

Guide to Writing Good Research Briefs

A good brief contains:

Background to the research

- Gives an overview of what your organisation does and the events, problems or opportunities that have led you to need research. This helps the prospective supplier understand what you already know and how you expect to use the information the research will collect. For example, is the research expected to influence a decision or to provide background data.

Research Objectives

- States what it is you want the research to find out
 - This doesn't mean you should write a list of questions, but you do need to say more than 'research my market'
- Examples of research objectives are:
 - 'Understand the needs of....'
 - 'Assess reactions to....'
 - 'Measure satisfaction with....'
 - Understand why...'

Target Audience

- Defines the type of people you need the research to be conducted among, eg your customers/users of your services, prospective customers/users, the general public, members of your organisation, your staff, certain business sectors, politicians, etc
- Say what you already know about the target audience, so that the research supplier can design a representative sample. For example, the size of the target audience, its demographic profile and geographic spread.
- State whether there are any particular sub-groups that you want to be able to examine within the overall target audience
- Say whether you have lists of the customers, members, etc that the research is to be based upon; indicate how large and up-to-date the lists are, and whether they include contact details such as phone numbers.

Timing

- Say whether the research has to be completed by a deadline; or if it should be timed around certain events, such as an advertising campaign.

Deliverables

- State how you want the results conveyed, eg in a full written report, in a presentation, a set of tables, or some combination of these.
 - It's a good idea to make sure the deliverables include a description of how the research was done, for future reference
- Tell the supplier if you need hard copies of the report (and how many copies) as well as an electronic copy and how many times you will need the results presented to different audiences.

Budget constraints

- You may not want to tell prospective suppliers how much budget you have but, if you know you have only limited funds, it's sensible to say so, to avoid receiving proposals you cannot afford – and to avoid misleading the suppliers.

When do you need to receive the proposal

- Allow two weeks, for prospective suppliers to prepare their proposals.

Where to send the proposal

Your contact details for queries the prospective supplier may have.

- Some clients' procurement processes do not allow any discussion with prospective suppliers. This is very unhelpful and should be avoided, because it means prospective suppliers are forced to make assumptions, which could prove costly to you. You will get better quality proposals if you allow prospective suppliers to ask questions and discuss your brief with you.
- Better still, invite prospective suppliers to briefing meetings, where you can enlarge upon the requirements in the brief and answer questions on the spot.