

## Draft guidance: answering questions from suppliers

### How to answer supplier questions on the Digital Marketplace

Answering supplier questions, or 'clarification' questions, on the Digital Marketplace.

#### Supplier questions: what they're for and when suppliers can ask them

When you post your requirements on the Digital Marketplace, all eligible suppliers can apply for the work. If a supplier needs to clarify something in your requirements, they can ask you a question, also known as a 'clarification' question, through the Digital Marketplace. You must respond so the supplier can decide whether a piece of work is right for them and whether to offer their services.

When you publish your requirements, suppliers will be given a date by which they must ask any questions they have. This should give you enough time to answer them.

#### How you'll know if a supplier has asked a question

When a supplier asks a question, you'll be sent an email to the address you gave when you created your Digital Marketplace account. Ensure this email address will be monitored. If you're away during the time when suppliers can ask questions, you should make sure your emails are forwarded to a colleague.

#### Answering open and transparent questions

You must make sure that suppliers have access to the same information about the work. This means all suppliers will have an equal opportunity to win the contract. All questions and answers will be published on the Digital Marketplace so anyone can see them.

You must:

- post all questions and answers on the Digital Marketplace
- make sure questions don't include the supplier's name or any confidential information about the supplier
- give an individual response to each question even when questions are similar
- answer all questions at least 1 working day before the deadline to give suppliers time to decide if the work is right for them

You should answer questions:

- within 2 to 3 working days
- more frequently when the deadline is approaching

#### Giving useful answers

You should make sure you answer every part of a supplier question as they often include several queries. Providing links to supporting information can be helpful.

### **Difficult, confusing or commercially sensitive supplier questions**

If you receive a question that you don't understand, you can ask the supplier to explain what they mean in your answer. All suppliers will see your response, and the supplier can then rephrase their question and ask it again.

You must not reveal commercially sensitive information when you answer a supplier question, eg the supplier's price for the work or how they plan to solve your problem.

### **Holding a session to answer supplier questions**

You can hold a question and answer session to answer a lot of supplier questions at the same time. This should mean that suppliers don't ask duplicate questions. It's best to hold a session 3 or 4 days after you publish your requirements so suppliers have a chance to think of questions to ask.

### **Types of question and answer session**

You can hold a:

- webinar
- conference call
- meeting

### **How a question and answer session works**

Suppliers who attend a question and answer session can ask questions through a chat feature in the webinar software or over the phone during a conference call. You should appoint someone to run the session. They should:

- make each question visible to everyone in the session
- not disclose the name of the supplier

You should make sure the right people are available to answer questions, eg a technical person should be present to answer technical questions. If you need to ask for information from a team member who isn't present, you should tell the supplier you'll publish an answer on the Digital Marketplace later.

### **After a question and answer session**

You must post all questions and answers from each session on the Digital Marketplace so suppliers who didn't attend aren't at a disadvantage.

### **Software for a webinar**

Your software should include these features:

- dial-in: so the buyer and suppliers can join the webinar
- chat: so suppliers can ask questions
- recording: so questions and answers can be transcribed and shared with other suppliers through the Digital Marketplace

- screen-sharing: so the buyer can share a presentation