Queensland Government

Guidance notes

Invitation to Offer

What is this document about?

This document contains guidance to help a Customer complete the Invitation to Offer (ITO) document for the establishment of a General or Comprehensive Contract or a Standing Offer Arrangement (SOA) under the Queensland Information Technology Contracting (QITC) framework.

For the purposes of these Guidance Notes, 'Customer' includes a Principal establishing a SOA.

Information about the opportunity

1. Summary of opportunity and Customer objectives

The Customer can add as much or as little information as appropriate to detail the opportunity available. This should be high level and not duplicate the information provided in the requirements. This section should clearly explain the Customer's objectives and desired outcomes, which will assist Suppliers to present innovative and alternative offers to meet them.

The Customer should also explain the benefits to the Suppliers of the opportunity and set out relevant background information. Examples of relevant background information include:

- issues or difficulties the Customer is trying to overcome or avoid
- unacceptable risks that the Customer is trying to avoid or minimise and
- benefits the Customer would like to achieve.

For routine purchases, this section may be short. For purchases with higher risk/value, this section should be lengthier.

If the evaluation criteria include 'ability to meet the Customer's objectives/desired outcomes', then it is important that it is clearly specified here what those objectives/outcomes are.

2. Indicative timetable

Insert the indicative timetable. The issue date and closing date should always be set out. Other relevant dates include: closing date for questions, briefing session, evaluation period, shortlisting of Suppliers, commencement of work. An example is provided – delete anything that does not apply.

3. Evaluation

The Customer can change the evaluation criteria in this document.

The evaluation criteria provided is an example only. Evaluation criteria should be relevant to the Products and/or Services that are being purchased.

It is recommended that:

- the Customer does not include too many evaluation criteria;
- the Customer checks that it is asking the right questions in the ITO to obtain the right

information to assess suppliers against the criteria;

- the evaluation criteria are outcome focused rather than compliance based. For example, ‘ability to achieve the Customer’s objectives/outcomes”, rather than “compliance with the specification’.

Suppliers need to be notified if there are changes to the evaluation criteria. Changes to the evaluation plan, including evaluation criteria and weightings must not be made after offers are received. Example evaluation criteria are provided – add any other criteria that apply and delete any that do not apply.

If the evaluation criteria include ‘ability to meet the Customer’s objectives/desired outcomes’, then it is important that it is clearly specified in the ITO what those objectives/outcomes are.

4. Mandatory / Highly desirable criteria

If there are any mandatory criteria/requirements that the Supplier must comply with, then specify what they are. If there are no mandatory criteria then this section can be deleted. Mandatory criteria suggest that there is no scope for ‘partial’ compliance, so be careful about what is identified as a mandatory requirement as it may automatically exclude some suppliers from participating in the ITO.

Another option is to list criteria as ‘highly desirable’. This indicates to suppliers that the Customer has a preference that suppliers meet the criteria, providing the opportunity to consider suppliers that might not necessarily comply 100 per cent with the criteria (which would otherwise be excluded if the criteria were ‘mandatory’).

5. How offers are to be submitted

Obtaining Suppliers’ responses in editable format will assist the Customer to make changes if necessary as part of contract negotiations. If there are specific format requirements of the Customer, then specify them. For example, the Customer may want responses to be submitted in PDF format, Word format or Excel. In addition, a Customer may want certain parts of the offer submitted as separate attachments to make them easier to distribute to the evaluation team Furthermore, a Customer may want to specify a particular page limit or maximum file size.

6. Invitation to Offer Conditions

The Invitation to Offer Conditions, which form part of the ITO, contains provisions which govern the Invitation Process, including any offers which are submitted by potential Suppliers in response to the ITO.

Changes to the Invitation to Offer Conditions are not encouraged. However, if it is necessary to amend or add clauses (e.g. to address an unusual step in the evaluation process not otherwise contemplated by the Invitation to Offer Conditions), the Customer can do this in this section. It is recommended that the Customer obtains legal advice before making changes to the Invitation to Offer Conditions.

Schedule A – Response schedule

7. Questions in the Response schedule

In this schedule, the Customer needs to ask for all information that could influence the Customer's decision whether to proceed to enter into the Contract and which Supplier to appoint. This is a flexible section.

The Customer should insert any specific questions it wants the Suppliers to answer in order for the Customer to be able to evaluate the Supplier's offer and its ability to meet the Customer's requirements and objectives. Focus on questions that are important to the supply of the Goods/Services. Generic questions are set out in the Invitation to Offer, but these should be supplemented with specific questions that are important to ask, and are relevant to the evaluation criteria.

If appropriate, specify a page limit for the Supplier's response to each question.

8. Financial Information

Generally, it is not recommended that financial information is requested for routine, low value or low risk contracts. Providing financial information, such as audited financial statements, incurs costs for suppliers and requires specialist expertise to evaluate. There are other ways to assess financial viability of a supplier, including through external assessment organisations.

It is recommended that this information is only requested for procurements that justify due diligence of this nature based on the risk and value of the procurement. For example high risk or high value contracts where failure by the Supplier has significant consequences/risk (e.g. transition impacts).

For Contracts/SOAs where it is important to assess the financial viability of the Supplier providing the Products and/or Services, rather than ask every Supplier participating in an Invitation Process for financial information, consider including a statement that Suppliers may be asked to provide financial information if requested at a later stage (e.g. once Suppliers are shortlisted).

Who can I contact for more information?

For more information contact qitc@qld.gov.au