Every moment of frustration when you can't find something.

Every struggle to get an SME to focus on a technical review.

Every time the final reviewer makes major changes with 20 minutes until submission.

Every missed submission is trying to tell you something: the system is broken.

Successful organizations hear this message clearly and work to continuously improve their processes and systems to reflect an ever-changing environment. But when you're buried in day-to-day proposal work, barely holding it all together, it's hard to spot the warning signs — let alone respond to them.

Busy Isn't Working

It's easy to celebrate hard work. It's harder to admit that constant busy-ness might be hiding real system failures.

Proposal teams regularly accept chaos as the cost of doing business. Deadlines are missed. Content gets recycled without review. Final versions aren't final at all — and everyone walks away exhausted.

But exhaustion isn't a metric. And burnout isn't a sign of commitment. It's a warning.

If you're not tracking the right things, you can't fix what's broken. Worse — you may not even realize something *is* broken. These five metrics will show you what your process is really doing — and why your team may be too overwhelmed to say it out loud.

1. Submitting to Submit — or Submitting with Intent?

Is the bid even worth the effort?

Before a single word is written, one of the most important steps is often skipped: qualification.

Was the RFP thoroughly reviewed? Do you have a mandatory requirements checklist to identify hidden "gotchas" early? Does your team meet every requirement? If you haven't built a relationship with the buyer, is this really the right one to chase? Does the RFx sound like it was written for someone else? Are you competing with vendors that may be better positioned?

And most importantly: is this the kind of client you're built to support — or just someone with a live deadline?

What's your reasoning for submitting? If the answer is "just to show that we're working," you're tracking the wrong kind of metric.

Think of it this way: if you met your most profitable future client through one of these quick responses, would you be proud of what they saw? Could you justify your sloppy response? Would they want to work with you?

If your team can't say why you're submitting — and why you're submitting *now* — you're not being strategic. You're just staying busy.

A well-defined list of pre-submission questions — answered affirmatively or with explanation — increases true submission rates, raises win rates, and lowers team frustration. For some teams, saying no more often led to the biggest yes: fewer proposals, higher wins, and a writing team that finally had room to breathe

2. Where the H3LL Is It?

How long does it take your team to find what they need?

Writers aren't slow — they're methodical. They know what they need, but not always where to find it.

The wrong systems create unnecessary work for the writing team. The right systems organize everything in a logical folder structure: resumes, project summaries, org charts, standard language, references, master files, imagery, and more. Most proposal delays don't come from writing time. They come from chasing down what already exists.

If it takes more than two minutes to locate a document, your system is leaking *hours* of time and energy every day — and adding unnecessary burden to the team. Even a basic content library can reduce search time by up to 70%. That's not just a time-saver. That's capacity reclaimed.

3. Running Out the Clock

How fast is too fast?

Procrastination is often caused by a combination of fear of failure, perfectionism, low confidence, or the desire to avoid stress — and it's the *primary* challenge for any writing team. Even the best systems fail when someone doesn't follow them.

When timelines collapse, reviews disappear.
When reviews disappear, quality disappears with them.

Missed deadlines can turn great responses into last-minute scrambles. Sprinting to the finish isn't a sign of commitment — it's a sign your system has failed. Responses built this way have less than a 40% chance of success.

Even when the team is prepared, it only takes one person to derail the process. And if that issue isn't addressed, it will keep happening — and keep tanking your submissions.

Final reviews, SME feedback, even evaluator scoring crosswalks all vanish when your submission becomes a sprint. If your team is fighting for time in the last hour, there's no chance for a solid review. Things *will* be missed, and the response will be subpar.

This metric doesn't reward speed. It exposes where your system is forcing trade-offs.

4. Silence Isn't Golden

How burned out is your team — really?

No one reports on this metric. But it's there — in delayed approvals. In quiet chat threads. In teams that stop asking questions and start assuming silence is good enough.

Are your people tired — all the time? Do they laugh together? Eat together? Share the burden? Offer ideas to make things better?

If not… what does that say?

A high-friction, non-existent system with no consistent workflows doesn't just slow things down. It drives people out. Out of conversations. Out of their best thinking. Sometimes out of the job.

People leave when they feel unheard. When nothing changes. When the easiest path is silence. "Why speak up if no one listens?" eventually turns into, "I'm too tired to care."

If the team isn't talking, the system isn't working.

5. When the Win Isn't a Win

Are you winning the bids that matter — or just inflating the numbers?

Not all wins are created equal. A high win rate sounds impressive — until you realize it's built on chasing easy wins, not competitive ones.

A real win rate tracks success on proposals where:
- You weren't the obvious front-runner
- The requirements were complex
- The response required strategy and cross-team coordination
- The team had to develop new thinking or deliver something innovative
- A subcontractor was required — expanding your network or reach

Submitting only when you know it's a safe win, instead of where you're competitive and can shine, isn't a win. It's a ceiling dressed up like success.

Bonus Metric: Scorecard Reviews

What happens after submission matters more than you think.

Too many teams treat evaluator feedback like punishment. If the scorecard gets reviewed at all, it's just to assign blame — not to learn.

But scorecards aren't about wins and losses. They're about clarity. They show:
- What mattered to the evaluator
- Where the team missed the mark
- Which content consistently underperforms
- Where the business or messaging needs to grow

Lessons-learned reviews shouldn't assign blame. They should prevent repeat mistakes.

The smartest teams track this because they treat proposals like a feedback loop. If you're not using that loop, you're not getting better. You're just repeating the same mistakes and hoping the result will change.

Have You Heard What Your Process Has Been Trying to Tell You?

Your proposal process has been telling you what's wrong.

It's in the delays. The missed reviews. The silent chats. The documents no one can find. The rushed approvals. The wins that feel like relief instead of celebration.

If all you're tracking is the win, you're reading the scoreboard without understanding the game.

These five metrics don't just show you where you stand. They show you what your system actually supports. Where the cracks are. Where the energy's going. Where your people are getting stuck — or giving up. Where you shine. And what's needed to give your writers the space to succeed at what they do best.

The truth has been there the whole time. You just needed a way to see it.