Guidelines for the Appointment of Tourism Consultants

These guidelines have been prepared by the Tourism Consultants' Network (TCN), a special-interest section of the Tourism Society. They are based on research among our members and users of consultancy services.

The research indicated that if the guidelines were followed, consultants' time could be used more effectively, clients would obtain better proposals and the value and quality of the work commissioned would be higher. Most importantly, budgets could be used more effectively and profitably to the mutual benefit of both client and consultant.

The Tourism Society is based in the UK, but many TCN members work and/or are located in other countries. The guidelines are designed to be used internationally, subject to the regulatory and commercial context of the countries in which projects are located.

The guidelines also seek to reflect the different processes that may be applied by private or public sector commissioners of consultancy services. Increasingly, public sector bodies in the UK, the European Union and other countries are required to follow rules for the procurement of consultancy services and these constrain many of the procedures to be used in tendering tourism consultancy work of any scale. These new guidelines try to reflect that situation as well as provide advice for those with more freedom of action.

The guidelines are designed primarily to help in the process of identifying and appointing a suitably qualified consultancy practice although many of our members are independent consultants and much of the advice is applicable more widely.

Identifying potential consultants

How do you find a consultant?

- The Tourism Consultants' Network is the biggest association of specialist tourism consultants in Europe. Full details of our members' expertise and experience can be consulted on this website, under the Find a Consultant tab.
- Alternatively, the professional tourism organisations most relevant to your project may keep a register of approved consultants e.g. your local Destination Management Organisation or Tourist Board, or your sectoral group e.g. the Museums Association or one of the accommodation sector bodies.
- Also, do ring around to find out who has done what elsewhere. When you have got some names of potential consultants, ring them up to establish their interest – and get a first impression. The Chairman of the TCN or the secretariat of the Tourism Society will always be happy to advise if needed.
- Many public sector bodies in the UK and international agencies are now obliged to advertise their tender opportunities via an open portal. Given the plethora of portals, not all consultants will be aware of them all and you may miss alerting some of the

best candidates. We recommend that you send details to those you would particularly like to tender. You can also draw the attention of all TCN members to a project opportunity by sending brief details and a link to your portal to the Tourism Consultants Network (via consultants@tourismsociety.org) who will be happy to circulate the details to its members.

How many consultants should be approached to tender?

- For most projects, ideally three, and generally not more than five.
- The more consultants you ask to make submissions, the more you will increase your workload. It is time-consuming to liaise with candidate consultants, to meet with them, to provide background information and to assess their proposals.
- If you ask more than three, some of the most suitable and busiest consultants might decide not to make proposals because the chance of being selected is reduced.
- Open tendering may be more transparent but it can create problems. If you have to go to open tender, we strongly recommend that you adopt a two stage approach whereby you ask for a pre-qualification tender before choosing a short list for full tenders. We are aware of situations where more than 20 full tenders have been submitted for relatively small jobs; this is a waste of resources for the client who has to go through many inappropriate submissions and for the many consultants who don't have the right experience or skills.
- Providing information on how many consultants have been approached will allow consultants to gauge their chances of success. It is also helpful it you can say who the other consultants are.

Preparing the brief

Should you tell consultants what the budget is?

- It is mutually helpful to state an approximate budget because tourism consultancy can vary considerably in scale and depth. The best way for a consultant to judge your aspirations is to know how much fee is available. It is virtually impossible to design a brief that is not capable of many different interpretations and the best consultant for the job is not necessarily the one who guesses correctly the value of input required.
- Stating the budget offers a benchmark whereby all consultants can say what they can offer for that price, making it easier for consultants to prepare a suitable approach and easier for the client to compare bids. If no budget is stated, you are likely to end up with a number of proposals that are very hard to compare.
- Some firms have limits below which they will work only on the basis of direct, non-competitive appointments.
- By providing information on the budget and numbers competing, you can be more confident that those consultants that tender will put forward good, competitive proposals.

How detailed should the brief be?

- Do not overload a study brief. The quality of the work will suffer if consultants are expected to deliver too much within a limited budget. Aim for depth rather than breadth.

- Provide as much detail as possible on the scope and scale of the project, particularly if no budget is indicated.
- It is wise initially to treat briefs as provisional and to be prepared to issue amendments to them. The process of liaison with consultants during the preparation of submissions often raises valuable, fresh ideas. A rigid brief may preclude the most beneficial outcome.

What information is needed from consultants?

- Be proportionate. The information requested in briefs is often unwarranted given the scale of the project and risks associated with it. Only ask for information that you really need to assess the consultant's suitability for your project. In recent years, public sector procurement processes have tended towards greater bureaucracy with requests for excessively detailed information.
- There is often an inordinate emphasis in tender documentation on policies, procedures, accreditation and financial strength, requiring consultants to provide masses of information. These matters are important but should only be taken up with the successful consultant; there is little point in requiring all tenderers to provide such details at the outset.
- References are particularly important but do leave any approaches to the final decision stage to avoid unnecessary inconvenience to referees.
- If you require consultants to have professional indemnity insurance, do be realistic in the level required: if the level demanded is too high, you risk disqualifying or deterring perfectly competent consultants.

What else can ensure we get the best possible tenders?

- Allow a minimum of three weeks for the preparation of proposals. Consultants are not necessarily able to drop everything the day they receive your brief. The best consultants are usually the busiest.
- Have someone available throughout the period to meet the consultants or answer their questions over the phone. This should be a responsible professional involved with the project, not the procurement officer. A consultant will prepare a much more effective proposal if they have a full understanding of the relevant issues.
- If a multi-organisation team is appointing the consultants, one member should be given delegated powers to resolve questions that may arise and to give clear answers to consultants' queries.
- This should extend to the power to issue amendments to the brief and the timetable if the need arises, as for example when an oversight emerges that is identified by one of the candidate consultants.
- Some clients take the view that any and all requested information and questions should be circulated to all competing consultants. This stifles innovation; if a consultant wants to pursue an interesting or new line, they should be encouraged to do so. They will be less likely to do so if other consultants are going to benefit from their enquiries or suggestions.
- If your procurement process involves submissions via an e-portal, do work with your procurement team to make sure it is reliable, simple and user-friendly.
- Your brief should ideally include arrangements for consultants to visit the site(s) (if appropriate to the project) before preparing their proposal.

Interviewing and selecting the candidates

Interview arrangements

- It is helpful to all parties to let consultants know the likely date(s) for interviews at the earliest opportunity, even if they may not be short-listed.
- A choice of dates is helpful as some consultants (especially the best) may have other important commitments on your chosen date.

What selection criteria should be applied?

- Your criteria will vary according to the project, its cost and duration but may include:
    - ‘Technical’ or specialist skills;
    - Relevant industry sector experience, CVs[1];
    - Overall track record;
    - Quality of references: individual and corporate;
    - Understanding of the brief and compliance with it in their submission;
    - Approach to the work, evidence of innovative thought;
    - Knowledge of the geographical or market area, but only if prior experience is deemed essential; experienced consultants will rapidly acquire the necessary market intelligence on the ground (and can be provided with local support or required to include a local consultant with the necessary market knowledge in the team)Quality of project management;
    - Price; and
    - Timescale; ability to deliver when required, or as proposed.
- Ensure the assessment of tenders gives sufficient weight to the technical qualities of the proposals when related to the tender price. You may want to retain the right to negotiate on price if your favoured consultant is deemed too expensive. If price is the over-riding factor, make the weighting clear and ideally, state the budget to avoid wasted proposals.
- You should weigh each factor in any evaluation of proposals but experience has shown that the most important aspect of all is to find a consultant with whom you and your team can work constructively.
- This suggests a need for a flexible approach to evaluation criteria rather than an ill-conceived or inflexible scoring matrix.

Should you interview consultants or judge on written submissions?

- It is important to know who the consultants will be who will work on your project and how well you and the consultants could work together but interviews can be misleading as the presentation skills of consultants vary.
- Some organisations are now basing their choice purely on the written proposal. Such an approach can save time and expense for both parties, but there are risks in not having met consultants in person.
- If there is a clear favourite amongst the written proposals, you could invite the consultant for a discussion, without commitment, prior to formal appointment. This

[1] We advise that you do not prohibit specialist sub-consultants from participating in more than one submitting team. If you do, you may lose a particular expert with particularly relevant skills because his or her team is not chosen.

will give you a chance to meet face-to-face and confirm that they are the right team for the job.
- If you decide to interview, do so only with those consultants who have a realistic chance of success.

Getting the best from Consultant interviews
- Your interview team should ideally be not more than two or three people - all of whom are knowledgeable about the proposed project and the brief.
- The interview room should be arranged in a welcoming style with consultants and sponsors sitting alongside each other around the same table.
- Allow sufficient time to meet and greet the consultants, and for them to settle in and set up any presentation equipment as many consultants will wish to use audio-visual material. (Candidates should be asked in advance if they wish to make audio-visual presentation and, if so, what equipment you will need to provide.)
- Specify the interview length: If you are interviewing several consultants on the same day, the best is perhaps a 60 minute cycle: 25 minutes for presentations, 25 minutes for discussion and 10 minutes for changeover. Anything under 45 minutes will probably be too short.
- You may wish to limit the amount of time allocated to formal presentations.

Appointing the consultant

Informing consultants of the outcome and documenting the appointment
- Lengthy legal contracts are sometimes required, notably by major donor agencies for major contracts but more simple options should be sought for smaller projects.
- A simple letter of appointment, clearly stating the agreed terms of the commission, will often suffice. The consultant should then confirm acceptance, also in writing.
- It is courteous to inform unsuccessful consultants as soon as possible after the selection process has been completed.
- Offer to inform them of what were seen as the strengths and weaknesses of their proposal/presentation.

Working together to ensure the best results

What makes a good timetable for the project?
- Start date: most consultants cannot allocate time for your project until you have confirmed their appointment.
- It is vital to agree a timetable for the project with the consultant, and for this to be flexible to cater for contingencies that arise during the study.
- Give your consultant sufficient time to carry out a full professional job. Getting the best outcome is usually more important than saving a few weeks.
- Allow plenty of time for setting up meeting and interview programmes and conducting contextual research and surveys; the people the consultants need to interview cannot always be available or respond instantly.

What about meetings during the project?

- One costly element of a consultant's work is attending regular client meetings. If you can keep these to a minimum during the project itself, this will be beneficial to you and to the consultant.
- A schedule of organisations or persons to be consulted should, if possible, be in the agreed brief; otherwise it should be drawn up and agreed at the start of the work.
- For longer projects, many international organisations require the consultants to present an inception report after the first couple of weeks on site, which summarises briefly the consultants' proposed methodology and embraces any agreed last-minute minor modifications to the brief. This document de facto becomes part of the contract between client and consultant.

Payments

- For all but the smallest jobs, consultants will want a clear invoicing and payment schedule and should, ideally, include an inception payment as there are inevitably start-up costs and some time-lag before the first milestone. Prompt payment after each milestone is important, particularly for the many small consultancies.

What is the process for submitting the final report?

- Your consultant should send you a draft report, for comment and amendment if necessary, in advance of the final text.
- Ownership of the copyright of any new material produced in the course of a project should be agreed at the start of a project.

Use these Guidelines and the TCN Code of Good Practice when commissioning consultants

Irreconcilable disputes between Client and Consultant are rare. If they occur, it is in the best interests of both parties to resolve them as soon as possible.

All Members of the Tourism Consultants Network have agreed to comply with the TCN's formal Code of Practice, available from the TCN website tcn.tourismsociety.org. When commissioning a consultant, the terms of this Code of Practice should be borne in mind. In the case of any dispute Clients should refer to the Code for any references therein that are helpful in clarifying the potential points of dispute.

However, if an apparently unresolvable dispute arises between a Client who has engaged a Consultant for the provision of services in accordance with these guidelines and a Consultant who is a member of the Tourism Consultants' Network, the Client may apply in writing to the TCN Chairman who will review the matter in dispute. The Chairman may himself advise on the issue or he may appoint another individual to act as an informal mediator.

The objective will be to provide impartial guidance to assist the Client and the Consultant to resolve the matters in dispute.

Feedback

The Tourism Consultants' Network committee has drafted these Guidelines, which will be kept under review and revised in response to changing circumstances in order to provide the most constructive and mutually beneficial advice possible. The TCN would welcome feedback on this advice or suggestions for improvements from both clients and consultants: please send any comments to consultants@tourismsociety.org.