of the project as well as their expertise. The organization of the *Project Understanding* section provides some insights into what makes a proposal successful. Research questions 3a and 3b provide a deeper understanding of the persuasive tactics used in this section.

*Research Question 3a – What persuasive tactics are used in the Project Understanding section of the two proposals?*

*Research Question 3b - What are the experts’ reactions to the identified persuasive tactics used in the two civil engineering proposals?*

Research questions 3a and 3b are addressed together, below. To answer research question 3a, the *Project Understanding* section was examined to determine how proposal writers persuaded their audience of their ability to understand and, ultimately, carry out a project. After evaluating the proposals, five persuasive tactics emerged: *Restatement of information in RFP, Use of key terminology, Appeal to Client’s knowledge, Persuasive Language, and Use of supporting details.*

To answer RQ3b, client reviewers and consultant writers were shown excerpts of the identified tactics and asked to give their own opinions. It should be noted that the participants were not given the actual proposals or RFP in order to preserve the anonymity of both the
municipality and firms. A description of the five tactics follows along with a description of participant reactions to the first four tactics.

Tactic 1: Restatement of information in RFP

One tactic used in both proposals was to restate information verbatim from the RFP. Presumably, by doing so, consultants convey an awareness of what the RFP is requesting.

Examples where text was taken directly from the RFP are underlined and include:

(28) The stated project goal is to produce a preferred alignment for the reconstruction of County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 14 from I-35W to I-35E. (Proposal A)

(29) ...and the eastern part of ______ County (as stated in the RFP) is the “fastest growing part of the Metro Area.” (Proposal B).

(30) Therefore (and in direct response to the RFP) our Team proposes to integrate the Systematic Development of Informed Consent (SDIC) into all of our Phase I work. (Proposal B)

The parenthetical use in example (29) is noteworthy because of its similar reoccurrence in Proposal B as seen in example (30).

Participant Reactions to Tactic 1

When the client reviewers were asked to respond to these examples, they stated that they are not impressed when consultants restate information from the RFP and they see it as filler or ‘fluff’, which could turn off the client. To many clients, it is a signal that the consultant is simply regurgitating information from the RFP and not providing genuine insight into the project, the importance of which was illustrated under Principle 4 (pp. 39-40). On the other hand, restating information could be used to set up the reviewer for additional insight, which would be beneficial, as exemplified by client reviewer R-1, below.
(31) R-1: A lot of them do it, as a filler. They fill up pages by just sort of repeating things from the RFP. Well, we just sort of skim through it, and keep going, keep going, maybe we get to something good. Maybe it turns us off. You know in my writing style, I don't know if I'd use it or not. But if it was in quotes, in the other one, I can see how the consultant would repeat it that way. They do. Maybe they're setting up, they want to state something from the RFP because they're gonna use it to make their point. But if it's just to repeat, well. (R-1, 371-381)

The consultant writers added that they rarely restate information verbatim from the RFP, as shown in the above examples. The only instances where they may refer back to the RFP parenthetically, as in example (30), would be if they felt an unusual request was made in the RFP and they wanted to specify that they were addressing the unusual request, or if they wanted to summarize something in the work plan. Both consultant firms reported that using this method of citation in the project understanding section would be unlikely.

Tactic 2: Use of key terminology

Proposal A exhibited the use of specialized terminology in the sub-section regarding public participation (32). The use of italics, used in the proposal, emphasizes the importance of the term potentially affected interests, while the provided analogous term, key stakeholders, defines the term. Furthermore, by providing an alternate definition, the authors of Proposal A ensure that all committee review members understand what they are referring to, exhibiting a sense of audience awareness (Principle 2, pp 33-37).

(32) ...the strategy session will identify those potentially affected interests (PAIs) or key stakeholders who are most likely to be impacted and interested in the CSAH 14 alignment evaluation. (Proposal A).
Proposal B also used specialized terminology, in the form of an acronym, when it made explicit reference to the SDIC (Systematic Development of Informed Consent) process (see 30, p. 55), a requirement set forth in the RFP. Since the SDIC process was referenced in the RFP, this may be a common term. However, the firm cited that the approach is “grounded in Bleiker’s guiding principles”. Bleiker was not explicitly identified in the proposal and it is unclear whether or not all review committee members know who Bleiker is and the importance this person must hold in the SDIC public participation model. By referencing a known expert in the field, the consultant presumably positions themselves as expert in the field. However, if the review committee does not know who this expert is, the reference could be meaningless.

Participant Reactions to Tactic 2

When asked their perspectives on the use of special terminology, the interviewed consultant writers reported that they try to avoid the use of acronyms, although consultant writer W-4 indicated that if it were a common acronym, she may consider using it. However, as consultant writer W-2 reiterated below, the audience may extend beyond engineers and may include people with diverse backgrounds. Therefore, it behooves a consultant to clearly define key terms, whether they are assumed to be common or not and demonstrate a sense of audience awareness (Principle 2, pp. 33-37).

(33) W-2: You know, they [client committee members] don’t have MBAs and you want to make it understandable to anyone and not use all the acronyms that engineers tend to use and, does everybody know what this stand for? I don’t have clue what this stands for. (W-2, 701-705)

Tactic 3: Appeal to Client’s knowledge

Both proposals seem to appeal to the client’s knowledge as exemplified in the following sentences:
The County is being proactive in addressing these growth-related impacts by conducting this study prior to the build-out of these areas. (Proposal A)

The RHS Team appreciates the foresight of the County in organizing Phase I with the basic goal of developing a plan and building consensus to go forward. (Proposal B)

Again, we commend the County’s flexibility—its plan provides the possibility for two projects (or more) to proceed in the later phases. (Proposal B)

Notice the contrast between Proposal A’s sentence (34), where The County is the subject, and Proposal B’s sentences (35) and (36), where The RHS Team and we are the respective sentence subjects. In Proposal A’s example (34) the statement reads as a fact, with no reference to the firm writing the proposal and is fairly neutral in its tone. In examples (35) and (36) however, where Firm B serves as the subject, the tone seems to convey a much more direct message of appreciation and one where the firm is the understood expert.

Participant Reactions to Tactic 3

Overall, the interviewed client participants were unimpressed by sentences 34, 35 and 36 and shared the general sentiment that the consultants were “kissing up” (R-1), or “giving a pat on the back” (R-2), that they deemed unnecessary. As client reviewer R-3 put it,

R-3: Developing a plan, building consensus to go forward, showing the foresight, that’s a generic statement that always sounds good. The County is proactive, yeah great, I mean you hear that so often. Oh, you’re being so proactive. I usually blow through those and say, yeah fine, tell me the real stuff. Let’s get to it. Tell me the real stuff, let’s get to it. I wouldn’t [miss these types of sentences]. I, you know, sometimes you’ve got to get things started and you want to say some positive statements at the front. I think that’s all good. [It could be a transition.] But as far as having any big impact. Not for me. (R-3, 368-379)
This perspective was contrary to what consultant writer W-4 felt about sentence (34).

(38) W-4: I like the first one a lot. We use things like that a lot. It’s kind of a congratulatory, you guys are on the right track, you’re doing the right thing, you’re being, I think agencies like to hear that they’re being progressive. (W-4, 503-504)

Consultant writer W-2 stated emphatically that none of the three sentences added any value to the proposal or spoke to the issues of the project but rather served to “stroke the client”, echoing the sentiments of the client reviewers. She would instead recommend writing the sentences to describe how the client has positioned the consultant to proceed with a plan.

Consultant W-4 agreed with this sentiment and further described that sentences (35) and (36) as currently written gave a feeling that the client met the consultant’s approval, a feeling consultant W-4 found presumptuous and inappropriate for a client/consultant relationship. Again, note that in both sentences (35) and (36), the sentences are consultant, rather than client-centric. As noted earlier, under Principle 2 (pp. 33-37), avoiding “we” statements and making sentences more client-fronted, indicates a greater sense of audience awareness.

Tactic 4: Persuasive Language

Given that the proposal is intended to persuade the client of a firm’s capabilities, one might expect a certain degree of self-promotion. Both teams exhibited some instances of self-promotion when mentioning themselves, using evaluative adjectives, such as identified by Lagerwerf & Bossers (2002) and Sant (2004), to reiterate their respective strengths. Proposal B tended to use this type of self-promoting language (identified in italics, sentences 39 – 43, below) more frequently than Proposal A.

(39) In preparing this proposal, the Rigley team performed considerable research by meeting with the various affected stakeholders to understand their concerns and perspectives on the project. (Proposal A)
(40) This section shows that the RHS Team has a complete understanding of the highway corridor and offers the right approach to provide the best value. (Proposal B)

(41) This proposal shows that the RHS Team provides all the right answers. (Proposal B)

(42) The RHS Team offers the best opportunity to achieve such a plan because:
   a. We will be led by Mike Smith, a true veteran of similar corridor studies.
   b. Mike will be closely supported by task leaders with whom he has worked before...
   c. We offer great depth with excellent potential for continuity into Phases II and III. (Proposal B)

(43) RHS has a strong background and current workload in this area, which involves focusing quickly on useful design concepts – particularly for proposed interchanges. (Proposal B)

Participant Reactions to Tactic 4

When asked for input regarding these sentences, the client reviewers, as a group, found sentence (39) to be acceptable although reviewer R-1 qualified his acceptance of the sentence, stating that it should be backed up with evidence that the consultant did indeed meet with affected stakeholders. Furthermore, if this evidence was apparent within the proposal, a sentence such as (39) would be unnecessary.

Along those same sentiments, consultant writer W-2 strongly believed that a sentence such as (39) is unnecessary and that in fact, a client should presume that the consultant has met with the affected stakeholders because it is simply an aspect of coordinating a complete project proposal and part of demonstrating their expertise (Principle 3, pp. 37-39). She felt that to state this fact directly would be redundant.
Consultant writer W-4, however, disagreed, citing that the proposing firm should get credit for doing the research and that furthermore, not all reviewers may be aware that the consultant met with the stakeholders, again demonstrating the importance of audience awareness (Principle 2, pp. 33-37). She qualified her support of sentence (39) however, saying that it is necessary to identify the specific stakeholders.

(44) W-4: The concept though, of letting them know we did our legwork, I think is good. And we should get credit for that and an individual reviewer might be aware that we spoke with them, but maybe not everyone else who cares about the project. So, um, I like that. (531-533) [I would personalize the sentence more] Otherwise it looks like a canned proposal language. I would identify who those [stakeholders] were. (534-535)

All of the reviewers and writers agreed that sentences (40) and (41) were inappropriate for inclusion in a proposal and in fact, could negatively impact the reviewers’ perception of the consultant. As client reviewer R-3 puts it:

(45) R-3: This second one. It’s pretty condescending, pretty arrogant. They have a complete understanding, the right approach and best value. We’ll see. I’d still try to look at the content beyond that, but it doesn’t help them (R-3, 381-382, 389).

The clients also reported that the bullet-point approach used in sentence (42) is effective because it substantiates the initial statement, reflecting the input by both clients and consultants regarding sentence (39). However, both clients noted that they would reword the sentences to make them more project and client specific. As (42) is currently written, the qualifiers are too vague. As consultant writer W-2 stated:

(46) W-2: What are the differentiators, what are, where this is more, I’m not big on this, “We’ll be led my Mike Smith a true veteran” Well, this could be said
differently, "Team leader Mike Smith has done, 45 projects similar to yours in the last 3 years." Now that's a strong statement. Or, "Team leader Mike Smith just finished a project with your neighboring client" Exact same thing. Now that will get a client's attention. Oh! This guy knows his stuff. (W-2, 609-613)

(47) W-2: Yeah. What's a veteran? 3 years in the industry or 20 years in the industry. I mean there are guys here that say, "tell 'em that this guy has been here 3 years." Is that a long time? I mean, I'm not impressed by that. (W-2, 615-616)

By rewriting sentence (42) as consultant participant W-2 suggested, the sentence better demonstrates the level of expertise within the consulting firm, an important factor to clients evaluating proposals (see Principle 3, p. 37-39). Another benefit of sentence (42), as consultant W-4 stated, is that the bullet-point format facilitates the proposal review by making it easier for the reviewer to scan, an important factor identified earlier under Principle 6 (pp. 43-45) regarding layout and visuals.

**Tactic 5: Use of supporting details**

It seems that both proposals demonstrated an understanding of the project by listing items mentioned in the RFP and then providing additional details beyond those given in the RFP. By providing these additional details, consultants could be demonstrating a level of interest and investment in the project, in addition to special insights which are sought after by reviewers, as identified under Principle 4 (pp. 39-40).

For example, the RFP provided some background information regarding the amount of development occurring within the project area. This background information provided a context and justified the need for the project. Both proposals demonstrated their understanding of the need for the highway by reiterating the current and projected growth as stated in the RFP, but the
level of detail provided by each proposal differed slightly. In Proposal A, the firm first stated in general terms that the area is “experiencing tremendous growth”. Then, framed by the word “specifically”, information not stated in the RFP was provided. In the case of Proposal A, the firm cited projections of future employment and population increases between 2000 and 2030. This information was provided under the subheading of 1.1 Transportation/Travel Demand Issues.

Proposal B also provided information regarding growth in the subsection “How well do we understand the project?” Here, the proposal cited the RFP (see example 29) regarding the growth occurring in the area, but rather than providing specific information regarding future growth, the proposal provided supplemental details referring to past data:

(48) Both Centerville and Lino Lakes grew more than 90 percent between 1990 and 2000 and substantially more development is ongoing or planned in the near future (Proposal B).

In contrast to Proposal A, Proposal B did not give any supporting details regarding future growth in their first mention of growth-related issues. In some respects, this is surprising because the project is in response to a highway development which would ultimately address future, long-term needs. However, under the third subheading “How will we reflect community input and forecast the study area’s future?”, Proposal B does allude to future growth when it cites, in bullet-point form, land use development proposals for the following:

(49) • A possible new Vikings football stadium
• The “Racino” - a current and well advanced race track-casino development proposal
• Numerous other commercial and residential developments, particularly in the areas north and east of Centerville. (Proposal B)
So, as in Proposal A, supporting details beyond the RFP are supplied, but unlike Proposal A, Proposal B disperses this information between various subheadings within the section. Bear in mind that in the RFP, growth-related issues are mentioned in the first paragraph of the background information section, the second section of the RFP (See Appendix D). Thus, Proposal B forces the client to seek related information from different sections of the proposal. As articulated under Principle 2 (pp. 33-37), when writers group like information together, it improves document readability and exhibits a positive sense of audience awareness. In this instance, one could argue that Proposal B lacks this sense of audience awareness.

Another example of providing supporting details is in Proposal A’s section 1.2 Alternative Development. In this section, Proposal A discusses the possibility of reconstructing the existing roadway in general terms, as identified in the RFP, but provides supporting details regarding the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing this option, which were not included in the RFP. Furthermore, in explaining the advantages and disadvantages the writers’ addressed environmental concerns which would restrict roadway development in some locations, citing that an island in the area is home to a heron rookery and an eagle’s nest.

The RFP made no mention of these specific environmental concerns; however, it is clear in the RFP that firms should address environmental concerns. By citing the heron rookery, a detail which is quite specific to the project area, the writers seemed to demonstrate a level of local knowledge and expertise (Principle 3, pp. 37-39) as well as some level of investment and insight in the project (Principle 4, pp. 39-40). Additionally, the details presented in Proposal A reflected the order in which they were presented in the RFP, which as exemplified in Principle 5 (pp. 40-42), facilitates the client’s review.
By contrast, Proposal B did not go to the same level of specificity in describing the implications of a future roadway. In the section *How well do we understand the project?*, the proposal mentioned the need to address environmental concerns, but rather than citing specific details, as Proposal A did, the need was expressed in more general terms.

(50) "From an environmental standpoint, there are a number of resources for which adverse impacts would need to be avoided, minimized, and mitigated. These resources include the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Regional Park Reserve, the area's lakes and shorelands, wetlands, and Rice Creek itself." (Proposal B)

In this case, the resources were identified, but the impacts were not. Although the RFP made note of some of the resources, Proposal B did not elaborate by giving any area-specific details, therefore missing an opportunity to convey to the client any special insights (Principle 4, pp. 39-40) they may have regarding the project. As indicated in Table 3, Proposal B included a separate subsection to address environmental approvals but environmental details specific to the project were not included in this subsection either; instead the subsection described potential environmental review processes, processes which are generally included in most, if not all, development projects.

In answering RQ3a, five persuasive tactics were identified: 1) restatement of information in RFP; 2) use of key terminology; 3) appeal to client's knowledge; 4) persuasive language; and 5) use of supporting details. Each proposal employed the use of these tactics differently. Most notably, Proposal A tended to use supporting details which were future-oriented and project-specific, while Proposal B lacked project specificity. Further, while both Proposals used evaluative adjectives as a persuasive means, Proposal B used them more often and with more adverse reactions from all the interviewed participants.
Responses to RQ3b shed some light on the difference between reviewer and writer perceptions of effective persuasive tactics, especially in regard to appealing to the client’s knowledge. While the client reviewers generally do not find these appeals necessary, one writer feels it is important to provide this praise. Additionally, while the use of evaluative adjectives sometimes provoked adverse reactions, it seemed that the lack of substantive evidence supporting the claims was more problematic than the terms themselves.

Discussion

In this discussion, I will first compare patterns found in the results to the literature; discuss the implications these findings have for teaching; and finally, describe limitations of this study and opportunities for further research.

Patterns in the findings

Principles of an effective civil engineering proposal.

In response to Research Question 1, six principles emerged as being influential toward the effectiveness of a civil engineering proposal. While each of the principles is important in their own right, Principle 1 (pp. 30-33), which states that relationships between consultants and clients are important in both developing and choosing a proposal, is particularly noteworthy. At least in this Midwestern context, both consultants and clients would agree that established relationships are related to the principles 2, 3, 4 and 5.

For instance, Principle 2 (pp. 33-37) states that consultant writers must demonstrate a keen sense of audience awareness when writing proposals, and cater the proposal response to a variable audience. While the technical writing textbooks and proposal writing how-to books would agree with this assertion, they fail to mention the importance relationships hold regarding
this fact. As seen in the results, consultants rely on established relationships to determine who exactly the audience is in order to provide an appropriate response.

Relationships are also important in regard to Principle 3 (pp. 37-39), which states that consultants should demonstrate expertise, and Principle 4 (pp. 39-40), which states that consultants should demonstrate special insights regarding projects. In order to show expertise and special insights consultants are expected to look beyond the information presented in the RFP and “do their homework”. Again, relationships play an important role in “doing the homework” because this is one way consultants depend upon to identify important or underlying issues not identified in the RFP.

Principle 5 (pp. 40-42), states that clients expect proposals to be organized in a certain way. While clients do expect consultants to follow the parameters set forth in the RFP because it facilitates readability, as stated by client reviewer R-3 (21, p. 41), it might be beneficial for a client to organize information in a different manner if it can help the consultant demonstrate special insights relevant to the project. This point is significant for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that the conventions of genres are not necessarily hard and fast and there is room for flexibility in communicating ideas within the framework of a genre. This is in keeping with the ideas presented earlier by Bhatia (1993). It is also important in reference to Principle 1 (pp. 30-33) and relationships because as the consultants in this study reported, it is necessary to have a relationship with your audience in order to know the extent to which a writer can alter or change the organization of the proposal. Thus, not only are relationships important, but so is audience awareness.

Finally, as exemplified by client reviewer R-1 (26, p. 44), the use of supporting visuals (Principle 6, pp. 43-45) are linked to relationships (Principle 1, pp. 30-33), audience awareness
(Principle 2, pp. 33-37), consultant expertise (Principle 3, pp. 37-39), and special insights (Principle 4, pp. 39-40). In the case identified by reviewer R-1, a consultant used a visual to show different options for a staging plan. However, the visuals conveyed a message to the client reviewer that the consultant had the project “all figured out” and the client felt that the consultant should have focused more on process rather than result. In this case, it is likely that a strong relationship between the client and consultant prior the RFP would help the consultant identify this value and thus result in more effective use of visuals.

Again, each of the six principles which emerged during this study is important in their own right, but the importance of relationships can not be underscored enough. Further, it is a significant finding, at least in this context, because its importance was not mentioned in the reviewed literature.

Organization.

Pertaining to Research Question 2, which examined the overall organization of a civil engineering proposal, the results show that, in general, the civil engineering proposals examined in this study follow the same general organization as prescribed by technical writing and how-to books (See Appendix A). That is, these proposals first provided a summary of the project in a project understanding section, a solution to the project problem in the form of a work plan and deliverables, a description of available resources and personnel, and finally, a cost estimate. While Proposal B did follow this general order, its inclusion of the Cost section in the Appendix does seem out of place. Excepting this, it is unsurprising that these proposals followed the same overall organization, given that both proposals were written in response to an RFP which prescribed the organization of the proposal. As stated by both the how-to books and the reviewers interviewed in this study, it behooves proposal writers to follow the directions set forth
in the RFP because proposals that do not meet the organizational requirements risk being rejected during initial screenings (Houp et al., 2006). However, as evidenced by client reviewer R-1, even if the RFP does not spell out a specific organization, proposal writers generally write civil engineering proposals with this same overall organization (see p. 41). Clearly then, there is a genre convention in how proposals are organized overall and by adhering to these genre conventions, writers meet the expectations of the reviewers. Thus, the proposals in this study did not appear “noticeably odd” (Bhatia, 1993), at least in their overall organization.

When looking at the organization within the *Project Understanding* section Proposal A and Proposal B differed. Namely, while Proposal A presented information in the same order as in the RFP, Proposal B changed the order in which information was presented and interspersed information regarding justification for the project throughout the *Project Understanding* section, rather than presenting this information in one place, as evidenced in example (33). As McKenna (1997) learned in his study of engineering report writing, engineers sometimes have difficulty including information within the proper sections of the report. It would seem that the same trend is occurring in Proposal B.

An important consideration regarding this point is that, evidenced by the participants in this study, proposals are often written as a collaborative effort with both engineers and non-engineers contributing to the writing process. It could be that in Proposal A, a non-engineer, marketing person helped to ensure that the proposal was cohesive and non-repetitious in its organization. Proposal B was perhaps written more exclusively by engineers who seem less able to effectively organize information. Since the actual authors of the proposals were not interviewed for this study, this reasoning is speculation. However, based on my own experience in the landscape architecture/architecture profession, depending on the project scope or size of
the consulting firm, technical personnel (landscape architects, engineers, etc.) tend to write more
documents if the firm is small simply because marketing and support staff are not present.

*Persuasion in Civil Engineering Proposals.*

Based on the findings in this study, and in response to Research Questions 3a and 3b, there seem to be two major aspects relating to how writers can be persuasive in writing proposals. The first aspect is in the content of the proposal itself and the second aspect is how this content is presented.

The quality of the content within a proposal plays a crucial role, as evidenced by Principle 3 (pp. 37-39), which states that reviewers are looking for expertise, and Principle 4 (pp. 39-40), which states that reviewers expect a demonstration of special insights. The important distinction here is that both expertise and insights must be relevant to the specific project. In the *Project Understanding* section in particular, reviewers want to be assured that prospective consultants (writers) fully understand the project at hand. The only way consultant writers can do this effectively is if they have a clear understanding of exactly what the RFP is requesting. As suggested by Kliment (2006), as well as the consultant writers and client reviewers interviewed for this study, it is important for proposers to identify the ‘hot buttons’ associated with the project so that when writing the proposal they can focus their responses to these specific considerations. Only then will client reviewers be impressed.

However, an important aspect of understanding what these ‘hot button’ issues are seems to be dependent not only on a thorough understanding of the written RFP, but also on the existing relationship of the proposing consultant and the potential client (Principle 1, pp 30-33). It seems that prospective consultants rely on these relationships when conducting research in preparation for the proposal submittal or as consultant W-4 stated, to clarify information in a
poorly written RFP (4, p. 31). Furthermore, given that many client reviewers will not discuss the project once the RFP is made public, these relationships become even more essential. The importance of these relationships was all too apparent during the interviews; however, there was no mention of the importance of relationships in any of the reviewed literature.

In articulating the content within the proposal, the findings and literature both suggest that client-centric language is more favorable than consultant writer-centric language. This means that writers should put their understanding of the client’s problem before writing about their own expertise, as exemplified by writer W-2, who noted that although this should be a ‘no-brainer’, many engineers still begin sentences with phrases such as ‘we are the best’. These types of phrases seem to raise a red flag for the reviewers interviewed in this study, where they want the writer to really prove that they are indeed the best. As Sant (2004) warns, these types of claims, which use evaluative adjectives, are ineffective largely because they are unsubstantiated.

*Implications for teaching*

The results of this research are important because while many of the students in civil engineering classes in U.S. settings are native speakers of English, an increasing number of students are non-native speakers of English. As the University of Minnesota anticipates more diversity in its student population, to reflect the changing demographics of the state, it can be expected that more classes will include non-native speakers of English. Thus, the need for ESL awareness in courses not specifically designated for ESL populations, such as the civil engineering course that I currently teach, will become more necessary.

While the civil engineering proposals examined in this study do seem to follow the same overall organization as prescribed by technical writing and how-to books, based on this research
and my experience teaching in the CE 4101 the results point to some areas where more attention could be paid. Admittedly, this research provided few, if any, hard and fast rules regarding effective proposal writing, and thus the principles and tactics described in the results are speculative. Yet, engineering students, both L1 and L2, likely need more practice conducting research in preparation for the actual proposal writing, developing relationships, organizing information within each section of the proposal, substantiating claims with evidence, collaborating with one another, and preparing for oral presentations and interviews.

Research.

Conducting ample research is essential because it allows writers to provide substantiated support which highlights their expertise and special insights regarding a project. This point is especially important for L2 learners because as evidenced by Bhatia’s (1993) study of ‘self-promotion’ genres such as the letter of application, L2 writers may not exemplify their past experience and expertise and may instead rely on self-glorification or adversary-glorification strategies.

Thus, in order to provide relevant and substantiated evidence, the first step in developing an effective proposal is to research the project fully and analyze the RFP document. Houp et al. (2006), Kliment (2006), and Sant (2004), provide sample RFPs in their books which begin to help with this task. Both Sant and Kliment advise proposal writers to read between the lines when reviewing RFP documents and to look for gaps between what the client issuing the RFP knows and what they expect as a result. Notably, while Lannon (1997) stresses the importance of understanding an RFP document, he does not provide an example of how to evaluate such a document in his technical writing textbook, a shortcoming in my mind. Based on my experience teaching the CE 4101 course over the past two years, evaluating the RFP can be a difficult task
for all learners, although L2 learners seem to have more difficulty reading between the lines. An example of how to evaluate an RFP document would be especially helpful for L2 students (although, arguably, it could prove useful for many L1 students as well). In particular, this exercise needs to be scaffolded and broken into two steps: 1) identify the obvious project requirements listed in the RFP; 2) ask why these are requirements to determine what the underlying requirements are and where there are gaps in knowledge. Students need to ask themselves questions such as, “Why is the client requesting this? Why does the client care?” By asking and then answering these questions, the proposal writer is better positioned to provide information in the proposal that is truly project specific and not a mere regurgitation of the RFP document, something reviewers disliked.

*Developing relationships.*

Second, given the importance relationships hold in the proposal writing process, I would also argue that students should go one step further in defining the project requirements by asking questions of the person who issues the RFP. As shown in this study, proposal writers depend on client relationships in order to gather project-specific information and ultimately, win a proposal. It could be a worthwhile exercise for students to practice developing these relationships by contacting the person who issues an RFP. In my own experience teaching proposal writing in the CE4101 course, I have noticed numerous students write statements such as, “It is assumed from the RFP that the client wants X.” This statement is not persuasive and does not show that the client, or in this case, the student, has done their homework. By contacting the person who writes the RFP with questions, students are forced to consider the project requirements before they actually start writing the proposal. This exercise also offers opportunities for other types of professional communication such as requests for information via email.
Organization within sections.

As shown by the findings of this study, it seems that writers have little difficulty organizing the proposal as defined by the RFP into appropriate sections overall. However, as evidenced by the way in which Proposal B included information in various places throughout the Project Understanding section and McKenna’s (1997) assertion that engineers have difficulty organizing their thoughts within sections, it seems that teachers could focus on how information is organized within each section of the proposal. As stated earlier, one of the benefits of ESP-based genre studies is that it arms instructors with authentic teaching materials (Hyland, 2004). In addition to telling students that one of the conventions of proposal writing is to present information in the same order as it was presented in the RFP, students should evaluate existing proposals in conjunction with the RFP to which they respond and look for patterns between the documents. Students should note the order in which information is presented in the RFP and then note the order in which information is presented in the proposal.

There are two benefits to using authentic materials in this task. First, students note the convention first-hand. Second there is an opportunity for discussion when the information is presented contrary to the convention, such as exemplified by Proposal B where the order differs from the RFP. This discussion is important because it affords the opportunity to discuss why a writer might choose to organize information in a different order and to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of doing so. For example, as both the client reviewers and consultant writers noted, it is sometimes necessary to put information in an order contrary to the RFP, especially if one wants to focus attention a particular aspect of the project. By looking at authentic examples in this way, instructors avoid prescriptive teaching and challenge students to think critically about the genre conventions.
Substantiating claims.

At the paragraph and sentence level, students need to learn how to substantiate their claims, especially when using evaluative adjectives. In my own teaching in the CE4101 course, it seems that many students, both L1 and L2, have a natural inclination toward writing, "We are the best" type statements. After showing the students in my class examples of client reader reactions to these types of statements, they seemed to better understand why clients did not react favorably. They began to understand why it is important to substantiate claims with value statements that are relevant to the specific project at hand. Having this knowledge of the reader perspective is a good first step in helping students learn to substantiate their sentences.

The next step is helping student develop substantiated claims. As Sant (2004) suggests, writers should first acknowledge the client's request that moves beyond simply restating information from the RFP but instead taking a broader perspective and describing why the client is making the request. Then, the writer should add a value statement, such as why such a requirement or solution will benefit the client. Finally, to substantiate the claim, writers should provide relevant and project-specific support.

Collaboration.

One unexpected finding of this research was the degree to which non-engineers participate in the proposal writing process. During the interviews with writing consultants, which consisted of both an engineer and a person from the marketing department, it seemed that engineers are often charged with the task of research and preliminary proposal drafts, while marketing personnel are depended upon for compiling all of this information and writing one cohesive document. Therefore, since it seems that many proposals are written as collaborative
projects by both engineers and non-engineers, it may be useful to approach proposal writing as a group endeavor within the classroom, although more research is needed in this area.

Oral interviews.

Finally, it is important to remember that a well-written proposal may not be enough to win a consultant work; the consultant may also need to interview with the potential client and give an oral presentation. Although oral presentations and client interviews were not a focus of this study, it seems that the proposal should be taught in a more holistic fashion, where students learn all the components of the proposal process. Students should learn to develop relationships prior to writing a proposal, write a proposal, and engage in an oral interview.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations associated with this study. To begin, the sample size of only two civil engineering proposals is small and thus broad generalizations regarding the genre of civil engineering proposals is impossible. Also, it was unknown which of the original six proposals was actually awarded the project since the two proposals examined in this study were chosen based on the researcher’s intuitions.

Second, the proposals used in this study were very specific to that of transportation planning in a Midwest American context; the field of civil engineering is quite broad and it would be useful to examine not only more proposals, but proposals which are written in response to other types of civil engineering problems and different cultural contexts. Furthermore, the proposals examined in this study represent only one type of proposal, that which is written in response to an RFP. In fact, there are other types of proposals which may take on different forms, such as a letter, and vary in their formality. Different types of proposals work differently and may require different teaching approaches. Of course, one advantage of looking at only one
facet of the engineering field is that it narrows possibilities for difference, but by taking a wider perspective, it would be possible to see if the patterns found in this study can be generalized to a wider variety of civil engineering proposals types, or if they are specific to the transportation engineering proposal written in response to an RFP.

In addition to looking at a small sample size, another limitation of this study is the fact that only the Project Understanding section of the proposals was examined in any depth. This was done because the Project Understanding section was written primarily in prose for both Proposals A and B. The other sections of the proposals did not lend themselves to easy comparison because they differed in their use of charts, graphs, and prose. However, by examining the other sections of the proposals, it would have been possible to gain a more holistic view of the proposal to see how writers presented their project solutions in the form of work plans, deliverables and qualifications. Furthermore, graphs, charts and figures play an important role in communicating ideas, as evidenced by consultant writer W-3 who stated that she is able to “communicate ideas immediately” through a table. An opportunity to examine the usefulness of visual aids was also missed in this study and warrants further research.

Additionally, while the researcher tried to balance rhetorical and linguistic analysis with information gained from specialist informants, the depth of this study is admittedly shallow. A closer examination of ‘moves’, similar to the IMRD moves described by Swales for research articles, would hopefully bring to light more useful patterns which could be beneficial in teaching contexts. Further research regarding how and what language is used to negotiate meaning while developing relationships and gathering information in support of a proposal could also be beneficial to the study of pragmatics and could have useful pedagogical implications. In
regards to data analysis, there is an obvious limitation in that there was the only person conducting coding. Thus, there is the possibility for poor inter-rater reliability.

Another shortcoming of this study was the way in which interviews were conducted. As mentioned in the Methods section of this paper, the interviews were inconsistent in that some interviewees elaborated at great length about some questions leaving little time to pursue other questions, while other interviewees elaborated less on some subjects and more on others. Additionally, since the participants were shown excerpts from the two proposals, as opposed to the proposal in its entirety, it is possible that the responses regarding the excerpts do not accurately reflect how information was conveyed. For example, in the cases of unsubstantiated sentences (see examples 39-43, pp. 59-60), it may have been worthwhile to examine the surrounding sentences and paragraphs to verify the extent to which the unsubstantiated sentences were supported. While the use of excerpts was useful in protecting the identities of the authors of the proposals being examined and the RFP to which they responded, their use did limit the depth of the findings.

Finally, it would have been extremely useful to interview the actual writers of both the RFP and the proposals to gain deeper insights into why authors organized and wrote the proposals the way they did. As it stands, there is much speculation regarding why authors made particular choices. For instance, it is not entirely clear why Proposal A followed the RFP more closely in the *Project Understanding*, whereas Proposal B opted to focus on the public participation aspects of the project. However, given that this study occurred three years after the RFP and proposals were written, the authors may not have remembered the reasoning behind their choices after all.
Areas for future research

The results of this study point to a number of areas for further research. To begin, this study examined only civil engineering proposals in a Midwest American context, and while the results show what is effective in this cultural context, it would be useful to do a similar study in a non-American and preferably, non-Western context in order to understand what the expected norms are for different cultures. For instance, as exemplified by Bhatia’s (1993) study of job application letters, Asian applicants relied more heavily on personal appeals and did not use the same persuasive strategies as their Western counterparts. Given that the proposal is a persuasive document, it would be useful to understand how non-Western engineering proposals are used and written by different cultural groups so that ESP instructors would know what to focus on in their teaching. Additionally, more ethnographic studies such as Pogner’s (1999) provide insights into how cross-cultural communication and power dynamics influence the development of engineering reports; it would be valuable to broaden these studies to include engineering proposal documents as well.

Additionally, it would be useful to study different types of proposals, such as proposals which are written as a letter, to determine whether or not there is a common psychology across proposal types. For instance, are layout and readability important factors for all proposals? To what degree is organization important? It would be useful to know if the tactics found in this study hold true for other proposal types as well.

As evidenced by the results of this study, a crucial aspect to any successful proposal is the ability to clearly define the project problem. And while relationships play a key factor in defining and identifying these problems, based consultant reviewers remarks, it seems that the overall quality of the proposal depends largely on the quality of the RFP. When RFPs are not
well written, proposal writers reported being frustrated in formulating a project-specific response largely because the problem was not well defined in the RFP. Since the reviewers interviewed in this study reported that they all learned how to write RFPs on the job, it might be worthwhile to study the RFP as a genre so as to teach students how to write not only proposals, but RFPs as well. By learning how to write both RFPs and proposals, students (as future professionals) might be better equipped in defining and describing project problems.

Consultant writer W-2 alludes to another area of future research when she states, “the proposal isn’t going to get you the job” (8, p. 33). All the consultant writers interviewed echoed this sentiment and as the client reviewers confirmed, a well-written proposal is just the first step in winning a project. Consultants and clients need to develop strong working relationships before the RFP is even issued, and after writing the proposal, many clients interview consultants before making their final decision. Thus, it could be very fruitful to examine how consultants develop strong working relationships with their clients and what role both written and oral communication play in developing and maintaining these relationships. This type of research could be especially useful as the engineering field becomes more both more diversified both in terms of culture and gender. Further, given the importance relationships hold in determining a winning outcome, one might even ask the question, “How badly can a proposal be written and still win?” This would shed light on what are considered the most important tactics and conventions in proposal writing. Finally, the interview process itself could be examined.

As mentioned earlier, the role of collaboration in developing civil engineering proposals warrants further research. The participants in this study were not only civil engineers. Rather, civil engineers and marketing personnel collaborated together to formulate a cohesive proposals.
Furthermore, sub-consultants often contribute to the proposal, providing input on their own services.

Conclusion

The results of this study show that in general, civil engineering proposals do follow the overall organizational structure as prescribed in technical writing and how-to books. Thus, organizing civil engineering proposals according to the genre conventions found in this study is a good first step toward developing an effective proposal. Yet, to be truly effective, writers must show a full understanding of the proposed project by providing relevant and project-specific support that demonstrates special insights and experience. As stated by both writer and reviewer participants in this study, established relationships between the client seeking services and the proposing consultant are crucial to developing a full understanding of the project and being able to provide such support.

This study points to areas for development in teaching practices; namely, to approach proposal writing as a research project so students learn to effectively evaluate the RFP and identify the project problems, gather appropriate supporting evidence, and learn to develop relationships via other communicative means such as email. By approaching the proposal in this manner, it is hoped the L2 learners, as well as L1 learners, will be better positioned to think critically about developing effective proposals as they move into the professional world.
Postscript: The winning proposal

As mentioned earlier, one limitation of this study is the fact that the two proposals examined were chosen based on the researcher's criteria. Thus, it was unknown if either of the two proposals examined were actually awarded the transportation project. After the completion of this study, the researcher contacted the county project engineer to determine which proposal was actually awarded the project; neither of the proposals examined in this study won. The winning proposal was in fact the proposal identified in the Methods section as the proposal which was missing pages and therefore not considered.

The purpose of this Postscript section is to apply the knowledge gained from studying Proposals A and B to see how it compares to the actual winning proposal. Based on information taken from the winning proposal and correspondence with the county project engineer, I will first examine how the principles identified under Research Question 1 apply to the winning proposal. I will then examine Research Question 2, the structure of the proposal, and finally Research Question 3, persuasive tactics. As shown below, many of the principles and tactics derived by examining Proposals A and B apply to the winning proposal.

Research Question 1: What do experts in the community, both writers and reviewers, identify as the principles of an effective civil engineering proposal for a public transportation project?

Principle 1: Relationships established prior to the RFP submittal are important considerations in both developing a proposal and selecting a winning proposal.

Clearly, relationships held an important role in determining the winning proposal. As the county engineer stated, below (51), the previous working relationship with the consulting firm was a determining factor in selecting the winning team.

(51) "They also proposed a very experienced project manager, who we have good history with. Most consultants had a very good understanding of the project and
a good issues map. It really came down to their project team and past history of being able to deliver such a project.” (Anoka County Project Engineer, personal communication, May 14, 2007)

Second, the consulting firm acknowledged this working relationship directly in their written proposal. In their project understanding section, they wrote:

(52) Jack Smith, P.E. our Principal-in-Charge and Project Manager, is highly qualified to manage all aspects of the proposed project and has worked closely with Anoka County staff on numerous highway projects. (Winning Proposal)

Principle 2 Audience awareness is a key component in developing an effective proposal and clients expect consultants to demonstrate audience awareness in completed proposals.

It can be speculated that this proposal adhered to conventions of audience awareness in that the proposal followed the structure prescribed by the RFP. Additionally, the writers were client-centric in their sentence structure (see below, examples 53 and 54, p. 87).

Principle 3) Clients seek a level of expertise which may or may not be above and beyond the clients’ own expertise

Principle 4) Clients expect consultants to demonstrate knowledge of special insights regarding the specific project at hand

Regarding Principles 3 and 4, the winning proposal does demonstrate special insights regarding the specific project. In particular, the winning proposal includes a subsection within the Project Understanding section regarding the need for a Transportation Analysis. The RFP did not specify the need to identify this section, yet it is pertinent to the project and included in the proposal.
5) Clients expect consultants to organize the proposal document in a certain order.

The winning proposal was organized in the order prescribed by the RFP.

6) Document layout and the use of supporting graphics and visuals facilitate the review and selection of proposals.

Supporting graphics seem to have played an important role in determining the winning proposal and conveying a strong understanding of the proposed project. When asked why the winning proposal won, the county project engineer stated that in addition to providing a thorough written project understanding, the winning consulting firm provided an “excellent issues map.” (Anoka County Project Engineer, personal communication, May 14, 2007) An issues map usually consists of aerial photograph of the proposed project area with areas of special interest indicated on the map. For instance, the issues map identified important environmental areas and key commercial districts.

Research Question 2 – What is the overall structure of two civil engineering proposals and to what extent does the RFP determine the structure of the proposals?

As stated above, the winning proposal followed the overall organization as identified in the RFP.

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Note that the winning proposal included 6 pages in the *Project Understanding* section and only 2 pages in the *Work Plan and Schedule* section. This differs considerably from the two proposals examined in this study. After reading the winning proposal, much of the information included in the *Project Understanding* section was related to what the consulting firm would do to address the project needs, in essence providing a synopsis of the anticipated work plan. The two proposals examined in this study tended not to include their work plan information in the project understanding section. More research to determine whether or not reviewers appreciate having both a description of the project and an overview of the work plan included in the project understanding section is necessary.

The winning proposal presented information in the *Project Understanding* section in the same order as in the RFP using the same sub-heading titles as in the RFP (see Table 6). The winning proposal added one sub-section, *Transportation Analysis*, immediately after the *Alternative Alignment Analysis* sub-heading.
Table 6. Order of information relevant to Project Understanding section presented in RFP compared to Proposals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RFP</th>
<th>Proposal A</th>
<th>Proposal B</th>
<th>Winning Proposal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Background Information</td>
<td>• Transportation Issues</td>
<td>• General project understanding</td>
<td>• Alternative Alignment Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Alternative Analysis</td>
<td>• Alternative Development</td>
<td>• Public Participation</td>
<td>• Transportation Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Environmental Documentation</td>
<td>• Public Participation</td>
<td>• Alternative Development</td>
<td>• Environmental Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Public Participation</td>
<td>• Summary</td>
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<td>• Public Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Alternative alignment comparison and selection of preferred alignment,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Alternative Alignment Comparison and Selection of Preferred Alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Project management, meetings and coordination.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Project Management, Meetings and Coordination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 3a – What persuasive tactics are used in the Project Understanding section of the two proposals?

Tactic 1: Restatement of information in the RFP

The winning proposal does not restate information in the same manner as by the other two proposals examined in this study. Rather, the winning proposal restated information from the RFP when it used the bullet point lists from the RFP for the Alternative Alignment Analysis, Environmental Impacts, and Alternative Alignment Comparison. While the writers of the winning proposal provided significant support beyond the bullet point list for the Environmental Impacts section, less support for these bullet point lists was offered the other sections. In some ways, restating the bullet points in this winning proposal is surprising because as reviewers
mentioned earlier, they do not like it when writers restate or regurgitate information from the RFP.

Tactic 2: Use of key terminology

The winning proposal identified most of the acronyms used in their proposal such as, potentially affected interest, (PAI) and Environmental Assessment, (EA). One acronym was not defined, the FHWA (Federal Highway Administration), presumably because it is known by reviewers.

Tactic 3: Appeal to client's knowledge

The winning proposal does not appeal to the client’s knowledge in the same manner that Proposal B does, using structures such as, “We appreciate the foresight the County has…” Rather, the winning proposal takes a more subtle approach, as exemplified by the following examples:

(53) As a result, Anoka County sought federal funds for improvements to this corridor in cooperation with the surrounding communities. (Winning Proposal)

(54) Realizing that obtaining consensus from such diverse interests would be a challenging task, Anoka County has recommended the SDIC – Systematic Development of Informed Consent – approach to public involvement for the project. (Winning Proposal)

In these examples, the winning proposal seems to take a client-centric approach to their writing in the same manner as presented by Proposal A.

Tactic 4: Persuasive Language

The winning proposal does not use evaluative adjectives frequently and does not make “We are the best…” type statements as seen in Proposal B. The winning proposal does use evaluative adjectives when describing the project manager:
Jack Smith, PE our Principal-in-Charge and Project Manager, is highly qualified to manage all aspects of the proposed project and has worked closely with Anoka County staff on numerous highway projects.

As seen earlier in this research study, one must substantiate a claim when using an evaluative adjective. In the example presented above, the winning proposal does substantiate the claim highly qualified, by stating that the project manager has worked closely with the County. Here again, we can see that relationships play a role in determining the quality of this substantiated claim; County staff will know the degree to which this statement is true or not based on their previous relationships. Additionally, we can see the degree to which writers rely on readers knowing information beyond what is written in the proposal. For instance, in this example, the writer states that the project manager has worked on numerous highway projects; specific projects are not cited here because presumably, the reader knows what these projects are.

Tactic 5: Use of supporting details

The winning proposal provided ample supporting details, relevant to the specific project. In particular, the winning proposal included nearly one page of text regarding a Traffic Analysis. While this aspect of the project was not mentioned in the RFP, its inclusion in the proposal shows specific insights into the project. Additionally, as in Proposal A, the winning proposal provided specific environmental information regarding wildlife (eagle and heron) and Native American archaeological sites.

Conclusion

In general, the winning proposal exemplified many of the principles and tactics identified in constructing an effective proposal. In particular, we can see from the project engineer’s comments the importance previous relationships had in determining who actually won the
proposal. Furthermore, we can see that writers depend upon this relationship when conveying information; it may affect the degree to which claims are substantiated.

One of the primary differences between this proposal and the two proposals examined in this study is the fact that the winning proposal included more details about the consultant will do to address the project in the Project Understanding section. More research is needed to know whether or not reviewers favor this type of writing or not.

Finally, as the county project engineer pointed out, cost was a determining factor in selecting a consulting firm.
References


Minnesota Department of Administration. (2005). Record number of immigrants arrived in Minnesota in 2005. (Media Release). Retrieved from Minnesota Department of Administration State Demographic Center Web site:

http://www.demography.state.mn.us/resource.html?id=18677


University of Minnesota. (2006, February 3). Transforming the University of Minnesota: Final Recommendations of the Task Force on Undergraduate Reform: Student Support. Retrieved April 20, 2007 from University of Minnesota Transforming the U Web site:


Wahlstrom, R., (2002). Teaching the proposal in the professional writing course. Technical Communication (40)1, 81-88.

### Appendix A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidebook Organization Conventions</th>
<th>Textbook Organization Conventions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Reporting Technical Information</em>, Houp et al., 2006</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Cover
- Letter of Transmittal, Executive Summary
- Table of Contents
- Statement of your Understanding of the Problem
- Scope of Offered Services, Organization of team and reporting relationships
- Resumes of key team members
- Proposed Schedule for completing the work
- Record of experience on like projects
- Firm honors, awards, and publications
- References, Fee (if asked)
- Other supporting materials.

#### Section 1.
About the client, Understanding the Requirement

#### Section 2.
Discussion, The Requirement, Analysis, Approach

#### Section 3.
Proposed Project, Project Organization, Management, Plans and Procedures, Staff, Deliverable Items, Schedule, Resume

#### Section 4.
Qualifications and Experience, Relevant Current and Recent Projects, Resources

##### Miscellaneous
Front Matter, Appendixes

#### 1. The Business Case
Cover Letter, Title Page, Table of Contents, Executive Summary, Pricing and Payback analysis

#### 2. Solutions and Substation
Solution in significant detail, including: deliverables, operational description of proposed equipment/system, training, documentation, implementation Pricing/cost analysis, Scope of Work, Project plan/master schedule, Project team, resumes, organization chart, Subcontractors, References, Case Studies, Testimonials

#### 3. Conclusion
Summary of Key Points, Request for Action

#### 4. Appendices
Terms and Conditions, Glossary/nomenclature, Marketing materials

#### 1. Introduction
Statement of Problem and Objective, Project Background and Need, Benefits, Qualification of Personnel, Data Sources, Limitations and Contingencies, Scope

#### 2. Body
Method, Timetable, Materials and Equipment, Personnel, Available Facilities, Needed Facilities, Cost, Expected Results, Feasibility

#### 3. Personnel

#### Budget

#### 4. Appendixes
Appendix B1

Rhetorical Structure of Civil Engineering Proposals

Name/Pseudo name: ______________________________________

Company: ______________________________________________

Work Phone: ____________________________________________

Work E-mail: ___________________________________________

Municipal Reviewer Interview Questions – Proposal Reviewers

Personal Experience
  1. How many civil engineering proposals have you reviewed?

  2. Have you ever written civil engineering proposals? Can you explain your experience? Did you enjoy it?

  3. Please explain to me how the RFP/Proposal process works in your municipality.

  4. Why do you review proposals? What is your primary goal when reviewing a proposal?

  5. Are the proposals you review typically in response to a Request for Proposal (RFP)? If not, why would you receive and review a proposal?

  6. Who usually writes the RFP? How do you determine what information to include in the RFP? Do you usually write the RFP as the sole author, or do you collaborate with others? If you collaborate, with whom do you collaborate and how?

  7. Did you have any formal training about how to write an RFP? Where, when and how did you learn?

  8. Did you have any formal training about how to review a proposal? Where when and how did you learn?

  9. Are you the only person to review a proposal? If not, who else reviews the proposal? What are you looking for when you review it? What would others be looking for? What are the criteria in assessing a proposal?

10. Do you enjoy reviewing proposals? Why or why not?

11. To what extent do strong writing skills impress you? Do strong writing skills have any impact on whether or not a firm will be awarded a project?
12. What is the relationship between you and a firm during the process of submitting a proposal? Does the relationship change after a proposal is accepted, and how does the relationship change? Does communication between you and firms change before and after a proposal is accepted? For instance, is the degree of formality different at different stages of the project (before proposal acceptance and after).

13. Do you usually know the firms who submit proposals? Does any previous experience working with particular firms influence your decision when reading and choosing among proposals?

14. Why do you choose to hire a consulting firm for projects? How familiar are you with the type of work you are asking a consulting engineering firm to do? When you choose a firm, do you consider the firm to be of more, less or an equal expertise than you?

15. If you are looking for an expert, what is the most effective way for a firm to convey that they are experts and competent? Is it possible that a firm can ‘over-emphasize’ their expertise? How can you tell this through their writing?

Proposal Reviewing

16. What type of information is typically included in a proposal submittal?

17. What type of information should/should not be presented in a proposal?

18. In your opinion, what is the most important information to be conveyed in a proposal? What is the most important section? What is the next most important section and why?

19. Please rank the following sections in order of importance: Project Understanding, Deliverables, Background and Experience, Availability, Work Plan and Schedule, Agency Participation, Cost.

20. How can a proposal convey that a firm is invested in the project and knowledgeable?

21. How do you expect the structure and content of the proposal to be divided among sections? Is it dependent upon the RFP? How does the content organization impact your assessment of the proposal?

22. Do you expect the information to follow the same organizational structure of the RFP? What are your impressions if it does/does not?

23. Is it important to present the information parallel to the RFP within each section or just for the general section organization? What are your impressions if the information follows the RFP? What if it doesn’t?

24. Does the information in proposals ever differ from the order presented in the RFP? How does it differ? What is your reaction if it differs?
25. Should the information be repeated between sections? For instance, what would be your impression if the firm’s experience was mentioned in the project understanding section?

26. Do you usually read the proposal from beginning to end or do you read certain sections first and other later? In what order to you read and evaluate the proposal?

27. What type of information do you expect to see in a proposal that is beyond the information presented in the RFP? To what degree should information in the proposal expand upon the information presented in the RFP? How should it be presented (after something stated in the RFP is mentioned, through the use of visuals, etc.)? Why should additional information be presented?

28. Is it important for a firm to restate information from the RFP verbatim in the proposal? Why/why not?

29. Look at the following sentence: 
   "...and the eastern part of Wood County (as stated in the RFP) is the "fastest growing part of the state." 
   Do you think the parenthetical mention of the RFP is effective? Why/why not? Is it important to cite the RFP?

30. Assuming that when a firm responds to an RFP, they are trying to position themselves as experts in the field, what are your opinions regarding the following sentences: (For example, do you think it is important that the firm recognize the County’s efforts? Do you find any of these sentences to be overly direct or overly-flattering?)
   • "The County is being proactive in addressing growth-related impacts by conducting this study prior to the build-out of these areas."
   • "The RHS team appreciates the foresight of the County in developing a plan and building a consensus to go forward."
   • "We commend the County's flexibility – its plan provides the possibility for two projects to proceed in the later phases"

31. Given that a proposal is intended to persuade you that a particular firm is the best for the job, what are your opinions regarding the following sentences: (Are these appropriate for a proposal submittal? Why/why not? Do any of these sentences seem too direct?)
   • "In preparing this proposal, the Rigley team performed considerable research by meeting with the various affected stakeholders to understand their concerns and perspectives on the project."
   • "This section shows that the RHS Team has a complete understanding of the highway corridor and offers the right approach to provide the best value."
   • "This proposal shows that the RHS Team provides all the right answers."
   • "The RHS Team offers the best opportunity to achieve such a plan because:
     a. We will be led by Mike Smith, a true veteran of similar corridor studies.\"
b. Howard will be closely supported by task leaders with whom he has worked before...

c. We offer great depth with excellent potential for continuity into Phases II and III.

- "RHS has a strong background and current workload in this area, which involves focusing quickly on useful design concepts – particularly for proposed interchanges."

32. In which section do you think the above sentences would most likely be found: Project Understanding, Deliverables, Background and Experience, Availability, Work Plan and Schedule, Agency Participation or Cost? NOT ASKED

33. If an RFP states that cost should be included in the last section of the RFP, would you expect to see this information in the Appendix, or elsewhere? What is your impression of including the cost information in the Appendix?

34. What information would you expect to see in the Appendix?

35. How many pages per section?

If you were reviewing a proposal, and the RFP stated that the proposal must include information regarding the understanding of the project, deliverables, background and experience, availability, work plan and schedule, agency participation, and cost, how many pages would you expect to see devoted to each section, for a total of 15 pages? Keep in mind that when the proposal is evaluated, the project understanding, background and experience, work plan and schedule and cost sections will each be worth 25% of the proposal assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight (as specified in RFP)</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages of Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Project Understanding</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deliverables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Background and Experience</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Availability</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Work Plan and Schedule</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Agency Participation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Cost</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total Pages</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

36. In the Project Understanding section of a proposal, two firms utilized different ways of subdividing the section. Firm A used a numerical scale and title while Firm B used questions to indicate subheading titles. Do you prefer either of these approaches? Explain why you do/don’t prefer each choice. Are there any advantages to using these approaches? Do headings matter?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Main Heading</strong></th>
<th><strong>Firm A Headings</strong></th>
<th><strong>Firm B Headings</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subheadings</td>
<td>Project Understanding</td>
<td>Project Understanding and Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Transportation/Travel Demand Issues</td>
<td>How well do we understand the project?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Alternative Development</td>
<td>How will we reflect community input and forecast the study area's future?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>1.3 Public Engagement/Involvement</td>
<td>How will we define the area's transportation needs and develop alternatives?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Summary</td>
<td>How will we address project environmental approvals and set a path for Phase II?</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

37. Do you think that firms use information from previously submitted proposals when writing a new proposal or do you think they start from scratch for every new proposal? To what extent do you think 'recycled' information (ie, project information sheets, etc.) is this acceptable? What sort of impression does it leave on you?

**Visual Impact**
38. Do you expect to see pictures, charts, and graphics in proposals? What types of visuals do you expect to see? Why should a firm use visuals? What type of information do visuals convey beyond the picture? (For instance, that a firm is able to effectively communicate land use plans via visuals to the general public.)

39. Are you concerned with the physical appearance of proposals? Why/why not? What makes a proposal look good? What effect does your overall first visual impression have on your assessment of the proposal?

40. How do you determine the page length of the proposal?

41. Do you have any preferences regarding font size and layout (columns or not) of the proposal?

42. How do you determine how many graphics and visuals are sufficient? Is quantity as important as quality?

43. Is there anything that you would like to add that we haven’t discussed?

44. May I contact you if I have further questions?
Appendix B2

Rhetorical Structure of Civil Engineering Proposals

Name/Pseudo name: ________________________________

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Work E-mail: ________________________________

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- “RHS has a strong background and current workload in this area, which involves focusing quickly on useful design concepts – particularly for proposed interchanges.”

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Firm A Headings | Firm B Headings
---|---
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          | 1.3 Public Engagement/Involvement | How will we define the area's transportation needs and develop alternatives?
          | 1.4 Summary | How will we address project environmental approvals and set a path for Phase II?

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51. Is there anything that you would like to add that we haven’t discussed?

52. May I contact you if I have further questions?
Appendix C

CONSENT FORM

The Rhetorical Structure of Civil Engineering Proposals

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding the rhetorical structure of civil engineering proposals. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a civil engineer, civil engineering professor, or municipal reviewer of civil engineering proposals. This study is being conducted by Alyssa M. Ruesch, a graduate student in the program in English as a Second Language at the University of Minnesota. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to research the rhetorical structure of a civil engineering proposal. Specifically, we are examining how civil engineering proposals address the topics set forth in a Request for Proposal (RFP) and how the proposal serves to persuade governing bodies of a particular firm’s expertise. We would like to investigate what elements make a civil engineering proposal successful. It is hoped that the insights gained from this study will better inform future instruction.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to participate in a one-hour, face-to-face interview regarding your experience writing or evaluating civil engineering proposals. We would also ask that you answer any follow-up questions. Please note that an audio recording will be made of the interview.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

There are no risks or benefits associated involved in participating in this study.

Compensation:

You will receive no payment for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that we may publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you nor your company or educational institution. Research records and audio recordings of the interviews will be stored securely and only the researcher and my university supervisor will have access to the records. When the study has been completed, the records and recordings will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.
Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Alyssa M. Ruesch. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at:
Alyssa M. Ruesch
ILES
214 Nolte Center
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN 55455
(608) 213-0308 or e-mail rues0022@umn.edu

You may also contact this researcher’s academic advisor:
Elaine Tarone, Professor
English as a Second Language
331G Nolte Center
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN 55455
(612) 624-2023 or e-mail etarone@umn.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects’ Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.
Appendix D

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL – CSAH 14

Goal: The project will produce a preferred alignment for the reconstruction of County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 14 between I-35W and I-35E within the cities of Centerville and Lino Lakes in Anoka County.

Background Information:

Recently, the eastern portion of Anoka County was described as the "fastest growing part of the Metro Area." Substantial growth has occurred in the Centerville and Lino Lakes area over the past ten years and substantially more development is planned in the very near future. CSAH 14 is classified as an A-Minor Arterial connector/expander and is a vital link between Lino Lakes west of I-35W and Centerville and I-35E. Anoka County was successful in obtaining federal STP funding for fiscal year 2005 to reconstruct CSAH 14 between I-35W and I-35E. The project is located in the cities of Centerville and Lino Lakes, wholly within Anoka County.

The general concept of the project is to construct a four-lane highway between I-35W and I-35E. While the original concept was to improve the existing CSAH 14 on its existing alignment, local concerns are now causing us to consider alternative alignments, other than the existing alignment, to make this connection. It is assumed that an alternate alignment would be located north of Peltier Lake.

The federal funding does not include the overpass at I-35W or an interchange at I-35E. The reconstruction of CSAH 14 (Washington County Road #8) from a two-lane to a four-lane highway between I-35E to TH 61 is included in a separate project tentatively scheduled for commencement in 2004. (The interchange is not included.)

Scope of Project:

Anoka County is seeking consultant services to provide a scope of alternative alignments, appropriate public involvement, and environmental review documentation to select a preferred alignment for the reconstruction of CSAH 14 from I-35W to I-35E.

It is anticipated that the consultant’s proposal will include looking at various schematic designs for the interchange configurations at the connection points of CSAH 14 at both I-35W and I-35E.

This RFP for consultant services is for Phase I of a three-phase design process that will ultimately lead to construction documents. The three phases are anticipated to be:

Phase I: Alternative alignment evaluation, preliminary environmental documentation, and public participation.
Phase II: Preliminary engineering for the preferred alternative, public involvement, and final environmental documentation (Project Memo, Environmental Assessment (EA), or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)).

Phase III: Final design engineering, public involvement, and preparation of final construction documents (plans, specifications, and cost estimate).

The consultant chosen for Phase I may, or may not, be considered for continuation of Phase II or Phase III at the sole discretion of the County.

The project will include coordination with many different groups some of which are: Anoka County, the City of Centerville, Columbus Township, City of Lino Lakes, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Rice Creek Watershed District, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, Metropolitan Council, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Services, and US Army Corps of Engineers.

WORK TASKS:

The consultant shall prepare an Alternative Analysis Report utilizing the following work tasks:

1. Alternative Alignment Analysis

The consultant shall prepare an analysis of possible alignment for CSAH 14 and its connections to I-35W and I-35E. Alternative designs should include consideration of:

- Improved safety
- Improved circulation between land uses and road corridors in Centerville and Lino Lakes
- Improved mobility between I-35W and I-35E
- Minimizing environmental impacts (see next section)
- Access and safety for businesses along the existing CSAH 14 corridor
- Access and safety for residential uses along the existing CSAH 14 corridor
- Access and safety for the Rice Creek Chain of Lake Regional Park
- Consolidation of access points
- Connection to existing road systems
- Construction complexity (foundation soils, drainage, etc.)
- Other modifications that may be appropriate to accomplish the connection

The consultant shall prepare traffic projections for proposed alternatives based on the year 2005 and 2025. The consultant will coordinate with the City of Centerville, Columbus Township, and City of Lino Lakes, to assure that all planned developments are incorporated into the study traffic projections, as well as the standard percentage factor used by Mn/DOT and Anoka County.

2. Environmental Documentation:

The consultant shall prepare appropriate environmental review documentation for the alignment alternatives. The environmental review shall follow the Federal guidelines and the recommendations in the Mn/DOT Highway Project Development Process (HPDP).
The environmental review for each alignment must document the following:

- Flood plain impacts
- Farm land impacts
- Archaeological impacts
- Park land impacts
- Wetland impacts
- Ecologically-sensitive items impacts
- Water quality impacts
- Noise impacts
- Air quality impacts
- Endangered and protected species impacts
- Historical property impacts

3. Public Participation

The Systematic Development of Informed Consent (SDIC) method of public involvement shall be examined and followed from the beginning of the project work.

The consultant will be required to prepare for and participate in public meetings. The consultant will prepare and provide handouts describing the project and provide display alternative alignment schematics along with proposed typical sections on aerial photos for review by the public. The consultant will be required to prepare written responses to the publics' written comments received at such meetings and include these comments/responses on the appropriate environmental review documentation.

The consultant will also participate in city council, township and/or county board work sessions and regular meetings as necessary with Centerville, Columbus Township, and Lino Lakes.

Monthly status meetings with the Project Management Team, consisting of representatives of Anoka County, the City of Centerville, Columbus Township, and the City of Lino Lakes, will be required as well as monthly updates to the project progress schedule. Other meetings with involved agencies, businesses, and the public will be scheduled as necessary in the best interests of SDIC.

The consultant shall keep a record and orderly files of all correspondence with all agencies, local governments, and the public involved in the project. This information shall be made available to the Project Management Team electronically and/or at the regular monthly meetings. Minutes from all meetings shall be provided to the Project Management Team shortly after the meetings.

4. Alternative Alignment Comparison and Selection of Preferred Alignment

In the analysis of the possible alternatives for CSAH 14, alternatives will be compared as to function in at least the following ways:
RFP--CSAH 14 FROM I-35W TO I-35E

- Impacts to the environment
- Traffic operations including Level of Service
- Mobility and accessibility to both I-35W and I-35E
- Impact on residents and businesses in Centerville, Columbus Township, and Lino Lakes
- Impact on Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Regional Park
- Access management
- Right-of-way implications
- Project delivery schedule (to completion of construction)
- Level of required detailed environmental documentation, i.e., Project Memorandum, Environmental Assessment (EA), or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
- Estimated construction cost
- Traffic impact during construction
- Ability to satisfy permitting requirements for the alignment alternatives

5. Project Management, Meetings, Coordination:

The consultant will perform all work necessary for the effective coordination of the project work to insure that activities are completed on time, within budget, and in accordance with State and Federal laws, rules, and regulations.

Management and administration of the project will include communications with Anoka County, the City of Centerville, Columbus Township, the City of Lino Lakes, and other required groups necessary to complete the alternative analysis for CSAH 14. The consultant will be required to coordinate alternative analysis with all agencies and municipalities involved.

PROJECT TIME SCHEDULE AND DELIVERABLES:

The project work will commence within one month of the RFP deadline, immediately upon selection of the consultant team. The consultant will prepare a project schedule based on these start and completion dates (utilizing Microsoft Project or other approved project management software) and will monthly update the schedule with the Project Management Team to insure the schedule is maintained.

The consultant is to develop a work plan/schedule with, but not limited to, the following deliverables:

- Monthly Progress Meetings with Anoka County, City of Centerville, Columbus Township, and City of Lino Lakes staff, including update of schedule
- Layout schematics on aerial photo of each alignment alternative
- Traffic Projections (2005, 2025)
- Level of Service (LOS) Analysis (2005, 2025)
- City Council Work Sessions with the Corridor Cities
- Agency, Business, and Public Coordination Meetings
- Appropriate Environmental Review Documentation
• Draft Alternative Analysis Report
• Final Alternative Analysis Report
• Public information meetings to address Alternative Analysis
• Public Information Meetings to address Environmental Review Documentation
• Response to Agency and Public Comments Environmental Review Documentation
• Electronic files of Alternative Analysis Report and summary of Preferred Alternative with revised estimated construction cost and project completion requirements and schedule

Information to be Provided by Anoka County:

Anoka County will provide the following information to the successful consultant:

1. Half-section maps of all alternative alignment corridors

2. Existing traffic count data

3. Four (4) years of crash data

4. Construction/record drawings of affected County highways

Contact for Questions:

Prospective responders who have any questions regarding this request for proposal may call or write:

Lyndon Robjent, Assistant County Engineer
Anoka County Highway Department
1440 Bunker Lake Blvd. NW
Andover, MN 55304-4005
(763) 862-4237  lyndon.robjent@co.anoka.mn.us

Proposal Content:

The proposal shall be limited to not more than fifteen (15) pages, not including cover letter, examples of work, graphical materials (maps, pictures, and drawings), personnel qualifications, and items required under #7 below.

The following will be considered minimum contents of the proposal and must be submitted in the order listed:

1. A statement of the objectives, goals, and tasks to show the firm’s view and understanding of the nature of the contract.
2. A description of the deliverables to be provided by the firm.

3. An outline of the firm's background and experience with examples of similar work done by the responder and a list of personnel who will conduct the project, detailing their training, work experience, and hourly rate. The project manager assigned to the project must be stated in the proposal and shall remain throughout the project, as long as he/she is still employed by the firm. No change in other personnel assigned to the project will be permitted without the written approval of the agency project manager.

4. A statement of the firm's availability to perform the work.

5. A detailed work plan that will identify the major tasks to be accomplished and timeline for completion to be used as a scheduling and managing tool, as well as the basis for invoicing.

6. Identification of the level of the sponsoring agencies participation in the contract, as well as any other services to be provided.

7. Cost to provide services identified in this RFP. Responders to this RFP are also required to include a lump sum estimation (non-binding) to provide services for the future Phase II and Phase III portions of this project.

8. The forms and documents required under other sections of this Request For Proposal.

**Delivery of Proposals:**

All proposals must be sent to:

Lyndon Robjent, Assistant County Engineer
Anoka County Highway Department
1440 Bunker Lake Blvd NW
Andover, MN 55304-4005

All proposals must be received not later than 2:00 pm (Central Time) on November 14, 2003. Late proposals will not be considered.

All costs incurred in responding to this RFP will be borne by the responder.

Fax and e-mail responses will not be considered.

Submit seven (7) copies of the proposal. Proposals are to be sealed in mailing envelopes or packages with the responder's name and address written on the outside. An authorized member of the firm must sign each copy of the proposal in ink.

Terms of the proposal as stated must be valid for the length of the project. Break out the hours for each employee category (i.e., principals, senior engineers, and technicians, etc.) per work task.
identified. Show the hourly rate for each employee. Also break out and list any direct expenses, overhead, and profit. Indicate any assumptions made and include this information with the cost proposal. Total dollar amounts for each work task and deliverable shall also be shown as well as a total dollar cost for the entire project.

Proposal Evaluation:

Representatives of Anoka County, the City of Centerville, Columbus Township, and the City of Lino Lakes, or others as determined by Anoka County, will evaluate all responses received by the deadline. In some instances, an interview may be part of the evaluation process. Anoka County reserves the right to solicit additional information from any or all responders to clarify the proposal prior to assigning final points. A 100-point scale will be used as a guide to create the final evaluation recommendation. The factors and weighting on which proposals will be judged are:

1. Work plan/Schedule 25%
2. Qualifications/experience of personnel working on the project 25%
3. Expressed understanding of project objectives 25%
4. Cost detail 25%

It is anticipated that the evaluation and selection will be completed by December 12, 2003.

Agency Not Obligated to Complete Project:

This request for proposal does not obligate the agency to award a contract or complete the project, and the agency reserves the right to cancel the solicitation or parts of the solicitation if it is considered to be in its best interest.