

AusAID Public Affairs Period Contract

Generic Debrief to Tenderers

1. Overview

1.1 AusAID wishes to thank all who tendered for the Public Affairs Period Contract which was advertised on 21 October 2000. Tenders were called in six categories: Writing (speech writing, media and editing); Film/Video; Photography; Public Relations, Events and Marketing; Communications; and Graphic Design.

1.2 The tender was a very productive exercise for AusAID and attracted conforming tenders from 30 individuals and 29 firms, institutions and organisations. The tenders nominated a total of 183 individuals. The high overall quality of the tenders provided a very competitive field and allowed AusAID with the assistance of the Technical Assessment Panel (TAP), to make clear distinctions between tenders and between individuals nominated.

1.3 In the Request for Tender (RFT), AusAID proposed to provide Tenderers with an oral, generic debriefing after contracts had been signed with the successful tenderers.

1.4 In this case however, given the higher than expected number of tenders received and the high number of individuals nominated against the categories and sub-categories, the provision of an oral debriefing to all tenderers would be a major undertaking which unfortunately, is beyond our capacity to provide. Accordingly, the following summary of the common strengths and weaknesses of the tenders received (as identified by the TAP) is provided to assist tenderers to formulate future AusAID tenders.

1.5 Given the number and quality of the tenders, some tenderers have not been awarded period contracts and many of the contracts awarded do not include all of the individuals nominated. A number of tenders were rated technically suitable by the TAP, but some of the lower rated, technically suitable tenders were not offered contracts. This was because in most categories, AusAID's needs were met without offering contracts to all technically suitable tenderers.

2. About The Technical Assessment Panel (TAP)

2.1 The TAP comprised highly qualified AusAID representatives and independent specialists. The TAP members ranked tenders according to their technical merit based on the tender content against AusAID's specifications as set out in the Selection Criteria and Terms of Reference (TOR) contained within the RFT.

2.2 Tenders which fell outside the scope of the RFT or did not fully address its requirements were marked down accordingly.

3 Inclusions Which Strengthened Tenders

3.1 Tenders which rated well in the technical assessment had the following features:

- Included examples of work where appropriate and included relevant, illustrative attachments:
 - This held particularly for tenderers in the Film/Video Photography and Graphic Design categories. Considerable weight was given to the quality of the work produced in these categories and so failure to demonstrate the quality by providing relevant examples of work was marked down. Several tenderers gave great relevance to specific projects in their technical proposal, but submitted examples of work related to a completely different topic. Several tenderers also cited aid-related experience, but failed to provide examples of that experience in their tender when there was clear advantage in doing so;
- Were clear about what was required. The higher rated tenders used examples to *demonstrate* their claims against a certain criterion and tenders which merely claimed to have done something without providing supporting evidence were marked down;
- Showed how they understood the criterion. For example, in demonstrating their understanding of the aid program, successful tenderers provided a statement in their own words of what they saw as AusAID's objectives, aims and priorities; and
- Clearly identified their role in any given process, linked their claims to outcomes and focussed on the results achieved. For example, some strong tenderers detailed:
 - how a particular project met a client's identified communication objectives; or
 - where their inputs had resulted in increased sales for a client; or
 - where recruitment grew or attendance figures rose as a result of the material produced.

3.2 Some tenders contained ambiguities and were marked down because the TAP could not clearly interpret their meaning.

4. Examples Of Weaknesses In responses To Selection Criteria

4.1 The following examples highlight common weaknesses of tenders against the various selection criteria.

Selection Criterion A

4.2 Numerous tenderers made no effort to demonstrate an understanding of Australia's aid program. Tenderers who researched and demonstrated a clear

understanding of Australia's aid program were scored higher than tenderers who neglected to express any understanding of the program.

4.3 Some tenderers used their response to Selection Criterion A to explain processes or approaches to communicating development issues, rather than demonstrating their abilities through citing examples of work.

Selection Criterion B

4.4 Tenderers who made broad, unsubstantiated claims of experience were marked down. All such claims should have been substantiated. In this regard, two weaker tenders included:

- "Throughout his career he has demonstrated a strong ability in gaining extensive media coverage in mainstream and specialist media". No lists of coverage gained or examples of media coverage were included in the tender; and
- "[Consultant x] has assisted [firm y's] client to gain significant positive coverage for their new products, corporate initiatives and issues." No examples of coverage were cited.

4.5 Some tenderers failed to cite all relevant experience against the criteria, leaving it to the TAP member to find relevant experience listed in the CV and make the connection to the appropriate criteria.

Selection Criterion C

4.6 Lack of detail in demonstrating appropriate office and administrative capacity was common. Tenderers who did well in this category provided detailed evidence and/or examples to substantiate experience/capacity.

4.7 Several tenderers did not provide detail of Quality Assurance practices and policies and/or demonstrated capacity to prepare and produce high quality, publication-ready documentation:

- A poor example: "I remain confident in the ability to efficiently develop a project towards completion, satisfying my standards; which I set marginally higher to what I imagine to be the client's expectations".

5. Some examples of Best Practice:

5.1 The tenders which stood out were those in which:

- The tenderer clearly demonstrated legitimate experience and/or abilities relevant to the criteria by citing relevant examples;
- Cited their strongest claims first;
- Avoided the use of broad, unsubstantiated claims; and
- Provided cross-references within the text of Examples of Work Undertaken and of Materials Produced.

5.2 The following examples were considered to represent best practice in clearly outlining experience against selection criteria:

- "The Publishing Manual written by the consultant for the (Country X) -Australian Basic Education Project (see next page) was praised as a model in the use of plain English to explain difficult processes and for the ease with which it could be translated into the language of the country for the use of local writers, editors and planners. (A detailed "Example of Work Undertaken" followed);
- "Her most recent freelance assignment was the editing of a 450-page textbook for (Publisher A) containing more than 200 illustrations and diagrams ... (see details and referees in Annex I, page 3);" and
- "Over the past few years I have contributed articles and photographs to the following publications - The Age, The Sunday Age, The Australian (a list of 32 publications was provided).