

How to close a deal with the federal government

John Skipper runs NCSI(<http://www.ncsi.com/Home/Default.aspx>), a show organizer who focuses on running events for federal agencies. Given the tricky economy, John is cautiously optimistic that the government will continue to fund and approve NCSI's initiatives, since the government has continued to spend on information technology and other projects in good and bad economic times.

Since I have always wondered how (and tried and failed) to get government events started, I was interested to see how NCSI made it happen. For those interested in getting into the government space, John notes that it takes three to four times as long to get things done in the government sector as in the private sector, so the ability to be patient and persistent is crucial in getting the business.

Here's John's tips to close a deal with a federal agency:

1) Take the long view in developing relationships and contacts

Think about the long term connection you are trying to build. Who do you know within the government who can link you with the powers that be? Also be prepared to help to use your connections to help your targets in those agencies. In the long term, how can you build a community using the event as the focal point?

2) Make sure what the agency wants to do matches your model

John's model is to take the event to the agency. Just glance at the NCSI homepage and you'll see that a number of events take place on airbases, army bases and navy yard. Will your financial model work with the agencies such as payment and revenue generating guidelines?

3) Understand the federal procurement process

You will be asked to bid on various projects, or you'll find out about an opportunity which you'll need to bid on. Make sure you submit your request for proposal(RFP) by all the guidelines and deadlines. Then prepare to wait, sometimes as long as a year for the next step. As mentioned above, being patient and having many iron in the fire is key.

4) Develop iron clad references, preferably in the government sector

"Who do you know, and what do they say about you?" is important to get most pieces of business, but particularly in the government sector. In addition additional checks such as security clearances may be necessary for you proceed with government projects

5) **Be the leader and drive the process**

Don't get frustrated with the delays and setbacks. Remember you are the expert in running events, so the agency will look to you in providing leadership in bringing the event to fruition. Make sure you set the guidelines after you get the business and get the buy-in and commitment from the client agency to follow the process you've set.

As John Skipper knows, getting business from the government is a tough process, but a very lucrative one. Once you've made your mark, you'll find further business easier to get, so if you're determined to try, Washington is your oyster!

Warwick Davies is the Principal of The Event Mechanic!, a consulting company which helps event organizers realize greater revenues and profits by fixing 'broken' events and launch new ones both in United States and internationally . His clients include event organizers in the information technology, healthcare, biotechnology construction and design engineering and executive event markets. Previously, Warwick was responsible for internationally recognizable event brands such as Macworld Conference and Expo, LinuxWorld Conference and Expo, and the Customer Relationship Management Conference and Exposition worldwide. For more information on The Event Mechanic! and past SISO The Event Doctor! columns please visit <http://www.theeventmechanic.com/resources.html> He can be reached at Warwick@theeventmechanic.com or at 781 354 0119.