

Facing both ways: A workshop on how to commission and use research

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There are two participants in commissioning research

- **Commissioner**
- **Contractor**

Partners or adversaries?



In a perfect world you will:

- **know what information you want**
- **know what you are going to use the information for**
- **have enough time to gather the information**
- **have sufficient resources, both human and financial to finish the work.**

In the real world there are compromises: ‘Oh, the programme is almost over and we haven’t done the evaluation and we’ve got £10,000 in the kitty.’



PART 1: THE SPECIFICATION

- **Do you know what you want to know? Are you able to set out clearly the purpose and intended use of this research?**
- **Do you have the skills to write a specification on your own? Do you have colleagues or a steering group who can help? Are you able to employ a consultant or commission a development study to do this?**
- **Will you set out the aims and boundaries of the research and then let contractors suggest the means? Or will you specify the means as well?**



PART 2: COMMISSIONING THE RESEARCH

- **What sort of contractor are you looking for? A big research company? A university? A small local agency? Somebody you heard of through the grapevine? Does it make any difference as long as the contractor can do a good job?**
- **How will you find the contractor? Open advertisement? Invitation of a number of contractors known to you or recommended to you? Selection of a contractor that has already worked for you?**
- **If by open advertisement, will you use a two-tier system (expression of interest and full tender) or a one-tier system (full tender)?**



- **How much time will you give contractors to prepare their tenders? A week? A fortnight? A month? Longer?**
- **Will you let contractors know in advance the amount of money available for the research? Or will you make them guess?**
- **How will you select the best contractor for the research? What criteria will you use? Price? Quality? A combination of the two? Will you have the support of colleagues or a steering group?**



- **Will you ask some or all contractors to come for an interview/presentation of their tender? Or will you select a contractor on the basis of written tenders only?**
- **Will you ask for examples of contractors' previous work or carry out your own searches for such examples? Do you know what to look for?**
- **Are you able to carry out negotiations with contractors before making a final decision - for example, ask them to resubmit their tenders either on the basis of revising their unit costs or altering the type and amount of activities they have proposed in order to fit into your budget and timetable?**



PART 3: MANAGING THE RESEARCH

- **How involved will you be in the research? Will you provide background information or facilitate the research by providing contacts, etc? Or will you leave it all to the contractor?**
- **How often do you expect to meet with or hear from the contractor? At the end of the project? Every week? Every day?**
- **How will you manage the contractor? Laissez-faire: let the contractor get on with it? Command and control: expect the contractor to do it your way, come what may? Partnership: be kept in the loop and work with the contractor to resolve any difficulties that arise?**



PART 4: AT THE END

- **How will you work with the contractor to achieve outputs that are in the right format and of the right quality for your purpose? Will you ask the contractor to make presentations of emerging findings before producing final outputs? Will you expect to work through a number of drafts?**
- **What will you do if the research findings are critical of your organisation or do not support the position you intended to take? Will you ask the contractor to change the findings? Will you rewrite the contractor's findings?**
- **Will you involve the contractor in disseminating findings and learning from the research?**

