



Transforming Local Infrastructure Professional Services Cluster

How to... get a quality service AND value for money

Most voluntary organisations will have contracts or service level agreements with third party suppliers. But how do you increase your chances of getting a quality service that represents value for money? We've made some suggestions to consider when sourcing a professional service such as an HR provider or an independent financial advisor.

Listen to word of mouth and recommendations

Ask the people you trust if they would recommend their suppliers.

Look for a quality mark

Businesses with a quality mark have gone through a rigorous process to demonstrate they provide a high standard of product or service. An example of a quality mark is ISO 9001 which covers management systems to support customers.

Find out if the supplier is a member of a professional body

A professional body is a non-profit organisation seeking to further a particular profession, the interests of individuals engaged in that profession, and the public interest. Sometimes membership of a professional body is necessary to practice a profession.

Ask if suppliers have other customers from the voluntary sector

Knowing if a supplier has other clients from the voluntary sector can indicate their level of understanding of the wider issues facing the sector.

Ask suppliers for references or testimonials from other customers

It helps to speak to other customers about their experience of working with a supplier. Things you might want to ask about include: does the supplier do what they say they're going to do, and in the agreed timeframe? Do they take into account your organisation's needs?

Ask to see examples of their work

This is particularly important if you're looking for a printing, design or website supplier.

Be clear about what you want to buy

Send suppliers a document that specifies your requirements along with an invitation to tender for work. This means you'll be able to compare like for like eg on costs or technical details.

Know where the gaps are in your knowledge

You might be seeking to contract in an area on which you have limited knowledge, eg IT, design or photocopiers. Work with a helpful colleague or someone from a support organisation to develop your expertise.

Get three quotes from three different suppliers

This shows that you're being fair and transparent in your decision-making. Find out if your organisation has a policy about when to obtain verbal or written quotes.

The cheapest option isn't always value for money

We're all for saving money but the cheapest option isn't always the best. Customer service is important, particularly if you're buying a support contract. Consider social and environmental benefits too eg does the business support people with disabilities or use recycled paper?

More information

From September 2013 the Professional Services and Purchasing Clusters are joining to form the Voluntary Sector Resources Group. For more information contact:

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