

An introduction to tendering in care





An introduction to tendering

No matter what sector your business is in, tendering is important and offers exciting growth opportunities.

In the care sector, tendering is the best way to show local authorities that your setting provides the best place for residents to stay under your care. But to be successful and reap the benefits, you need to know how to tender correctly.

If you're new to tendering, this handy guide will give you the knowledge you need to start the process of tendering with confidence.

This guide will provide an overview of the tendering process, how to win more tenders, and common mistakes to avoid.

What are the steps to tendering?

1. Identifying the right contracts

It's essential that you source contracts that are relevant to your care setting. Some handy online tools for searching for tender opportunities include Tracker, Tenders Direct or Complete Tenders.

2. Expressing interest

Showing an Expression of Interest (EOI) lets the buyer know that you're interested in submitting a bid and doing business with them. The sooner you express your interest, the sooner you can get started on creating a high-quality bid and give yourself the time to produce your best work. Once you've expressed interest, it's important to know that you're under no obligation to proceed and if you wish to opt out later, you can.

3. Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ)

A Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) is a document you have to fill in at the beginning of the tendering process. And as the name suggests, the PQQ is designed to let your potential customers know all about your business before they decide whether or not to formally invite you to bid for a project.

The PQQ also lets the customer know that you meet at least the minimum standards required to bid. The kind of information you'll be expected to include in a PQQ are a top level description of your experience, skills and resources, as well as information on Health & Safety procedures and any certifications you have in place.

If you need help getting your Health & Safety policies and procedures ready for tender - or you need help producing the right evidence of your Health & Safety measures - call our team of experts today on **0345 844 1111** to see exactly how we can help.

4. Invitation to Tender (ITT)

If your company has been shortlisted after the PQQ stage, the buyer will now assess your future and what you can potentially offer should you win the contract. It's important to keep in mind you will have competitors so you must have something different from the rest of the field. You need to stand out!



What are the steps to tendering?

You can come across various types of tender processes depending on your sector and the nature of your business. These can include:

Invitation to Tender (ITT) –

When a buyer produces a formal document which outlines the scope of the project. Companies are then invited to respond to this and outline their commitment to the project delivery. This includes quality questions covering method statements, case studies and more specific narrative on their suitability.

Selection Questionnaire (SQ) – In essence, these are synonymous with PQQs and require the same level of detail, care and precision to complete but request information from suppliers in staged questions.

Request for Proposal (RFP) – Invites multiple proposals from bidders detailing the proposal and costings involved; it is less restrictive than an ITT and offers the chance for creativity, though it may have some word limits or formatting rules to adhere to. Though it can be used in construction, it's often used in creative industries.

Expression of interest (EOI) – Prior to continuing the procurement / bidding process, prospective suppliers may wish to initially gather details from interested parties.

Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) –

Often used to shortlist suppliers when there are a large number of applicants, a PQQ is a list of questions relating to the criteria a supplier must meet when applying for a contract. It will ask for core business details in order to consider the application. These may include; financial information, insurances, policies and compliance.

Any Qualified Provider (AQP) – Based on a standardised service for easy comparison. Bidders who meet the requirements are invited to bid.

Request for Quotation (RFQ) – Often for a standardised product or service so it's straightforward to compare; this is where the buyer has a clear idea of the work they want.

Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) – It's open for a set period of time, normally the whole contract period so suppliers can join at any time.





Key considerations for tendering in the care sector

- ✓ **Do you meet the financial requirements?** Has the Commissioner set a minimum turnover? Bidders will often be assessed via credit checks or scores. There's often a particular score/rating a bidder must achieve in order to pass, this needs checking first to avoid falling at the first hurdle. Other performance indicators might include ratios, liquidity, operating margins etc.
- ✓ **Are you registered with a regulatory body such as the CQC or Care Inspectorate?** Has the Commissioner stipulated that you need to have a certain rating, e.g. rated Good?
- ✓ **Tender weighting.** Assess how the tender will be weighted on price and quality.
- ✓ **Pricing** - is the pricing fixed at a certain rate that bidders must agree to meet? Has there been a price range stipulated that bidders must bid within? Can you deliver the service stipulated within this price?
- ✓ **Specification** - can you deliver the service that is required?
- ✓ **Experience** - do you have experience delivering similar services? References or case studies will be required for most tenders, do you have any? Sometimes these are pass/fail so careful consideration is required.
- ✓ **Evaluation criteria** - within the tender documents there will be an evaluation criteria detailing how your tender will be assessed.
- ✓ **Policies** - are your policies up to date and compliant?
- ✓ **Have certain technologies or accreditations been stipulated?** Examples of this might include call monitoring systems, ISO standards or accreditations such as Cyber Essentials.
- ✓ **Does TUPE apply to this tender?** If so, have you reviewed the implications of this?
- ✓ **Insurances** - do you have the right cover in place? Tenders will stipulate the types of insurance and cover required. For instance, in the care sector Medical Malpractice Insurance is stipulated.
- ✓ **Location** - does the tender stipulate that you require an office or practice in the area the service will be delivered in?
- ✓ **Method statements** - the quality side of the tender submission is the most challenging. Be sure to dedicate enough time and resources needed to put together thorough, compelling responses to tender questions.



Additional Registrations, Licences, Safety Docs

- Some social care tenders that require the provision of accommodation and/or accommodation and low level support may not require registration, but it could be that they require bidders to hold a HMO licence for the properties in question. They may also be required to evidence certain safety certification and contingency documentation, e.g. Gas Safety Certification, compliance with fire regulations, locality risk assessments, etc.



Added Value - Commissioners procuring in this sector are increasingly specifying that providers will need to deliver additional value. This could be in the form of offers of apprenticeships or a set quota for job offers during the contract's lifetime, etc. Check the requirements, can you fulfill these obligations?



Information Security - It's not unusual for tender submissions to ask for bidders to evidence their data protection protocols. These requirements can often go beyond the submission of individual information governance policies, requiring the completion of online Information Governance toolkits and/or possession of the government's Cyber Essential accreditation or equivalent (e.g. ISO 9001).

Failure to meet these requirements may mean you fall at the first hurdle, so check/seek support to check the bidding criteria.





Steps in the tendering process



Procurement team formation

The buyer will put together a procurement team including relevant stakeholders such as budget holders, quality management, Health & Safety representatives and human resources, to name a few. The size and makeup of the team will depend on the nature and value of the contract.



Evaluation criteria and tender development

The buyer and procurement team will agree on what the tender will involve, including:

- Specification
- Mandatory requirements, e.g. ISO Certifications
- Questions, rules and instructions
- Evaluation criteria - this is crucially important and will consider how tenders will be scored e.g. what weight will be given to quality versus price
- Contract length
- The procurement process, e.g. will a PQQ be required?



Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ)

As mentioned previously, this step is to help initially short-list companies and involves answering a series of questions.



Supplier shortlist

Again, depending on the type of contract and nature, the evaluation will be used to shortlist companies through weighting criteria and sub-criteria.



Selection

Once the process is complete, the panel will come together, compare scores and use those to select the winner(s).



Initial evaluation

The panel will score each bid against the agreed evaluation criteria, ranking them from lowest to highest. The buyer will compare:

- Price
- Relevant experience
- Understanding of the requirements
- Past performance
- Technical skills
- Resource available
- Proposed methodology



Presentations, interviews and visits

This may not be essential in all cases, but companies may be invited to give a short presentation or question and answer session.



Negotiations

At this stage, it's highly unlikely there'll be an opportunity for significant negotiation, particularly on the overall price, and some tenders may not offer any scope for negotiation.

If anything is negotiated, it is more likely to be aspects such as contract wording and pricing from the perspective of additional items.



Contract award

Once everything has been finalised, the contract will be awarded.

Unsuccessful entrants should be given the opportunity to gain feedback, and in some cases may even wish to challenge the procurement process if they think it was flawed/unfair.



Issuing of tender (ITT)

This stage will depend on the type of your tender, but it could include the issue of an ITT, or it could be a request-for-quote or request-for-quotation to enquire about pricing for a timeframed task.



Completing the tender

- ✓ **Be accurate** - make sure your spelling and grammar are faultless. Get somebody else to proof-read your tender once it's written.
- ✓ **Be transparent** - use clear, easy-to-understand language without jargon.
- ✓ **Be logical** - structure your tender in an easy-to-understand-format. Most buyers will specify a structure, so make sure you follow it.
- ✓ **Be thorough** - complete the tender with care. Do your research. Alongside making sure you've read the requirements in detail this will show the procurer you have really taken the time to understand their needs.
- ✓ **Be engaging** - don't just cut and paste some standard copy from a previous tender. This is your opportunity to sell yourself with real-life examples specific to this tender application. This is an opportunity to showcase your work!

What if I lose the tender?

It's important to bear in mind that a win ratio of 1 in 3 is often considered good - so don't be disheartened if you don't win every tender you apply for.

If you want to improve your applications, you can request feedback on your application to understand why you missed out. Asking for feedback on your tender, you stand to gain a lot of useful insight into how you can improve your bid next time around.

There are also professional consultancies out there that can help you. You might want to partner with bid-writers who've got experience supporting businesses like yours.

Certifications and accreditations that can help you win more business

A large proportion of Pre-Qualification Questionnaires (PQQs) ask for ISO 9001. By holding this certification, you can often increase your chances of achieving that all-important 'A*' grade.

ISO 9001 isn't the only certification that is useful for tenders. You may also be asked for Environmental (ISO 14001) and Health & Safety (ISO 45001).

We are seeing more and more points being awarded for organisations holding Environmental and Health & Safety certifications, driven by government initiatives from recent years.

A registered member of the Safety Schemes in Procurement (SSiP) and endorsed by the Health & Safety Executive, Smas Worksafe is a nationally recognised Health & Safety Accreditation scheme that can also help you demonstrate your business' Health & Safety standards.

How Citation can help

Here at Citation, our Health & Safety experts are able to help you prepare all the evidence you need about care policies and procedures to help you demonstrate exactly what you need when completing tender applications.

When you partner with us, we'll guide you through the process and help you create a standout application.

If you have any questions or would like the help, guidance and advice of our expert team, you can call us on **0345 844 1111** for a chat about what you need and to get the ball rolling or you can drop us a line [here](#).