

Five keys to tendering and bidding success

1. Allow sufficient preparation time

Under the procurement rules introduced in February 2015 the minimum time allowed from advertisement to deadline was reduced from 54 days to 30 days. Under the new Light Touch Regime which applies to health and social care procurement, even this limit does not apply and therefore can be even shorter. It is important to start working on a tender or bid as early as possible. To make a rough calculation of the time necessary to complete a tender or bid: add up the number of words needed to answer the questions then allow one working day of 7 hours for each 1,000 words. Of course this assumes that all of the required evidence is readily available. If more time is needed to collect evidence then this should be added to establish a final total.

2. Know your organisation

Successful tendering and bidding is largely about three things: a) evidence of your organisation's performance in particular the measurement of service user outcomes showing evidence of progression; b) the qualifications, skills and experience of staff and management, which includes Board members, is highlighted as important in the 2014 procurement rules; and c) the way in which the contract and the organisation is managed in order to provide effective and efficient services. It should be noted that the evidence that the provider has capacity and capability to deliver a quality service in all things is paramount. It is essential that those preparing tenders and bids have easy access to this type of information and evidence which should be available in real time. Remember that the tender will form part of the contract so claims must be deliverable in the long term.

3. Ensure your policies are compliant

Increasingly we are seeing evidence of tenders and bids for grants failing as a result of poor, non-compliant policies. Two key areas for failure are: a) policies being out of date. It is expected that policies will be reviewed, and therefore updated annually. Too many providers review their policies every three years only to find that these are judged to be "out of date" during appraisal; b) Policy making and review is a function of governance, therefore, at the time of review all policies must be signed off for and on behalf of the Board. The crucial function of policy making which sets out what the governing body require of staff, is all too frequently delegated to managers. However, setting up the procedures which implement policy is a management function. Frequently these two separate processes are combined into one document which is liable to result in failure. An [audit](#) of a small number of policies can provide both an indication of compliance with the required standard and guidance for future policy making.



4. Tender and bid writing skills

There was a time, about twelve to fifteen years ago, when successful tendering and bidding depended upon the skills of the writer only. This is no longer the case. The factors set out above now play a key part in the preparation of a successful bid or tender. The modern author is faced with sometimes draconian word limits to answer a question, sometimes as few as 200 words. It does not help that the purchaser may well require a lot of detail. The skills needed are therefore much more to do with the selection and presentation of relevant evidence, than “telling a story”. Added to this is the fact that the tender usually becomes part of the contract. As result the provider must be certain that the content is contractually accurate in term of deliverability and sufficiently precise to avoid a potential breach of contract action later. This is an event which is sadly becoming all too frequent. TfC offers three solutions to help providers who need assistance in this area: a) Our Tender or Bid [preparation service](#) prepares tenders and bids incorporating the evidence which you provide; b) Our Tender Review service has proved to be an extremely powerful and successful method of support, with the [full tender review and support service](#) regularly achieving scores in the 90’s; and c) [In-house training courses](#) to help managers understand the requirements and staff to improve skills.

5. Find the advertisement for a tender or bid.

It is rare for the daily total of calls for tenders for contracts, including bids for grants, in the services sector to fall below 200. Indeed on one day in March 2016 as many as 376 were published. Amongst all of this “noise” it can be hard to identify the calls which are relevant to a single provider. There are services which select calls based on key words and the European classification known as CPV codes. But this selection methodology is not wholly reliable. The only real way providers can know which calls for tenders or bids are relevant to them is to be sure that notices have been reviewed through reading them, rather than by relying on codes and key words alone. It is often the case that the relevance of the contract is in the description which gives much more detail than the title of the notice can provide. This is a service we offer. The [TfC tender alert service](#) has provided this service since 2006, reviewing the detail before distributing calls to tenders for health and social care contracts and increasingly bids for grants. By doing so we ensure that our Members do not miss out on attractive opportunities and save them the time taken to read many irrelevant notices.

To discuss any of the above matters and how these might affect your tender success rate please:

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