



TENDERS | BIDS | PROPOSALS | SUBMISSIONS

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

INSIGHTS FROM TENDER EVALUATIONS IN THE RAIL SECTOR

NOVEMBER 2022



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CONTENTS

Why go Behind Closed Doors?.....	1
Who evaluates your tenders?.....	3
How does an evaluation panel work?	5
What makes a winning bid?.....	7
How well are bidders currently performing?.....	14
How important is a relationship with the client?.....	19
Does ‘the favourite’ win?.....	21
How well do bidders use the Q&A process?	24
Are evaluators ‘sticklers’ for process?	25
Does it look bad if you need an extension?	27
Do evaluators hold a grudge if you don’t bid?.....	28
Are bidders sore losers?.....	29
Key takeaways.....	31



Why go Behind Closed Doors?

Having worked in bids and tenders for more than 20 years, we've consistently heard bidders express frustration at the complexity of the procurement process and the challenge in gathering real, meaningful and constructive feedback from evaluation panels.

Several years ago, we took it upon ourselves to see if we could help clients go 'behind closed doors' to improve their understanding of the procurement process and to gather feedback that might give them insight into what bidders were doing well and what they could do better. The research revealed a few surprises, overturned a few myths of the dark art of bidding and transformed some teams to embrace a new approach to their submissions. We considered the research a resounding success and decided to make it a permanent part of our ongoing knowledge development.

Behind Closed Doors is an indispensable resource for companies who want insights into what it takes to get that bid-winning edge. I hope the findings and insights we present prove valuable to you, by giving you confidence in your current approach to bidding or perhaps by steering you in a new direction which might bring more success in future.

Thank you to all who participated and we look forward to continuing the conversation.



Who did we ask?

We invited evaluators of rail sector projects from across Australia and New Zealand to share their feedback on procurement undertaken within the past 2 years. We are thrilled with the breadth of responses we received. The experience of our respondents covered all the bases imaginable:

- Projects ranging in value from \$1M to more than \$1B
- Private enterprise, as well as Federal, State and Local Governments
- Projects spanning the full spectrum of project types including infrastructure, rolling stock, signalling, maintenance and operations, across light rail, passenger rail and freight rail
- Procurement models including alliances, collaborative contracts, early contractor involvement, design and construct, managing contracts, head contracts and public private partnerships
- Procurement activities including market soundings, through to expressions of interest, requests for proposals, requests for quotes, requests for tenders, interactives, presentations and clarifications.

By tapping into this breadth of experience, we are confident that the research findings can be used to improve your next bid.

What did we ask?

Our past tranches of Behind Closed Doors research have focussed on the formal submission. This time, we broadened the research to investigate the pre-submission preparation phase and the post-submission presentation and negotiation phase. We also asked for feedback on bidder behaviours throughout the bid process.

We gathered feedback from evaluators using two research instruments: a detailed survey and an in-depth interview.

Who evaluates your tenders?

This question of 'Who evaluates your tenders?' has always been subject to assumptions and misunderstandings. Many bidders work on the assumption that evaluation panels are staffed by people just like them, with the same technical backgrounds and subject matter expertise they have. **Behind Closed Doors shows that this assumption is flawed.**

Not all evaluators are technical or subject matter experts. In order to score well, bidders need to cater to a wide range of expertise and experience within an evaluation panel.



Panel size

Panel sizes were reasonably consistent with 80% of panels having between 3 and 7 members, and 20% of panels between 7 and 11 members. No evaluators reported a formal panel comprising fewer than 3 members or more than 11.



Organisations represented

A lot of organisations are involved. In addition to the buying organisation, 30% of panels included stakeholder representatives, 20% included representatives from user groups and 10% included representatives from other related parties.



Disciplines represented

Not surprisingly given that our specific audience is the rail industry, 100% of panels included evaluators from an engineering background. There was also strong representation from project management (80%), legal and commercial (70%), construction (50%), design (40%), finance (40%) and supply chain and procurement (40%). Other disciplines routinely represented included stakeholder engagement, passenger experience, technology and systems, planning and approvals, community engagement, human resources and industrial relations, communications and treasury.



Seniority represented

Importantly, evaluation panels comprise a broad mix of seniority and experience. This contrasts with the standing assumption that evaluation panels are all highly technical and broadly experienced industry experts. In fact, only 60% of panels included industry experts and only 50% of panels included senior executives. The vast majority of panels included mid-level managers (90%) complemented by subject professionals (70%). Notably, 10% of panels included entry-level officers.

The results confirm that evaluation panels are diverse groups, with a mix of organisations, disciplines and seniority represented.



TAKEAWAY: Bidders must cater to the broad mix of organisations, disciplines and levels of expertise that are commonly represented on their evaluation panels. It is a serious mistake to assume all evaluators will have the same objectives, expertise and understanding. Evaluation panels are not a homogenous group and are not *just like you*.

Chart 1: Evaluation panels include a diverse cross-section of disciplines – not everyone is an engineer!

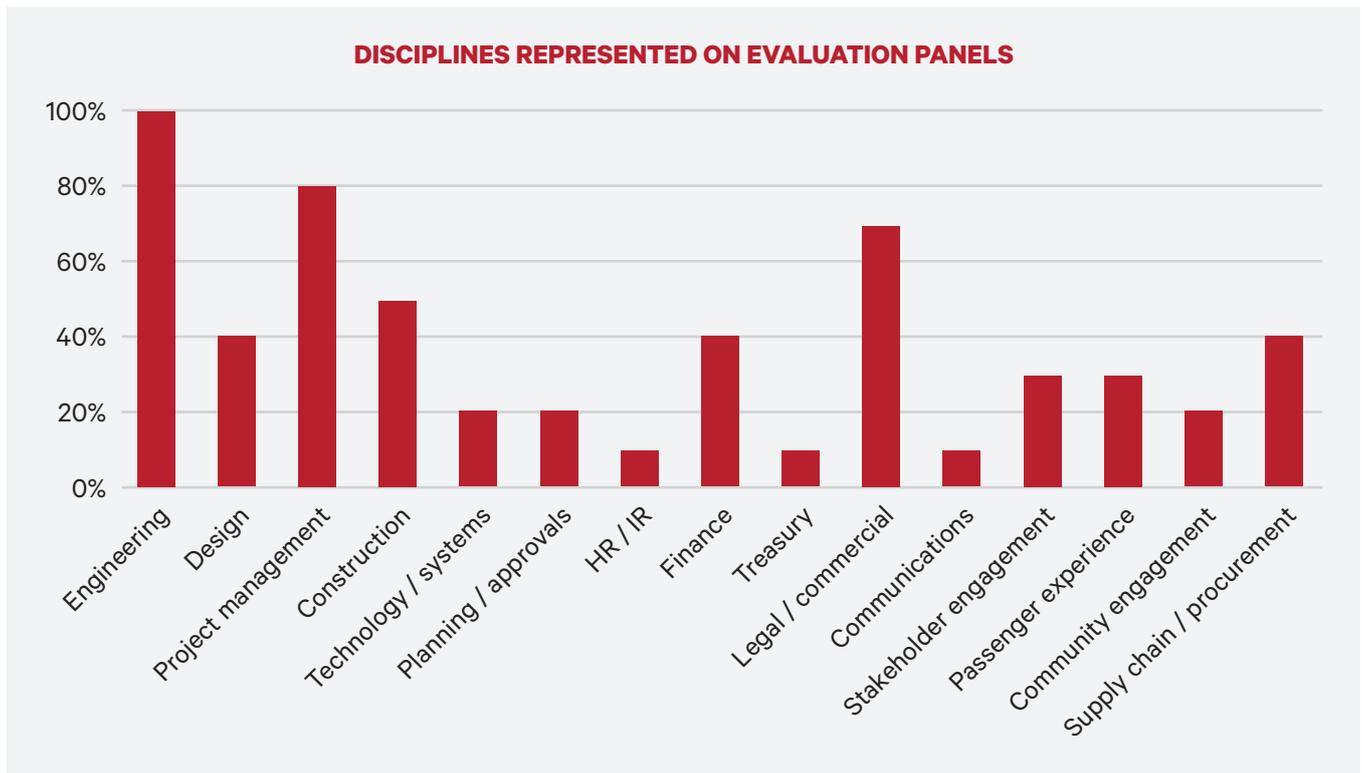
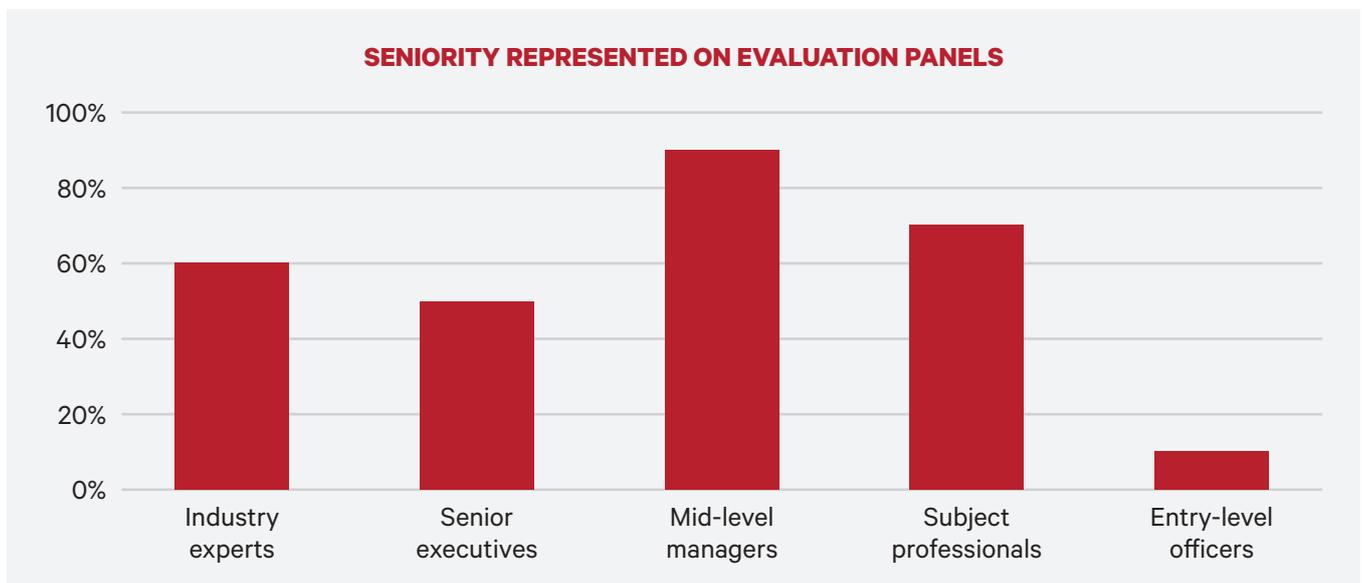


Chart 2: Evaluation panels include evaluators with varying levels of experience – a typical evaluator may be less experienced than you expect



How does an evaluation panel work?

Procurement processes are complex beasts with complex governance structures.

Governance structure

Evaluators reported that it is common for procurement processes to use a combination of governance structures. These include project teams that coordinate the process and engage with bidders (90%), evaluation panels that assess and score each submission (80%), governance panels that ensure procurement policy is adhered to (70%), procurement steering committees that direct requirements (60%) and advisory panels that provide subject matter expertise (40%).

Notably, the larger procurement projects tended to use all of these governance structures concurrently.

Depth of engagement

The standing assumption by bidders is that panel members only review and assess their specific selection criteria. (We're sure you've heard that one before.) Interestingly, the research confirms this is the case only half the time. The rest of the time, panel members are more deeply engaged with each one reviewing and assessing each bidder's full submission one-third of the time!

The results show that there are many layers of people involved in the evaluation of a procurement opportunity and that the evaluators are more deeply engaged than typically assumed.



TAKEAWAY: Evaluators frequently read and assess the full submission, so bidders need to prepare submissions that tell an integrated, consistent and cohesive story.

Chart 3: A procurement process is likely to use a number of panels to undertake various aspects of governance

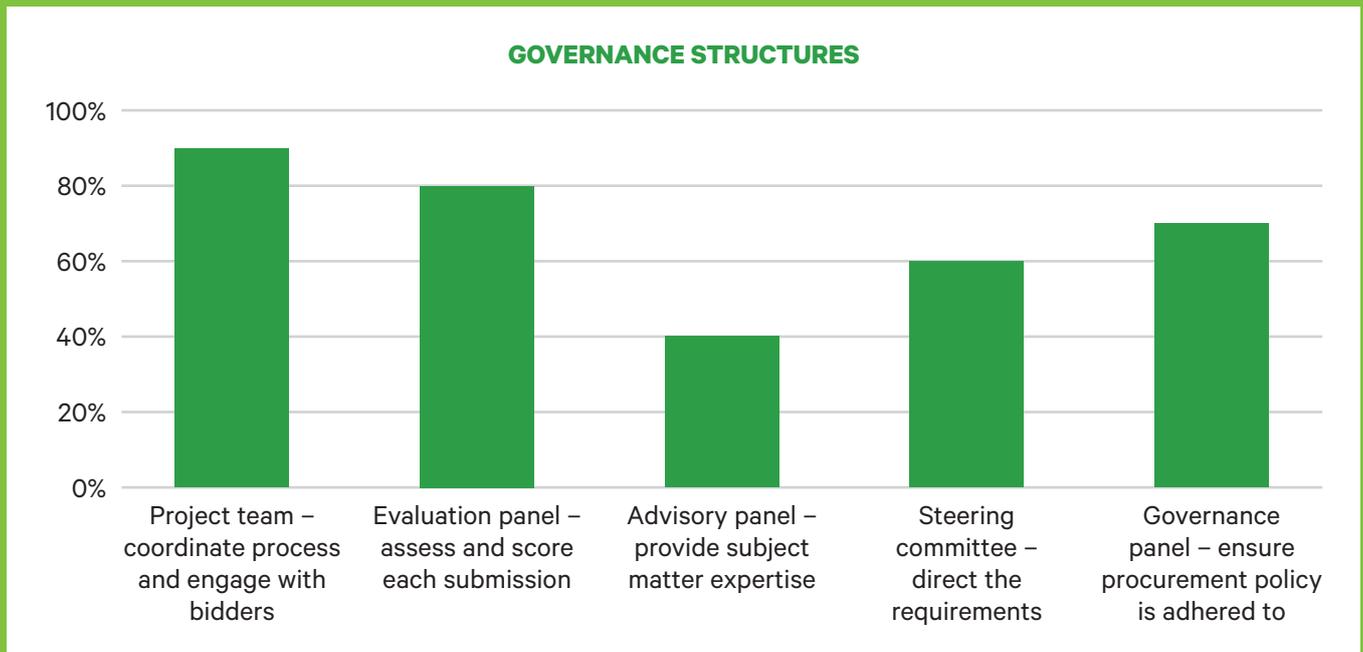
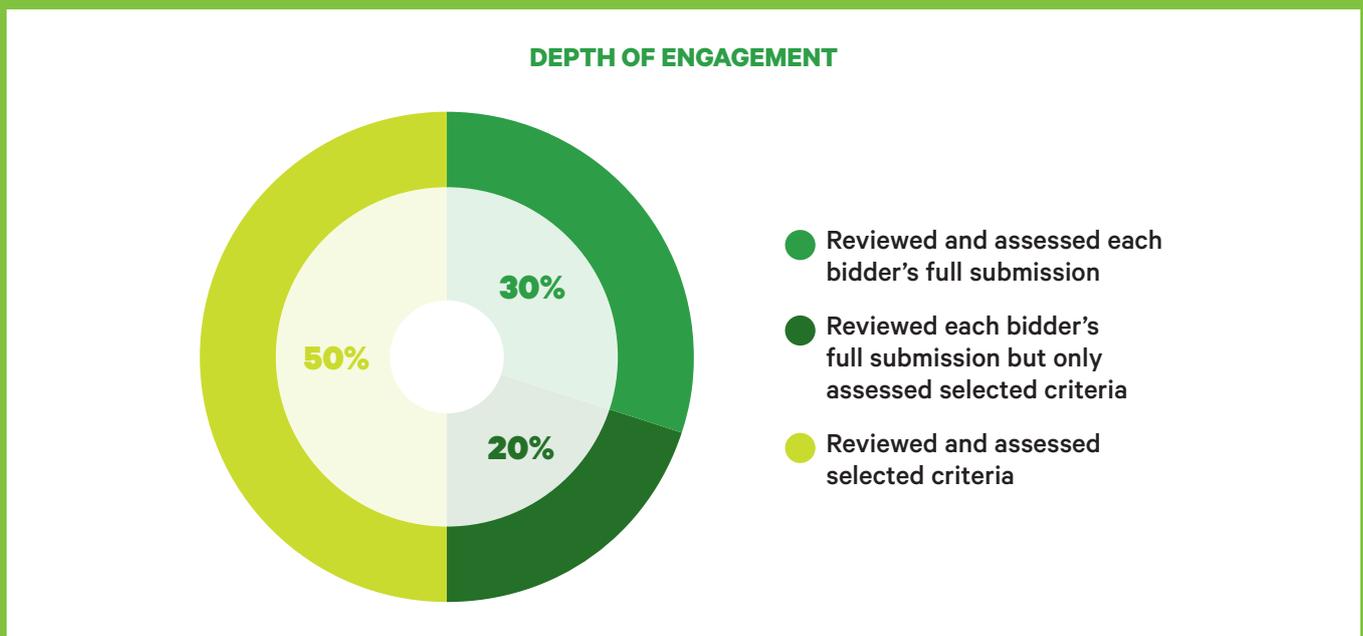


Chart 4: Evaluation panels operate on varying levels of engagement, depending on the bid – the assumption that the submission is divided into silos is true only half the time



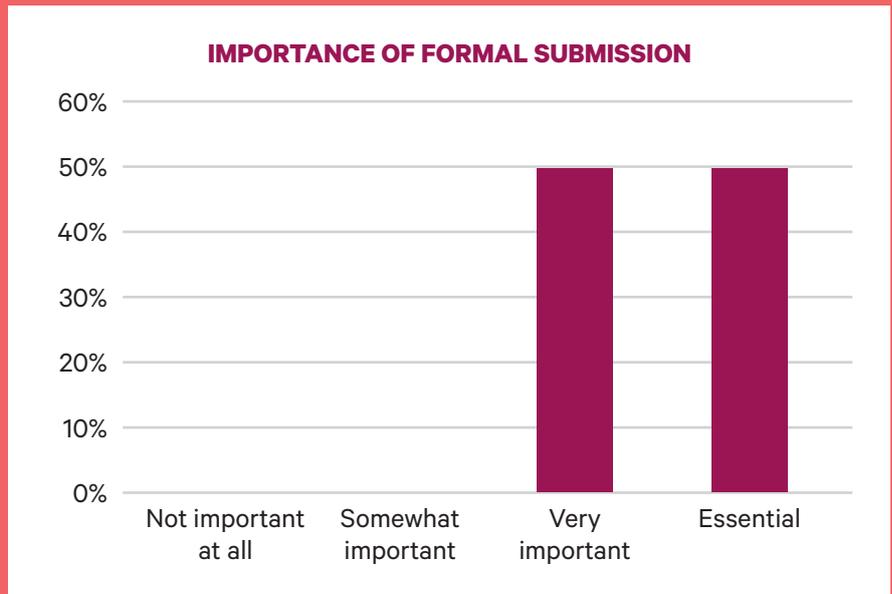
What makes a winning bid?

This is what it all boils down to: what separates the winners from the losers?

Importance of the formal submission

It should come as no surprise that the formal submission is crucial to a bidder's success in a formal procurement process. Every evaluator said that the formal submission was either 'very important' or 'essential', making it abundantly clear that bidders need to invest in the formal submission if they want to win.

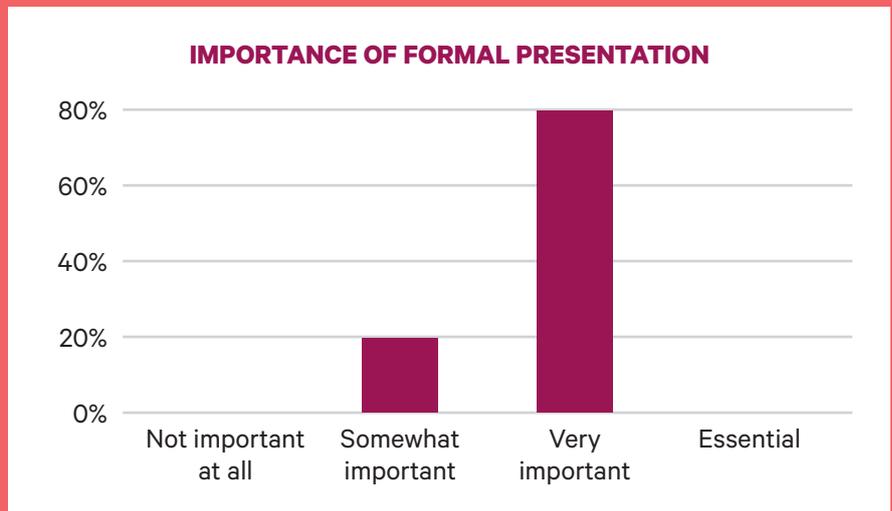
Chart 5: A bidder's success relies on the formal submission – bidders must submit high quality proposals to win



Importance of the formal presentation

The bidder's performance during a presentation or interview is also critical with 80% of evaluators saying that a presentation or interview is 'very important'.

Chart 6: But don't forget about the formal presentation as this will also have a significant impact on your success

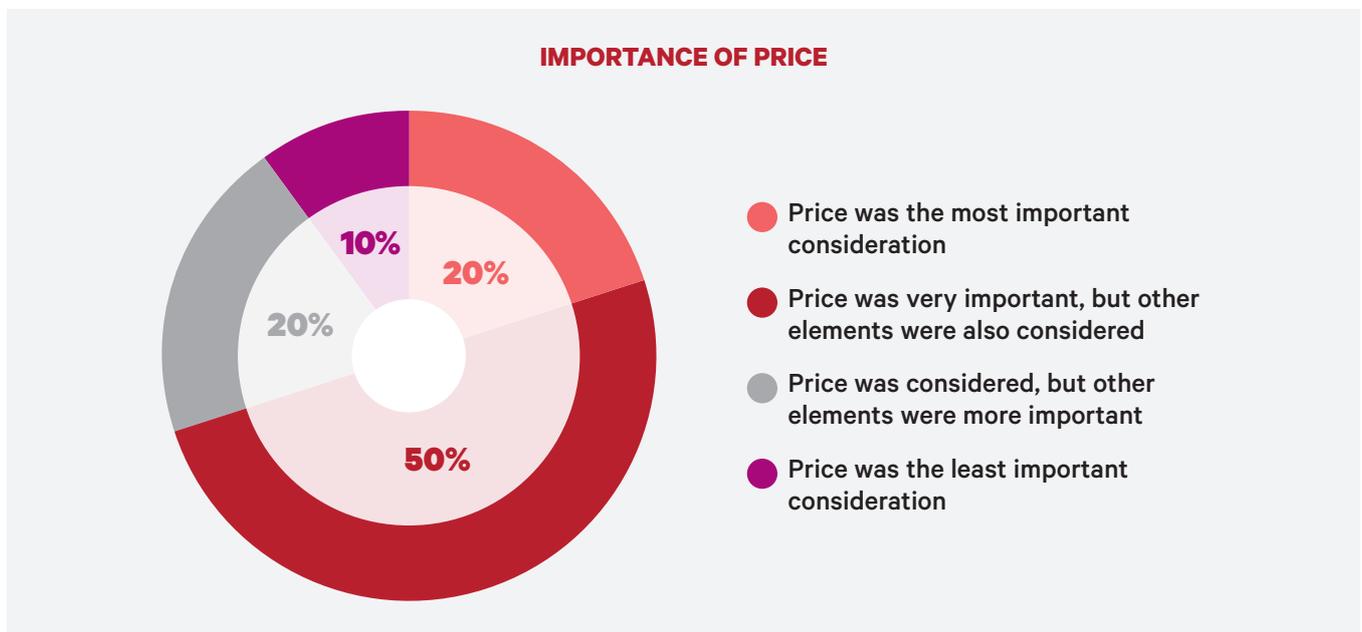


Importance of price

As usual, questions about price produced an interesting mixed response.

Price was *the most important* consideration for 20% of evaluators. In contrast, a collective 30% of evaluators said that price was either *the least important* consideration or *less important* than all other elements. In addition, the majority of evaluators (50%) said that price was very important but other elements were also considered.

Chart 7: Price matters, as part of the bigger picture



Flick ahead and check out Chart 13 and Chart 14. Given how critical it is that bidders do well in their formal submission and formal presentation, it is surprising to see that bidders' performance is so mediocre.

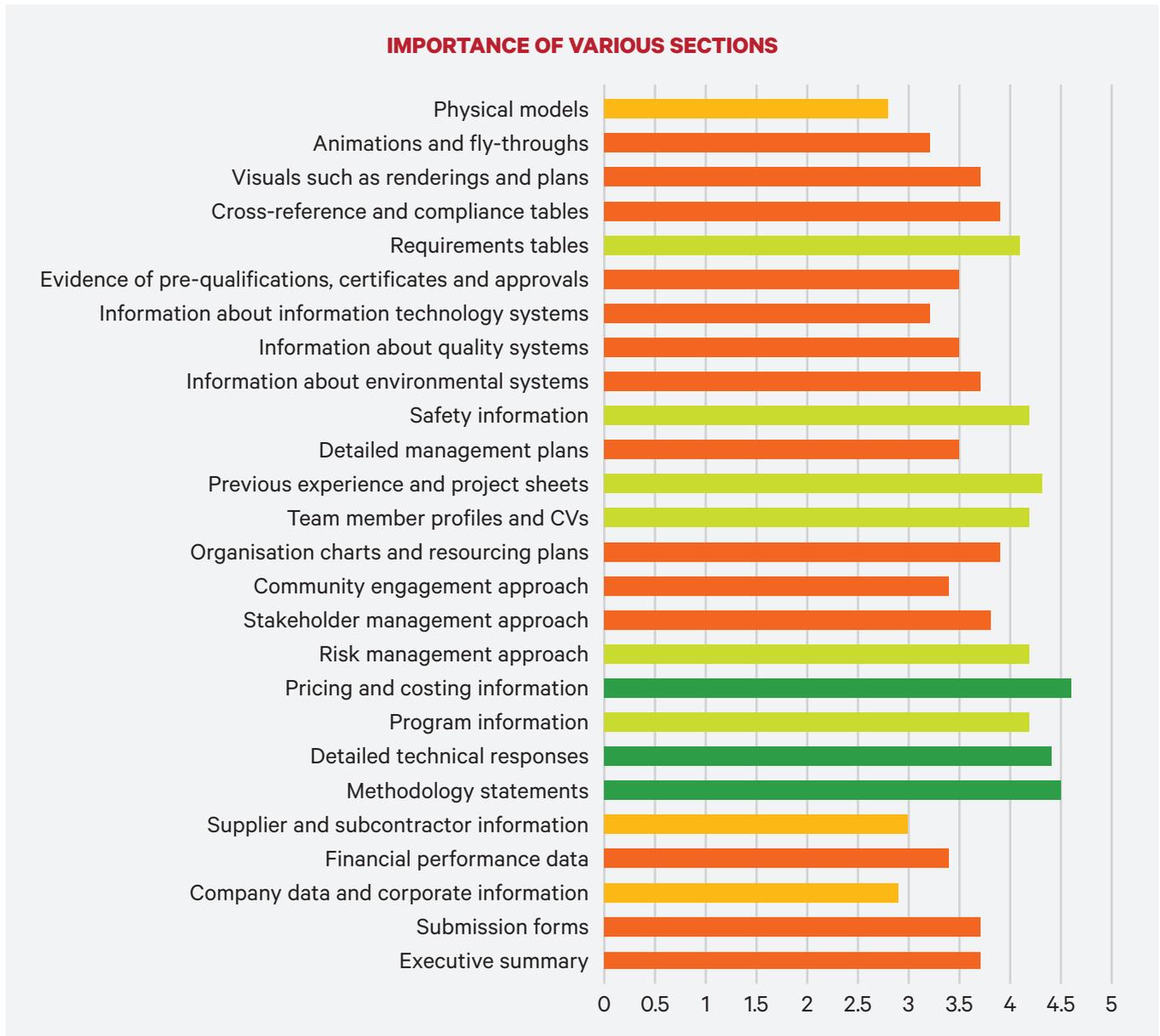
KEYS TO WINNING BIDS

Importance of various sections of the submission

We asked evaluators to tell us how important the various sections of the submissions were.

It should come as no surprise to most readers that the holy trinity is pricing and costing information, methodology statements and detailed technical responses. Not far behind are previous experience and project sheets, team member profiles and CVs, program information, risk management approach, safety information and requirements tables.

Chart 8: Some sections of a submission are more important than others in influencing evaluators – the scores below are shown as a weighted average on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being 'not very important' and 5 being 'very important'



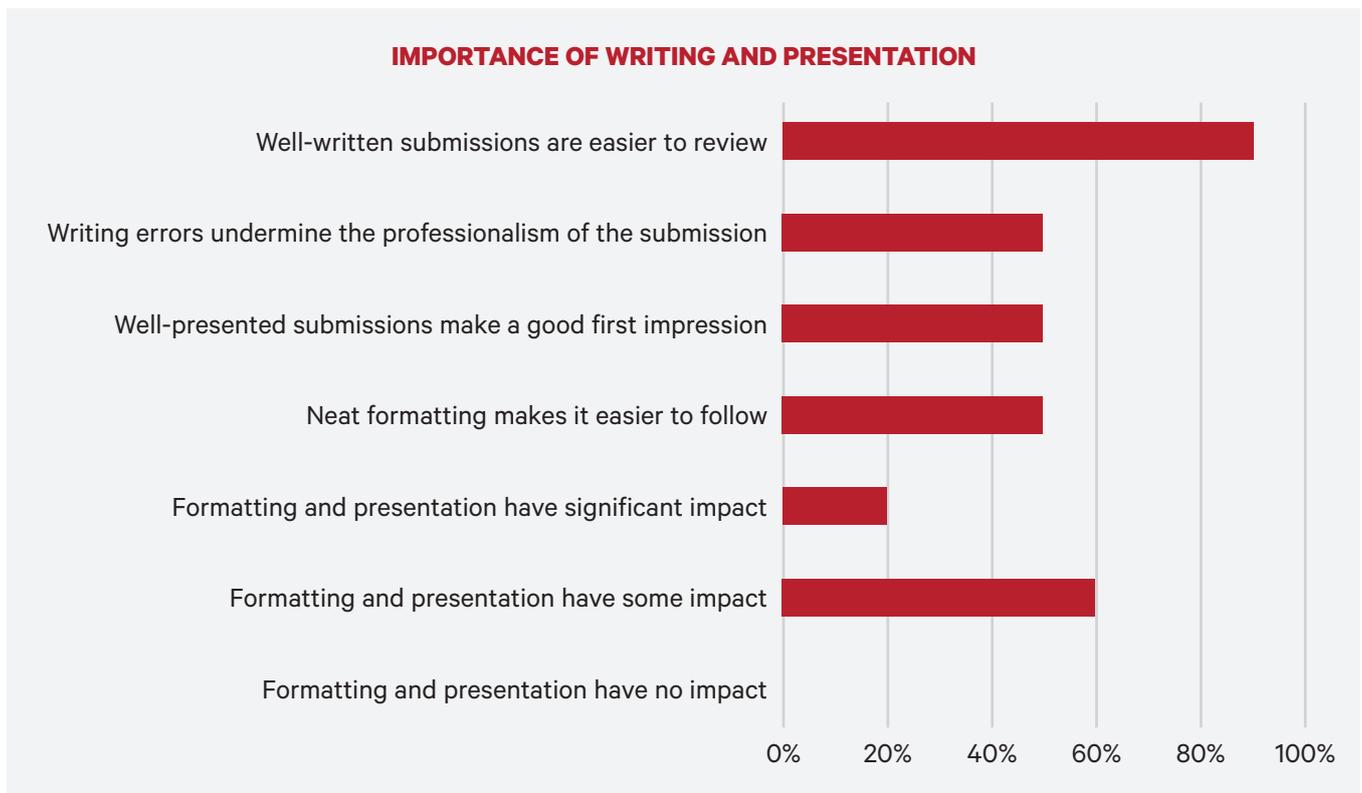
TAKEAWAY: While pricing and costing information remains the most important section of a submission, only 20% of evaluators said price was the most important consideration and 50% said it was always considered as part of the bigger picture.

Importance of writing and presentation

Another topic of frequent debate is how important the 'soft' elements of writing and presentation are. This side of a submission is often dismissed as 'prettifying up the documents', but evaluators were very clear that these aspects matter.

Well-written submissions were easier to review according to 90% of evaluators, and 50% said that grammar, spelling and punctuation errors undermined the professionalism of a submission. Further, 80% of evaluators said that formatting and presentation have some or significant impact, 50% said that well-presented submissions made a good first impression, and 50% said that neat formatting made a document easier to follow.

Chart 9: The 'softer' aspects of writing and presentation matter



TAKEAWAY: Make life easier for your evaluators. Well-written, well-presented documents engage your evaluators and make it easier for them to review and assess your submission.

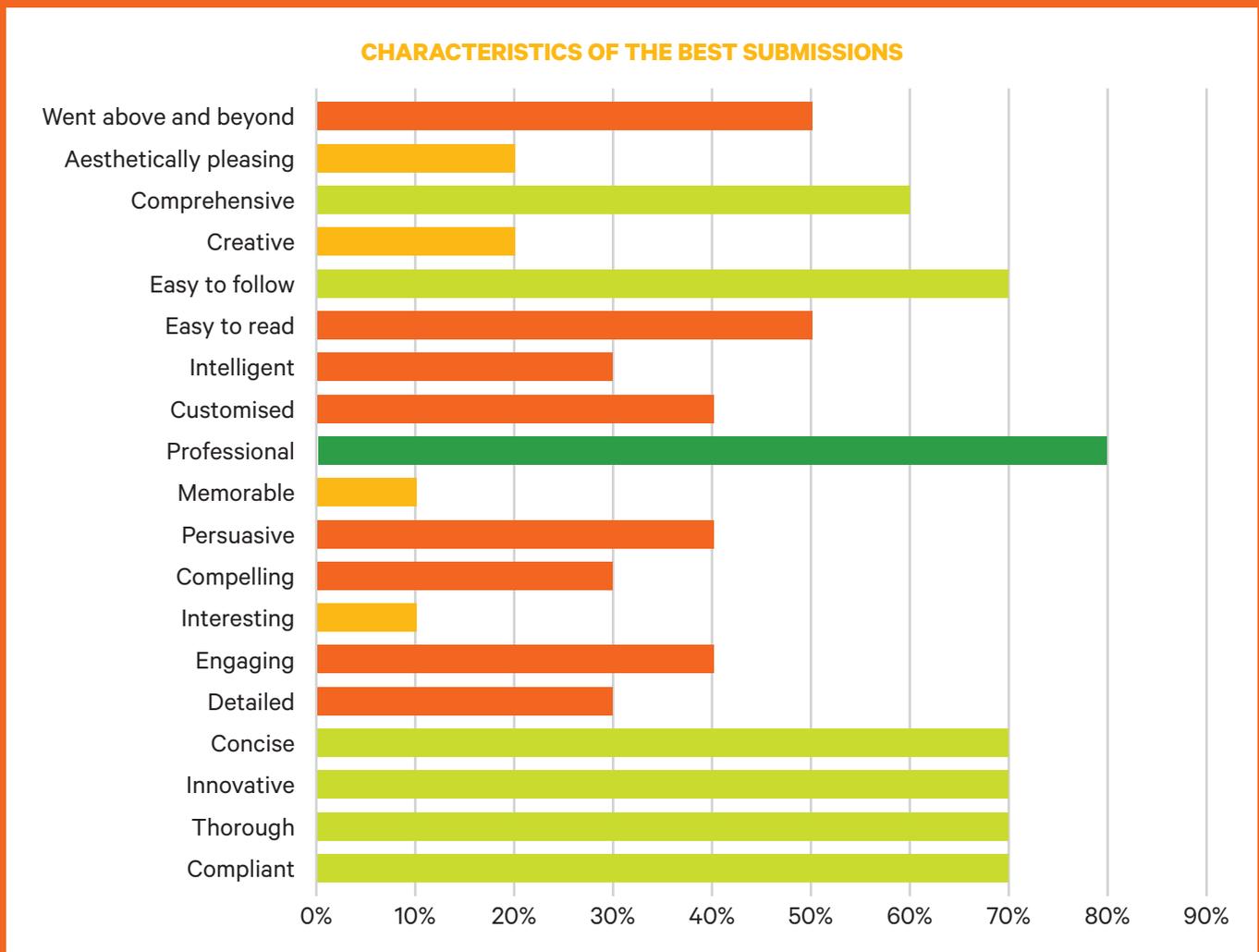
KEYS TO WINNING BIDS

Characteristics of the best submissions

Evaluators cited almost 20 characteristics common to the best submissions, with 7 characteristics standing out as the most important:

- Professional
- Easy to follow
- Concise
- Innovative
- Thorough
- Compliant
- Comprehensive.

Chart 10: Evaluators were clear about what made a strong submission, with 7 stand-out characteristics



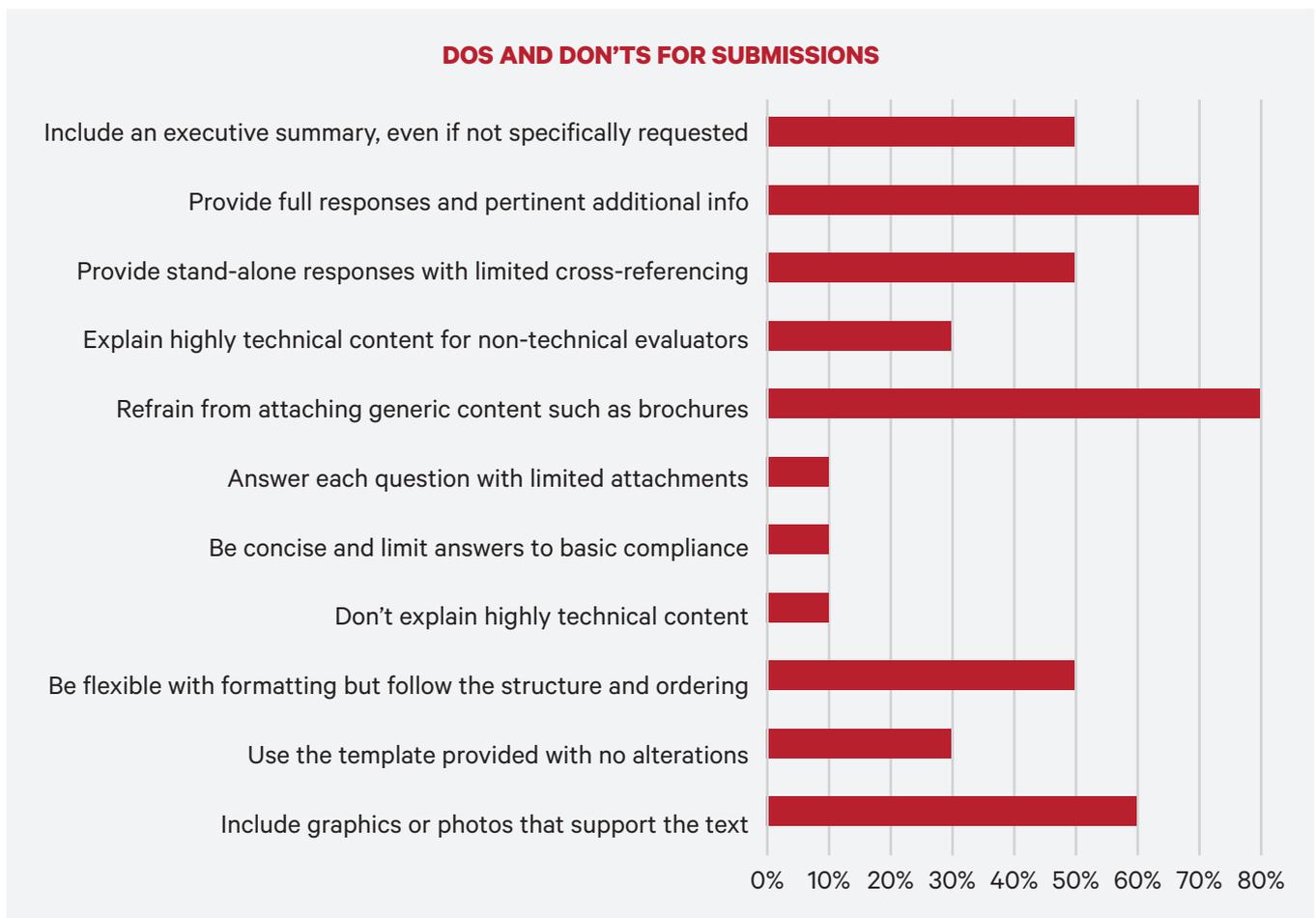
Readers may jump to the conclusion that ‘concise’ justifies keeping their submissions short and sweet, but ‘comprehensive’ and ‘thorough’ also rated strongly. The key is to include information that is both relevant and pertinent.

Dos and don'ts for submissions

Providing comprehensive responses including additional pertinent information was recommended by 70% of evaluators. The key word here is 'pertinent'. Evaluators could not have been clearer in stating that generic information like brochures and capability statements is not welcome with 80% saying bidders should refrain from attaching content of this kind.

The conundrum is whether to use the template provided: 30% of evaluators said that bidders should use the template provided with no alterations, while 50% said that bidders could be flexible with the formatting as long as they follow the bid structure and order. (Our advice is to be guided by the specific instructions from the buyer for the bid in question. If the client says to use the template provided, do so.)

Chart 11: A round-up of evaluators' top recommendations for submissions



'Pertinent' is the key word when it comes to additional information. Evaluators were crystal-clear in their view that generic information like brochures and capability statements is not welcome in a submission.

BIDDER PERFORMANCE

What evaluators expect

We asked evaluators to tell us how important various factors were when assessing a bidder’s submission, such as previous experience, technical capability, an innovative solution, clarity of communication and so on. The results show that evaluators have high expectations across a wide range of factors, but a clear top 5 emerged.

The top 5 factors for bidders to deliver in their submissions:

1. Confidence that the performance criteria will be achieved
2. Confidence that the budget will be achieved
3. Confidence that the key milestones will be achieved
4. Demonstrated understanding of the project
5. Proven technical capability.

What bidders did well



Demonstrated a detailed understanding of program and systems assurance obligations.



Recognised opportunities and presented solutions.



Provided preliminary artefacts. Provided sample equipment.



Accepted commercial terms with no departures.



The bidders used documentation that had been provided over 10 years earlier to develop an innovative technical solution. Proposed a well-thought-through alternative.



Clearly understood the buyer’s focus and pitched the whole project from an operator and customer perspective, rather than as a constructor- and financier-led project.

Chart 12: Evaluators assess bidders on a range of factors



How well are bidders currently performing?

In many ways, this section of the Behind Closed Doors research is the most informative as evaluators provide their ‘no holds barred’ feedback on bidder performance from recent bids. This area of feedback provides the best insight into the competitiveness of bidding and the opportunity for bidders to distinguish themselves.

Typical quality of tender documents

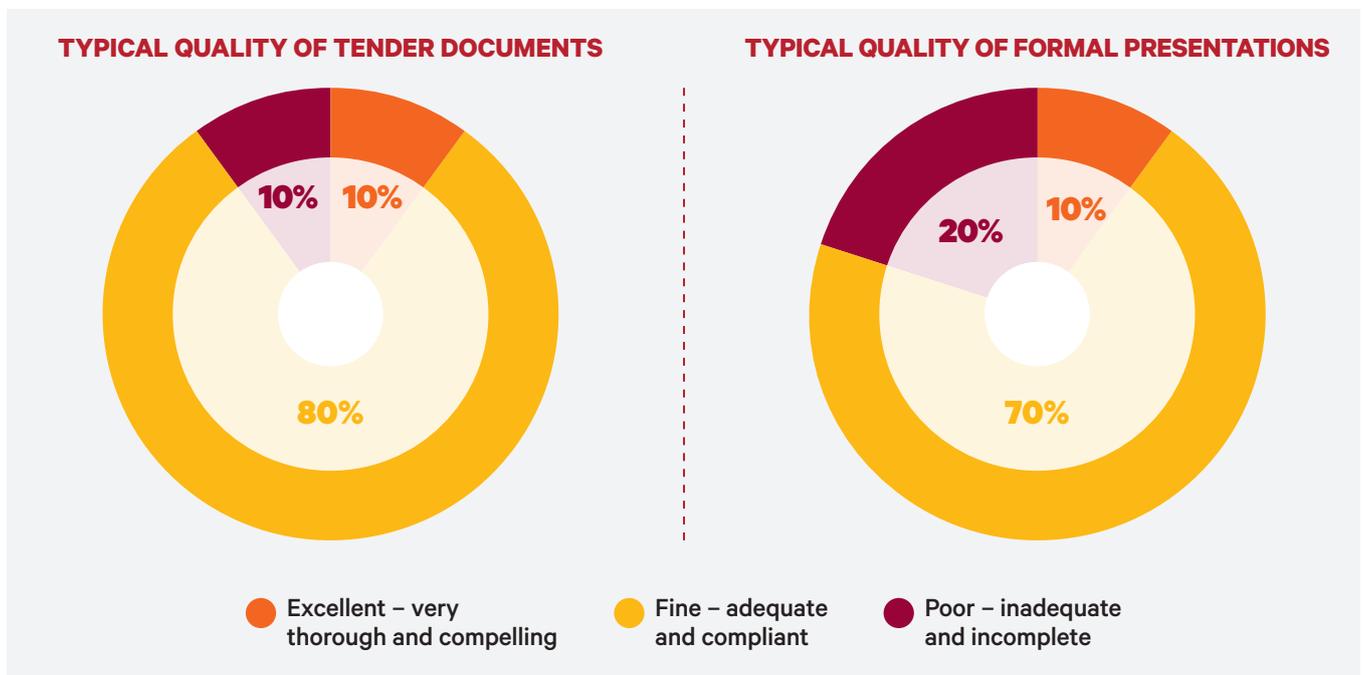
The good news is that 80% of evaluators report that the bids received are ‘fine – adequate and compliant’. The even better news for bidders is that there is a tremendous opportunity to up their game as only 10% of bids are considered ‘excellent – very thorough and compelling’.

Chart 13: The typical quality of tender documents is ‘fine’ – meaning there is a great opportunity for bidders to step up and impress the evaluators

Typical quality of formal presentations

Bidders have an even better opportunity to improve their presentations. Only 70% of evaluators report that the presentations are ‘fine – adequate and compliant’, with a consistent 10% being considered ‘excellent – very thorough and compelling’.

Chart 14: The typical quality of formal presentations is slightly poorer, presenting another good opportunity for bidders to distinguish themselves from their competitors



TAKEAWAY: Only few submissions are considered to be excellent, thorough and compelling. This leaves plenty of room for bidders to up their game and produce submissions that go beyond compliance.

BIDDER PERFORMANCE

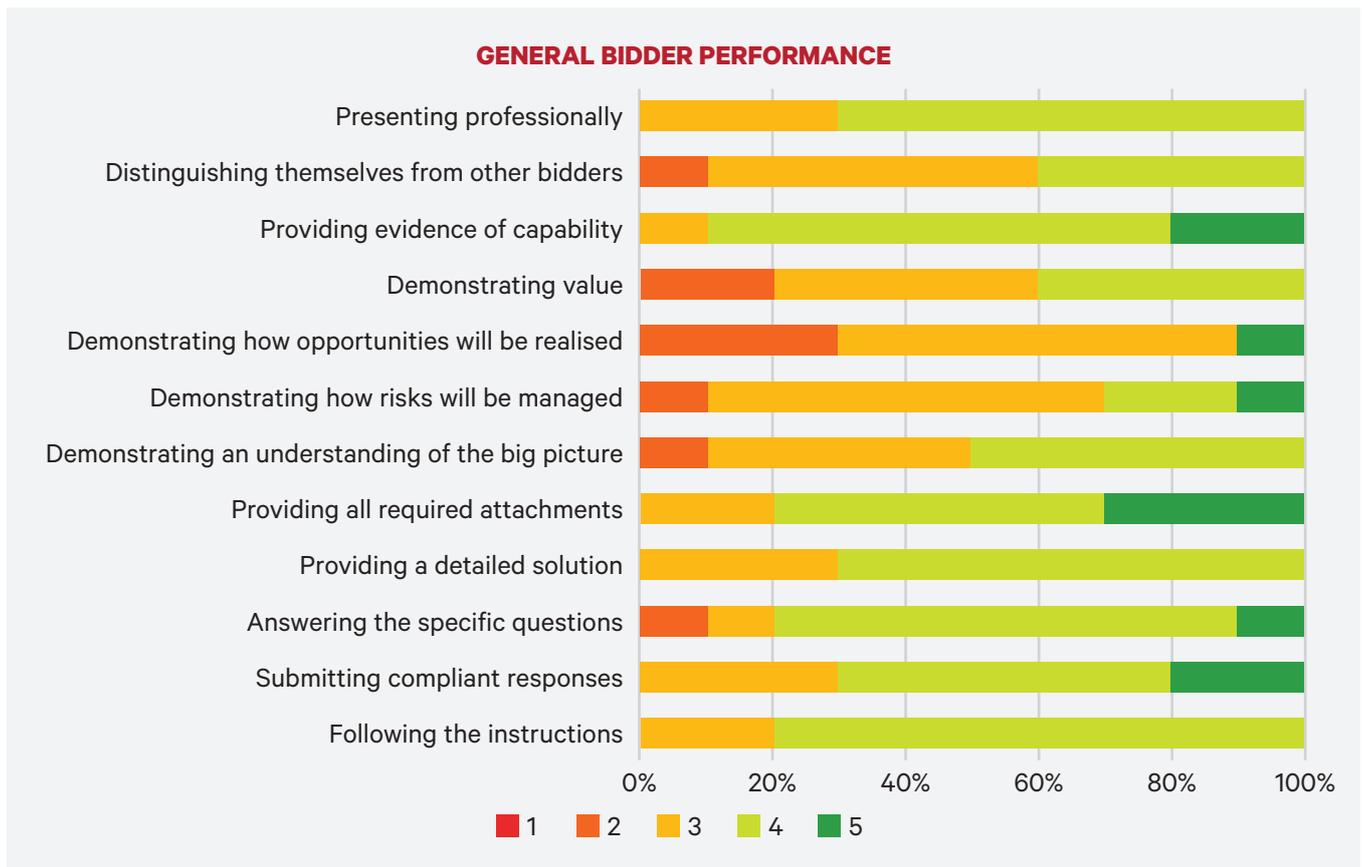
General bidder performance

We asked evaluators to share feedback on how well bidders perform across a range of bid activities and expectations such as following instructions and answering specific questions through to explaining how risks will be managed, demonstrating value and distinguishing themselves from other bidders.

The results here showed that bidders are doing okay at meeting compliance-level activities and expectations but have a way to go to impress evaluators on the more meaningful elements. For instance, 80% of evaluators said that bidders were good at following instructions. Similarly, 75% of evaluators said that bidders were good or very good at submitting compliant responses.

In contrast, only 50% of evaluators said that bidders were good at demonstrating an understanding of the big picture, and that 10% were poor at doing so. Even worse, only 25% of evaluators thought that bidders were good or very good at demonstrating how risks would be managed, while 10% thought that bidders were poor. According to evaluators, bidders performed the worst at demonstrating how opportunities would be realised, with only 10% of bidders being good or very good at this, and an alarming 25% rated as poor.

Chart 15: Bidder performance varied across bid activities and expectations, with bidders performing okay at compliance-level activities but poorer at more meaningful elements – bidders were scored on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was very poor and 5 was very good



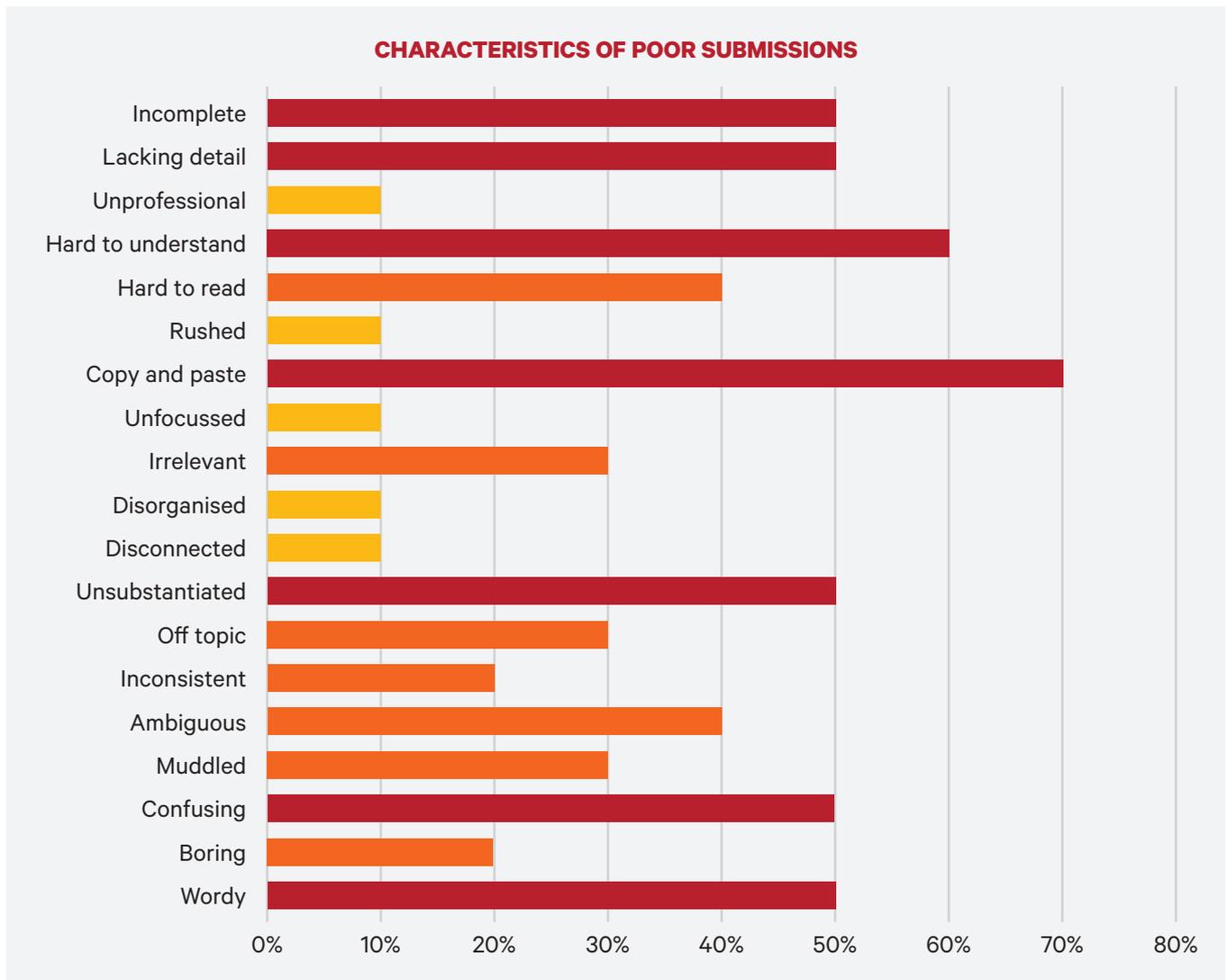
Bidders are generally good at submitting compliant responses but are poor at demonstrating their understanding of the big picture.

Characteristics of poor submissions

Evaluators cited almost 20 common failings in the submissions they reviewed, but 7 deadly sins stood out as the most common failings, all referenced by at least 50% of evaluators:

- Copy and paste
- Hard to understand
- Wordy
- Confusing
- Unsubstantiated
- Lacking detail
- Incomplete.

Chart 16: Evaluators saw consistent themes in poor submissions, with 7 deadly sins occurring frequently



BIDDERS' COMMON FAILINGS

Where bidders went wrong

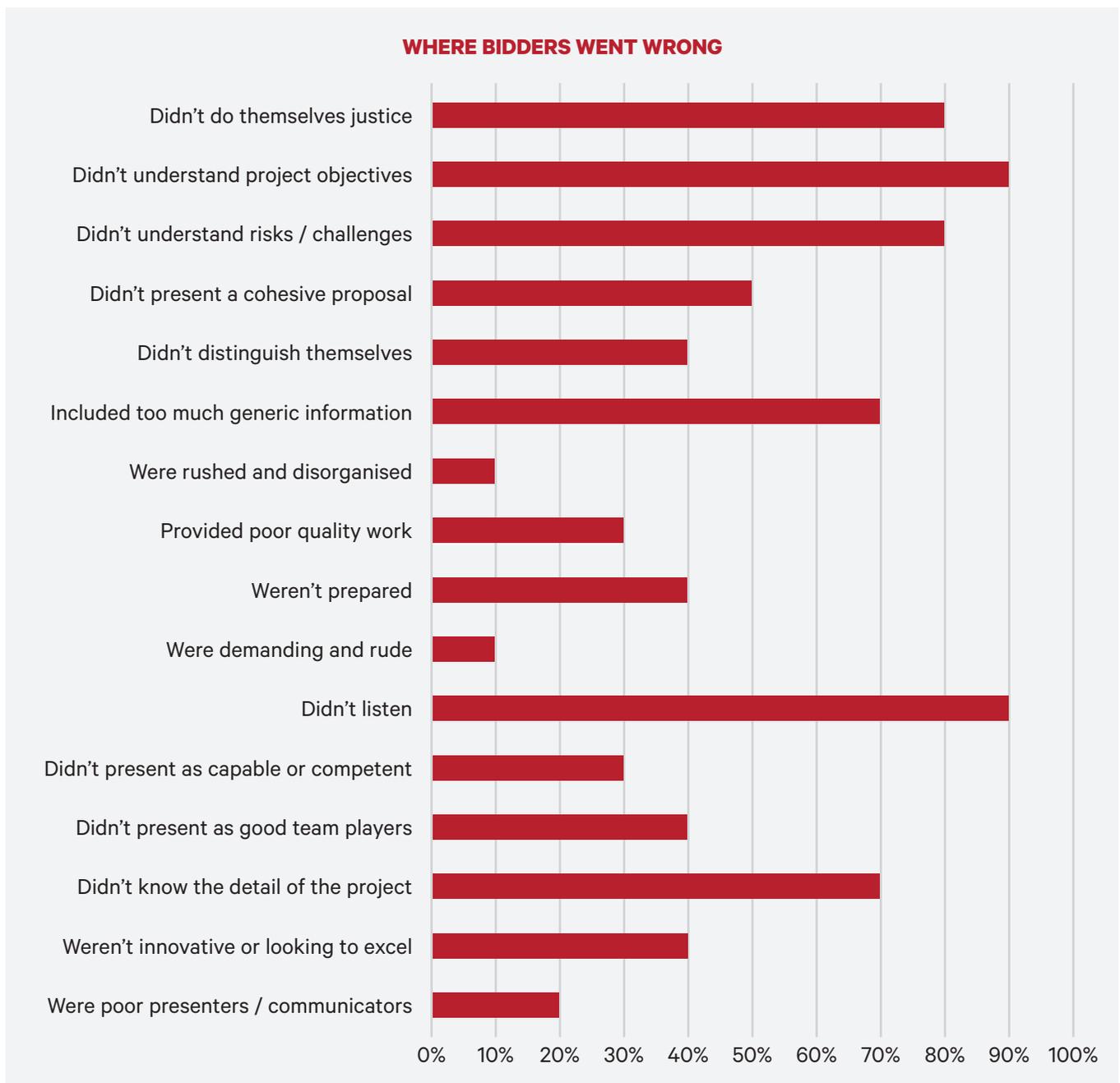
When asked where bidders dropped the ball, evaluators referenced a wide range of issues, from not addressing criteria, to demonstrating poor attitudes and behaviours, through to missing the mark on project objectives and risks.

From a content perspective, the most common failings were not demonstrating an understanding of the project objectives (90%), not demonstrating an understanding of project risks and opportunities (80%), not doing

themselves justice in the proposal (80%) and including too much generic information (70%).

In relation to behaviours, 2 issues stood out: bidders didn't listen (90%) and bidders didn't know the detail of the project (70%). Evaluators also reported a high incidence of bidders not being innovative or looking to excel, not presenting as good team players and not being prepared (all 40%).

Chart 17: Bidders' common failings



What bidders did poorly



Complacency – the bidder thought that delivering Stage 1 guaranteed that they would be chosen to deliver Stage 2. Stage 1 was performing well, but they needed to bring their A-game.



Did not pick up on buyer's buying signals and offered a sub-optimal approach and sub-contractor panel.



Answered the wrong exam question. Their narrative was a clumsy, unmodified copy of an unrelated project. Offered a complex technical solution that was too expensive for the project.



Didn't present as a cohesive team – were misaligned internally and in disagreement during a formal presentation.



Did not address the criteria. Made unsubstantiated claims.



Didn't understand the key pressure points for the client.



Not willing to negotiate on items such as IP.

What bidders should do better

When asked what they would love to see bidders do better, evaluators provided a wide range of responses, from the minutia to the big picture:

“Ask questions.” “Ask more questions.” “Don't be afraid of asking questions.”

“Answer the questions.” “Make it easy to read.”

“Engage the end user and maintainer in the procurement process.”

“Consider whole of life when evaluating different materials.”

“Recognise stress points and offer innovative solutions.”

What bidders should stop doing

When asked what they would like bidders to stop doing, evaluators provided a few basic suggestions and some big insights:

“Stop submitting non-compliant bids.”

“Stop making unsubstantiated claims.”

“Stop promising people who won't be available.”

“Stop promising a delivery schedule that is unrealistic.”

“Stop ruling out alternatives too early.”

“Stop trying to ‘influence’ the evaluators during the process.”

How bidders could achieve better outcomes

When asked what bidders could do to achieve better outcomes, buyers didn't pull any punches:

“Explore more innovative solutions.”

“Understand what the client is after.” “Understand the buyer's true objectives.” “Understand the wider context of the project.” “Determine what the client is really looking for in the evaluation criteria.”

“Understand what risks are being transferred and offer alternatives to these risk profiles where possible.”

“Change the specific tender, risk and opportunity profile between client and contractor to find a more equitable sharing regime.”

“Do due diligence on the buyer's requirements.”

“Understand the value-add opportunities that go beyond business-as-usual.”

“Bidding is an investment. If you are not committed to prepare a great submission, don't proceed and waste people's time.”

How important is a relationship with the client?

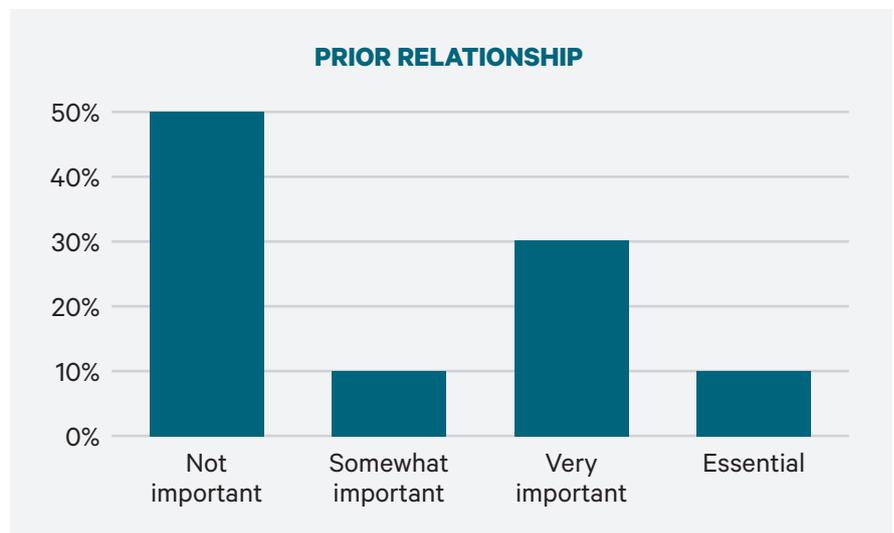
To understand the importance of a prior relationship between a buyer and a bidder, we asked three related questions. The results show a fascinating dichotomy and some strong differences of opinion.

Taking the three questions together, it might be more correct to say that while a prior relationship is not a requirement it definitely helps. How else is a bidder to engage meaningfully with the buyer prior to the bid period?

Importance of a prior relationship

Of the evaluators surveyed, 50% reported that it was not important for a bidder to have a prior relationship with the buying organisation. This seems reassuring to bidders who don't have an existing relationship with the buyer, however the following two charts contradict this.

Chart 18: There is mixed feedback from evaluators about the importance of a prior relationship between the bidding and buying organisations

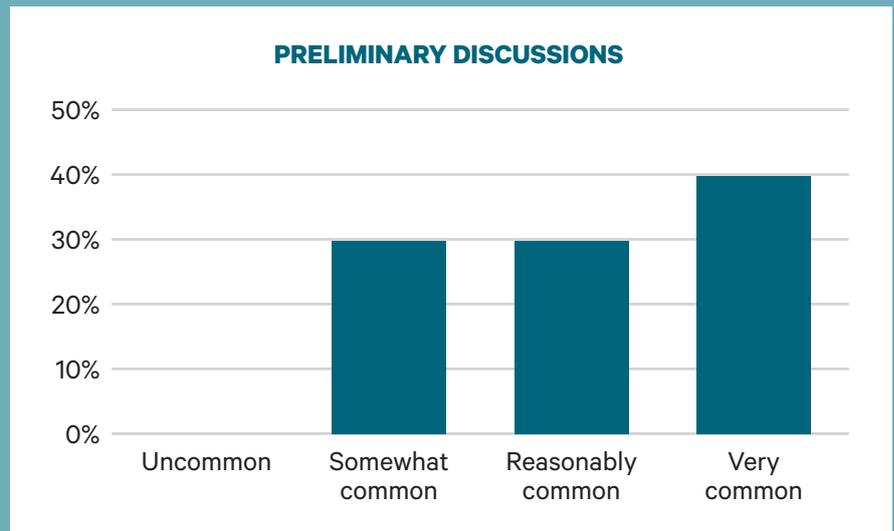


TAKEAWAY: Bidders should make it a priority to connect with buyers before the formal procurement process commences, and to use preliminary discussions to drive a deeper understanding of the client's vision, objectives and risks.

Prevalence of preliminary discussions

All evaluators reported that it was at least somewhat common for the buying organisation to have had preliminary discussions with one of more of the bidders prior to the formal procurement process commencing, with 40% saying that it was very common.

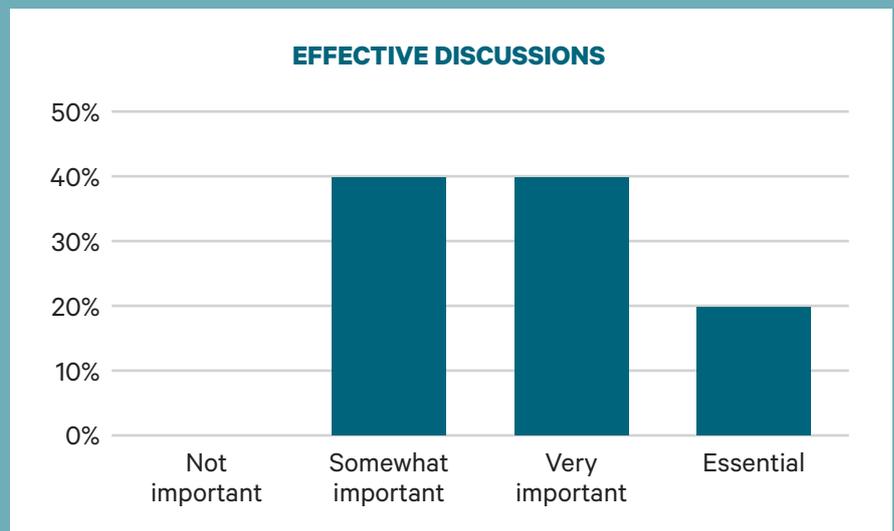
Chart 19: It is at least somewhat common for bidding organisations to engage in preliminary discussions with buyers prior to a formal process



Importance of effective discussions

In contrast to the first question about the importance of a prior relationship, all evaluators reported that it was at least somewhat important to a bidder's likely success for them to have had effective preliminary discussions prior to the bid period, with 20% saying it was essential.

Chart 20: And it is at least somewhat important to a bidder's success for them to have effective discussions with the buyer prior to the formal process



Does ‘the favourite’ win?

We often hear bidders say that buyers have already made up their mind before the formal process commences. The results don't seem to support this argument. Instead, the feedback shows that a win can be anyone's right through to the end.

Familiarity between buyer and bidder

Not surprisingly, especially in light of the previous section, evaluators reported that the successful bidders were almost always known to the evaluators prior to the procurement process commencing.

This is supported by 50% of evaluators who said they had previous positive experience with the successful bidder, 30% who knew of them but didn't have personal experience, and 20% who had extensive past experience with the successful bidder. Notably, no evaluators reported that a successful bidder had been an unknown entity or someone with whom they had had previous negative experience.

Competitiveness among bidders

This question generated a mixed response along with some interesting insights.

Of note, 80% of evaluators said that all bidders were viable and could deliver the project, although only 60% of evaluators said that all bidders were compliant.

A clear theme from evaluators was that the decision was difficult to call – 40% said that the end result was very close and the end decision was difficult, and 30% said that all bidders were clustered together and it was difficult to differentiate them.

According to 50% of evaluators, the successful bidder won on value, 30% reported that some bidders distinguished themselves beyond their competition and 10% said that the successful bidder demonstrated that they were significantly more capable. Only 10% reported that the successful bidder was less expensive.

Differentiating between bidders is often difficult and bidders are often clustered together. This presents bidders with an opportunity to strengthen their differentiators to catch the eye of the evaluators.

Chart 21: Successful bidders are almost always known to the buying organisation prior to the bid period commencing

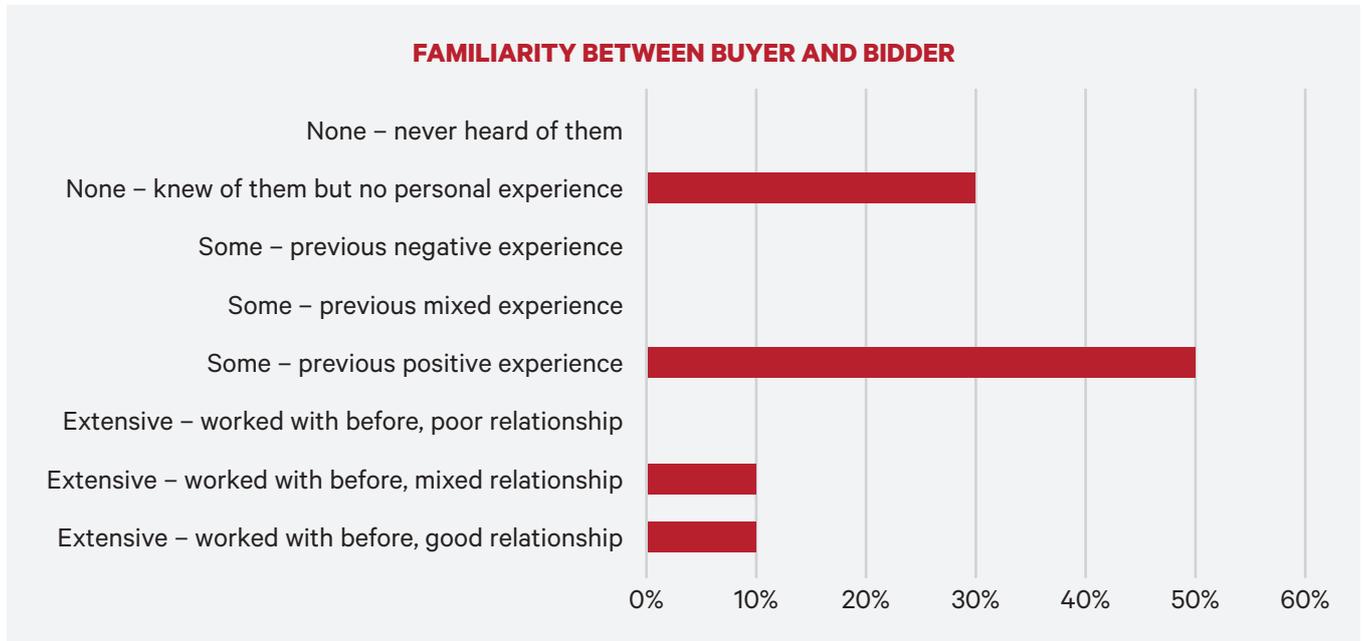
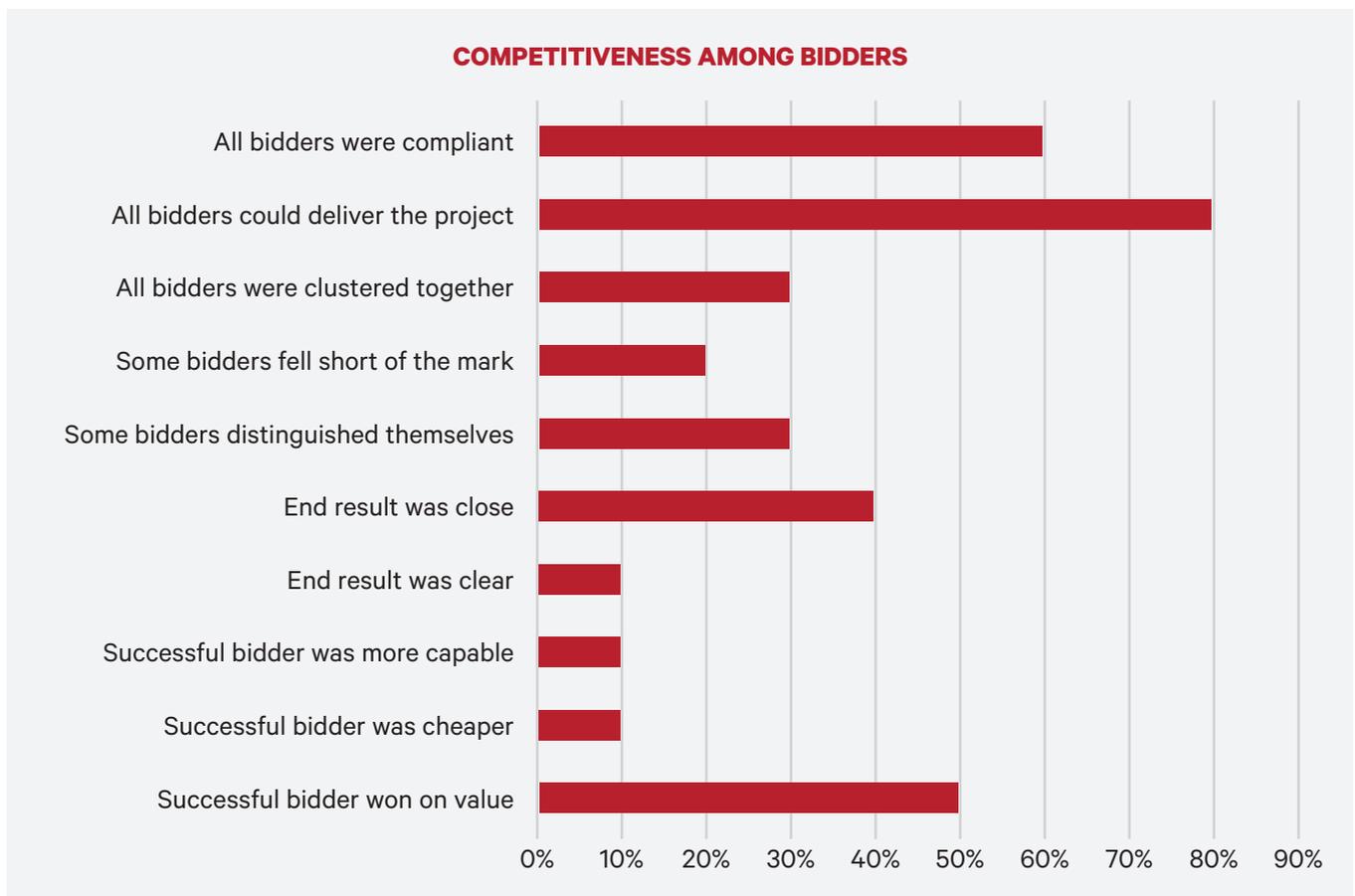


Chart 22: Most bidders can deliver, but few are able to differentiate

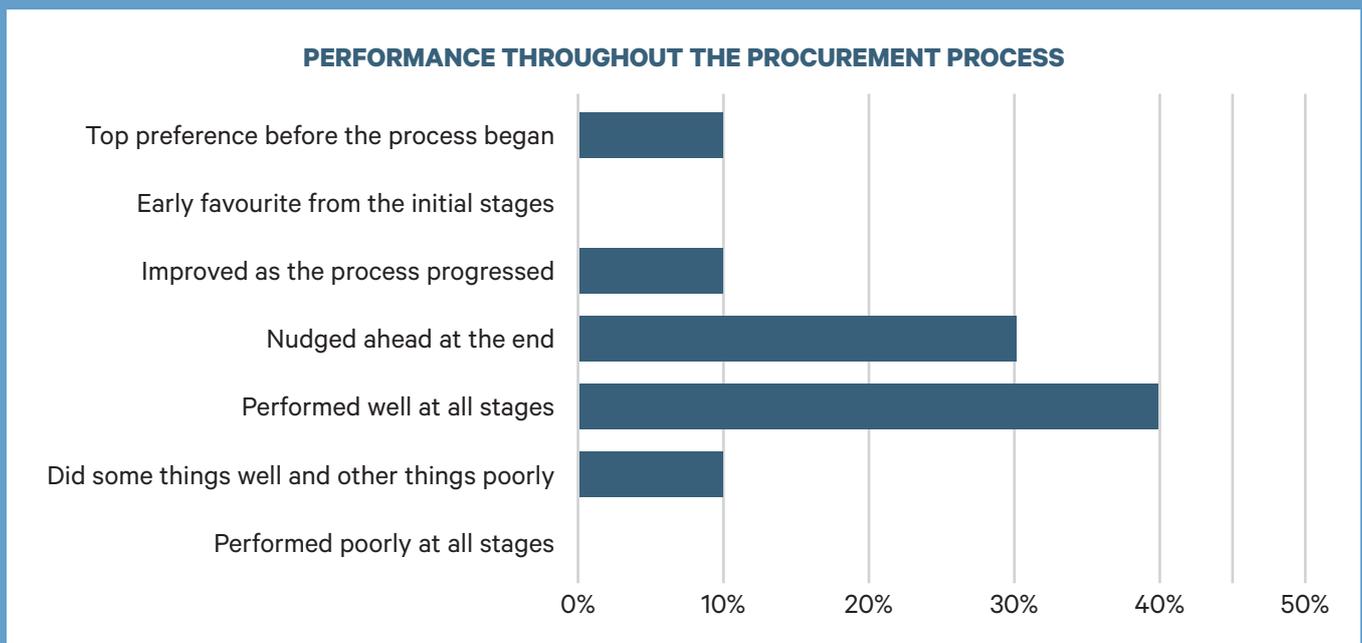


Performance throughout the procurement process

This question produced some interesting insight into the benefits of steady, solid performance throughout the procurement process.

The successful bidder performed well at all stages in 40% of cases, but in 30% of cases the successful bidder nudged ahead at the end proving that it is essential to keep working right to the finish line! And to answer the question about whether the ‘favourite’ wins – they sometimes do, but only in 10% of cases.

Chart 23: Maintaining consistency and perseverance throughout the procurement process is key to outlasting your competition



TAKEAWAY: Winning a bid can be anyone’s game. Ideally, bidders will be known – positively – to the buying organisation, will work hard to distinguish themselves from their competition and provide value, and will perform strongly throughout the procurement process.

How well do bidders use the Q&A process?

Across all of our previous Behind Closed Doors research, a consistent message from buyers has been that bidders underutilise the Q&A process. We're pleased to report that evaluators within the rail sector believe that bidders are doing a much better job than in other sectors.

Effectiveness of the Q&A process

According to 70% of evaluators bidders are using the Q&A process effectively, however...



TAKEAWAY: Dive in to the Q&A process to ensure you gather a deep understanding of the project and the risk profile. To protect your competitive edge, ask proprietary questions through the confidential question function.

Advice from evaluators

A common theme from evaluators is to ask more questions! The Q&A process is designed for bidders to ensure they have a full and thorough understanding of the risk profile, so evaluators are often left scratching their heads when bidders refrain from asking questions in case it tips their hand to their competitors.

"Ask clear, concise questions." "Be specific."

"Actually ask questions! Typically, a proponent will not ask a question because this may give competitors some insight into their approach or strategy."

"Seek as much clarity as possible so you fully understand the requirements. Use the confidential question function to ask proprietary type questions to ensure you are able to tailor their responses."

"Ensure the questions cannot actually be answered by reading the tender documents!"

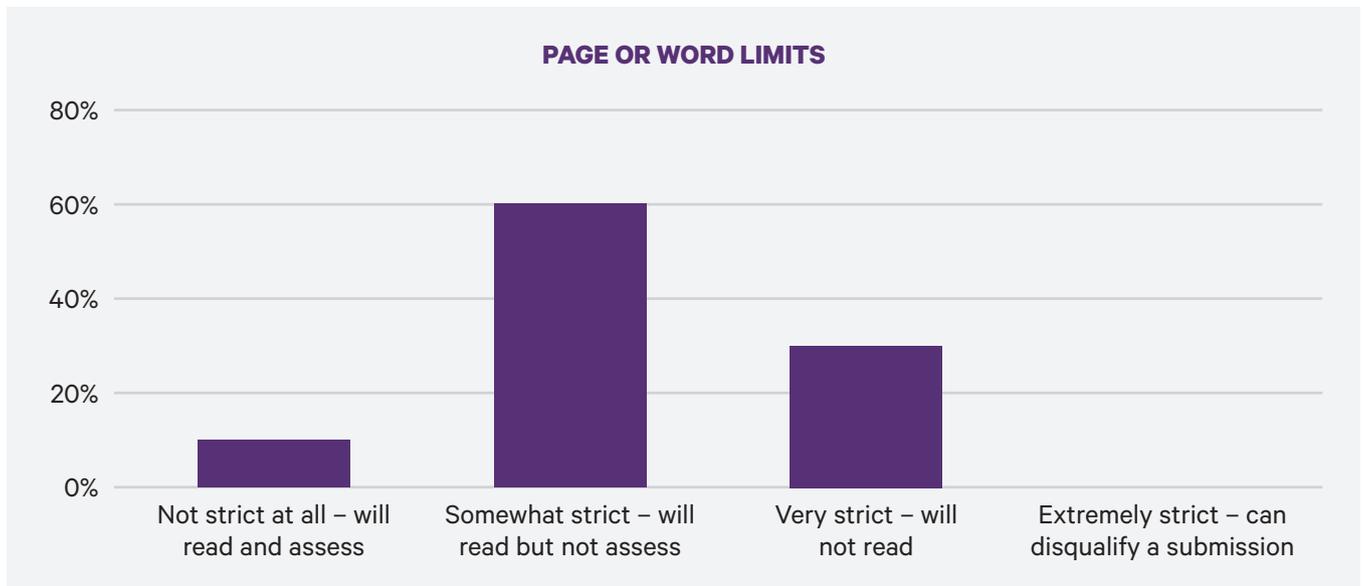
Are evaluators ‘sticklers’ for process?

Most bids have strict probity guidelines and submission requirements. We wanted to know how rigidly these rules are applied.

Page or word limits

Judging by the evaluators’ responses, it’s a good idea to stick to the limits. While no evaluators said that exceeding the limits might get you disqualified, the majority of evaluators are somewhat or very strict about the limits with 30% saying the extra information is not read and 60% saying it is read but not formally assessed.

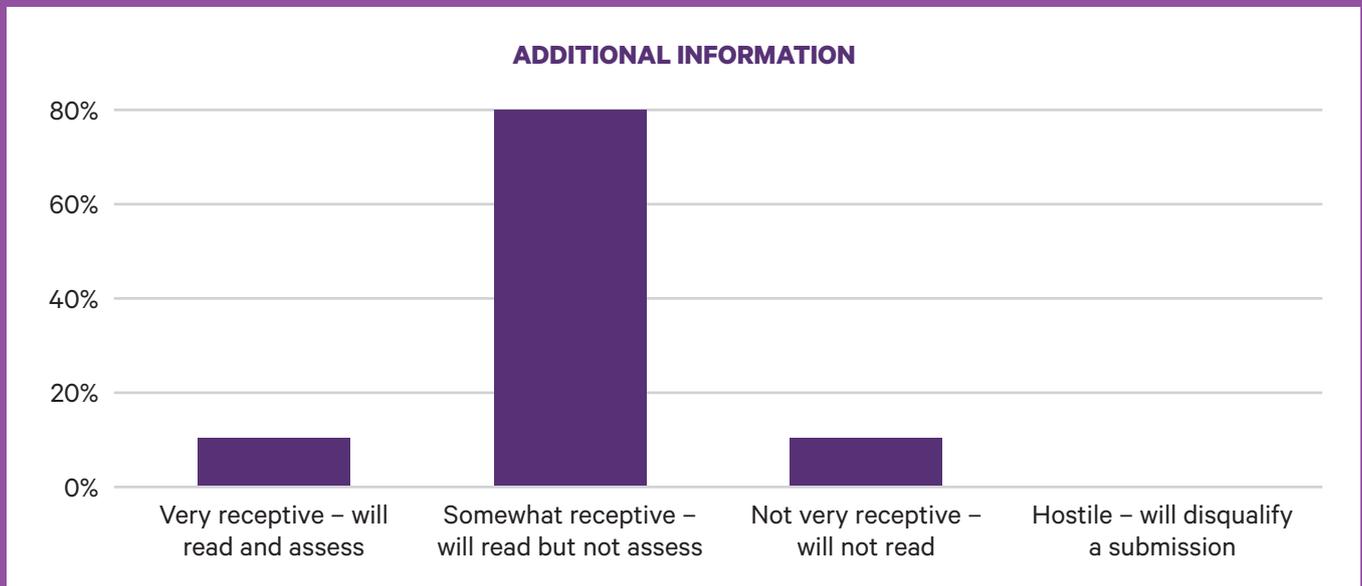
Chart 24: Evaluators take page and word limits seriously



Additional information

On the other hand, evaluators are quite receptive to receiving additional information that supports the submission: 80% of evaluators said that additional information is read although not formally assessed, while 10% said that it would even be assessed if it were relevant and pertinent. No evaluators were hostile to the idea of additional information being provided, and only 10% said that the information would not be read.

Chart 25: But they are receptive to additional information



TAKEAWAY: Always stick to the word or page limits but do provide additional information to support your submission. Just remember: the information must be relevant and pertinent.

Does it look bad if you need an extension?

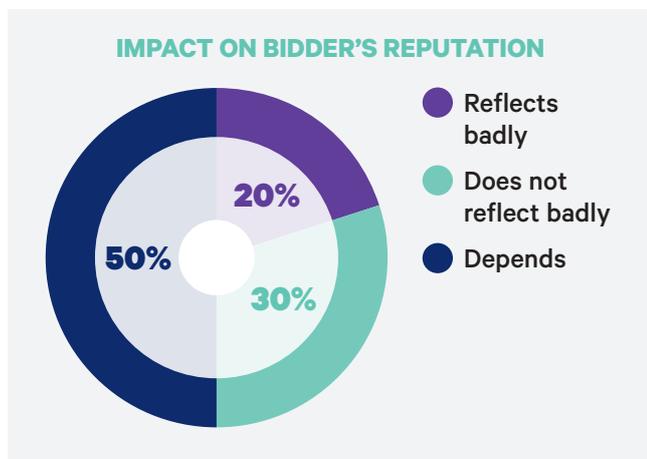
One of the biggest conundrums of a bid is what to do if you really need an extension.

Does it look bad? Kind of.

Impact on reputation

Evaluators gave mixed feedback about whether requesting an extension would reflect badly on a bidder with 20% saying that it does reflect negatively and 30% saying it does not. A further 50% were on the fence, judiciously saying that it depends.

Chart 26: Asking for an extension could reflect badly on a bidder, depending on how it is pitched



Advice from evaluators

If you must ask for an extension, evaluators had plenty of sage and sensible advice to offer:

“Declare early.” “Signal early.” “Do it early – not last minute!”

“Provide relevant and clear reasons.” “Have a very good reason.” “Provide the reason for the extension and suggest a reasonable timeline.” “The reason for an extension needs to be outside the bidder’s control.”

“Explain why in detail, including how the buyer will get a better outcome.”

TAKEAWAY: Bidders should be cautious about asking for an extension. Depending on the timing of your request and your reasoning, it could reflect badly. If you need an extension, ask as soon as possible, refer to a reason outside of your control, propose a reasonable timeline, and show how the buyer will get a better outcome.



Do evaluators hold a grudge if you don't bid?

Bidders often tell us that they feel pressured to bid and fear being penalised in future if they decline an opportunity.

Buyer expectations

The responses from evaluators confirm that there is a co-dependency between buyers and bidders. There is an assumption that bidders will bid and a disappointment if bidders decline to bid. Having said that, evaluators appear to understand the practical reality of a company's capacity to bid – and then to deliver – and understand that bidders may not be able to participate in every opportunity.

The key expectation is to communicate: if you don't intend to bid, advise the buyer as early as possible and explain why.

"There is a small number of bidders, so a withdrawal is disappointing."

"It can be disruptive if a withdrawal happens at short notice."

Likelihood of future work

Great news: reports of grudges being held have been greatly exaggerated. No evaluators reported that it would be unlikely for a bidder to be invited to bid on a future project just because they declined to bid on a previous project. Indeed, 60% of evaluators said it would be highly likely that bidders would be invited to bid on the next project, 30% said it would be somewhat likely and 10% said it would be almost certain.

Advice from evaluators

If you need to decline an opportunity, be open and honest with the buyer as early as possible:

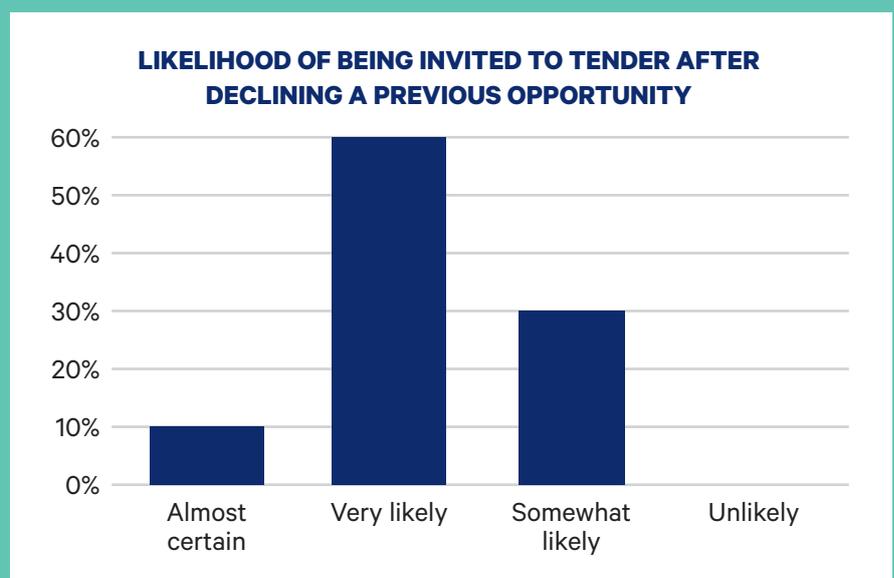
"Engage early." "Advise early." "Discuss prior to the opportunity going to market."

"Provide clear rationale and explanation." "Explain the situation." "Be upfront with the client."



TAKEAWAY: Buyers understand the practical reality of a bidder's capacity to bid and deliver work. Protect your ongoing relationship by communicating early and honestly.

Chart 27: Buyers understand that bidders can't respond to every opportunity



Are bidders sore losers?

One of the most alarming findings from previous Behind Closed Doors research was that bidders were sore losers – even going so far as to be aggressive to evaluators during debrief sessions. We are relieved to report that bidders within the rail sector conduct themselves much better than in other industries!

Maximising the value of debriefing

Most evaluators seem to genuinely want to provide meaningful and constructive feedback to bidders. To maximise the value of the debrief sessions, evaluators advised bidders to be prepared, listen carefully and seek to understand rather than blame.

“Understand the areas of risk that lost them the bid.”

“Prepare questions on specific areas that they know themselves were probably their weak points.”

“Engage and ask searching questions.”

“Have a structured approach – not just general Q&A.”

“Seek to understand why they lost, rather than blame the client. For instance, if you lost on price, why?”

Questions to ask

Evaluators were quick to propose questions that bidders would do well to ask, including suggestions to ask general questions about how to perform and engage better in future; specific questions on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; and technical questions on program, systems assurance, price and risk.

“What could you do better next time?”

“How could you have engaged better?”

“How could you have done better in meeting the requirements?”

“How could you have improved your price / solution?”

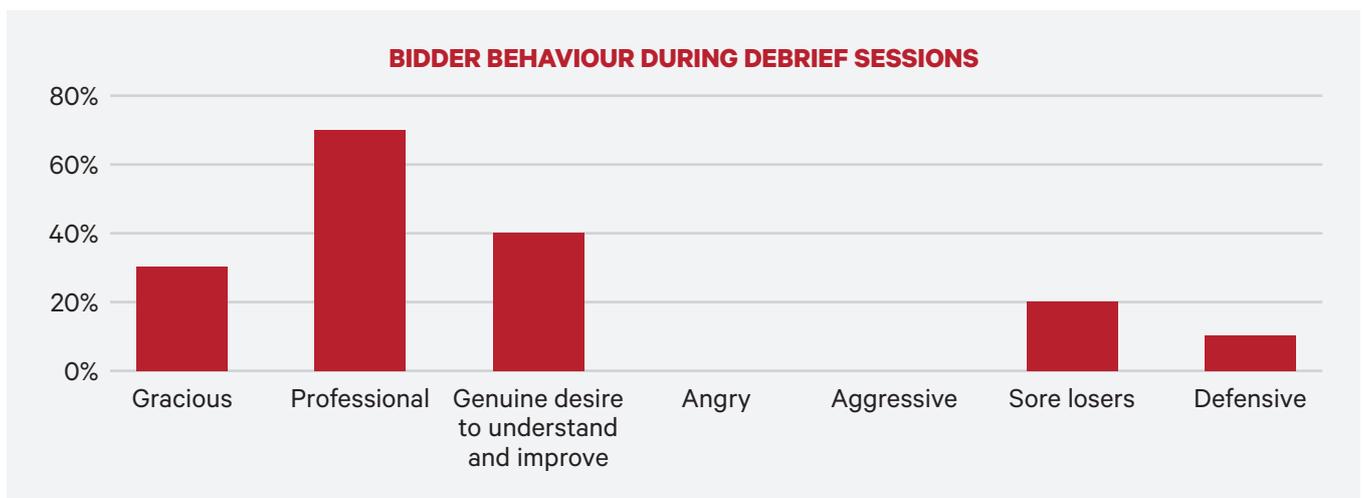
Bidder behaviour during debriefing

Reflecting on debrief sessions, 70% of evaluators said that bidders behaved professionally, 40% showed a genuine desire to understand and improve, and 30% behaved graciously. However, 20% said that bidders behaved like sore losers and 10% behaved defensively.



TAKEAWAY: Use the debrief process to understand why you lost and how you could have done better. Be professional and prepare in advance. Use a structured approach and ask general, specific and technical questions. And use the opportunity to build the relationship for the future.

Chart 28: Most bidders conduct themselves well during debriefing sessions, but not everyone!



Key takeaways

There has been momentous global and national change since we produced our first Behind Closed Doors Research Report in 2019. But while Covid brought new challenges to business with supply chain issues, shutdowns and resource shortages among them, the challenges for bidders remained pretty much as they always were. If anything, the Report has reinforced that bidding is not for the feint-hearted: if you're not prepared to deliver a great submission, then it's best not to enter the race.

1

Know and respect your audience

You should know everything you can about the buyer and their project. While a pre-existing relationship is not critical, it will improve your chances to have had effective preliminary discussions with the buyer prior to the bid period and will improve your understanding of the project's risks and challenges. On this point, evaluators commented that bidders often showed a lack of understanding of the project and the big picture, which resulted in generally poor submissions. It's also important to understand who the evaluators are so you can pitch your responses accordingly. Even in the rail sector, evaluation panels include a diverse cross-section of disciplines – they're not all engineers!

2

Bring your A-game to every question and presentation

Yes, price remains one of the most important sections of a tender but it's rarely the only factor evaluators consider. To win a tender, bidders need to bring their A-game to every question and every presentation they deliver. Evaluators will frequently read the entire submission so it's important that you tell a complete and consistent story that shows you understand the project and that you can give evaluators confidence in your ability to meet the performance criteria, achieve the key milestones and make budget. With only 10% of submissions and presentations deemed excellent and the remaining 90% deemed 'adequate' or 'poor' there is plenty of room for bidders to step up.

3

Pay attention to the 'soft stuff'

The so-called 'soft stuff' matters, with the majority of evaluators stating what we know to be instinctively true: well-presented submissions are easier to follow and make a good first impression. Neat formatting and presentation make it easier for evaluators to do their job and will engage them more easily, improving your chances of their understanding your solution and following your proposal. A clear structure and grammatical polish aren't just nice-to-haves – they demonstrate effort, professionalism and attention to detail.



4

Attach only pertinent information

Think carefully about what to include in your attachments. If you think you can just attach your capability statement or marketing brochure – think again. The key word here is ‘pertinent’: your attachments need to be pertinent and relevant to the bid. Generic information not only doesn’t cut it, but it will also do your submission more harm than good with the vast majority of evaluators saying generic information is never welcome.

5

Stand out from the crowd

Evaluators noted that bidders are often clustered and that choosing the winning bidder is not always straightforward. This presents a fantastic opportunity to stand out from your competitors and create memorable differentiators for the evaluation panel to consider. Offer more than a compliant, business-as-usual response. Explore innovative solutions and be open to alternatives. Demonstrate your energy and enthusiasm for the buyer’s project. Show your smarts and your professionalism, and your commitment to delivering a first-class submission.

6

Ask questions: don’t be coy

A common request from evaluators is for bidders to ask more questions of the buyers. Engage with the Q&A process and ask searching questions that will help you understand the project and its inherent risks and challenges. If you’re worried that your questions will reveal your solution, use the confidential question function for those types of questions; but it’s in your best interests to join in the Q&A process and demonstrate your commitment and enthusiasm.





Research undertaken by



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