BID/NO-BID DECISION FRAMEWORK

A disciplined approach to opportunity selection

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A framework for decision

Standard Operating Procedure: Bid/No-Bid Solicitations

A practical framework for disciplined pursuit decisions
Designed for global teams and individuals

Purpose

In proposals, the most expensive bid is the one you should never have chased. Every pursuit consumes time, money, and credibility. Yet many organisations default to "yes," stretching resources thin and lowering win rates.

This framework provides a disciplined, transparent process to:

- Focus resources on opportunities with the highest probability of success.
- Align pursuit decisions with organisational strategy and market priorities
- Build institutional learning through consistent evaluation and feedback.

It is more than a checklist, it is a **decision language** for teams, enabling firms and individuals to know when to invest, and when to walk away.

<u>The 6 Phase Decision Flow</u>

1. Opportunity Capture & Fast Filter

Objective: Quickly log all opportunities and remove clear mismatches before deep work begins.

Actions:

- Record essential details: client, deadline, sector, geography, scope, budget.

- Apply "Quick Kill" criteria:

1. Is the deadline feasible for a compliant, quality proposal?

2. Is the client aligned with our target strategy/mission?

3. Is the geography legally, operationally, and security-compliant?

4. Is the budget realistic for the scope?

5. Do we meet baseline eligibility requirements?

Example:

If an RFP arrives on Friday with a Monday deadline for a 100-page technical submission, this is an automatic **No Bid**.

If the opportunity is from a client outside our target portfolio (private sector when our strategy is donor-funded development), this is also an early **No Bid**.

2. Strategic Fit:

Objective: Align opportunities with organisational mission and growth priorities.

Questions:
- Is it in our target sectors and geographies?
- Will it deepen existing relationships or open priority markets?
- Does it strengthen our brand or positioning?
- Do we have the technical expertise required?
- Is the delivery team available within the required timeframes?
- Can we resource the proposal effort without jeopardising other bids?

Scoring (1–5)
1 Misaligned | 3 Partial fit | 5 High-priority strategic alignment

Tip: Adjust weightings for regional growth priorities and partner readiness.

3. Competitive Position

Objective: Determine if we have a realistic chance of winning.

Questions:

· Have we delivered similar projects successfully (scale, geography, donor, sector)

- Do we have insights into the client's priorities, pain points, or decision-makers' preferences
- Can we clearly differentiate from competitors (solution, price, innovation, relationships)?
- Do we know who the incumbent is, and how they are performing?
- Are we positioned as a trusted partner or just another vendor?
- Do we have local presence, partners, or compliance advantages that competitors lack?
- Can we leverage past performance or references that resonate with this client?
- Do we have evidence of thought leadership, pilots, or innovations valued in this

Scoring Guidance (1–5 scale):

1 Weak position No relevant track record, no client info, and no differentiators.

2 Low position Some relevant delivery history, but no unique edge or relationship leverage.

3 Moderate position Relevant experience + limited client/market insight, moderate differentiation.

4 Strong position Solid track record, some insider knowledge, and clear differentiators.

5 Winning position Proven, visible track record + deep client insight + clear edge over competitors.

Examples:

High Score (4–5): You know the incumbent is underperforming, your solution is cheaper and proven in similar contexts, and you have a direct line to decision makers.

Mid Score (3): You have delivered in the sector but lack insight into current client frustrations or competitive intelligence.

Low Score (1–2): No past experience with this client/sector, limited info, and your offer looks generic compared to competitors.

4. Risk vs. Reward

Objective: Balance financial, operational, and reputational factors.

Questions:
- Is the financial margin worthwhile?
- Will this win strengthen future opportunities?
- Could delivery risks or failure damage credibility?
- Are there hidden costs (compliance, travel, reporting, audits) that could erode margin?
- Would winning this contract displace or distract from higher-value opportunities?
- How likely is scope creep or underfunding during delivery?
- Will this project open doors to new markets, donors, or partnerships?

Scoring Guidance:
- 1 = High risk, low reward

- ○ 3 = Balanced but marginal gains
- ○ 5 = High reward, manageable risks

Example: A small profit bid that secures entry into a priority market might still score high on reward.

5. Decision & Documentation

Objective: Make transparent, accountable, and consistent decisions.

Process

- Use a standardized **scoring system** to ensure objectivity (max = 25 points).

    20–25 = Strong Bid → Proceed with confidence.

    15–19 = Conditional Bid → Proceed only after addressing weaknesses (e.g., resourcing, pricing, compliance gaps).

    <15 = No Bid → Log rationale and decline early to save resources.

- Require documented justification for every decision, not just the score ("Client misaligned with strategy," "High reputational risk," etc.).
- Ensure decisions are made **before major costs are incurred** (proposal team mobilization, partner commitments).

Governance:

- Final decision made by a **cross-functional bid committee** (Business Development, Finance, Delivery, Technical, and Leadership).
- Decisions should reflect a balance of **commercial, operational, and reputational factors**, not just financials.
- Ensure **conflict of interest** is declared if committee members have ties to partners, competitors, or the client.
- Document votes or consensus in meeting notes for transparency.

Learning Loop:

- After each bid outcome, review if the **original Go/No-Go decision** held up (Did the assumptions prove right or wrong?).
- Capture "decision hindsight" in a **bid tracker or lessons-learned log.**

Highlight cases where:

A **No-Bid** protected resources from a poor opportunity.

A **Conditional Bid** turned into a win after weaknesses were resolved.

A **Strong Bid** was lost due to overlooked risks.

Feed these insights back into the **criteria weighting and scoring system** quarterly.

Share learnings openly with leadership and delivery teams to build a culture of disciplined pursuit.

6. Learning and Continuous Improvement

Objective: Improve decision quality over time.

- **Track win/loss ratios by decision type** (bids pursued vs. declined) to see if the framework is guiding the right choices.
- **Update criteria weights quarterly** to reflect market changes, donor priorities, and organizational capacity.
- **Share case studies of No Bids** that proved right (or wrong), building institutional learning around risk appetite and foresight.
- **Capture lessons from debriefs** (both wins and losses) and map them to the decision criteria, were the early signals accurate?
- **Maintain a central knowledge base** (Notion, SharePoint) to log decisions, rationale, and outcomes for future reference.
- **Survey internal stakeholders** (delivery teams, finance, partners) post bid to assess if the decision aligned with execution reality.
- **Incorporate client feedback** from proposals and post-project reviews into refining pursuit decisions.
- **Identify patterns in missed opportunities** did declining bids result in competitors gaining footholds that matter?
- **Run an annual calibration session** with leadership to challenge assumptions and evolve the Go/No-Go framework.
- **Reward transparency and learning** by recognizing teams who raised red flags that prevented costly pursuits.

Implementation for International Teams

- **Shared Tools:** Use a central platform (CRM, Notion, SharePoint) for logging opportunities and scores.
- **Time Zones:** Set clear deadlines for input from all regions.

Roles:
- **Bid Lead:** Coordinates scoring and information gathering.
- **Regional Leads:** Provide local market insights.
- **Technical Lead:** Confirms capability fit.
- **Finance Lead:** Reviews budget feasibility.
- **Executive Sponsor:** Final decision approval.

Bid/No-Bid Scoring Matrix

Criteria	Description	Score Range (0-5)	Weight (%)	Weighted score
Strategic fit	**Alignment with our mission, core services, and long-term goals.**	**0 = No fit, 5 = Perfect fit**	**20%**	**Score x 0.20**
Competitive Position	**Strength of our differentiators and past performance in this area.**	**0 = None 5 = Strong advantage**	**20%**	**Score x 0.20**
Client Relationship	**Level of trust, engagement, and insight with the client.**	**0 = None 5 = Deep, ongoing relationship**	**15%**	**Score x 0.5**
Resources Readiness	Capacity, expertise, and bandwidth available for both bidding and delivery.	0 = No **capacity, 5 = Fully ready**	**15%**	**Score x 0.15**
Risk vs Reward	Assessment of project risks vs. potential financial, strategic, or reputational rewards.	0 = High risk, low reward, 5 = Low risk, high reward	**10%**	**Score x 0.10**
Financial Viability	Expected profit margin, payment terms, and overall financial attractiveness.	0 = Poor, 5 = **Excellent**	**10%**	**Score x 0.10**
Innovation/Portfolio Value	Opportunity to strengthen our portfolio, learn, or innovate.	**0 = No value, 5 = High value**	**10%**	**Score x 0.10**

Decision Thresholds:

- **80–100%:** Green Zone: Proceed.
- **60–79%:** Amber Zone: Address gaps before proceeding.
- **Below 60%:** Red Zone: No-bid.

Bid/No-Bid Flow Process

1. **Opportunity Identified** Capture in opportunity tracker.
2. **Initial Screening** (quick 5–10 min check for obvious misfits).
3. **Scoring Assessment** using the matrix above.
4. **Team Review Meeting** to discuss scores, risks, and potential strategies.
5. **Decision Point:**
   - **Bid:** Assign bid manager, develop capture plan.
   - **Conditional Bid:** Address gaps (partners, info, pricing) before green light.
   - **No-Bid:** Record reason, share lessons learned with the team.
6. **Post-Decision Feedback Loop:** Update lessons learned, refine scoring criteria over time.

Closing Note: This framework is designed as a tool. Its power lies not only in structured decision making but in the discipline to say *no* when a pursuit is not worth the cost. When consistently applied, it safeguards resources, improves win rates, and strengthens market positioning.

This framework was developed by Priscilla Osaro. (Bid & Proposal Specialist). It may be adapted for internal use with attribution to the author. .