

The Role of Business Development in Legal Project Management

By [Susan Raridon Lambreth](#) on May 31, 2021

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In my recent interviews with speakers for the upcoming [Global LPM Summit](#), a theme emerged. It seems that law firm clients were requesting, but not always receiving, legal project management (LPM) on their matters. There could be many reasons for this, including:

- The lead partner on the matter is unaware that LPM was specifically included in the Request for Proposal (RFP);
- The firm doesn't have enough trained professionals to provide LPM approaches on the client's matters; or
- The firm doesn't actually have LPM services or professionals, despite what they might have put in the RFP response.

While any of these could be the case, I have heard several examples where LPM was not used even though I know the firm has a well-resourced LPM team. Maybe the lead partner doesn't understand LPM. Or, perhaps they don't want LPM support on a particular matter. But could there be other reasons? This made me think about the importance of the collaboration and communication between the Business Development (BD) and LPM functions. All parties must understand and support the firm's LPM objectives and function. This can happen in several ways.

First, after the partner receives an RFP, it typically gets routed to the BD professional. Sophisticated LPM or BD teams have usually developed standard RFP language. This language explains the firm's LPM approach, its services and may even include successful case studies. No mystery here. This standard language is a customary best practice intended to address common requests.

However, when LPM was a new concept, few clients asked about it. When they did, the BD team would typically engage the LPM team to draft a response. The LPM team would know about each client and what they were requesting. As LPM increased in usage and popularity, a number of firms are responding to a considerable volume of RFPs asking for these services. If the BD team inserts standard LPM language, those responsible for LPM may never discover that clients have requested the approach. Moreover, the LPM team may be unaware that the firm even won the RFP. Without this knowledge, the LPM team may not know to provide the promised LPM services.

The BD team plays an important role in informing the LPM team when RFPs are won, and LPM requested. They are also essential in letting the lead partner or client team know that LPM was a critical component of the RFP so that the partner can follow up with the LPM team for client support.

Second, an essential component to generate LPM buy-in throughout the firm is to demonstrate client demand. There is plenty of interest among law firm clients. One of the best ways to prove the demand that is through metrics. The BD team can track the RFPs that ask for LPM or related efficiency approaches. Further, the team can provide those examples, supported by the exact language used. Some of the examples in recent RFPs are:

- Does your firm have dedicated legal project management ("LPM") professionals? If "yes", please provide their

names and titles. Please explain how these individuals work with your lawyers (e.g., scope development, matter analytics, budget development, case and / or task tracking, process improvement initiatives, process development, etc.). If your firm does not have dedicated LPM professionals, please describe how this function is supported within your firm.

- Explain how your firm would add value to this transaction in terms of **project management**.
- What role do you see **project management** playing in your engagement?
- What will you do for us in terms of using **legal project management** and providing LPM training to our lawyers?

The BD team is critical to tracking and sharing this information with the LPM team and those driving strategy and innovation in your firm. That will help the firm understand the importance of LPM to specific clients, how many are requesting it, and the types of approaches they seek.

The success of LPM depends upon connecting the dots between the lead partner, BD, the matter team, and the LPM team. Otherwise, client frustration will surely follow. LPM is essential to the clients who request it. For law firms, it's the opportunity to meet and exceed client expectations and engender loyalty.

Here's another example to put a fine point on the issue. The client had selected the law firm in question to be part of a panel. The selection was based, in part, on the firm's LPM capabilities. But the firm was not receiving much of the work intended for it because it was not providing the LPM services it promised in the RFP response. Unless something changes in its service delivery, the firm will not likely survive the next "panel refresh."

This firm likely has the capabilities that the client wants. It would be a pity to lose business in this way. Consider, too, whether your firm needs more LPM resources to support the growing demand and how you are doing to get those resources. We have seen professionals in many areas of law firm business move into LPM roles and the [Summit](#) will provide great education for anyone involved in these areas or seeking to make a move.