



## **Guide to Assessing Research Proposals**

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## **Key elements of a research proposal:**

### **Background**

- Re-states the business/organisation's problem
  - This helps you to check that the supplier has understood your situation

### **Research objectives**

- Confirms what you have asked to be investigated

### **Methodology**

- Recommends the *type* of research needed, eg quantitative or qualitative, observation techniques or interviews, focus groups or individual interviews, telephone or face-to-face interviews, online, etc.
- Summarises the sort of information to be collected/questions asked
- Specifies how many interviews (or observations) will be needed
- Describes the composition of the sample: the geographic spread, the representation of key characteristics of the target audience, inclusion of special sub-groups, etc
- Specifies when and where the interviews will be conducted, eg in respondents' homes, at their places of work, in the street, etc
- Specifies any special techniques or analyses that will be used

### **Timing**

- When the research will be conducted and the results supplied

### **What the supplier might need from you**

- When and how the supplier needs you to provide lists of customers, or product samples, or copies of test materials, or permission to interview on your premises, etc

### **Deliverables**

- Unless you have specified otherwise, suppliers will assume you want only one version of the report, in electronic format, and one presentation.

### **Cost**

- Costs are usually quoted exclusive of VAT
- Costs will be based on the recommended methodology. They may need to be revised if, having considered the methodology, you ask for additional features.
- Some suppliers automatically provide a breakdown of costs, so that you can see exactly what is included and how much each element costs.

### **Key personnel**

- The individuals who will be carrying out the work and/or liaising with you during the project

### **Credentials**

- The relevant research experience of the agency and the key personnel who will be carrying out your work.

## How to decide between proposals

You should decide what you are looking for from prospective suppliers and their proposals before you issue the brief.

Your brief should also have made it clear to prospective suppliers what criteria you will use to assess proposals. For example...are you looking for lowest price?... or the most imaginative methodology?...or a tried and tested approach?

Read each proposal in full and decide:

- Has the supplier demonstrated that they have understood the problem and how you are expecting the research results to help solve it?
- Have they made it clear why their proposed method is appropriate?
- Can you supply the materials they will need to carry out the research as proposed?
- Have they over-looked anything? Have any inaccurate assumptions been made? - Make sure that this is not your fault!
- Are the proposed timings in line with your needs?
- Does the price cover everything in the proposal?
- If the price is higher than the others, is this matched by higher quality of key personnel, or use of specialised techniques?
- Can you afford the price?

Telephone the supplier(s) and ask for clarification of any points that are unclear.

Assuming that more than one proposal satisfies all the above, consider:

- Which supplier(s) demonstrate 'added value', ie have shown special insight to your problem, have particular skills or experience relevant to your problem?
- Which supplier(s) demonstrate sympathy or a good 'fit' with your organisation's (or your internal client's) style of working?

And if more than one proposal still satisfies all the above, ask yourself if there is any reason why you should not simply choose the cheapest option.