

Love Me Tender

A plain English introduction to tendering for arts practitioners

Cork City Council Arts Office

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1. Overview

This resource is intended to provide arts practitioners based in Cork city, that may be new to tendering processes, with information about what is involved and why it may be of benefit to submit tenders for contracts for the delivery of arts-related services.

Periodically, Cork City Council Arts Office publishes invitations to tender for contract-based work or supplies on eTenders.gov.ie Some of the documents used in tendering processes can be very long and filled with technical language. They may initially appear daunting. However, the process is designed to be straightforward. This resource contains guidance on:

- How to understand tender requirements
- How to read tender documents
- How to submit a response to a request for tenders.

By getting familiar with the process, the expectations and the documentation, more local arts practitioners can confidently avail of opportunities relevant to your practice. A well-prepared tender isn't about flair and 'artspeak' is not required — it's about clarity, consistency, and compliance.

To stay up to date on opportunities of this kind, the following is recommended:

- Register on eTenders.gov.ie and set up notifications for opportunities of interest to you;
- Sign up to Cork City Council Arts Office's quarterly Mailing List by following this link: <http://eepurl.com/ddOG5P>
- Follow Cork City Council Arts Office on social media
 - Facebook: @CorkCityArts
 - Instagram: @CorkCityArt

For an audio narrated video presentation on the content of this resource, go to <https://www.corkcity.ie/en/council-services/services/arts-culture-heritage/arts-office/resources/> Scroll to the bottom of that webpage to access the video.

2. What is a tender

A tender is a structured competition where organisations bid for public work. This process is part of public procurement, which is how public bodies, like local authority Arts Offices, spend public money in a fair and controlled way.

So, a tender is simply an offer (or bid) made by a business to provide goods, services, or works to a public body (like a local authority). [\[gov.ie\]](http://gov.ie)

- A public body describes what it needs (e.g. a programme, building works, consultancy)
- Suppliers (tenderers) submit proposals explaining:
 - How they will deliver it
 - How much it will cost
- The public body evaluates all submissions and awards the contract to the most economically advantageous tender (based on quality and price, not just cheapest)

eTenders.gov.ie provides a single, visible platform where all suppliers can see opportunities such as 'Calls for Tenders' or CFTs:

- Everyone gets access to the same information
- Deadlines and documents are shared openly
- Award notices are published afterwards [\[oireachtas.ie\]](http://oireachtas.ie)

This prevents favouritism and ensures a fair competition.

3. Who can tender

To tender, you must:

- Register on eTenders.gov.ie
- Meet the selection criteria (experience, capacity, etc.)
- Provide all required documentation
- Submit your response correctly and on time

Any organisation or individual that can deliver the work and meets the requirements can submit a tender. This includes businesses of all sizes, as well as other types of organisations.

People that submit tenders can be referred to using any or all of the following terms:

- Respondent
- Supplier eg. Supplier of a Service
- Tenderer

There are different types of tenderers, some of which are described below in 4 general groupings:

2a. Businesses and Companies

Most tenders are submitted by:

- Small and medium enterprises (SMEs)
- Large companies
- Sole traders (including self-employed individuals like artists, arts consultants, arts project managers etc)

Public procurement in Ireland is designed so that SMEs and smaller suppliers can compete for contracts, not just large organisations. Even a small organisation can win a contract if it meets the criteria.

2b. Partnerships and Consortia

Sometimes, one organisation or person alone may not have all the required skills or capacity.

In that case, suppliers can:

- Form a consortium (group of organisations)
- Submit a joint tender

This means you don't have to go it alone — you can team up and “share the stage.”

2c. Community, Arts, and Not-for-Profit Organisations

or many local authority contracts (especially arts, culture, and community programmes), eligible tenderers may include:

- Community groups
- Non-profit organisations
- Arts organisations
- Social enterprises

As long as they can demonstrate capacity and experience, they can compete alongside commercial providers.

2d. Irish and International Suppliers

Depending on the value of the contract:

- Irish suppliers can apply
- Suppliers from other EU countries (and sometimes beyond) can also apply

Public procurement rules require open competition, especially for higher-value contracts. [\[tenderwatch.ie\]](https://www.tenderwatch.ie) So your competitors might not just be local — they could be from across Europe.

4. Who cannot tender

Suppliers cannot tender for these reasons:

- If they are not registered on eTenders.gov.ie
- If they do not meet minimum requirements (financial, technical, or experience)

If a supplier expresses interest in a tender and then realises it is not for them, there is no obligation to proceed. Not everyone can proceed all the way through the tender process. A supplier may be excluded if they:

- Fail the pre-qualification stage (PQQ) in a restricted procedure
- Have issues with tax compliance or legal declarations
- Do not follow the tender instructions properly

For example, in a restricted process, only tenders selected after the first stage are invited to submit a full tender.

5. Access to an invitation to tender

eTenders (www.etenders.gov.ie) is Ireland's official online procurement portal. It is run by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP). It is used by all public sector organisations, including local authorities [tenderwatch.ie]. It is a central platform where:

- Tender opportunities are advertised
- Documents are shared
- Responses are submitted electronically

You must be registered on eTenders to access tenders. To register and submit your tender, follow step-by-step instructions provided on eTenders.gov.ie here:

- [European Dynamics - Guidance Videos](#)
- [European Dynamics - Short User Guides](#)

Closed tenders are only available to suppliers already registered on eTenders.gov.ie so it is advisable to register even before you see a tender that you are interested in.

Please Note: In May 2026, some updates were made to eTenders.gov.ie. All new competitions are published on the new platform

If you were already registered on eTenders.gov.ie, you do NOT need to create a new account but you must 'activate' and update it, if you have not done so already. The interface will also appear slightly different to you.

On first login, you'll need to:

- Check your details
- Add or update missing information
- Reconfirm your organisation profile

You may also need to:

- Reset tender alerts
- Re-enter business categories (CPV/NACE codes)
- Add extra organisational details [gov.ie]

6. Understanding Tender Documents

A tender document is usually divided into several parts. Most local authorities and other tendering bodies that publish tenders use templates. By getting familiar with the layout of the templates, you will find it easier to respond to a tender.

There are two templates that are used for every tender:

1. A 'Request for Tenders' document or 'RFT' - this template will be full of information provided by the tendering body so that the tenderer receives clear instructions about what is required and how to comply.
2. A 'Tender Response Document' or 'TRD' – this template contains blank areas where the tenderer can respond to the RFT in the designated sections. Some additional materials may also be requested to be submitted separately to the TRD such as CVs.

The instructions in the TRD will mirror the instructions in the RFT. This is deliberate so that the tenderer is clear on what is required and where to provide what has been requested.

While the exact sections of these templates may vary slightly, you'll typically see the contents listed below and outlined in detail overleaf.

5a. RFT

- Cover page with key information such as deadline and contract scope
- Contents page with useful overview of document contents
- A section with standardised instructions to Tenderers
- A section with an overview of Competition
- A section on what is required from tenderers
- A section on the criteria for selecting tenders to assess
- A section on criteria for awarding the best tender
- A section with standard expectations for tenderers on compliance

5b. TRD

- Cover page with key information such as deadline and contract scope
- Contents page with useful overview of document contents
- A section with instructions on how to complete the TRD
- A section where the tenderer can respond to the criteria for selecting tenders to assess
- A section where the tenderer can respond to the criteria for awarding the best tender

Following is a more detailed look at typical sections in an RFT document.

A section with standardised instructions to Tenderers

Read this section fully noting the following in particular:

- Deadline and submission rules you must comply with
- Tender structure details that will guide you on what to provide at which stage, if there is more than one stage to the tender process

A section with an overview of competition

Read this section to get a sense of some basic terms of the tender competition. A lot of the information here will be standard content that is found in other templates also.

A section on what is required from tenderers

This section is very important. While other sections might contain a lot of text that is the same in every RFT, this section will contain information that is specific to the tender. Your response needs to demonstrate clearly how your tender meets the requirements better than any other tender can. You are advised to read this section very carefully and to get very familiar with the content so that you can submit a good quality response.

Before you start to work on your response, it is important that you assess whether delivering the services required is feasible for you based on the timeline, budget and other factors outlined in this section. So it is likely that this is the first section you may wish to read.

A section on the criteria for selecting tenders to assess

This section will outline clearly the basic requirements that need to be fulfilled or committed to. Many of the questions in this section require a Yes or a No.

If the requirements in this section are overlooked or not met to an adequate standard, your tender will not be assessed. A tender will be disqualified from the competition if it does not meet minimum requirements.

This makes things straightforward for tenderers: either you can meet the criteria and it's just a case of completing the section with your information or you cannot meet the criteria so this is not the right opportunity for you.

This section will be mirrored in the TRD document so that the tenderer is clear on what is required and where to provide what has been requested.

A section on criteria for awarding the best tender

This section will outline clearly the qualitative requirements, which means that they require much more detail than a Yes or No answer.

This section will be mirrored in the TRD document so that the tenderer is clear on what is required and where to provide what has been requested.

Clear instruction will be provided for the tenderer on where to provide responses for this section, whether in the TRD or in a separate document or other format to be enclosed with the TRD, like CVs.

A section with standard expectations for tenderers on compliance

Read this section to understand what rules you must comply with relevant to this competition. A lot of the information here will be standard content that is found in other templates also.

7. Tender Assessment

Only when the deadline has passed for the submission of tenders can the tendering body access the submissions. Typically, more than one person is required to 'open' the tender submission space to ensure accountability and fairness.

Tenders are firstly reviewed to ensure they are eligible to be assessed ie.

- The tenderer has provided all the information needed to demonstrate ability to meet the minimum requirements of the selection criteria;
- The tenderer has provided responses to meet the award criteria;

A tender panel convened for the purpose of assessing the tender responses will review the submissions and then meet to discuss the tenders together. Tender panels are usually made up of a number of people with experience relevant to the tender.

In advance of inviting tenders, a marking scheme will be created and agreed upon by the tender panel. The outcome of the tender assessment will be communicated through eTenders.gov.ie. The name of the successful tenderer will be available to the public.

The allocation and weighting of the tender assessment marks will be explained clearly in the RFT and repeated in the TRD for the sake of transparency. This means that tenderers understand how criteria is assessed and where the priorities of the assessors lie and can submit your response accordingly. For example, while the price of each tender will be reviewed in order to identify which is most economical, the weighting of the allocated marks will determine how important cost will be in comparison with the other award criteria. Some tenders prioritise low costs while others prioritise different criteria such as level of experience, suitability of tender, motivation for involvement etc.

Costings will typically be assessed first using a mathematical formula. This formula is explained in the RFT document. It's purpose is to ensure fairness. It calculates value based on the costs estimated in all the tenders that have been *received* in any given call, not on hypothetical costs.

Other considerations for tender assessors usually include:

- Quality (technical response)
- Compliance

Once tenders have been assessed by a panel using the marking scheme provided, an award is made unless there are more stages to the tender process. Instructions for additional stages will be provided to the tenderers that are successful in the previous stage.

8. Final Tips

Below are helpful tips on preparing to submit your tender:

- Don't be put off by the length of tender documents or the technical language. Once you are familiar with the layout, you will recognise the templates and get comfortable with the process.
- Register on eTenders.gov.ie straight away. You never know what opportunity might come your way. It's helpful to browse opportunities and get a sense of different requirements.
- Start early on your tender response
- Follow instructions exactly
- Be clear and concise
- Ensure information that you provide is up to date such as documents like CVs, insurance details etc.
- Use plain English
- Proofread everything and double check that you are providing all the documentation requested
- Get someone else to review your tender before you submit it
- Label all of your response materials clearly before you submit them

9. Queries

If you have a technical issue or general question related to eTenders.gov.ie, you must email irish-eproc-helpdesk@eurodyn.com

If you have a question about a specific request for tender you must raise it officially by using the clarification function inside the eTenders.gov.ie platform. The tendering body cannot be contacted outside of eTenders.gov.ie by phone or email.

Once your question is received, these steps will be followed:

- Your question will firstly be reviewed to ensure that it is relevant.
- For fairness, if answered, both question and answer will be shared with all tenderers that have expressed an interest in the same tender opportunity. The identify of the questioner will remain confidential however.

Please Note: There is no limit to the number of questions you can ask but they must be relevant in order to be answered.

You must ask your question before the 'Closing Date for Queries' which is stated on the cover pages of both the RFT and TRD. One of the reasons for this is to ensure that nobody receives information at such late notice that their tender will be less competitive than others.

10. Additional Resources

On the eTenders.gov.ie landing page and Help section, tenderers will find:

- User guides: [European Dynamics - Guidance Videos](#)
- Walkthrough videos: [European Dynamics - Short User Guides](#)

Other references to tendering that may be useful to arts practitioners can be found online at the links below:

- Tender News www.tenderwatch.ie
- Public Art Commissioning
<https://visualartists.ie/how-to-manual/public-art-practice-for-artists-and-commissioners>
- Training in Tendering
<https://intertradeireland.com/sales-growth/tender-successfully/go-2-tender>