

GUIDELINES FOR EXPERIENCE CRITERIA AND CORPORATE REFERENCES IN ITQ AND RFx

General Points to Consider to Determine Appropriate and Applicable Corporate References

Use of Experience Criteria and Corporate References

Experience criteria and corporate references are useful tools in the technical evaluation of an Invitation to Qualify (ITQ) or other selection process. Experience criteria should be considered for requirements where past performance experience is critical to demonstrating a vendor's capability to perform the work. Providing corporate references is necessary to validate past experience. Where experience criteria and corporate references are used, consideration should be given to the appropriate parameters of the experience criteria selected and the method used to verify corporate references.

Experience criteria and corporate references **can be** incorporated as part of the ITQ and/or the final solicitation (RFx) phases of the procurement process.

This document is intended to provide guidance on how to select relevant experience criteria and on the verification process for corporate references.

1) Dollar-Value Requirement

- The type of procurement **should be** categorized – e.g.: outcome-based, professional services, on-site human resource, commodity acquisition, high-complexity, integrated solution (e.g.: data centre)
 - *Consider: A procurement of similar complexity with regard to experience but of lower dollar value might be appropriate as a reference.*
- The dollar-value reference **should be** relevant to the procurement.
 - *Consider: Dollar value is less important than complexity and similar services. References of similar size and scope can be quantified by the appropriate delivery measurement metric rather than the total contract value (TCV).*
- Breadth of services **should be** considered. If it is an outright sale, TCV is a good guide for dollar-value reference. If it is an integrated solution, consider overall scope of project and value of all services to determine dollar-value reference not just TCV.
- The dollar-value reference **should be** proportional to the scope of the project.
 - *Consider: TCV can be a misleading comparison point since it can be artificially inflated by other services that may not be in scope of the requirement in question (e.g.: if a vendor references a large dollar value project comprised of*

mixed services of which only a small portion of said services are relevant to the procurement requirements).

- Consider: Total dollar value for a past contract for mixed services is not equivalent to a contract for a specific service requirement of equal dollar value.
- The impact of a dollar-value reference **should be** proportional so as not to unreasonably limit the ability of the vendor to compete for this procurement.
- A dollar-value reference **should not be used** to measure solvency.

2) Location Requirements

- The location of the work to be performed **should be** considered in determining corporate references.
- If the procurement is for local, national, or international locations where work is going to be performed, then the corporate reference **may be required** to be from those locations.
 - Consider: there are advantages and disadvantages to local/national/international references. Location-specific references may be preferred for ensuring the proponent's delivery team has the expertise to deliver a particular type of service in a specific service location.
 - Consider: The Government of Canada is one of the largest consumers of IT in Canada, so international references may be the only way for a bidder to demonstrate their ability to deliver on a similar size project because no other comparable size project exists within Canada.
 - Consider: The right solution could be a combination of both local and international references – i.e.: for very large procurements.
 - Consider: The inclusion of some local references to validate the capabilities of the in country delivery team.

3) Timeframe Requirement

- The chosen timeframe reference period **should be** relevant to the scope of the requirement for the procurement.
 - Consider: Allowing varied reference periods based on the technology as applicable to the scope of the requirement (i.e., 3- to 10-year reference periods).
 - Consider: Generic requirements can have a longer timeframe reference.
 - Consider: Technical requirements are subject to a shorter timeframe.
 - Consider: A corporate reference linked to the cycle of ongoing or existing contracts can limit open and fair competition and favour the incumbent.

4) Verification of References

- There **should be** a process to verify requested references. The verification process should be included in the description of the evaluation and selection methodology of the solicitation. At a minimum, the credited experience criteria of the successful bidder(s)/respondent(s) must be verified.
 - When references are verified directly, a template for the verification process **should be** developed and applied consistently for all reference checks.
- The verification process may allow for verification of a random sample of the list of references provided if more references are provided than the minimum requested number. This mitigates against “coaching” of references. All experience criteria must be verified through (a) validated reference(s).
- Validation **should be** with the prime contact identified.
 - Consider: The seniority requirement for the referee (e.g.: the CEO of a company may not be familiar with the details of a contract if all arrangements were made by another representative of the company).
- Permit alternate approaches to verification. I.e., allow for validation via either signed attestation or direct validation instead of requiring one approach or the other.
 - An attestation signed by the referee **may be** used to verify a reference as an alternative to contacting the referee directly for verification. The attestation should explicitly address all of the requirements of the experience criteria and include contact information of the referee for further confirmation (if required).
 - Some references may be willing and able to directly validate a reference even if they are not willing or authorized to sign an attestation (e.g. government entities).
- If appropriate, bidders may be permitted to use references from key partners.
 - Consider:
 - The experience of a bidder's subcontractor(s) may have significant value even in the absence of an established Joint Venture.
 - Primes and subcontractors with an established history of effective collaboration may be well positioned to deliver on future projects.
 - If relevant and important to the requirement confirmation of current and/or previous teaming arrangements can be requested through a certification from the team member or subcontractor.