

## **Water Supply and Sanitation Period Offer Generic Debrief to Tenderers**

### **1. Overview**

1.1 AusAID wishes to thank all who tendered for the Water Supply and Sanitation (WSS) Period Offer (PO). The tender was advertised on 3 February 2001 and tenders were called in five sub-sectors:

- Water Resource Management;
- Water Supply – Rural/Community Managed;
- Water Supply – Urban/Institutionally Managed;
- Sanitation and Drainage; and
- Waste Management.

1.2 The tender was a very productive exercise for AusAID and attracted 42 complying tenders from individuals, firms, institutions and organisations nominating a total of 496 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 in relation to tender quality and between individuals nominated.

1.3 In the Request for Tender (RFT), AusAID advised that it would provide Tenderers with a generic debriefing once contracts have been signed with the preferred tenderers. 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 contracted for the purpose. 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. The following summarises TAP member comments on the common strengths and weaknesses of the tenders received.

### **3. Inclusions Which Strengthened or Weakened Tenders**

#### **General Comment**

#### **Strong Tenders**

3.1 In broad terms, the TAP found that tenders which rated well in the technical assessment generally:

- were prepared with the reader in mind i.e. were logically and clearly set out presenting the information in an easily accessible manner to give TAP members the maximum opportunity to consider the tender and to rate it against others;
- were clear about what was required and when referring to individuals:
  - used examples to demonstrate their claims against each selection criterion;
  - clearly identified their role in any given process;
- fully complied with AusAID's documentation requirements as set out in Tender Schedule B of the RFT;
- tailored the content of Curriculum Vitae and Experience Data sheets to the TOR and Selection Criteria;
- fully addressed **all** selection criteria in their response; and
- showed their understanding of the selection criterion.

#### **Weaker Tenders**

3.2 The TAP also found that tenders which rated poorly in the technical assessment generally:

- were not well structured making it difficult for the reader to find key sections;
- did not show an appreciation that the technical proposal (or response) was the key document and depended largely on what was contained in CVs of nominated individuals;
- were overly brief in presenting their personnel in their response and so "under-sold" themselves;
- claimed that individuals had particular experience but failed to provide supporting evidence; and
- often used the same words to respond to all or a number of the selection criteria for all nominees. This tended to reflect adversely on the credibility of the tender as responses to Criterion B and C were intended to be written by the individual.

#### **Comments Against Selection Criteria**

#### **Selection Criterion A(a) (office, administrative and financial support capacity)**

3.3 Tenders which rated well against this criterion:

- addressed all elements of the criterion and particularly their financial support capacity;
- demonstrated their capacity and approach to managing individuals contracted through the PO, including their proposed mobilization procedures identifying:

- issues (such as obtaining visas, travel and health insurance) and illustrated their experience in dealing with factors which can delay mobilisation;
- the briefing of consultants to give a clear understanding of the assignment, AusAID and the Partner Government’s requirements along with reporting requirements 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;
- the debriefing of consultants 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.

3.4 Examples of sound approaches which demonstrated an understanding of the key issues include:

- “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 provided with both technical and administrative support.....”; and
- "We will negotiate contracts with consultants that define TOR, reporting requirements, lines of authority and communication. The contract will include procedures for making travel arrangements and for making progress/final payments".

#### **Selection Criterion A(b) (production of high quality documentation)**

3.5 Tenders 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;
- referred to notable, substantial and even award-winning reports produced previously;
- referred to professional affiliations that require certain standards of document preparation and presentation;
  - such references extend the credibility beyond the single document at hand.
- provided an adequately bound tender containing an accurate table of contents, consistency of language (i.e first or third person) and no typographical, editorial or formatting errors;
- defined acronyms on first use; and
- detailed the IT, report preparation and any other technical facilities available.

#### **Selection Criterion B(a) (formal qualifications)**

3.6 Tenderers 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);
- possessed relevant qualifications in a resource management-related area consistent with the sub-sector for which they were applying;
  - stated the thesis topic for those with post-graduate qualifications;
- demonstrated current knowledge and a recognition of the specialist skills required in relevant areas (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).

### **Selection Criterion B(b) (professional skills and experience)**

3.7 Tenderers who rated well against this criterion:

- presented sufficient information to enable an assessment of the individual's claims;
- prepared CVs and project data sheets which related nominated individuals' experience and skills to the requirements of both the RFT/TOR and the specific sub-sector;
- demonstrated a record of work experience (including overseas consultancies) in the sub-sector;
- in response to the RFT statement that professional experience in developing countries would be an advantage, but was not a prerequisite for selection:
  - where experience in developing countries was lacking, demonstrated that they had an understanding of relevant developing country issues and showed how their skills could be adapted to meet the PO needs; and
  - related their work experience, for example with small remote communities in Australia, to similar contexts in developing countries;
- demonstrated work experience in developing countries or isolated communities; and
- did not simply repeat a listing of assignments from their CV.

3.8 The most common weakness in tenders that did not score well against this criterion were those which:

- were poorly presented or provided inadequate evidence of individuals' experience or qualifications to substantiate claims;
  - in some cases CVs gave some indication of appropriate experience in a particular area but the remarks against the selection criteria did not develop or adequately describe the particular experience involved;
- did not appear to have any experience relevant to the nominated category. For example, one individual claimed "extensive experience in the water resource management area" when the only category that they had nominated for was waste management;
- responded only by listing the organisations where they had worked or the positions they had held rather than setting out their achievements and detailing how their experience related to the specific professional experience required;

- tended to assume that senior experience (e.g. CEO, senior executive, senior academic) was self explanatory combined with a failure to expand the relevance of particular skills and experience to the selection criteria;
- for many individuals (often engineers) failed to demonstrate an understanding of the humanitarian, institutional or relationship dimensions of their work; and
- failed to fully set out relevant employment history including commencement and completion dates or to provide details of recent consultancies and professional development experience.

### **Selection Criterion B (c) (sound and appropriate advice)**

#### 3.9 Higher scoring tenders:

- set out the situation in which the advice was provided, the level of the recipient of the advice and described the impact of the advice on the situation;
- demonstrated that they were aware of the need to assess the conditions particular to developing countries and take all of the relevant conditions into consideration in preparing their advice to suit the conditions;
- linked their experience and expertise with the context of conditions in developing countries;
- for individuals with developing country experience, demonstrated their capability to provide appropriate advice by referring to specific instances where they had provided sound advice; and
- highlighted that a “one size fits all” mentality is not appropriate within this context.

#### 3.10 Weaker tenders:

- did not clearly demonstrate how their particular level of expertise could be transferred to providing advice appropriate to developing countries; and
- made simplistic “motherhood” statements which did not show any understanding of the issues involved.

### **Selection Criterion C(a) (oral and written communication skills)**

#### 3.11 Higher scoring tenders:

- exhibited strong skills through reference to specific examples;
- used gender neutral language;
- considered more general issues of communication in different and difficult environments;
- gave examples of the application of a systematic approach to developing solutions to overcome communication challenges or gaps in a particular environment;
- demonstrated relevant language skills beyond English;
- provided illustrations of their negotiating skills and evidence of effectively presenting relevant material to decision makers;
- indicated a familiarity with the sensitivities of cross-cultural work (whether in Australia or in developing countries) and the development of an approach to overcoming those sensitivities.

3.12 Lower scoring tenders:

- often focused on the production of written materials and did not refer to oral communication;
- simply provided a career history and did not address all of the selection criteria; and
- did not give examples of their work.

3.13 One poor example stated that “he had written several reports” without alluding to context of their preparation, the content or providing examples.

**Selection Criterion C (b) (appreciation of gender, environmental and community development issues)**

3.14 The stronger responses demonstrated knowledge of the particular policies, an understanding of the issues associated with their application and provided specifics of gender awareness training. Sound examples included

- “...has sound experience in management of AusAID projects which has spanned the change from ‘Women in Development’ to “Gender and Development”. 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”; and
- “In many of the client countries where the consultant has worked, the need to enhance the role of women and other groups in project development and delivery led to specific project components directed at these objectives”.

3.15 Perhaps the least useful approach to addressing this criterion was that of the consultant who had simply “noted” AusAID policy in this regard. The weaker responses:

- failed to address all aspects of the criteria including gender, community development and environmental issues;
- claimed “a full appreciation of relevant AusAID policies” without demonstrating this “appreciation”;
- treated gender as relating to EEO or “gender balance” rather than demonstrating a wider appreciation of the gender issues as they relate to developing countries;
- simply equated “community development” with “community consultation”; and
- failed to provide any clear evidence that the consultants had direct experience, understanding and/or training in these areas.

**Selection Criterion C(c) (team leadership and team participation)**

3.16 The more successful tenders:

- presented evidence of experience as a team leader/member over a range of projects including in design, monitoring and evaluation teams;
- specifically identified the individual’s role in any activity;

- showed an appreciation of the need for different skills in different team roles and gave examples of their experience in these roles;
- provided evidence of the successful management of multi-disciplinary teams; and
- pointed to successful involvement in projects where collaboration within or across disciplines was required.

3.17 Overall the weaker tenders:

- tended to assume that their capacity in this area was (or would be) understood from a broad statement of experience such as “X has managed many high level teams.”;
- did not address all of the issues – ie leadership, teamwork and design, monitoring or evaluation teams;
- mentioned teams in which they had participated but did not identify their role in the team; and
- asserted that they had management skills but failed to demonstrate it.