KEYSTONE PROCUREMENT

USER GUIDE

Bid / No-Bid Calculator

How to answer the 15 questions and decide whether a tender is worth bidding for

Duty. Service. Integrity.

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START HERE

The calculator at a glance

The calculator helps you decide, in a few minutes, whether a public tender is worth the time and cost of a bid.

You answer 15 questions across four areas: your relationship with the buyer, your fit and capability, your competitive position and the commercial case. The calculator then gives you a result to guide your decision. **Most bids are lost before they are written,** so the best time to use it is as soon as a tender is published.

Use the result as one part of your decision. It is a structured check, not a verdict: it does not tell you that you will win, or that you will lose.

You will need

- The tender documents, including the contract notice, the selection and award criteria, the specification and the draft contract terms.
- Notes from any pre-market engagement, supplier events or conversations with the buyer.
- A rough view of your delivery costs, the resources you would need and your other commitments.

Five steps to a decision

1
Gather
Collect the tender documents and your notes.

2
Answer
Work through the four areas, one screen each.

3
Check
Use Back to review any answer before you finish.

4
Result
Click See my result once all 15 are answered.

5
Decide
Bid, don't bid, or act on the gaps first.

The four areas

Area	What it tests	Questions
A. Relationship & Intelligence	How well you know the buyer and why the opportunity exists	5
B. Fit & Capability	Whether you qualify and can deliver if you win	4
C. Competitive Position	Whether you can realistically beat the other bidders	3
D. Commercial Viability	Whether winning would be good for your business	3

Complete it as a team. Bid managers, delivery leads and finance often see different risks. Agreeing on each answer is part of the value.

STEPS 1 TO 4

Using the calculator

The calculator runs over four steps, one screen per area. A progress bar at the top shows where you are and how many steps remain.

1. **Read each question.** Answer for this specific tender, not for your business in general.
2. **Click the answer that fits best.** Each question has three options, from strongest on the left to weakest on the right.
3. **Answer every question on the screen.** The counter beside the button, such as "0 of 5 answered", shows your progress. **Next** becomes active once all are answered.
4. **Move on or go back.** Click **Next** for the following area, or **Back** to review or change earlier answers.
5. **See your result.** On the last step, click **See my result**.

The answer scale

Every question follows the same pattern, so you can compare your answers across the four areas.

	Strongest	Middle	Weakest
Position on screen	Left	Centre	Right
What it means	You can answer with confidence and evidence	There is something, but with gaps or doubts	You can't answer yes, or you don't know
Example	Yes, invited	Approached them	Found it cold

The buttons

Next	Moves to the following area. It stays greyed out until every question on the screen is answered.
Back	Returns to the previous area. Your answers are kept.
See my result	Appears on the last step and shows your result.

Not sure between two answers? Choose the weaker one. An optimistic answer can talk you into a bid you are unlikely to win.

QUESTION REFERENCE

The 15 questions

A. Relationship & Intelligence

Step 1 of 4 · 5 questions

Bids from suppliers who understand the buyer before the tender is published tend to score far better than cold responses.

Question	Answer options	What to consider
1. Were you asked to bid, or did you find this opportunity yourself (open/cold tender)?	Yes, invited · Approached them · Found it cold	An invitation suggests the buyer already sees you as credible. A tender found cold on a portal means you start with no visibility.
2. Do you understand why you were asked, or why this opportunity exists?	Yes · Partially · No	Think about the problem behind it: a contract ending, a new policy, a service failure or new funding.
3. Have you had pre-tender engagement or spoken directly to the buyer?	Yes · Some contact · No	Count market engagement events, supplier days, consultations and direct conversations before publication.
4. Do you have an existing relationship with this public body?	Strong · Some · None	Strong means current or recent delivery, or regular contact with the people who will evaluate bids.
5. Do you understand the buyer's priorities, pain points and evaluation focus?	Yes · Partially · No	Could you explain what the buyer values most and how bids will be scored, without rereading the documents?

B. Fit & Capability

Step 2 of 4 · 4 questions

A "No" on mandatory criteria is usually decisive on its own, whatever your other answers.

Question	Answer options	What to consider
1. Do you meet the specified/mandatory selection criteria?	Fully · Mostly · No	Check turnover thresholds, insurance levels, accreditations and pass/fail requirements. "Mostly" can still mean exclusion if a gap is mandatory.
2. Do you fully understand their technical and contractual requirements?	Yes · Partially · No	Review the specification, service levels, payment terms, liabilities and performance indicators.
3. Do you have the resources and capacity to deliver if you win?	Yes · Would need to scale · No	Consider staff, equipment, subcontractors and cash flow, alongside your existing commitments.
4. Does this opportunity align with your strategic goals and sector focus?	Strong fit · Some fit · Poor fit	Would winning strengthen your position in a market you want to grow in?

C. Competitive Position

Step 3 of 4 · 3 questions

Meeting the requirements is not enough. You need a reason for the buyer to choose you over the other bidders.

Question	Answer options	What to consider
1. Do you know who the likely competition is?	Yes, well · Some idea · No	Think about the incumbent, regular bidders in this sector and larger firms likely to take an interest.
2. Do you have a genuine, defensible advantage or differentiator?	Yes · Slight · None	A real differentiator is something competitors can't easily claim: proven results, local presence, specialist expertise or added social value.
3. Do the buyers already understand your work and its benefits?	Yes · Partially · No	If the evaluators don't know you, your bid has to prove everything from scratch.

D. Commercial Viability

Step 4 of 4 · 3 questions

A contract you win at a loss, or one you don't really want, can do more harm than losing.

Question	Answer options	What to consider
1. Can you make money from it (realistic margin vs. cost to deliver)?	Yes · Marginal · No	Compare the likely contract value with your full delivery costs, including mobilisation, management time and risk.
2. Do you actually want the business (strategically and culturally)?	Yes · Neutral · No	Do the buyer's way of working, values and expectations suit your organisation?
3. Is it worth bidding for given your win probability and the cost of producing the bid?	Yes · Borderline · No	Weigh the time and money a bid takes against your honest chance of winning, based on your answers so far.

D3 is the summary question. Answer it last, looking back at everything you said in A, B and C.

UNDERSTANDING THE OUTPUT

Reading your result

Once you click See my result, the calculator brings your answers together into an overall view of the opportunity.

What you see will depend on the answers you gave, so no two results are quite the same. Whatever your result, read it as a guide to your decision rather than the decision itself.

Look back at your answers as well as the result. The areas where you answered weakest show where a bid is most at risk, and where you may still be able to act before the deadline.

Answers that usually decide it

Some weak answers matter more than others. If any of these apply, look hard at the opportunity before you commit.

Answer	Why it matters	What to do next
B1: No, you don't meet the mandatory criteria	Your bid is likely to be excluded before it is scored.	Don't bid, unless you can close the gap in time, for example through a consortium or subcontractor.
D1: No, you can't make money from it	Winning would cost you money for the life of the contract.	Rethink the delivery model or price, or don't bid.
B3: No, you lack the capacity	Failing to deliver damages your reputation with this buyer and others.	Find a delivery partner before the deadline, or don't bid.
A1, A3 and A4 all weakest	The buyer doesn't know you and you start with no insight.	Bid only with a strong, evidenced differentiator, and build the relationship for next time.
C2: None, no differentiator	The contest is likely to come down to price.	Bid only if you can win on price and still make a margin.

If the result is borderline

- Can you change any weak answer before the deadline, for example by asking a clarification question or bringing in a partner?
- Is there a reason to bid beyond this contract, such as getting known by a buyer you want to work with?
- What else would your team be doing with the time a bid takes?

A no-bid is a good decision too. Declining an opportunity you are unlikely to win frees your team to put its best effort into the ones you can.

WORKED EXAMPLE

When capability isn't enough

Example Facilities Ltd is a fictional cleaning company. It found a county council tender on a procurement portal and has three weeks to respond.

Area	Question	Answer
A	1. Asked to bid or found it cold?	Found it cold
A	2. Why the opportunity exists	Partially
A	3. Pre-tender engagement	No
A	4. Existing relationship	None
A	5. Buyer's priorities and evaluation focus	Partially
B	1. Mandatory selection criteria	Fully
B	2. Technical and contractual requirements	Yes
B	3. Resources and capacity	Would need to scale
B	4. Strategic fit	Strong fit
C	1. Likely competition	Some idea
C	2. Defensible differentiator	Slight
C	3. Buyers understand your work	No
D	1. Realistic margin	Marginal
D	2. Want the business	Yes
D	3. Worth the cost of bidding	Borderline

Shading shows the strength of each answer: blue for strongest, beige for middle and pink for weakest.

What this tells you

The company can do the work. It meets every mandatory criterion and the contract fits its strategy. But the buyer doesn't know it, it had no contact before the tender, and its advantage over other bidders is slight. With a marginal price on top, the decision rests on whether it can win on more than price.

None of this means it should walk away. It does tell the team where to focus: ask clarification questions to understand the council's priorities, find out who the incumbent is, and test whether the price can be improved. If those answers don't move, a no-bid and a meeting with the council before the next tender may be the better investment.

GOOD PRACTICE

Using the result well

The calculator reads your answers. It can't read the tender for you.

Know the limits

- **It is only as good as your answers.** Optimistic answers produce an optimistic result.
- **It sees one opportunity at a time.** It doesn't know your pipeline, your other bids or your team's workload.
- **It doesn't read the documents.** Specific risks in the contract terms, pricing schedule or evaluation model still need a careful review.
- **It reflects today.** Clarification responses, new partners or changes to the tender can change your answers.

Build a bid/no-bid habit

- Run the calculator for every tender you consider, as soon as it is published.
- Hold a short bid/no-bid meeting with the people who would write and deliver the bid.
- Record the decision and the reasons, so you can learn from it later.
- Use the clarification period to close gaps, within the deadline set in the tender documents.
- Ask for feedback on every bid you lose, and track your win rate over time.
- Invest in relationships with buyers before tenders are published, through market engagement and supplier events.

Bidding for public contracts? Buyers must treat all bidders equally, so contact during a live tender usually has to go through the formal clarification process. Engage early, before the tender is published, and follow the rules set out in the procurement documents.

HELP

Common questions

Can I change an answer?	Yes. Use Back to return to any earlier step and choose a different option.
Why can't I click Next?	Every question on the screen must be answered first. Check the counter beside the button.
How long does it take?	A few minutes, if you have the tender documents to hand.
Should I run it more than once?	Yes, if something changes, such as a clarification response or a new partner. A fresh result can change your decision.
Does a positive result mean we will win?	No. It means the opportunity looks worth pursuing. The quality of your bid still decides the outcome.
Does a negative result mean we should not bid?	Not on its own. It is a prompt to look at the weak areas and decide whether you can address them in time.

Need a hand? Keystone Procurement is the trusted procurement partner you need by your side.
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