Guidance to buying using the G-Cloud Framework

Introduction

The following guidance is designed to assist schools, academies and multi-academy trusts procure Cloud services legally and effectively. Whilst Bromcom is unable to offer professional legal advice on procurement matters, this guidance is designed to bring to your attention the opportunities of using the G-Cloud Framework to procure services such as your Management Information System.

What is G-Cloud?

G-Cloud is one of three (at time of writing) frameworks available through the Digital Marketplace that help you find cloud services for digital projects. It is an agreement between the government and approved suppliers. Bromcom offers a number of services through G-Cloud, including the Bromcom MIS, Virtual School and Vision services, and therefore you can procure these services on the Digital Marketplace.

Digital Marketplace

The Digital Marketplace is a UK Government managed website designed to help you[1] buy services faster and more cheaply than entering into individual procurement contracts. It can be accessed at the following URL:

https://www.digitalmarketplace.service.gov.uk/g-cloud

Buying on the Digital Marketplace

When you buy through the Digital Marketplace, you have to be fair, open and transparent. You can only award contracts to suppliers who meet your needs.

To find the most appropriate supplier for your project, you need to write clear requirements and set out the criteria that you're going to evaluate suppliers against. Then search for your requirements on the Digital Marketplace and evaluate suppliers on the evidence they have provided in the Digital Marketplace. We strongly suggest that you keep a clear audit trail of these activities and save a copy of your searches on Digital Marketplace to show that you were not biased in your selection. For example, just deciding that you want Bromcom's MIS and therefore searching for "Bromcom" will be seen as a biased search. Assuming it is MIS services that you wish to procure, you should instead be searching for say "Secondary School MIS" or "Primary School MIS" under the "Cloud Software" category. Perhaps you also want the "Data storage and processing locations" to be in the United Kingdom and "Security certification" to be to ISO/IEC 27001 (service security). Perhaps it should have the ability to provide "life without levels" progress tracking? These are just examples and the important point is that you need to finalise your requirements and then select the service that best meets those with clarity and transparently. You should download your search results to review and compare services before making a decision. There is much guidance given on the Digital Marketplace website. Key publications can be found at

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-buy-digital-marketplace-services-fairly

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/g-cloud-buyers-guide

You may well need to make contact with one or more suppliers and you should keep records of these communications, including any early market engagement, clarification questions, emails and face to face conversations and demonstrations you may have had. If your selection process results in a single supplier meeting your requirements then you can make a direct award using the call-off process. If multiple suppliers have been found and cannot be separated using the information on G-Cloud, you can chose to run a mini-competition.

Mini Competition

You may find that more than one supplier may be able to meet your requirements and therefore need to carry out a further selection process to select the best service for your needs. You can therefore run a mini

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[1] All public sector organisations including agencies and arm's length bodies.

completion, which is a "Invitation to Tender£ (ITT) or "Invitation to Quote" (ITQ). In this context, think of them as the same thing. What you will need to do is send the following to your G-Cloud short list of suppliers:

- a covering letter, with a timeline for the process
- your specification/requirements
- instructions on how suppliers can ask questions about your requirements for their clarification, should submit their response to your ITT/ITQ
- your award criteria, scoring system and weightings

You may ask for practical demonstrations of the service too. Once you have evaluated the received bids (responses to the ITT/ITQ) according to your published criteria, you must choose the "most economically advantageous tender" (MEAT), which combines cost and quality so that you can fairing award the contract to the winning bidder.

Awarding a contract

Once you have chosen a service you need to award and publish details of the contract. You will need to complete a "call-off contract" https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/g-cloud-9-call-off-contract https://www.gov.uk/guidance/g-cloud-templates-and-legal-documents

You also need to complete a Customer Benefits Record form.

The G-Cloud framework contract includes the order form, terms and conditions and several optional 'schedules'. It includes a section about your services and a section about the call-off contract charges.

It is usually expected that services would start within 3 months of signing a contract and that the contract is up to 24 months initially with the option to extend a further 24 months (i.e. to 48 months total) in yearly extensions. After 48 months, you will have to repeat the process or find an alternative method to procure the services.

Please see https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-award-a-contract-when-you-buy-services for additional details.