

Environmental Management and Natural Resource Management (EMNRM) Period Offer

Generic Debrief to Tenderers

1. Overview

1.1 AusAID wishes to thank all who tendered for the EMNRM Development Period Offer (PO). The tender was advertised on 11 November 2000 and tenders were called in three sub-sectors:

- Coastal and Marine Resource Management;
- Land and Water Resource Management; and
- Environmental Management.

1.2 The tender was a very productive exercise for AusAID and attracted 102 complying tenders from individuals, firms, institutions and organisations nominating a total of 898 individuals against the above sub-sectors. 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 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. In this case however, given the higher than expected number of tenders received and the high number of individuals nominated against the sub-sectors, 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.

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

2. About The Technical Assessment Panel (TAP)

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

Inclusions Which Strengthened Tenders

Individual Consultants

Selection Criterion A

3.1 The best tenders from **individual consultants**:

- in relation to **Criterion A1**, described their office (including information technology and communications) facilities, their administrative support/arrangements and their financial management capacity; and
- in relation to **Criterion A2**, set out their approach and capacity to deliver quality outputs, set out some of their experience and explained (for example) how a report which they had produced and had been accepted by the client; and
 - the quality of their tender was considered by the TAP to be a good demonstration of this capacity.

Firms and Organisations

General Comment

3.2 In broad terms, the TAP found that **firms and organisations** which rated well in the technical assessment generally:

- were clear about what was required. The firms when referring to individuals used examples to demonstrate their claims against individual selection criterion;
 - individuals who claimed to have done something without providing supporting evidence were marked down;
- fully complied with AusAID's documentation requirements as set out in Tender Schedule B of the RFT and particularly in regard to the content of Curriculum Vitae and Experience Data Sheets;
- showed their understanding of the selection criterion. For example, in demonstrating their understanding of the aid program, successful individuals restated in their own words what they saw as its objectives and priorities; and
- clearly identified their role in any given process.

Selection Criterion A1

3.3 Firms which rated well against this criterion:

- in addressing capacity to source consultants:
 - provided information about the management and content of their consultant database;
 - addressed the extent (including the variety of discipline and sectoral coverage) along with the quality of their database (one firm gave details of its pre-listing screening processes);
 - demonstrated that theirs was a "living database" which is continually updated with CVs being added and removed regularly; and

- addressed the issue of rapid response giving specific details of their procedures for the quick turnaround of requests;
- demonstrated linkages with:
 - appropriate overseas firms and institutions which may also be able to provide additional expertise to and assistance/support for teams in the field;
 - like or complementary firms or organisations, government departments and institutions both in Australia or overseas;
 - national and international “centres of excellence”; and
- addressed mobilisation issues (such as obtaining visas, travel and health insurance) and illustrated their experience in dealing with factors which can delay mobilisation.

Selection Criterion A2

3.4 Firms which rated well against this criterion:

- set out how they would manage the consultants contracted through the PO, including their proposed mobilization procedures identifying:
 - the provision of briefing to consultants to give a clear understanding of the assignment, AusAID’s and the Partner Government’s requirements along with reporting requirements, Gender and Development (GAD) and security considerations where appropriate;
 - details of in-house team management expertise along with backstopping arrangements (technical and professional) including support in Australia and overseas; and
 - the debriefing of the consultant and an evaluation of the activity on the completion of the assignment along with the recording of lessons learnt; and
- provided details of their office accommodation (including access to offices overseas), systems (including any IT networking arrangements) and financial support arrangements.

3.5 Examples of a sound approach included:

- “We will provide technical, human resource, financial and logistical support to facilitate the successful implementation and management of assignments under the PO. Individuals will be supported by
- "We will negotiate contracts with consultants that define TOR, reporting requirements and lines of authority and communication. The contract will include procedures for making travel arrangements and for making progress/final payments".

Selection Criterion A3

3.6 Firms which rated well against this criterion:

- described their QA system;
- explained the processes and practices in place to ensure that documents are of high quality or described any arrangements with sub-contractors for quality control of documentation;

- provided a tender containing no typographical, editorial or formatting errors which was adequately bound; and
- detailed the IT and any other technical facilities available.

Selection Criteria A4

3.7 Firms which rated well against this criterion:

- demonstrated a constructive approach to the inclusion of LEPs;
- identified support and mentoring arrangements (both in-Australia and overseas) to be provided by more experienced professionals in the sub-sector; and
 - the identification of support arrangements for LEPs overseas was important but was not addressed in a number of tenders.

3.8 One strong approach documented a step-wise procedure which included:

- ensuring that the LEP is fully conversant with the study;
- providing additional briefing from in-house and external experts;
- establishing a monitoring program with an experienced mentor;
- providing training where required;
- undertaking an end of assignment evaluation and providing detailed feedback; and
- ensuring adequate communications when on assignment and that arrangements for emergency assistance or evacuation are in place.

SELECTION CRITERION B

Formal Qualifications

3.9 **Individuals** who rated well against this criterion:

- noted the importance of on-going professional development and provided evidence of additional training in cross-cutting areas (such as Gender and Development (GAD) and project management);
- tailored their CV and related their experience to the requirements of both the RFT/TOR and the specific sub sector;
- did not simply repeat a listing of assignments from their CV;
- possessed suitable qualifications in a resource management-related area consistent with the sub-sector for which they were applying;
- demonstrated current knowledge and recognition of specialist skills in relevant areas such as land administration, GIS and related technologies, land rehabilitation, hydrology, soil science, native forest and grasslands management (depending on the sub-sector); and
- demonstrated an ability to apply their knowledge in practice (for example through long-and short-term consultancies or in teaching extension personnel).

3.10 Examples of inclusions in very good responses include:

- “...is experienced in cadastral systems, surveying and mapping, GIS, GPS and land administration”;
- “...has extensive experience in land, asset and natural resource and geographic information systems both in Australia and overseas”;
- “...maintains up to date knowledge of natural resource management and land titling issues through his numerous consultancies”; and
- “...provides advice to both AusAID and the World Bank in...”.

Relevant Experience

3.11 Individuals who rated well against this criterion:

- demonstrated a record of work experience in the sub-sector, including overseas consultancies; and
- demonstrated working experience in developing countries;

3.12 The very good responses specified the role of individuals in relation to particular activities which were cross-referenced to their CVs and project data sheets. Examples include:

- “...has over 20 years experience in land and water management, including in soil and landscape surveys...”;
- “...for the major part of my career I have addressed the problem of sustainable use and long term conservation and rehabilitation of natural resources...”;
- “...I have participated at senior level in assignments in these areas working for international funding agencies including AusAID and the Asian Development Bank...”.

3.13 Tenders which did well against this criterion:

- gave brief indications of relevant aid work undertaken in developing countries including with which agencies; or
- where developing country experience was limited, contained evidence of relevant work in Australia, especially in remote areas with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

SELECTION CRITERION C

3.14 Individuals who rated well against this criterion:

- highlighted both their written and oral communications skills and illustrated how the latter had been demonstrated;
- provided specifics of cross-cultural interaction:
 - “ cross-cultural experience includes xxx months of field work living and working with rural communities and small, rural NGOs;
- provided specifics of gender awareness training;
- detailed experience in leading/participating in teams;
 - provided evidence of their experience with the Australian aid program: where there was no direct experience, the strongest individuals demonstrated the

efforts that they had made to research and gain knowledge of the program;
and

3.15 Examples of inclusions in very good responses include:

- “...has proven ability to communicate at all levels, verbally or in writing, gained from working in industry, research, government and education. He has experience and qualifications in education and training...”;
- “...has considerable experience in liaising with overseas government and semi-government agencies and has routinely interacted with a variety of stakeholders including farmers and...”;
- “...has sound experience in management of AusAID projects which has spanned the change from ‘Women in Development’ to “GAD”. This has necessitated the development of an understanding of the ways in which project activities, outputs and outcomes can impact upon or enhance the productive role of gender groups in the community”;
- “...is an experienced leader of multidisciplinary teams, having either participated in or lead 17 missions [as verified from his CV] (of which one was an AusAID design study)...”;
- “...is fully aware of AusAID’s project preparation requirements including incorporation of social dimensions (equity and gender issues), environmental considerations and its policy on indigenous groups...’; and
- “...as Team Leader/Institutions and Rural Development Specialist, has developed a sound and comprehensive understanding of AusAID program and policy in the rural development sector’.

4. **Examples of Weaknesses In Responses To Selection Criteria**

4.1 The TAP found that individuals who did not rate well and were marked down accordingly fell outside the scope of the RFT or did not fully address its requirements. Ambiguity in tenders cost marks and invited the TAP to place their own interpretation on events or circumstances.

4.2 The TAP also found that the most common generic weakness was a failure to address the requirements of the Selection Criteria. Those tenders that did not satisfactorily demonstrate their claims against the selection criteria (either because of limited capacity or the brevity of their responses) generally received low scores. Another common weakness was the inclusion of extraneous material: statements in support of claims against selection criteria needed to be objective and supportable. For example unless supporting information was provided, there was little point in stating that:

- We (the tenderer) produce documents of the highest quality; or
- This company uses world’s best practice in----

4.3 The following examples highlight the most common weaknesses of tenders:

IN RELATION TO CRITERION A

- some criteria were addressed by providing generic information about the company rather than information specifically addressing the criterion;

- for example, a number of tenders included information which appeared to be prepared for inclusion in a broad-based publicity statement for sending to potential clients;
- some tenderers (firms) claimed to have sound capacity to source additional consultants, yet proposed only two or three consultants in their tender and did not indicate from where additional consultants would be sourced;
 - in some cases the nominated consultants had limited experience which severely detracted from the firm’s claims against this criterion;
- some tenderers claimed strong quality assurance processes yet provided poor quality tender documents. Examples include:
 - the CVs of some consultants nominated in the technical proposal were not attached;
 - some consultants were discussed in the technical proposal but were not listed in the personnel matrix;
 - many tenders contained frequent spelling, typographical, formatting, binding and editorial errors; and
 - LEPs were nominated but the selection criteria for the provision of support to them was not addressed.

IN RELATION TO CRITERION B

- some consultants were nominated against two sub-sectors, but only had strong claims against one sub-sector;
- many CVs did not provide all of the required information. For example:
 - there were many cases where one or more of the CV requirements (eg formal qualifications, date of birth or nationality) were missing;
- many CVs did not detail (for each assignment) the country(ies) of assignment(s), the position held, the dates and length of assignments or provide a brief description of the tasks undertaken;
 - it was insufficient to simply provide a three page list of publications or to state that “here are a few consultancies I have undertaken, but I have done plenty more”;
 - many of the project data sheets did not reflect the experience most relevant to the PO; and
- there were a number of tenders in which the claims of the individual consultants in relation to criteria B and C appeared inflated;
 - while this could have been due to CVs not including all of the individual’s skills and experience, there were many cases where the text addressing claims in the technical proposal was not supported in the CVs.

IN RELATION TO CRITERION C

- many individual consultants provided insufficient information about their actual capacity or experience to substantiate their claim. For example:
 - statements were made that “I support gender equity” with no explanation of whether the consultant has any real understanding of gender and development policy in aid delivery; and

- some technical proposals failed to cite relevant experience against the selection criteria, leaving it to the TAP member to find relevant experience listed in the CV and make the connection to the appropriate criteria;
- “communication skills” was often interpreted as meaning ‘report writing’ and oral communications skills were frequently overlooked. In many other cases “oral communication” was interpreted as meaning “presentation skills” – that is lecturing rather than the capacity to listen, understand and communicate ideas (ie. a two-way flow) with a range of stakeholders;
- cross-cultural skills and capacity to interact with individuals and organizations was often interpreted only as “having overseas experience”. Thus the provision of a list of countries visited, without addressing cross-cultural skills with individuals and organizations was marked down;
- while a number of individuals claimed knowledge of AusGUIDE and/or AusAID’s GAD or Environment Policies for its consultants:
 - they often failed to provide any clear evidence that the consultants had direct experience and/or training in these areas; or
 - in discussing GAD, discussed work-place gender balance or other EEO principles instead; and
- numerous individuals made no effort to demonstrate an understanding of Australia's aid program or AusAID’s environmental guidelines. Individuals who researched these areas and expressed the understanding they gained in their response were scored higher than those who neglected to express any understanding of them.