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# 10 Tips

for enhancing  
tendering  
practices



## About the Author

Deirdre Diamante has a successful consulting practice built on helping companies win government business. Companies come to Deirdre because she gets government. Her consulting business is based on 15 years of experience developing and evaluating government tenders and contracts, and distilling this knowledge into practical tips and advice.

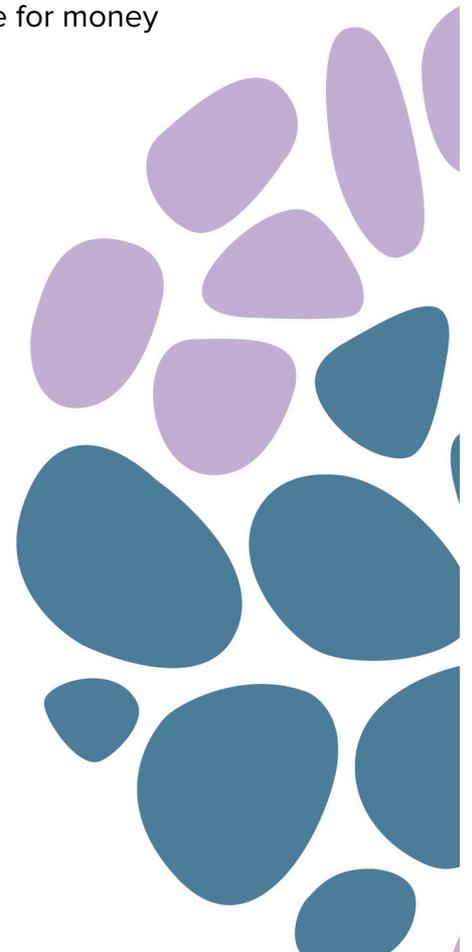
Deirdre delivers substance that is relevant to business, in particular small to medium sized businesses. Her advice is practical and provides an insider's look into how government develops, evaluates and awards tenders.

Deirdre's public sector procurement experience includes state and federal government departments and agencies across the portfolios of finance, justice, education, health and defence.

Deirdre has been responsible for the development of procurement policies that affect the whole of Government and the development, tender and contract of multi-million dollar contracts in areas including Information Communications Technology, energy, personnel, professional services and office supplies.

Deirdre is highly respected in all circles of government and represents a trustworthy and knowledgeable source of government procurement information.

Through the '10 Tips for Enhancing Tendering Practices' ebook, Deirdre has delivered 10 easy to implement, proven strategies that will give the reader confidence to build easy to understand tenders designed to generate the best value for money responses.



# Introduction

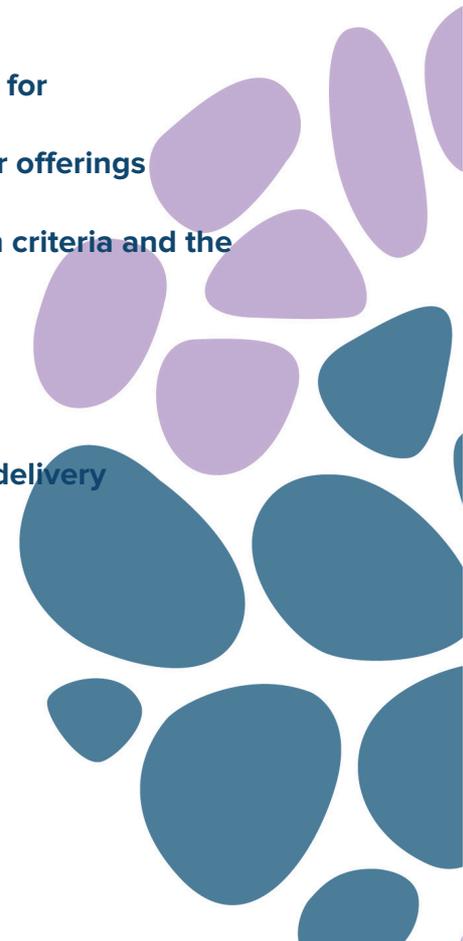
This eBook identifies 10 tips for both government and general procurement officers to enhance their tendering practices and to make sure the best provider is selected, at the best value for money.

As a State and Federal senior Government procurement advisor for more than 15 years, I have had extensive experience in developing, evaluating and awarding tenders, as well as offering debriefs. Now advising clients on how to submit to Government tenders, I am seeing the 'other side', broadening my perspective on what constitutes strong tendering practices – and, frankly, what doesn't.

Put simply, tenders should not be about developing hurdles to easily create prospective shortlists. They should be clear and direct to ensure the best quality responses are generated from the most suitable and greatest number of tenderers. Ultimately this will ensure you select the best provider.

*Every procurement officer has met a tenderer during a debrief process and thought "this tenderer is capable, if only they had tendered better". The 10 tips in this simple eBook will inform you of how to do just that.*

- 1. Develop simple questions with a maximum of three requirements**
- 2. The response template must include response fields for every requirement**
- 3. Use words with clear meanings**
- 4. Better manage the duplication of questions**
- 5. Don't assume that tenderers know what you are asking for**
- 6. Provide opportunities for tenderers to differentiate their offerings**
- 7. Show the direct relationship between tender evaluation criteria and the response schedules**
- 8. Include a checklist for completion**
- 9. Give tenderers an opportunity to minimise their risk of delivery**
- 10. Always offer a debrief**



# 1. Develop simple questions with a maximum of three requirements

A mistake often made by procurement officers is to load tender questions with three, four or five requirements and then become frustrated because the tenderer does not fully address the question.

Below is an example of a convoluted question:

*“Briefly detail your organisations’ recent experience providing IT services within a multi-organisational environment, including experience in:*

- *Managing a number of contracts within the one organisation where different divisions/groups within that organisation exhibit varying cultures, and*
- *Managing a number of contracts simultaneously within the one organisation, where the contracts may require differing skills and focus.”*

In reality this question requires 5 responses:

- Provide recent experience in providing IT Services in a multi-organisational environment
- Identify where they have managed a number of contracts in the one organisation
- Identify where they have managed a number of contracts in the one organisation and managed varying cultures
- Identify where they have managed a number of contracts simultaneously within the one organisation, and
- Identify where they have managed a number of contracts simultaneously within the one organisation that have differing skills and focus.

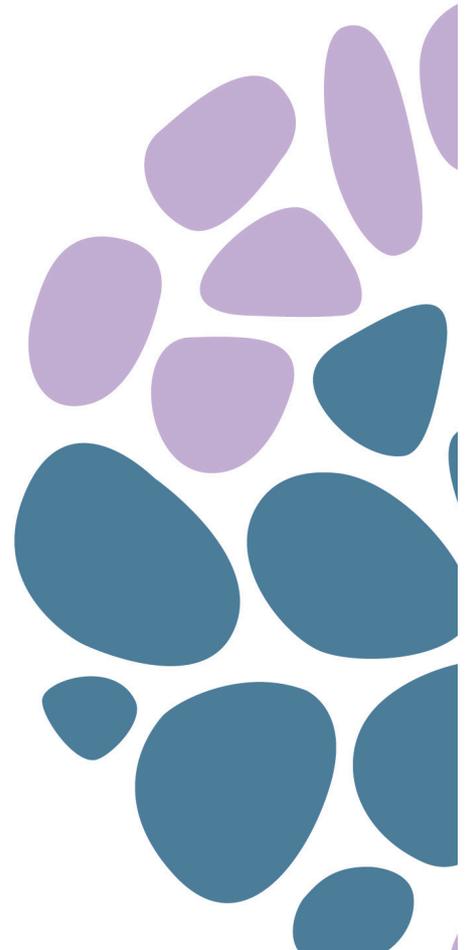
I advise clients applying for a tender to underline each requirement and sub-requirement to determine what the question is asking. Highlighting key words such as ‘recent’ and ‘briefly’ helps to answer the question succinctly. These edits are shown in the example above.

I offer the same advice to procurement officers. When generating tender questions highlight each requirement and sub-requirement to determine how many components there are to your question. If there are more than three then it’s highly likely you will not get every answer you need.

The solution is to split the question into two or three questions. Don’t worry if they are repetitive (companies expect this); just make sure they are clear and concise.

The sample question above could be redrafted into the following three questions:

1. Please provide up to three examples of experience you may have had over the last three years in providing IT Services in a multi-organisational environment.
2. Identify where you have managed a number of contracts in the one organisation either simultaneously and /or progressively and the success of this.
3. Identify where you have managed a number of contracts simultaneously within the one organisation that have required a different skill or focus.



## 2 Tailor the response template to maximise opportunities for strong responses

To ensure greater clarity of a tender question, tailor the response template to include response fields for every requirement within the question. The buyer is then maximizing opportunities for strong responses and minimising opportunities for a tenderer to miss responding to a requirement.

The following tender question is an example of one question with too many requirements:

*Please provide details of the methodology you propose to use to conduct the project. The methodology must be in the form of a project plan which describes all tasks and stages required to complete the project. The project plan must include:*

- *milestones, being completion of key stages or components within the project;*
- *a listing of key staff involved with each stage or component;*
- *a listing of sub-contractors / consultants involved with each stage or component;*
- *details of how you intend to provide the deliverables for each stage or component and the contents of each deliverable; and*
- *an indicative timetable to complete the project.*

**A clearer alternative is to present the question in the following way:**

### **Project Methodology**

- a) *Please provide a project plan which describes all tasks and stages required to complete the project, including project milestones.*

*Provide project plan*

- b) *Please provide a list of key staff involved with each stage or component of the project (as the stages are described in the project plan).*

*Provide a list of key staff*

- c) *Please provide a list of sub-contractors / consultants involved with each stage or component (as they are described in the project plan).*

*Provide a list of sub-contractors / consultants*

- d) *Please provide details of how you intend to provide the deliverables for each stage or component and the contents of each deliverable (as they are described in the project plan).*

*Provide details of how you intend to provide the deliverables.*

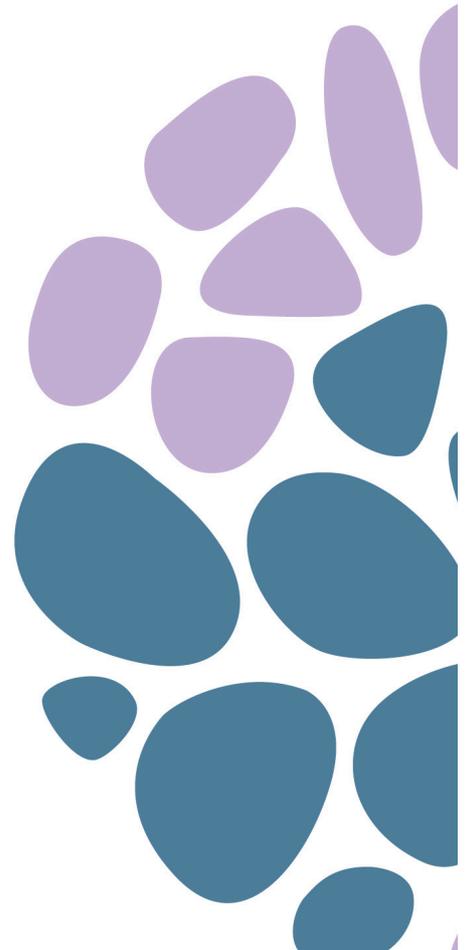
e) *Please provide an indicative timetable to complete the project (against each stage or component described in the project plan).*

*Provide an indicative timetable.*

The above example increases a tenderer's understanding of what is required within the question and ensures that they will not overlook any of the requirements when responding.

A further way to maximise strong tender responses is to include free text fields in the response schedules including an executive summary. Free text fields provide opportunities for a tenderer to give more detailed answers and to provide information they may not otherwise have been able to provide.

An evaluator may not formally evaluate an executive summary however reading it does create an impression of a company's capability and may provide content an evaluator can use to review/ confirm responses provided in other areas of the tender.



### 3 Use words with clear meanings

Most industries use terminology that is unique to their particular industry but is often not as well understood outside of that industry. The finance sector is a great example.

Government is another good example, as well as procurement.

Strong, clear, simple terminology is absolutely critical to the success of a tender, both in generating competitive, complete, relevant tender responses and in securing an outcome that meets the needs of the buyer. You are also guaranteeing a stronger outcome in terms of a well understood scope and deliverables.

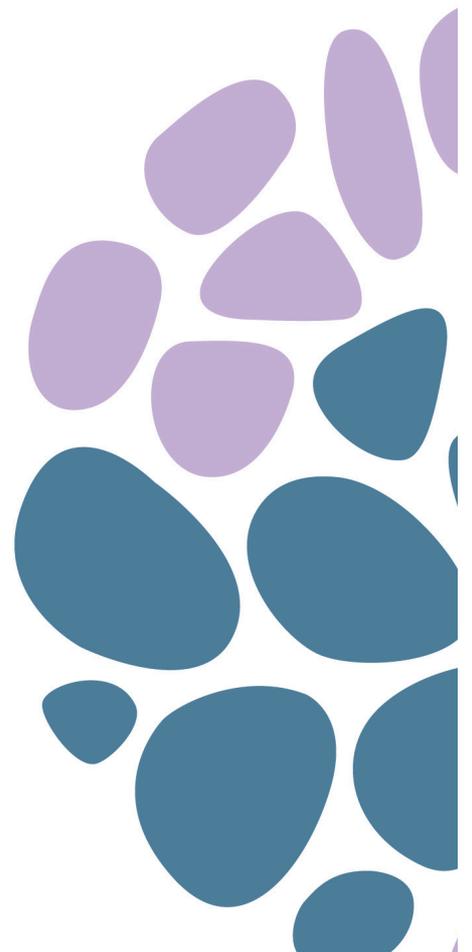
Tenderers often use language that is either too generic to generate any type of detailed response and/or is presented using terms that are not widely understood outside of Government and/or the procurement industry.

Simple terms are most effective.

The following table provides examples of commonly used words or terms that should be avoided and what to replace them with.

<b>Word / term to avoid</b>	<b>Suggested replacement term</b>
Recent	Provide a specific timeframe, for example no more than three years old.
Briefly describe	Provide guidance: "Using up to three examples describe your experience". You can also support this question with an indicative word count.
Detail	Provide guidance: "Using between three and five examples describe your experience, or qualifications, etc", or "Describe the processes you used in providing the service".
Detail support to be used	'Support' can have a broad meaning encompassing systems and human resources (employees or subcontractors). If you are asking for the type of support used to provide a service, identify what you mean, for example; "Identify any subcontractors you may use to support you in providing the services".
Economy	Economy is a broad term, describe what it should encompass from a tenderers' position
Governance	Describe what you mean by governance and more importantly what it incorporates. For example, an approach to overseeing delivery, escalation procedures, etc.

<b>Word / term to avoid</b>	<b>Suggested replacement term</b>
Probity	Government procurement officers may know what probity means but industry doesn't. If you are asking a tenderer to describe their approach to managing probity you should describe what probity is.
Customer Service Initiative Vs Value-Add	Highlight the differences between a Customer Service Initiative and a Value-Add initiative. CSIs should be free and should directly support the provision of the goods or services being procured. A Value-Add initiative may be costed and while related, is in addition to the goods or services being procured.
Provide experience in your industry, market and sector	Using examples, demonstrate what a 'market', 'industry' and/or a 'sector' encompasses for that particular tender.



## 4 Better manage the duplication of questions

Tenders do contain a lot of duplication for a reason: to ensure all requirements are addressed and that the interrelationships between requirements are clear.

As a result one requirement may be discussed in many parts of the document but have a different focus.

However, often the tenderer will not pick up on the different focus between questions and so in responding will either:

- **Cut and paste** from one question to another;
- **Not answer** the question because they think they already have; or
- **Refer** to the earlier question.

Only in a few instances have I seen tenderers prepare a completely new response for a question that is similar to an earlier question. This means that the purchaser is not getting the complete response they need to make a full evaluation.

To ensure a purchaser generates the best response they must structure the tender so that it's clear that each question must be answered separately and in full. It's no good to just have a general instruction at the beginning of the tender because a) people don't read instructions well, and b) people forget instructions.

Some tips to make sure every question is answered are:

- a) Acknowledge at the end of the question that the requirement is similar to a previous question (and identify that question).
- b) Highlight the differences between the similar questions, and
- c) Include an instruction directly after the question, telling the tenderer to respond to each question separately and in full.

As an example:

*Question a)*

*Identify where you have managed a number of contracts in the one organisation either simultaneously and /or progressively, and the success of this.*

*Question b)*

*Identify where you have managed a number of contracts simultaneously within the one organisation that have required a different skill or focus.*

Tenderers must provide a separate and complete response to question a) and question b). Question b) requires experience managing simultaneous contracts with different skills, while question a) requires examples of managing projects simultaneously or progressively.

## 5 Don't assume tenderers will know what you are asking for

In my time preparing Government offer documents I have developed questions assuming that tenderers will understand my full meaning. One example is an oft-used question on project management methodology:

*“Describe the project management practices you will use in delivering the product/service”.*

When evaluating responses to this question I looked for:

- Use of a project management methodology (internally developed or based on a published methodology)
- Gating or review processes
- Management of risks and issues
- Ongoing project reporting, and
- Governance processes.

I assumed, operating within a strong project management environment, that all companies would address the activities listed above as components of their project management process.

However, rarely did I get responses that covered all of my requirements.

I have since learnt that Government uses a different set of project management terminologies to that used by the private sector. Project management in Government can mean something very different to ‘project management’ in the private sector.

Within the market sectors there is further dilution of generic project management terminology. For example, project management within a service industry is very different to project management in a production industry.

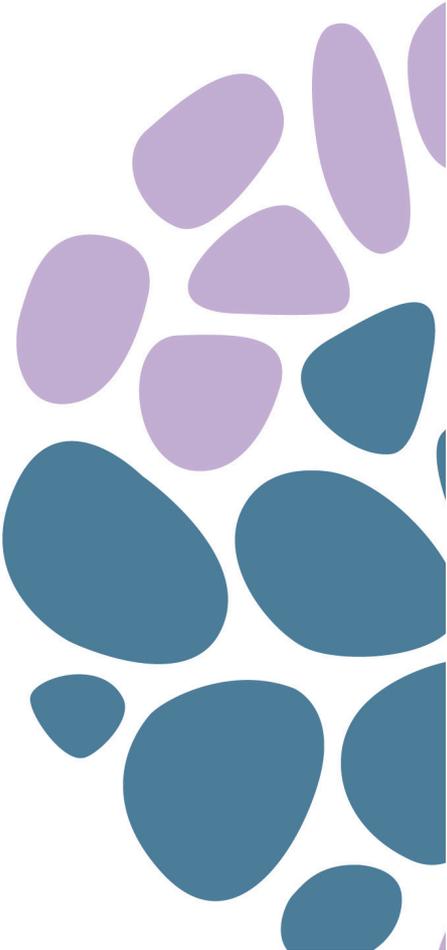
Therefore, in a tender document, procurement officers should describe the *output* or *function* that they need to assess rather than use a broad process or generic terminology.

For example, I would now rephrase the example question used above to read:

### **Project Management**

- a) Describe the project management methodology you will follow in delivering the product/service.*
- b) Describe your method for ensuring the deliverables are being delivered on time, to budget and to quality.*
- c) Describe your approach to managing risks and issues.*
- d) Describe your approach to overseeing the delivery of the product or service and your points of escalation.”*

This extra set of questions will increase the likelihood of generating the responses required to make a full and proper tender assessment, and create a more even playing field.



## 6 Provide opportunities for tenderers to differentiate their offerings

Most of the questions within a tender need to be prescriptive to generate the responses required to assess capabilities across a level playing field. Often this then leads to a result where strong tenderers are grouped around the same score with little to differentiate them.

This is further magnified when assessing responses to quotations with a small group identified.

Once you have tenderers grouped around the same score the evaluation will come down to price. To encourage responses that are better value for money, it's useful to have a handful of tender questions that can differentiate one tenderer's response from another.

There are many opportunities within a tender document for a tenderer to differentiate themselves from their competitors, including:

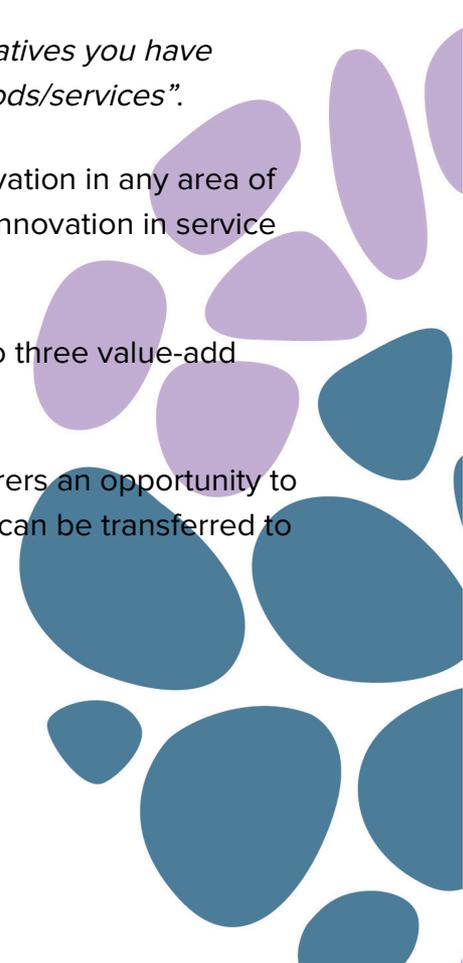
**Customer Service proposals.** These are very prescriptive in terms of customer engagement strategies, reporting, meetings and gathering end user feedback. While you must use some of these direct questions to assess a tenderers' capability against contractual requirements, you should also include additional, open questions such as:

- *“Please include other customer service proposals that will add value to the customer.”*
- Or
- *“Please provide three examples of customer service initiatives you have provided to other customers in the delivery of similar goods/services”.*

**Innovation.** Ask the tenderer to identify three examples of innovation in any area of their solution (that is, not just technological innovation but also innovation in service delivery, project management practices, customer service, etc).

**Value-Add.** Include a question asking tenderers to identify up to three value-add offerings.

**Knowledge management and knowledge transfer.** Give tenderers an opportunity to demonstrate how they build knowledge and skills and how this can be transferred to the buyer under partnering arrangements.



## 7 Show the direct relationship between tender evaluation criteria and response schedules

When providing support to companies responding to tenders I am often trying to find the link between the question asked for in the tender response schedules and the evaluation criteria.

Understanding the relevant evaluation criteria can provide a tenderer with additional information on the emphasis placed on the question and even a guess at the weightings of the question.

However, often it's not clear which question relates to what evaluation criteria, or worse, whether there is a relevant evaluation criterion.

Therefore, when developing the tender document you should always ensure that each tender evaluation criteria has a corresponding response schedule. If you cannot identify a response field or schedule for a particular evaluation criteria then there is no way for you to evaluate that criteria, and so it should not be used.

Once you have completed all the response schedules then you should map each of them to each of the evaluation criteria. This can be included within the list of evaluation criteria within the tender document.

The example below shows a table of evaluation criteria with the corresponding response schedules.

<b>Evaluation criteria</b>	<b>RFT part &amp; schedule</b>
<b><i>MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS</i></b>	
1.1 Compliance with Conditions of Tendering	Part D, Schedule 6
1.2 Compliance with the Conditions of Contract	Part D, Schedule 3, 8
1.3 Conflict of Interest	Part D, Schedule 7
<b><i>GENERAL</i></b>	
2.1 Experience, Capacity and Knowledge	Part D, Schedules 9, 10
2.2 Implementation, Project Management and Methodologies	Part D, Schedule 11
2.3 Customer Service	Part D, Schedule 13
2.4 Quality Systems and Standards	Part D, Schedule 12
2.5 Strategy and Innovation	Part D, Schedule 14
2.6 Marketplace Considerations	Part D, Schedule 22
2.7 Understanding of Government Strategic Direction	Part D, Schedule 9

## 8 Include a checklist for completion

As a procurement officer I almost always received one or two incomplete tender submissions, making it difficult to complete my evaluation of these responses due to ‘material’ information not being provided, for example pricing, a written response, design, etc.

Understandably, this made it impossible to select an otherwise very strong tenderer. Therefore, it is imperative that a checklist for tender completion be included in every tender.

With a checklist having to be completed, a tenderer has a simple process to follow to ensure nothing is overlooked, which means the purchaser gets the maximum number of conforming responses.

The Government is beginning to include a checklist for completion in its standard tender documentation, in particular for complex tenders. It also makes sense for checklists to become standard requirements in all bid documents.

Where a checklist hasn’t been provided in a tender document, I advise clients to create their own before they start on their response to ensure they cover all facets. The following steps could be followed in creating a checklist for completion:

1. List each response schedule. For example Schedule 1 – The Tender Form, Schedule 2 – Conflict of Interest, etc.
2. Match evaluation criteria in the Conditions of Tender to the Tender Response Schedules. Include these evaluation criteria as subheadings in your checklist so tenderers can check off their responses to each evaluation criteria.
3. List some items separately. For example, pricing, insurance and references.
4. Document all information that is in addition to the tender requirements. For example, drawings and designs, plans, etc.

At a minimum, a tender checklist for completion should include:

- Completion of every Tender Response Schedule – list every Schedule 1 to XX (there can be up to 20 of them);
- Responses to each Tender Evaluation Criteria;
- Full pricing details;
- Completed compliance statements to contract and specifications;
- Completed insurance details;
- List of three referees (or minimum number required);
- Signed physical copies of Schedules 1 and 2 (where requested);
- Correct number of copies of the tender document or CDs;
- Completed “additional information”; and
- Any drawings/designs etc. requested for in the tender document.

## 9 Give tenderers an opportunity to minimise their risk of delivery

Evaluations are often subject to a risk assessment with this risk quantified and added to the overall value for money equation at the end of the evaluation.

In making a risk assessment, an evaluator must understand not just the risk they assess (either based on company capability, capacity, solution maturity, market experience, etc), but whether the tenderer is aware of the risk associated with their delivery, and, if so, whether the tenderer has processes to minimise the assessed risk.

Often companies that are new to the market, or to Government, or that have developed an innovative solution that may not have been widely used, are those that attract a higher risk assessment.

Therefore, if a company is not selected because of a high-risk rating the buyer may be missing out on a strong or even innovative solution.

To give all tenderers an even chance in tendering and to ensure the best solution is selected, tenderers should be provided with an opportunity within their response to provide proposals or evidence that minimises the assessed risk of delivery.

For example, the following question could be asked:

*“What risks (if any) do you associate with your delivery of the required goods/services in this tender? Risks can relate to your company’s capacity, solution maturity, marketplace experience, etc. For each identified risk please also provide detail about how you will address those risks.”*

If an evaluator is not comfortable with the response they should follow up the applicant either through a clarification question, tender interview, reference report or site visit.

## 10 Always offer a debrief

Procurement officers should always offer a debrief opportunity to both the successful and unsuccessful tenderers.

Tender debriefs represent an opportunity to not only help companies to improve their tendering practices, but also to build strong and open relationships with the supplier base.

It's astounding the number of times that suppliers are not offered a debrief, or that when requested, a debriefing has been refused. In attending debriefs with my clients I am also amazed at how poor some have been, and at times inaccurate.

In order to make sure that the best possible tenderers apply in the future, the unsuccessful applicants need strong and constructive guidance to improve their tendering practices. Feedback on the tendering process from the supplier can also support the procurement officer in enhancing their tender documentation in the future, so debriefing is beneficial to both parties.

The best tender debriefs, in my experience, are when companies are shown where their tender response could have been improved and a constructive dialogue then occurs between supplier and purchaser.

The most destructive debriefs (that is, destructive to the purchaser / supplier relationship) is when the purchaser has a defensive attitude in order to protect their process, and/or the rejected supplier is not willing to accept constructive criticism.

When preparing a debrief, here are some points to remember:

- It's rare a company has been assessed as unsuccessful because they can't do the job; usually they are unsuccessful because the evaluator was unable to determine that they **could** do the job. Convey this to the tenderer and it will improve their frame of mind.
- Prepare yourself by reviewing each question in the tender response and make notes on the strengths and weaknesses of those responses.
- Provide examples of a strong tender response and show how that strong response compared to their response.
- Do not give tender scores.
- Document the conversation.
- Use debriefs to build strong supplier/buyer relationships. Where appropriate, identify upcoming tender and quotation opportunities and describe what's required.
- Offer some lessons learned for future tenders.

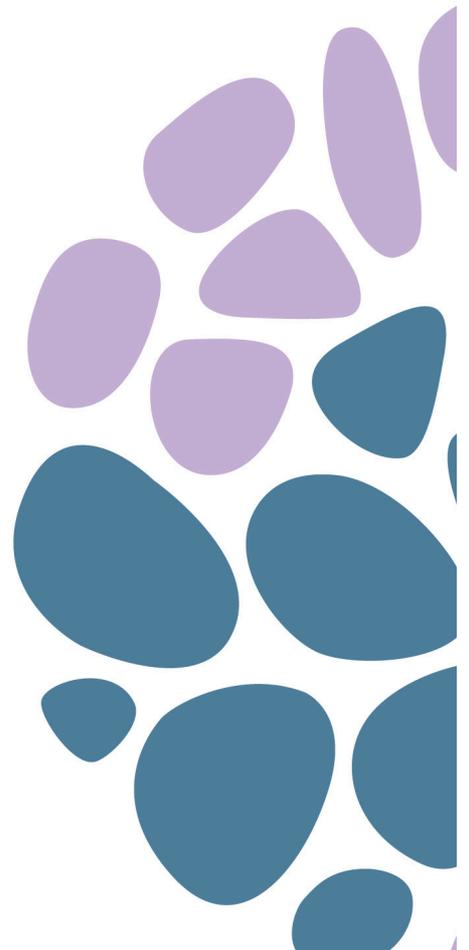
## Closing Statement

Through this guide I have putlined 10 easy to implement, proven strategies that will give you confidence to build easy to understand tenders designed to generate the best value for money responses.

For advice on implementing the tips within this guide, more information on tendering and procurement, or useful tendering tools please visit [www.miaconsulting.com.au](http://www.miaconsulting.com.au) or email [info@miaconsulting.com.au](mailto:info@miaconsulting.com.au).

## Good luck!

Deirdre Diamante  
Director, Mia



Drawing upon a unique dual perspective of government and industry, Deirdre Diamante's *10 tips for enhancing tendering practices* for procurement officers will maximise tender outcomes for both the buyer and supplier. These tips reflect Deirdre's considerable experience compiling and assessing tenders, as well as working on tender responses with businesses across multiple industry sectors.

## About Us.

Mia provides specialist advice on business and procurement practices in the public and private sector, with a particular focus on Winning Government Business. Our comprehensive suite of consulting services includes support for tendering and procurement, quality and risk management, project management, and developing strategies for engaging with government.

## Also by Mia.

### 10 TIPS FOR WINNING GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

In *10 Tips for Winning Government Business*, Deirdre Diamante delivers 10 easy to implement and proven strategies for navigating complex tenders, understanding what government is looking for, and preparing responses that will resonate with government evaluators.

