



Oxfordshire County Council County Procurement Team

The following guidance is intended to help those organisations submitting a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) and/or a Tender document to Oxfordshire County Council as part of a formal procurement exercise.

Tips for Completing a Good Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) & Tender Submission

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What is a Pre –Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ)?

The PQQ is a questionnaire issued to ascertain the suitability of potential suppliers to provide goods, services or works to the Council. It is likely to be the first stage in a two stage tendering process. You will be asked to provide details and evidence of your organisation's financial standing, business probity and technical capability. This can involve details about:

- Organisational Structure/Staffing
- Insurance
- Health & Safety
- Equality & Diversity
- Previous Experience
- Innovation
- Business Continuity

Check which questions are to be scored as a number of sections may be for information only. Make sure you answer the question and ask if you do not understand something.

If you're successful with your PQQ, in that information about your financial standing, business probity and technical capability meets the Council's requirement, you may be placed onto the shortlist for the contract. The PQQ may restrict the numbers for inclusion on this shortlist. Each organisation on the shortlist will be invited to tender for the contract. For some contracts the PQQ may not be required and the process may begin with the Invitation to Tender.



What is a tender?

A tender can be described in a number of different ways but could be described as being:

“A written presentation, tailored towards the needs of the Council, of your organisation’s ability to deliver the requirements of a contract which is evaluated against set criteria to establish your suitability for undertaking the work to the standard required and within the budgets set.”

Like a good CV, a tender should set out clearly (with evidence) why your organisation can do the work required and it should be tailored to the requirements of the Council. As mentioned above, a tender process will usually start with a PQQ, although the PQQ can sometimes be incorporated into the tender.



How are tenders evaluated?

All local authorities are bound by the same government rules and regulations which state that tenders must always list the evaluation criteria and the relative weightings in relation to the contract (including if an interview process will be involved) and will also give an indication as to how much of the score is given to issues connected to quality and how much to price. Quality is often valued as much as, if not more than, price. It is, therefore, important to demonstrate how you will deliver a quality service.

It does not matter what process the Council uses to evaluate tender submissions: the important thing is what criteria tenders will be evaluated upon. It is equally important that all tenders are treated fairly and transparently and it should be noted at this point that tender submissions cannot be scored against criteria that are not listed in the tender documentation.



What to consider when compiling your tender

There are a number of other issues and factors that need to be taken into account before you begin to compile a tender submission. The answer given to the majority of these will most likely be highly dependent upon your organisation itself, but also on the amount of knowledge you were provided with prior to the tender process. Some of the key issues to be aware of and that your organisation must be happy with before submitting a tender are as follows:

1. Can you deliver the requirements of the contract effectively for the entire life of the contract?

This is critical because if there are any serious doubts as to whether you can provide the level of service required for the whole term of the contract then you might need to reconsider submitting a tender. Declining the opportunity to tender will not influence any future submissions as tenders are all treated on their own merit.

2. What is there about your organisation that will make it stand out from the rest?

Can you offer something innovative or specialist as part of your service? Perhaps you have an area of added value you can bring to the contract,

which will give you that edge in the evaluation stage. Remember, local authority procurement is not usually just about price, as quality and whole-life-costs play a major part in the evaluation process. The tender process is usually highly competitive and it is important that bidders don't undersell themselves. Your submission could be one of a large number of tender responses, so anything that will make your submission stand out will help. You must ensure all questions are fully answered and provide all backup information that is requested. You should never make assumptions about the Council having prior knowledge of your particular organization.



Characteristics of a Poor Tender

It can be surprisingly easy for a tender evaluation team to spot a 'poor' tender, but it should be noted that a 'poor' tender is not always the result of bad practice: it can often simply be a case of someone not having the right understanding or not seeking appropriate advice and guidance when preparing their tender submission.

Listed below (in no particular order) are the key characteristics of a 'poor' tender. A tender is considered less favourably when it is:

- Filled with additional documents that are not clearly referenced in the submission
- Very generic (i.e. not tailored specifically to the requirements of the service)
- Lacking a clear understanding of the service specification
- Not evidenced
- Lacking in detail and effort
- Repetitive and indicates 'copying and pasting'

- Filled with significant errors and/or omissions
- Illegible
- Not well structured
- Poorly presented
- Inconsistent in the information it contains
- Compiled mainly from promotional material
- Completed from the view of a 'parent' company and not the actual applicant
- Lacking in information about other elements of the work of an organisation that will add more value overall to the contract, e.g. where networking with other providers establishes benefits to customers through improved access to other services
- Not priced accordingly to match specific requirements
- Not compiled in line with the Tendering Instructions issued by the Council



Characteristics of a Good Tender

It should be noted that a good tender does not mean that it will be a winning tender, only that it stands a greater chance of becoming one.

A typically good tender is:

- Free of significant errors and/or omissions
- Tailored to the exact requirements of the service
- Detailed with supporting evidence and additional documentation clearly referenced
- Clear about what benefits it can bring to the Council and customers
- Able to demonstrate commitment to the Council and customers
- Able to show where theory has/can be put into practice
- Clearly written and legible

- Clearly committed to continuous improvement and best practice
- Clearly detailed in terms of possible variations and innovations (where applicable)
- Inclusive of the details of added value derived from the expertise and experience of an organisation (where applicable)
- Compiled in line with the instructions



Useful Checklist

The following checklist provides some suggestions that hopefully assist in ensuring that your tender submission is the best it can be before being submitted to the Council for consideration. It should be noted that the checklist is not exhaustive and more complex or specialist contracts will almost certainly require a greater list of requirements for checking. The following list should certainly be included in every tenderer's final checks:

- ✓ Have all relevant aspects of the Council's requirements been discussed and supporting evidence provided of how performance will meet the required standard?
- ✓ Is everything standardised into the same font/type face and structure, etc?
- ✓ Is all the referenced supporting material and evidence included in a clearly set out appendix?
- ✓ Has the entire document been double-checked and then further checked by a non-involved colleague for omissions/areas of clarity, etc?
- ✓ Has the document been signed in all the relevant places by the required level of personnel?
- ✓ Do you have a duplicate copy of the document available to you for safe-keeping on file?



Top Tips

And finally, a few more tips to remember when putting your tender together:

- ♥ Take it one stage at a time.
- ♥ Always provide supporting evidence for statements made in your tender.
- ♥ Ensure the tender focuses on the requirements set out in the specification and evaluation criteria.
- ♥ Read the documentation carefully and understand what is required of you.
- ♥ Provide all of the information requested. If you cannot provide some of the information, for whatever reason, ask for advice or, as a minimum, give a reason for not providing the information in your tender submission.
- ♥ Where relevant, cross-reference the answers or responses in your tender to the questions in the invitation to tender. This will make it easier to evaluate.
- ♥ Be clear on your pricing model and state any assumptions you have made when pricing (for example, resources required by you and/or the Council, etc.).
- ♥ When submitting prices, ensure these are in accordance with the specific requirements of the tender documents.
- ♥ Read the questions carefully and answer them accurately and precisely.
- ♥ Make sure you are aware of the objective of the contract – this will help focus your submission.
- ♥ The Council can only evaluate what you have submitted. It can be difficult for the Council to refer to any previous knowledge or experience it has had with a supplier unless it is in your submission – do not make any assumptions about what the Council may or may not know about you or your organization.

- ♥ Don't be put off by the tender documentation – you can always ask for help. The tender documentation will always include details for you to clarify any points within the tender process. This will not jeopardise your application or put you at a disadvantage.
- ♥ Don't include publicity material in your submission unless you have specifically been asked to.
- ♥ You must complete and return the documents by the given time and date & make sure to sign anything that should be signed.
- ♥ Make sure you return the documents in the format requested.

Further information and guidance on the procurement process can be provided by contacting the Procurement Team by e-mail at cptnewvendor@oxfordshire.gov.uk or by telephone: 01865 323111

You might also wish to seek guidance from OCVA (Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action) and contact details are shown below:

The OCVA Development Team

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