

Winning Tenders – Part 1

The first step in preparing your response is to analyse the tender documentation.

What type of tender are you being invited to respond to?

- 'Request for Information' (RFI) or 'Expression of Interest' (EOI) – generally used to request information in order to shortlist potential suppliers prior to seeking formalised offers;
- 'Request for Quote' (RFQ), 'Request for Offer' (RFO)' or 'Request for Tender' (RFT) – generally used to obtain bids for clearly defined and specific requirements; or
- 'Request for a Proposal' (RFP) – usually seeks a solution to a problem or process.

You also need a clear understanding of the outcome of the tendering process. Will the tender be used to select a single service provider or a panel? For one project or for a period of time? Furthermore, what is the objective of the tendering organisation? Are they seeking to reduce their panel, replace their current providers, or broaden their panel?

Key points to note when responding to a tender include:

- The due date and time;
- Where the document is to be submitted;
- How many copies of the document need to be submitted and in what format(s);
- How the documents need to be labelled;
- What forms need to be completed to accompany the submission and by whom;
- What certificates or items of evidence need to be submitted, eg Quality Certificates; and
- Who to contact for more information, and what process should be followed.

Write a list of any terms you need clarified or further information you need, and note when and where any presentations or question sessions will be held.



Decide whether to proceed

Generally, tenders are won or lost well before the tender document is released. Most decision makers would have a good idea of who the best providers are before they go to tender. The tendering process simply confirms their choices within a formal framework. Unless you have a strong relationship with the right people or very good experience in the right areas, you should think twice about submitting a tender. You can do yourself more harm than good by submitting a poor quality response or one that shows your experience doesn't stack up.

If it is possible to tender for a part of the work or a specific category, consider doing this rather than submitting a proposal for the entire tender. Acknowledging that you are not experts in some fields gives you more credibility when you claim expertise in others.

Writing the Response

Provide lots of evidence of what makes your firm the best choice (include statistics, testimonials, referees, case studies, examples of previous experience, client lists, list of major cases, etc), and make all your statements factual and believable (ask yourself 'so what?', 'says who?' and 'can I prove it?').

Answer the tender in exactly the format requested, question by question, because tenders are usually analysed by a panel of people in accordance with a strict scoring matrix. Also, restate information or cross-reference where necessary because each person on the panel may assesses a different question or section and never read the entire tender.

Take notice of selection criteria weightings provided and ensure that the emphasis in your tender reflects the weightings provided.

Formatting and presentation

Aim to produce an easy to read tender. Try these pointers:

- Use margins, line spacing and paragraph spacing to create white space;
- Use a clear structure with headings and numbering;
- Use dot points, numbered lists, tables, diagrams and charts; and
- Use appendices where possible.

This isn't "War and Peace"

Include all the information you need to support your response, but keep the content high quality and relevant. A short and succinct response is better received than a long-winded, off-track response that frustrates (and bores!) the reader.