

1 Doing the groundwork

- Market your products and services directly to your prospective client – raise awareness about what you have to offer before a contract opportunity comes up. This will help to raise your profile and put your name at the forefront of their minds.
- Get to know your prospective clients – understand their priorities, needs and organisational ethos. Take a look at their website, corporate plan, vision and values statements and identify how your company can help them achieve their corporate goals.
- Start to build relationships with your target clients and key people within the organisation. Take an interest in their concerns and listen to what they tell you - those with stronger relationships stand a better chance of being considered when an opportunity arises.
- Make sure you are familiar with the public sector tendering process – if necessary enlist the help of a specialist bid writer who understands what it takes to make a successful bid. Although initially this may seem more costly, it will increase your chances of success, whilst also fast tracking your in-house expertise and building capacity for the future.

2 Before progressing

Sense check, questions to answer

- Do you have niche products, services or systems that enable you to deliver the contract and provide better services than your competitors? Be selective about the opportunities, which you pursue – the scattergun approach is time consuming and often means you waste valuable resources submitting bids with little chance of success. Pursue those where you have a clear unique selling point, strong niche offer or better relationship with the buyer than your competitors.
- Is the contract of the right size? As a rule of thumb only bid for contracts that are up to 25% of your annual turnover. Bidding for larger contracts may be seen as a risk and count against you.
- Are you able to provide the relevant documentation? Is it all up to date?

3 Writing your bid

Do

- Allocate sufficient time to plan, write and review your bid – don't be tempted to do a rushed job.
- Spread the workload – identify your bid team with the relevant skills, knowledge, technical expertise and time available to commit to the bid. Allocate specific tasks and deadlines.
- Use the buyer's template where instructed for your response. Where a template is not provided aim to address the key points in the same order and using the same terminology used in the tender document.
- Consider how you will manage the contract and include evidence to show that you have considered all aspects of delivery. Where appropriate include project plans with Gantt charts, organisational diagrams and an assessment of the potential delivery risks and how you will manage them.
- Start work on your costs early - make sure what you are proposing in the tender can be delivered within the budget allocated.

3 Writing your bid

Don't

- Use jargon, technical speak or acronyms without first explaining what they mean.
- Submit your bid without reviewing all the sections to make sure they are giving a coherent message.
- Forget to proof read and format your bid – poor spelling and inconsistent format present a poor image.

4 Submitting your bid

- Ensure you follow the submission instructions precisely.
- If you are submitting your bid in hard copy, ensure that you follow the buyer's posting and labelling instructions. Make sure that your packaging is free from all identifying marks (including those made by franking machines). Ignore this at your peril - failure to comply will result in your bid not even being opened.
- Always allow sufficient time to upload documents onto online portals – problems with technology will not be valid excuses for missing the deadline.

5 Post mortem and debrief

- Win or lose, always ask for feedback – this is essential for understanding your strengths and weaknesses and helping with future bids. If you were unsuccessful, try to understand why you were unsuccessful and how the winning bid was better than yours.
- If successful you need to fully brief your delivery team, confirm roles and responsibilities of team members, schedule contract meetings with the buyer, agree key performance indicators (KPIs) and Service Level Agreements (SLAs), review and update your project plan and risk assessment based on any new information and prepare for project roll-out.
- Consider whether industry certifications would be beneficial in demonstrating your high standards in relation to quality management, health and safety, the environment or looking after your staff.

6 Ongoing bid management

- Review and monitor success rate of each contract to identify which ones to pursue in future.
- Review feedback and record comments on positive and negative aspects of your bid submissions and refine or adapt your information library based on feedback.
- Build a tender library from which you can lift, amend and recycle appropriate sections of text as required. Bear in mind that no two tenders are the same and whilst recycling some information can save time, avoid creating a generic 'one size fits all' tender submission. Buyers want to feel that their specific and individual requirements have been fully understood and will feel rather short-changed if presented with an ill considered or bland proposition.
- Develop a library of case studies relevant to different areas of your work – these can easily be adapted for future bids rather than starting from scratch each time.