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## Writing the bid

This worksheet contains general advice on bid-writing and reviews some of the areas where local providers can offer added value and gain competitive advantage over non-local bidders. Even if your chosen form of partnership is the small element of a large/small partnership, you still need to pay attention to the bid writing process. To help your partner's bid win, look at the service specification and identify all the areas where your involvement can help them meet or exceed the commissioner's requirements, to make your joint bid stand apart from the rest

### AT A GLANCE

- You'll need to dedicate time to developing the bid
- Understand the scoring system, and structure your answers accordingly
- Have a clear vision of your proposed service – and why it's the best solution
- Turn your added value – your local-ness or specialism – into a clear competitive advantage

## Ground rules

Writing a good bid and pulling together all of the supporting evidence and documents is a lot of work. The quality of writing and style of presentation are important – you will be up against other organisations with dedicated bid writing teams. Even if you haven't taken on external help with other aspects of developing your partnership, consider taking someone on to help with this.

Even if you do take on help, your chief executive and other senior staff will need to dedicate time to the bid. The chief executives of one Collaborate partnership set aside three consecutive days for a round table meeting to hammer out their bid, as well as a number of smaller planning meetings. Another successful consortium estimated that altogether nearly 100 meetings had been involved in putting their bid together. It's essential that the key people from each organisation are ruthless about clearing time in their diaries for key points in the timetable. It's about your commitment to each other.

## Understand the scoring system

In order to ensure fairness and consistency, and protect themselves against legal challenges, commissioners use scoring systems to evaluate tenders. Points are awarded for different aspects of the tender, with some areas of the tender having higher weightings than others. Most commissioners indicate in their tender documents how bids will be scored. Lobby your commissioners in advance to make sure that they do this (see worksheet 5).

Make sure that you understand the scoring framework and structure the answers in your tender method statement accordingly. Don't focus all your attention on a few areas where you think you are strong, as this won't compensate for low scores in other areas. You need to cover all areas of the specification equally well, and use your added value as icing on the cake.

Pay particular attention to the areas that attract the highest scores, as one mediocre performance here can undermine outstanding answers in less highly pointed areas. Observe word limits, particularly where there aren't any limits specified: no-one likes a long-winded answer. Your competitors won't be making this mistake.

Ensure all of the required accompanying documents and appendices are there, **BUT** don't constantly refer to them in your answers. The evaluation panel won't thank you if they have to keep flicking between documents to see how good you are. They may not even bother.

Likewise, make sure that each answer is complete in itself. Each section will be scored separately, so don't assume that you don't need to cover something that's relevant because you've dealt with it in an earlier answer. Say it again, even if it means that you repeat the same point in several different answers. If it's not there, it won't score points.

Remember: **it's all about points.**

Finally, there will probably be areas where, in the discussions leading up to the tendering process, you have tried to persuade commissioners to a particular point of view and failed. The tender is not the place to continue the debate – just answer the questions.

## General advice on tender writing

Successful bids start from a clear vision of what a really good service looks like and a clear rationale for why it is the best way of delivering positive outcomes for service users. Invest time up front in developing these.

Involve service users in developing the vision, and make sure that they are enthusiastic about it. Consider asking one or two to join your presentation team if you are called for interview.

Ensure the fact that service users are at the heart of your proposed service comes over in your answers. Focus on the outcomes you are going to achieve and then explain how this will happen.

Liaise with other commissioners while constructing your bid, and emphasise your partnership's ability to deliver outcomes across agencies, budgets and commissioning frameworks.

Show that you understand the commissioners' goals, policy drivers and the broad strategy background. Explain how your service helps deliver them.

Don't rely on passion – demonstrate your commitment to effective delivery and back this up with evidence and examples.

You may need to overcome preconceptions about consortia – as one unsuccessful bidder (not a Collaborate agency) put it: '*We couldn't convince them it wasn't going to be a communication and cost nightmare*'. So:

- show the consortium's decision-taking process is efficient, not costly;

- show how your delivery model will provide a coordinated referral and access system, and deliver one integrated service and consistent standards despite the fact that there are several delivery partners.

Good mechanisms for assuring quality and performance will be vital to convince commissioners of the seamlessness of your consortium's services, and to manage the contract if you get it. How will the consortium deal with conflict and poor performance?

One way of defusing negative preconceptions is by establishing your brand and managing your communications. The more you can reinforce your identity as a genuinely new joint venture with its own personality, the less you will look like an ill-assorted group of agencies who have come together in a pragmatic pursuit of money.

Make sure your figures are right, that they are competitive, and show how they are sustainable across the lifetime of the contract.

Once you have drafted your bid, have someone who has not been part of the process cast a critical eye over it. This is very important – it's almost impossible not to get so close to the document that you cease to be able to see its flaws. Tendering departments in big organisations make sure all documents going out are peer reviewed – so should you.

## **Added value and competitive advantage**

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Partnerships of small or locally-based agencies can add value to services that larger, non locally-rooted organisations would struggle to match, through:

- specific specialist skills;
- synergies with other services already operating in the area;
- links into local volunteer programmes that can add value;
- well-established roots in the community enabling you to provide better social integration outcomes for service users.

Ask your service users what's particularly good about what you do. The box (page 5) shows some of the added value Collaborate partnerships felt they were able to offer, distinguishing them from larger, incoming competitors.

Your partnership should undertake a brainstorming exercise to see if it can come up with a similar list. Having done this, however, you then have to turn it into a genuine competitive advantage. Simply listing these things in the section marked Added Value (if there is one) will win you a few welcome

# THE VALUE OF LOCAL ROOTS

- Local knowledge enables us to offer service users community bridge building by linking them into mainstream, non-marginalised networks, not just referrals on to other problem-oriented services. We believe this promotes genuine social inclusion;
- Our local roots mean we understand how to integrate people into the community. Our in-depth knowledge of local networks and ability to signpost appropriately are sources of real added value;
- We can hit the ground running by using our existing services as a base from which to build the new service, and provide alternatives to those who can't be placed in the programme right away;
- We have well developed relationships with key stakeholders and referral sources, and are actively involved in delivery of local strategic priorities: LSP, Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership, etc. An incoming provider would need to build these links from scratch, thereby diverting resources from service delivery, or the service would

- risk not being effectively integrated;
- Long-term relationships and continuity can help to manage risk – people who are known from other services we run and aren't coming to them cold.

## Intelligence

- Pooling the knowledge and contacts of the partner organisations will help us identify trends and emerging problems;
- We can then feed these insights into discussions with the commissioning body on service planning.

## Synergy

- By embedding the specialist skills of each partner organisation into the service, we can offer clients access to a broad range of resources. An incoming organisation would simply employ a few specialist workers.

## Areas of excellence

- Award-winning user involvement and peer support programmes;
- OCN-accredited qualifications linked to structure of support sessions;
- Track record of positive work with hard-to-reach groups.

points. By working through the tender to identify all the areas where this added value enables you to exceed the ordinary standard of service and making this clear throughout your document, you will gain far more points. This is, after all, your real value.

## Other resources

Sitra's publication *A Provider's Guide to Procurement* contains chapters on tender evaluation and scoring, planning and preparing to bid, and pricing and costing. You should also look at the case studies in the chapter on *Working in partnership* for top tips from people who have done it. See [www.sitra.org.uk](http://www.sitra.org.uk) for more details.

## About Collaborate

Collaborate was a year-long project run by hact, funded by Communities and Local Government and delivered in partnership with Sitra and NHF, featuring six partnerships in Suffolk, Liverpool, Durham, Rotherham, Redbridge and Southend. The project aimed to demonstrate how diversity can be maintained and particularly how smaller SP providers could thrive within the emerging SP environment, by developing collaborative approaches to tendering and delivering services, between themselves and with larger organisations. Hact helped project partners in two ways:

- Through practical help and facilitation, working through some of the issues involved in developing collaborative models;
- Through financial support of the costs of building capacity of some of the smaller partnership members, as well as some of the legal and expert support costs.

In exchange, all the participating organisations contributed to an evaluation and facilitated learning process between the partnerships, so their insights could be shared with the wider sector.

## About hact

Hact pioneers housing solutions to enable people on the margins to live independently in thriving communities. We use our expertise and resources

to identify emerging issues, test ideas, support multi-agency solutions and share learning that changes policy and practice.

## About this resource kit

This resource kit has been produced as one of the ways of sharing the learning from the Collaborate project. It consists of eight worksheets, which provide information about strategic development, different collaborative approaches, how to influence procurement processes, developing collaborative bids and implementation issues (see list below).

Though focused on small providers, the learning has relevance for all in the SP sector. Hact doesn't intend to suggest that collaboration is the only option for small SP providers. Some may choose to leave the market. Others might persuade local commissioners to exempt them from the normal commissioning process.

For many providers, however, SP is a vital part of their income and leaving the market is not an option. Sooner or later, their service will be subject to reconfiguration and tendering, probably as part of a much larger contract. Some form of collaboration may represent their best chance of staying in the market – and possibly in existence. It may also, if the experience of some successful Collaborate partnerships is a guide, be a stimulus to developing better services and ensuring a diversity of provision for service users.

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## Collaborate resource kit

Worksheets:

- 1 A strategy for change
- 2 Large/small partnerships
- 3 Consortia
- 4 Developing positive relationships
- 5 Influencing the process
- 6 Legal issues
- 7 **Writing the bid**
- 8 Implementation