

RECOMMENDATIONS TO BIDDERS

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to share experiences gained by Nuffic in the evaluation of proposals in over 70 tender procedures with existing and prospective bidders. The recommendations given here are based on those experiences and on the outcomes of a workshop on tendering in the NPT, which Nuffic organized on 7 June 2005.

Read all the documents

When bidding for a project, take your time to read through the tender document and all the annexes. It will take some time, but it will be time well spent. It will provide an insight not just into the technical details of the project, but also into the minimum acceptance requirements for proposals and the financial rules and regulations. Reading the explanation of the score sheet will give you a better understanding of how the Tender Evaluation Committee will assess your proposal. The set of recommendations below follows the headings of the score sheet which can be found in Annex 10 of any tender document.

The capacity of the applicant organization/consortium (criterion 1)

A proven track record is needed to underpin the capacity of your organization or consortium. Make sure that your track record and references are introduced properly. Make it easy for the TEC to appreciate your factual contribution to previous projects and other relevant activities conducted by your organization or staff. Provide specific information that is relevant to this project. If your organization is leading a consortium, please highlight why you have chosen your partners and what the complementary strengths of all the partners are for implementation of the project. If you fail to do so, the TEC may conclude that your consortium has been formed for opportunistic reasons, that overlaps are too large, or that there may be management difficulties resulting in conflicts between partners.

The substantive quality (criterion 2)

You will win more appreciation by presenting a proper understanding of the context. The proposals should provide references to documents you have consulted, previous experiences and your in-house expertise. If you have undertaken a fact-finding mission as part of your bid preparation, it is proper practice to make explicitly clear how this has benefited your understanding of the needs and problems. Your understanding allows you to make a well-informed decision on what your strategy should be in order to make this project a success. It also demonstrates to the TEC that you know what the project is about. It shows that you have something substantial to add to the analysis of the outline, rather than just repeating the information presented in the outline. Providing a specific strategy for this project, rather than a blue-print strategy along the lines of 'we-always-do-it-like-this-because-that-is-what-we-are-good-at', is more convincing. Substantiate why you propose your specific approach, and provide answers to the challenges stemming from the priorities formulated by the Southern partner.

A limited team of experts, each individual properly accounted for with regard to the proposed activities, is an expression of effective use of technical assistance. Also, the use of other resources should be justified and must demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency. Expert time

spent in the Netherlands should be limited. The right mix of the competencies offered, and the right balance of Northern and Southern experts will facilitate project implementation.

Projects are implemented by the Southern partner (ownership). Their involvement in management (build on existing structures, rather than creating parallel project structures) and your views on cooperation by Southern and Northern partners should be clear. Propose how you will organize a professional dialogue within the project (South-North, within your consortium). The starting point in your approach will need to be the absorption capacity of the Southern partner.

Your views on how your approach will enhance sustainability need to be presented clearly. Think beyond the project and do not assume everlasting donor support. Do not ignore issues like gender and HIV-AIDS. Addressing them properly will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the project. A good proposal does not ignore important issues mentioned in the outline.

The technical quality (criterion 3)

A proper logical framework provides a good understanding of the intervention logic: how do you reach the objectives of the project in a coherent way? What activities will result in what outputs, which in turn will lead to the realization of the objectives? Indicators and sources of verification as well as internal monitoring and evaluation require elaboration. A work plan needs to be proposed for the first year, with a clear expert input and time dimensions. Specify why activities are undertaken and what outputs will be generated. Many projects have an inception phase. Even though more detailed planning will be done in that phase, you should already present your views on activities after this phase (which may need to be altered during inception). This provides an insight into your thinking. Make sure that texts, charts, tables and budgets are consistent.

Quality of the team (criterion 4)

A justification for each expert, a specification of his or her role and the expected added value of each expert will help in proposing a convincing team. Claims that proposed experts have a certain level of expertise or experience should be substantiated in their CVs. Good CVs allow the TEC to assess quickly whether a person is qualified for the position he or she has been proposed for. It is more convincing to propose how you will compensate obvious weaknesses of your staff, rather than ignoring these weaknesses and hoping they go unnoticed.

A project director is a senior employee of the lead organization of the consortium. He or she should be able to manage the consortium's input, and maintain relations with the major stakeholders. They are answerable to the Southern partner and Nuffic. Ideally, a project director will not be heavily involved in implementation. Make sure you identify the principal advisor or coordinator delivering the major input of the TA team.

The staffing of the project is tailored to the needs of the project and the proposed activities and not a list of all people you have available. Proposing a 'lean and mean' team assures an effective use of resources, minimizes coordination costs and reduces the risk of potential conflicts.

Use of regional capacity (criterion 5)

The use of regional training and education institutions and national/regional experts often means a more efficient use of resources. Moreover, they can provide specific knowledge and insights that Northern experts or institutions may not have. Just as for Northern experts (criterion 4) and Northern institutions (criterion 1), it is necessary to clarify their role, justify their input and provide proof of their added value. Their availability should be confirmed in

writing as well. Disregarding requests in the outline for national or regional involvement is not appreciated.

Price (criterion 6)

Make sure the budget shows a clear link to the proposed activities and required resources. Never exceed the maximum amount. Preparing a good budget means checking for calculation errors and adherence to the programme's financial rules and regulations (fee levels, 6% operational and management costs for Southern partner, 5% for contingencies, etc.).

Other issues

Sloppy presentation and spelling errors leave an unprofessional impression. Obvious copying and pasting from other proposals (for example, including the wrong names of people and countries) may lead the TEC to think you have a 'standard' proposal that you use for all projects.

Further information

General information on tendering can be obtained from the website www.nuffic.nl/npt. From the same website, you can also download the NPT brochure and the NFP-NPT newsletter. Since the start of the programme, Nuffic has collected frequently asked questions and published them together with the answers in a Frequently Asked Questions list on the same website. This will give you further insights which contribute towards a successful bid. Do not hesitate to contact Nuffic staff (npt@nuffic.nl).

Specific information on published tenders can be obtained by submitting questions to Nuffic (contact details are specified in the tender documents). Answers to the questions will be shared with other parties interested in this particular project.