



The Proposal Happiness Index 2025

Insights into satisfaction, meaning
and recognition in the bid &
proposal profession



Strategic
Proposals



APMP
MENTAL HEALTH
AFFINITY GROUP

In partnership with
the APMP Mental
Health Affinity Group

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Insights into satisfaction, meaning and recognition in the bid & proposal profession

**Do you start the working day with joy in your heart and a spring in your step?
Or is life in your career more frustrating?**

Welcome to the inaugural Proposal Happiness Index report, a pulse-check on wellbeing in the bid and proposal profession. Nearly 300 of you told us how you feel about your work - what drives joy, what causes friction, and what individuals and teams need to thrive. We received responses from 25 countries, with the most survey participants based in the US, UK, Canada and Australia.

Our goals? To celebrate what's working for you - and what's not. To let you know you're not alone, if you're struggling - and to help you identify strategies that might help. And to help managers listen, learn, and lead with greater empathy by reflecting on what they can do to support their teams.

Some headlines

How happy are you in your role?

6.8
out of 10

How meaningful do you find your work?

7.2
out of 10

How valued to you feel at work?

6.3
out of 10



Put another way, we're not an overwhelmingly happy bunch. That feels "OK-ish." Some of you are thriving - **18.4%** of the respondents scored a **9 or 10 out of 10** for their happiness rating, and that's wonderful to hear. But **21.7%** of you scored **5 out of 10** or lower, and that's cause for huge concern.



We're proud to sponsor APMP's Mental Health Affinity Group, who partnered with us on this research. The group provides a safe space for bid and proposal professionals to share challenges, exchange advice, and explore practical ways to support wellbeing in our high-pressure field. They host sessions on the fourth Wednesday of each month at 12pm Eastern/5pm GMT - and all are welcome.

To get involved or learn more, reach out to mentalhealth@apmp.org

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"Are you happy at work?" It's a simple question that invites an instinctive, emotionally based, "yes/no" answer.

We should be happy at work. However, doing meaningful work doesn't always make us happy. Sometimes it can require tough decisions and hardships.

Track your mood over time. Aim ahead, keep your head high, and always seek 'happier' states. Remember: it takes great effort and distance for a swan to take flight.



1—What makes proposal professionals happy at work?

When we ask what makes proposal professionals happy, the answers aren't transactional - they're deeply human. The most meaningful motivators aren't perks or titles but purpose, trust, and connection. These aren't "nice to haves" - they're the foundation of sustained performance.

The data highlights what many leaders already know: when people feel trusted, connected, and purposeful, they do their best work. The challenge - and opportunity - lies in creating the conditions where this can thrive, even under pressure.

Here's our scorecard of what makes people happy in bid and proposal roles, based on what you told us.



1. Teamwork and camaraderie

Collaboration, mutual respect, and shared wins are consistent sources of joy.

"Working on a great team of people."

"Healthy collaborations. Happy teams."

"Supportive colleagues."



2. Recognition and being valued

Feeling seen, respected, and appreciated - especially by leadership - fuels satisfaction.

"Recognition of my work."

"Management affirms and recognizes their team on proposal wins, interviews, etc., both from marketing and technical team members."



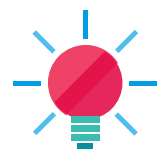
3. Winning and impact

Many respondents found fulfillment in contributing to tangible outcomes and business growth.

"Winning bids"

"Helping my firm win contracts"

"Helping our staff members retain their jobs."



4. Creativity and problem-solving

Proposal work gives many the chance to flex both their analytical and creative muscles.

"Solving problems! Making writing sing!"

"Finding the perfect balance when a proposal looks amazing and reads amazing as well. It's like solving a very complex puzzle."



5. Respect and trust

Many cited a preference for independence, decision-making freedom, and flexibility.

"Having a manager who trusts me."

"Being respected and trusted to do my job."



6. Variety and challenge

The fast-paced, ever-changing nature of proposals keeps work engaging.

"Working on challenging pursuits that we are well positioned to win."

"The challenge of something new and exciting every day."



7. Purpose and meaning

Many found happiness in knowing their work contributes to something bigger.

"Helping others succeed and being a part of win-win achievements."

"Feeling like my work matters not just to the company but to the world."

While not asked explicitly, many responses reflected a deeper need for inclusion. Words like "belonging," "diversity," "treated like an adult," and "safety and security" came up again and again. These insights echo broader DEI principles: the need for psychological safety, fair treatment, and workplace cultures where everyone feels seen and valued.

2—What makes proposal professionals unhappy at work?

There's much to love in life as a bid and proposal professional. But the volume and intensity of responses when we asked what makes you unhappy can't be ignored. The responses to this question were longer, more emotionally charged, and far more consistent. If happiness stems from purpose, autonomy, and recognition, then unhappiness is rooted in their absence.

This isn't just frustration - it's systemic. Proposal professionals are operating in high-stakes environments without consistent support, clarity, or respect. Recognition and resourcing aren't perks - they're prerequisites for sustainability. The health of this profession, and its ability to keep delivering wins, depends on better leadership, better planning, and deeper empathy.

We don't want this section of the report to be soul-destroying for readers. We want people to feel heard. And we want managers to review the list: might these apply to any of the folk who work for you, and what could you do to remove the pain points?



1. Unrealistic deadlines and lack of planning

Pressure without preparation came up more than any other issue. Last-minute requests, ignored timelines, and poor go/no-go decisions drain energy and trust.

"People missing deadlines, thus showing a lack of respect for what I do."

"Submitting on every proposal we find to 'get our name out there'."



2. Lack of recognition and respect

Many professionals feel invisible - their expertise sidelined, their contributions overlooked.

"Being treated as if our function is transactional and administrative."

"Constant recognition for sales teams while other teams receive little notice/recognition."

"I don't feel our roles receive the recognition or respect we deserve."



3. Poor leadership and process chaos

Respondents called out vague strategies, inconsistent tools, and micromanagement from leaders who don't understand the proposal process.

"Leadership certainly values the outcome of the work, not necessarily the work itself and what it entails."

"Being forced to use tools and processes that don't work. The people in charge of getting us the tools and resources we need don't understand our requirements."



4. Burnout, overload, and imbalance

Extended hours, back-to-back bids, and no time for recovery create an unsustainable pace for many.

"Having no downtime or personal time."

"The pressure of doing too many proposals at the same time with little interest from the operational team."

"Last minute bluebirds that mean late night or weekend work."



5. Disengaged or disrespectful stakeholders

Poor content, missed inputs, and dismissive attitudes from SMEs and contributors made many feel unsupported.

"Babysitting SMEs. Team members not meeting or disregarding set deadlines."

"Working with people who don't care, who don't get it, who take proposal work for granted."



6. Undervaluing the profession

A recurring theme was the perception of proposals as a reactive, non-strategic function.

"That the proposal role is seen like an admin task anyone can do."

"Our leadership doesn't understand our role and hasn't made an effort to do so."

Happy quotes

A calm atmosphere with snacks provided!

Being busy but not overwhelmed.

Being surrounded by awesome people.

Helping my SME colleagues to get their thoughts and knowledge down on paper with clarity.

Being heard and respected.

Celebrating with my team after we turn in a project we're proud of.

A great salary and benefit package, flexibility to balance my life.

Being appreciated for my contributions and feeling like an essential part of the team.

Working with my favourite colleagues.

Being able to take a team of technical people through the proposal process.

Being trusted, valued and having colleagues that I can laugh with.

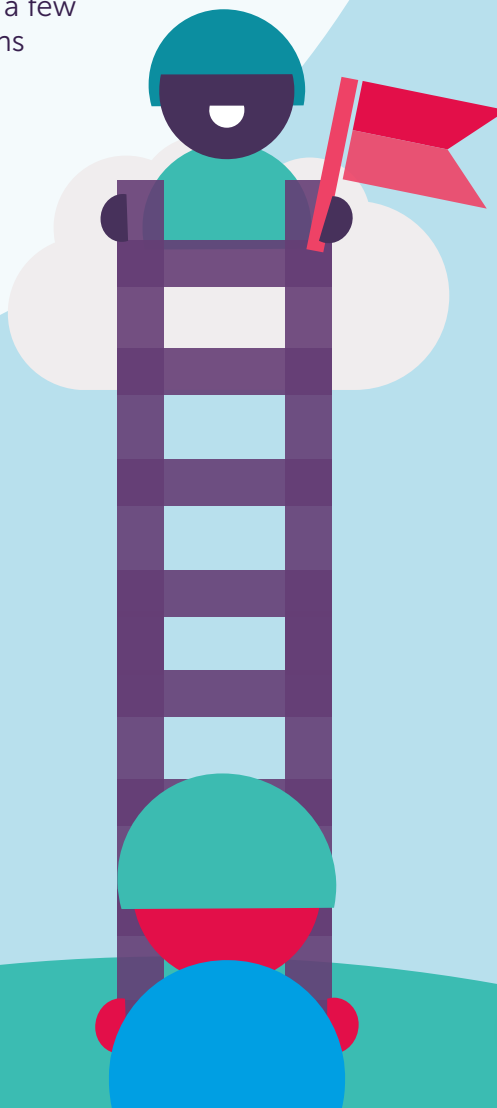
Creating something great from the chaos.

3—Systemic fixes: the happiness toolkit

There's no shortage of well-intentioned wellbeing initiatives in many organizations. Mindfulness apps. Mental health days. Stress management webinars. These all have their place. But when proposal professionals are consistently overwhelmed, under-recognized, and caught in systemic chaos, a wellness app won't fix it.

Happiness at work isn't just about performative perks. It's about practical, structural support. This is where leaders have a real opportunity - not to be blamed for past issues, but to actively shape a more sustainable and engaging environment going forward.

The shift starts with intent - but it's sustained by action. It's not about grand gestures. It's about getting the fundamentals right. Here are a few ways we've seen organizations make real progress:



Early engagement that sets the tone

Too often, proposal teams are brought in once the RFP drops - but the real difference is made upstream. Capture helps shape strategy, align messaging, and build client insight. And when capture and proposals work hand-in-hand, teams move from reactive to proactive - and that's where win rates rise.



Right roles, right people

Expecting one person to be strategist, writer, project manager, designer, and pricer? That's not sustainable. Take time to define roles, structure the team around complementary strengths, and educate the business on what it really takes to win.



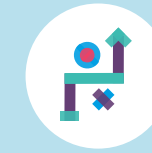
Smarter qualification

Saying no to low-chance deals is a game-changer. It frees up time, protects morale, and boosts win rates. Yes, it can be politically sensitive - but when you show the data, stakeholders get it.



Training that drives empathy

Everyone involved in proposals - not just bid teams, but also salespeople, SMEs and senior leaders - should understand the craft. Good training creates buy-in, builds empathy, and helps people appreciate what good looks like. When people know better, they do better.



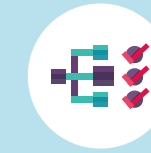
A clear engagement model

Is it clear how sales and pursuit teams should engage with you? A "just throw it over the fence" approach only fuels frustration. Even a simple service level agreement can clarify expectations and reduce friction.



Resources and tech that reduce friction

Still hunting down content? It's time to invest in smarter knowledge management - and consider where AI can safely accelerate quality and consistency.



Capacity planning that makes the case

How many bids do you do? How much time does each one take? Do the math. If your team's stretched too thin, use that evidence to start a conversation - and to challenge unrealistic assumptions.



Benchmarking to make the case

Senior leaders often need a wake-up call. Whether it's a quick report from a tool like our Proposal Benchmarker™ or a more in-depth independent review, external benchmarking gives you the evidence to influence change.

www.proposalbenchmarker.com



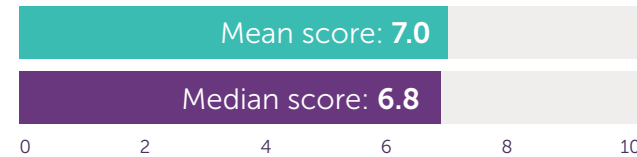
Celebrate more

We're not always great at shouting about success - but we should be. Wins, great feedback, process improvements: these are worth spotlighting. Get visible. Remind people what you make possible.

4—Numeric happiness scores

Question 1

How happy do you feel in your role?

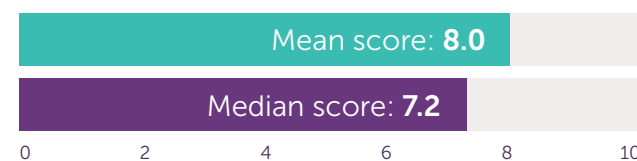


These average scores suggest a profession that's holding steady - but not comfortably. Proposal work can be joyful, purposeful, and deeply fulfilling. But it can also wear people down: we're worried about those who have low scores. The data's not euphoric, but it's not despairing either.

Happiness in this field is about being respected, supported, and empowered to do meaningful work well. Leaders who want to lift that score don't need to guess. Their teams are already telling them how.

Question 2

How meaningful do you find your work?



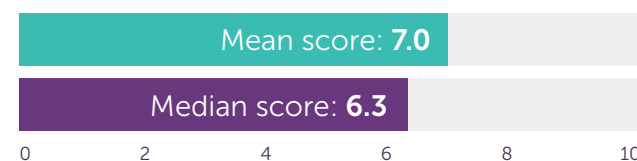
This was the highest-scoring question in the survey. In a profession that often operates under intense pressure, this result is striking - and heartening.

Despite the challenges, most respondents feel a clear connection between their work and a greater purpose. They see proposals as more than just paperwork or compliance exercises. They see them as vehicles for impact: winning work, protecting jobs, and helping organizations grow.

This score reminds us why so many proposal professionals stay in our career - even when the going can be tough. The meaning they find in their roles is a quiet source of resilience. It's a reminder to leaders that purpose is a powerful motivator. When you frame proposal work as strategic and impactful - and treat it that way - people respond with loyalty, creativity, and pride.

Question 3

How often do you feel your work is valued by leadership and key stakeholders?



Compared to the previous question on meaning, this result points to a subtle but important gap. Many proposal professionals find deep purpose in their work - but don't always feel that purpose is recognized or appreciated by others.

There's a disconnect between what the work means to those who do it and how that work is seen by those who benefit from it.

Recognition doesn't cost much - but its absence costs a lot. The data shows a profession that's engaged, committed, and motivated by impact. But motivation fades without validation. The opportunity for leaders is simple: look closer, listen more, and say thank you. Consistently. Publicly. Authentically.

5—Conclusions

The Proposal Happiness Index offers more than just a snapshot - it's a mirror. It reflects a profession driven by purpose, collaboration, and a desire to contribute meaningfully. But it also reveals the pain points that persist beneath the surface: lack of recognition, inconsistent support, poor qualification, and avoidable stress.

The data confirms what Strategic Proposals has long observed in client conversations:

Recognition matters.

Not just for morale but for retention, quality, and organizational loyalty.

Proposal professionals are deeply invested


in doing excellent work - and want to be treated as experts.

Process pain is real.

Automating a flawed process only amplifies the problem. The human experience of proposal work must be designed with intention.


Leadership sets the tone.

Where leaders are visible, empathetic, and informed, teams thrive.




For organizations looking to improve, the starting point is clear: listen. Ask your teams what's working, what's hurting, and what would help. Then act on it - not just with tools, but with trust.

This index establishes a baseline - a way to measure not just what proposal teams produce but how they feel doing it. We plan to continue tracking these metrics annually to benchmark progress and support meaningful change. And we're hugely grateful to the APMP Mental Health Affinity Group for their support and their involvement in the research, as part of the important role they play in our profession.



Our work environments, relationships with managers and colleagues, and the autonomy we're given all shape our mental health in powerful ways. The Proposal Happiness Index is a groundbreaking step in capturing the real, lived experiences of those in bids and proposals. The findings confirm what so many of us have felt - and show we're not alone in what brings joy or causes strain at work. With this data, we can push for meaningful change through transparency, best practices, and shared understanding. APMP's Mental Health Affinity Group is proud to stand alongside Strategic Proposals in driving this critical conversation forward.



Happy quotes

Having freedom to do what I do best.

Feeling enough pressure to keep me constantly moving, not so much that I'm constantly drowning.

Helping others grow their skills.

Kindness.

Great colleagues, clear strategy, happy clients and winning bids!

The diversity of people I get to work with and variety of projects.

Helping to lead people through a challenging process.

Inclusive behaviour.

I liken it to a jigsaw puzzle. When you open the jigsaw puzzle box, there are all these pieces: the job is to make those pieces come together to create a picture.

Winning, collaborating, and sharing success.

One minute after submission.

Recognition. Nothing big (although big is nice) but a thank you goes a long way and a public one even further.

The teams that I work with are absolutely incredible! I look forward to learning from them and building our success story together.



At Strategic Proposals, we don't just help clients win work - we help them build healthy, high-performing teams. From organizational design and hiring support, to bespoke training and leadership coaching, we help improve both the how and the who of proposal success. Because when teams feel supported, they don't just deliver more - **they stay longer, collaborate better, and win smarter.**



In the high-pressure environment of bid management, maintaining personal wellbeing isn't a luxury or an after thought, it's a strategic necessity.

Sustainable productivity stems from balance, not burnout. Embedding small, consistent practices such as taking breaks, creating boundaries for yourself (e.g. the ability to say no), and building in time for reflective pause, all work to safeguard mental resilience while enhancing personal performance. How often do you see things clearer after a lunch break?

Leadership can help by modelling and enabling these behaviours, shaping a culture where mental resilience is safeguarded and high performance is sustainable. The key is to treat wellbeing not as an afterthought, but as an embedded, strategic component of the entire bidding lifecycle.



About the authors



is the Managing Director of Strategic Proposals Canada. She's passionate about helping teams win more — and win smarter. Ceri shares her expertise widely through presentations, webinars, training, podcasts, articles, and posts, offering practical insights that elevate proposal success. Ceri is an APMP Approved Trainer, Fellow (Class of 2020), and 40 Under 40 award winner (Class of 2019).



is the Managing Director of Strategic Proposals UK. With experience in nearly forty countries, Jon has led and benchmarked numerous bid teams, helped win bids totalling over \$25bn, and trained more than 15,000 people. An award-winning writer and trainer, Jon was APMP UK's first chief executive and is a Fellow of APMP, the Royal Society of Arts, and the Institute of Professional Sales.

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