HOT OFF THE PRESS:

When you can’t control the narrative
Municipal Code does not allow disclosure of information about proposals received, **including names of competing proposers**, prior to award of a request for proposals.

We do not consider an award official until the contract is fully executed.

Once a contract is executed, our practice is to offer both a written, and if requested in-person debrief, to any interested proposer.
Background

• Exception to competition in Municipal Code
• Incumbent held contract for 37 years
• Council interested in best value
• Request for procurement to issue an RFP
• Straight-forward, right?
“Are they SURE they want to do this?”

- Me
Key Players: Internal

- City Council
- City Administration
- Purchasing & Contracts
- Evaluation Committee
Key Players: External

• Incumbent provider
• Local online news non-profit
• Local newspaper
This could actually be really interesting!

- Me, in my head…
A Very Odd Pre-Proposal

In attendance:

1. Incumbent Provider
2. Local online news non-profit
   *Remember, CEO is on the incumbent’s board*
3. A third company
What would you do?
The Rumor Mill

- Keep an ear to the ground
- Dissecting fact from hearsay is critical
- Identify potential bias risk and handle with tact
- Be light in the heart, but serious in the message
The Results

• **Three** proposals received.

• One drastically in excess of budget.

• **Two** close in score and shortlisted:
  1. Incumbent Provider
  2. Local online news agency
And the Award Goes To...
The Curveball(s)

…[The Purchasing] chapter does not apply to:

The following agreements approved by city council in open public meetings: intergovernmental agreements, economic development services…, and Longmont Cable Trust or any successor to that entity for providing public, educational, and governmental cable television services to the residents of the city.”
“Can’t we just make them stop talking? What are the ramifications of their actions?”

- Everyone
Remember that Spoiler Alert?

Your name, your RFP process (which is technically still confidential at this point), and accusations about your agency’s lack of transparency actually on the front page of the newspaper?

Worse things could happen.
From Hot off the Press to the Hot Seat

• Prepare with intention

• Ask for guidance when you are doing something new, especially if it’s high profile

• Observe people who do it well and adapt what makes sense for you
“Don’t take this personally.”

- The Mayor
When the dust settled

• Online article publishing all the documents
• I mean ALL the documents
• And, the Council meeting recording
“I would also like to say that Tuesday nights [sic] public implications of fraud and unethical behavior, going off of unsubstantiated and incorrect hearsay, in a public forum, specifically targeting me personally, was unfair, unprofessional and harmed the ability of the Longmont Observer to deliver on it’s strategy for Public Access Media for our city. Building a self-sustaining media makerspace, as is our intent, requires the entire community to engage and support the effort. These unsubstantiated and intentional misrepresentations, in a very public forum, damaged our ability to do that.

In a fair and equitable world, people who do things like this admit their mistakes, try to fix the damage they did and make public apologies when they're wrong.

One can hope.”

-Excerpt from open letter to Council from Awardee
FOLLOW UP:
Want to discuss any aspects of this story? Burning questions about why we made the decisions we made? Feel free to connect with me and we’ll keep the conversation going.

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