SUSTAINABLE APPROACH: May 2010

The University of Aberdeen spends over £70M annually on goods and services and, as a UK public contracting authority, has an ethical, and now legal, duty, to do everything it can to minimise the adverse impact of its procurement activity. As institutional buyers we too have a responsibility to ensure that our approach to purchasing is sensible and sustainable. This guidance is intended to help you.

Planning and pre-specification questions

Economic/cost avoidance
- Is there adequate funding available for the purchase, installation and operation of the equipment?
- Could the results required be obtained by having a third-party perform the service?
- Can you share, borrow, rent or lease equipment for this requirement?
- Is it possible to use, repair or modify existing or second-hand equipment?
- Is it necessary to have a top-of-the-range product, or will a more basic model suffice?
- Could the supply be modular, purchasing the base model then supplementing as the requirement changes?

Environmental
- What are the maximum weight(s) and dimensions of the new unit(s)?
- In the proposed location are there physical limitations on the supply, installation, access, operation, waste output, maintenance and end-of-life disposal?
- Will building modifications be required to widen doorways, strengthen floors, move internal walls, install barriers or shielding, supply or extend storage, change the floor-plan layout, improve ventilation, heating or cooling, modify the supply of utilities, deal with waste or change fire exits?
- Is it appropriate to request an “A” energy efficiency rating?
- Is there a more environmentally-friendly option available? Could the product be re-cycled after use, and how will this impact on costs?

Social
- Have the needs of all those requiring access to the facility, now or in the future, been considered?
- Will the supply affect anyone else (such as customers/users, co-located departments, suppliers, third party maintenance, emergency services)?
- Is it possible that small or medium sized enterprises might be able to supply to you, possibly collaboratively, and have you considered whether you can modify your specification to facilitate this?
- What steps can you take to reduce the possibility that your supply might originate from a supplier or manufacturer not complying with labour rights conventions? (This could be dealt with at the supplier qualification/PQQ stage – please see www.abdn.ac.uk/procurement: “Vendor Questionnaire”)

Specification

There are two main elements of a good specification: a brand-free, generic statement of need accompanied by a structured request for a “whole-life costing” for the goods being tendered.

The specification should also include award criteria and the weightings for these criteria. The criteria will relate to the main elements of the requirement and, when the scores have been considered, will enable a final decision to be based on an objective evaluation. They might include price, quality, proposed maintenance and levels of technical support, response times, specific experience, references and the delivery lead time.

A statement of need should clearly describe the requirement and might express this in terms of:

- A short, general description of what is required, written in plain English;
- The application: where and how the equipment will be used and what for;
- Minimum required performance in terms of, for example: volumes, speed, magnification, resolution, data to be produced, compatibility with equipment etc.;
- Inputs and outputs;
- Results expected;
- Compliance with prescribed standards;
Quality requirements and conformance with any quality control system;
Ease of use;
Operator requirement;
Upgradeability;
Physical limitations: weight and dimensions, mobility, access, floor-strength, building requirements (such as for room modifications or shielding);
An opportunity for the tenderer to include an alternative offer which might incorporate joint research, use of the University as a reference site, a novel approach, the application of new technology or ex-demonstration equipment etc..

The “whole-life costing” will reveal the true cost of ownership and provide a proper basis for comparison between competitive quotations; it is not unknown for a supplier to quote a low capital cost to secure the business, then uplift the cost of maintenance services to increase their margin.

Tenderers should be required to address all or most of the following areas in their responses:
Capital purchase price, or cost of lease or hire;
Availability and cost of alternative, environmentally-friendly options;
Delivery date (does this meet your timescale?);
Delivery to site and insurances;
Rigging into position;
Installation;
Testing;
Training for operation and local maintenance (both on and off-site);
Number of operators required;
Expected life of the equipment in a normal working environment;
Anticipated running costs over the expected life, including an estimate of annual costs for utilities in a similar operation and cost of replacements and wearing parts (with a guarantee that these will remain available);
Product life and upgradeability – when will the model offered cease to be produced, how long will spares be available for, and what is the approach to upgrading?
Warranties and extended warranties;
Post-warranty service and maintenance proposals for the life of the equipment (if this is not known then request that details for a five-year period be included);
WEEE: Waste electrical and electronic equipment legislation requires manufacturers to participate in a scheme for removal at end of economic life. Request that costs associated with the supplier or manufacturer meeting their responsibilities within the regulations are provided;
End of life replacement or disposal: what options are available when the equipment is no longer required, and what are the costs involved?
How much of the equipment offered comes from a sustainable source and/or is recyclable? How much of the transit packaging comes from a sustainable resource and/or is recyclable? Packaging must be removed from the site following delivery and this must be costed into the offer.

THIS IS INTENDED AS A PRE-TENDER GUIDANCE NOTE ONLY. FOR TENDERING PROCEDURES PLEASE CONSULT THE PROCUREMENT WEB-PAGE: www.abdn.ac.uk/procurement

Other sources of information
A helpful set of sustainable specifications (“Government Buying Standards”) for common commodities is available on the DEFRA website: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/economy/purchasing/.

Sustainable Approach to Procurement: www.abdn.ac.uk/procurement

Sustainability Test: www.abdn.ac.uk/procurement

Corporate Social Responsibility: www.abdn.ac.uk/ppg/index then Corporate Social Responsibility

EU Guidance: ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/index_en.htm

To track the environmental performance within HE: www.heepi.org.uk

Gary McKinnon
Head of Procurement
g.mckinnon@abdn.ac.uk (King’s ext.4467)