



TA Consultants United

CV EVALUATION REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Many experts have written to complain vigorously about a number of issues concerning the use of CVs in tender evaluation procedures. Accordingly, we invited our supporters to send us details of their complaints and we received many. We categorized these complaints under appropriate headings, published this review on our website, and requested proposals for reform.

This submission contains a description of the key weaknesses and failings in the present system and the proposals for dealing with them, which reflect the majority view of our community. We set out the problems under the various headings and follow each one with the proposed solution. The categories are:

- The CV itself
- Falsification and misuse of CVs by contractors
- Information required in CVs is frequently irrelevant and what is relevant is not required
- Evaluation procedures
- Evaluators.

Henry Leerentveld & Stephen Dewar



TA Consultants United

CV EVALUATIONS REPORT

I. THE CV ITSELF

Complaint:

The restriction on length (maximum three pages, sometimes four) makes it – in the current system of CV evaluation - impossible to provide all relevant information if one has worked for a significant length of time and had a varied career. (One expert, constantly urged by a contractor to show additional relevant detail in his CV, ended up with a document 78 pages long. While this case is exceptional it is perfectly normal for experts with lengthy and varied careers to have “bare-bones” CVs of well over ten pages).

Solution:

Submit full CVs with a one-page summary of key points for the post in question, including references to relevant pages and entries in main document to substantiate claims made in the summary.

Complaint:

The requirement to provide certificates of previous employment is excessive. Part of the problem here is that different EUDs/CAs interpret this rule differently. Some request the previous five years, others demand proof of every single employment and assignment throughout the expert’s entire career. In addition, when previous employers no longer exist (death, bankruptcy, etc) some CAs refuse to accept the word of the expert that he/she did in fact work in such organisations/roles. Of course, reasonable checks on the truth of experts’ claims are right and proper, but demanding references when employers no longer exist or when the relevant persons have died or simply disappeared, for example, is ludicrous.

Solution:

Request confirmations of employment for only the previous five years and/or those employment experiences that are most relevant to position being sought.

Where these cannot be obtained for good reasons, accept signed statements by the experts, if necessary in the form of sworn statements duly notarized (in exceptionally important situations only). This cannot guarantee the complete elimination of false claims by experts – but it should greatly reduce them, and increase the risks for those who still persist in doing this.

Complaint:

The need to submit all one’s records (degrees, professional qualifications, employment certificates, etc) every time one is included in a bid is absurd and a complete waste of time for the experts and the contractors.

Solution:

Experts should submit their CVs plus all supporting documents to a central register within the Commission in Brussels. Any queries or clarifications should be raised by that register. Once this is dealt with satisfactorily, the CV would be entered on a database and certified as accurate. CAs would then need only the expert’s identity code to check that everything is in order and to see whether the CV submitted in the tender corresponds with the one on the database. Experts would update their CVs after each assignment or whenever there is a material change in their circumstances (new degree awarded, etc).

This same principle of registration should be applied by other donors if they have decentralised tendering, evaluation and assessment procedures.

2. FALSIFICATION AND MISUSE OF CVS BY CONTRACTORS

Complaint:

Contractors are perfectly entitled to edit CV s to highlight those points that they believe most strengthen their tenders, especially given the length restriction (see first point above) – as long as they do not change the facts.



Problems in this area range from the fairly “minor” cases such as exaggerating certain skills or attributes (e.g. claiming an expert is fluent in the local language when, say, he/she has only a very basic knowledge of it) through to total falsification (one expert was horrified to discover, months after starting a project as TL, that his five-page CV had been completely and fraudulently rewritten by the contractor, without the expert knowing this).

Solution:

If a central database was set up (see point above) it would be impossible for contractors to prepare their own versions of CVs. In the meantime, experts should sign and date each page in the final version to be submitted with the tender, scan it and return to the contractor. The scanned version would be submitted. This approach would also eliminate the possibility of contractors submitting the CVs of experts they have not contacted and do not intend to use. Of course, everything can be forged, but contractors would have to take far more serious risks than they do at present (and we apologise to the many excellent and honourable contractors, who would be horrified at the thought of doing such things; unfortunately, there are contractors who do do them) so this should largely eliminate the problem.

Complaint:

Some contractors use the CVs of good experts, which they have on file from earlier tenders or projects, to strengthen their bids, without telling the experts concerned. In addition, they often include their names and CVs in the list of their proposed “pool” of STEs. When they win the contract, they find some reason to explain the unavailability of the expert and are allowed to put in a substitute.

Solution:

Signed and dated CVs (see above) would make this impossible.

3. INFORMATION REQUIRED IN CVS IS FREQUENTLY IRRELEVANT AND WHAT IS RELEVANT IS NOT REQUIRED

Complaint:

Quantity is preferred at the almost complete expense of quality. For example, if an expert is a person who has worked successfully in a number of foreign countries, it is a reasonable indication that they can adapt well to a new ethnic and cultural environment.

Requiring somebody to have spent a minimum of X years in such and such country or region is excessive, except under very special circumstances. The same applies to the requirement to have a minimum of, say, ten years experience in a particular field of activity. If that rule applied everywhere, we would not have Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, Facebook, Yahoo, Google, Skype, etc. These simplistic quantitative requirements are also a barrier to bright young experts entering the profession. In short, while knowing whether a proposed expert has worked in the relevant places or fields is of course important, it should not be made the primary determinants of suitability.

In contrast with the above point, an academic or professional qualification is often rated more highly than many years of successful work experience in a particular field. Clearly, sensible judgment is required in contrasting qualifications against experience.

Solution:

The one-page summary at the front of the submitted CV should include an explanation of why the expert considers himself/herself able to adapt to the country and show their previous achievements in the required technical area. This should focus on competences, not just bean-counting and box-ticking. This page should describe what the expert can offer the project, the team and the beneficiary, based on past achievements, not years doing this and that. Leadership and management skills need to be demonstrated (for TLs) and team skills for KEs. (These are not demonstrated by X years previous experience in similar roles – results have to have been delivered). This will require significant reforms to the evaluation process itself and require greater skills on the part of the evaluators. For these points, see below.

4. EVALUATION PROCEDURES

Complaint:

Evaluation procedures are neither comprehensive nor sufficient. Furthermore, evaluations lack consistency, transparency and demonstrated competency in conducting assessments. This lack of competency is demonstrated in irrelevant questions during interviews, bean counting in CVs instead of assessment of competences, unpredictable outcomes, inability to assess team-complementarity and inability to justify/explain choices.

**Solution:**

Where the results of evaluations appear strange (getting a lower score than in a previous evaluation, or where the really strong candidate fails to get a high score), introduce an appeal procedure so that the CA must release the full record of the relevant part of the evaluation process (individual evaluators' score-sheets, minutes of the discussion, etc).

5. EVALUATORS

Complaint:

Evaluators are often not competent to conduct this process. This is understandable, given that the primary work responsibilities of the officials involved is often to do totally different things – evaluations are simply occasional duties they have to perform. They also frequently lack the technical expertise to assess the level of professional skills of experts in fields outside their own area. The results, therefore, are often totally unsatisfactory. For example, one expert was rated at “85” and then, later, for an identical project, the same evaluators rated him at “70”. A worse case was when a project was re-tendered and evaluated and a proposed TL got a lower score on the second occasion than on the first one, despite the fact that he had actually increased his regional experience during the intervening period – regional experience being part of the requirements. We have several examples of this kind of inconsistency – and worse.

Experts who are outstanding in their field are often surprised when they are ranked less highly than the winner who has demonstrably less ability, relevant skills and/or professional qualifications and/or experience. There are of course situations when the strength of one candidate expert is not enough to compensate for the relative weakness of the overall proposed team (but see point above). However, if the project is about relativity theory and you happen to be Albert Einstein, you should be entitled to know why, for example, Brad Pitt got the job.

Solution:

Use independent experts to support evaluations as long as evaluations continue to be flawed. These should include an expert in human resource issues, especially reviewing overall “team chemistry” for the proposed group of KEs, plus leadership and management skills for proposed TLs and component leaders, and, where necessary, another expert for country-specific issues.

An expert in the technical area should be available too. Face-to-face interviews should be mandatory for all projects over a certain budget. Expensive? Yes, but in no other industry would an organisation hire a group of people to manage a work program with a budget of over €1 million without going to a lot of trouble to ensure they were the people with the right competencies and skills rather than X years of “experience” doing this and that. (And this will become less expensive once our proposal for a two-step assessment for technical proposals is accepted; in the first step the two or three best technical proposals are selected, in the second step the best team will be selected). A slimmed down approach could be used for FWC and STE assessments.

6. OUR OTHER PROPOSALS

The above proposals specifically address the main issues identified in the accounts sent to us by experts around the world. However, it is clear that we need to adopt an overall, structured reform process taking in all aspects together. We propose such a structured approach below, where the elements are ordered in a process and priority order.

1. Code of practice for recruitment and selection
There needs to be an overall framework describing the standards for the minimum quality of the recruitment and selection process - the ‘rules of the game’ - taking into account the procedures, the (minimum) qualifications of the assessors, transparency and mechanisms for appeal as the first step for improvement. This code of practice should be negotiated and agreed with all donors. We propose starting this process with the European Commission, as the biggest donor.
2. Based on this, improving the quality of evaluations and evaluators will be necessary including the following actions:
 - a. Developing and establishing assessment guidelines and instructions based on the new procedures;
 - b. Training and certification for evaluators: bringing evaluators up to a minimum standard according to the code of practice and ‘putting them to the test’ before they can be considered qualified to carry out evaluations;



- c. As long as CV evaluation remains flawed, structured (external) expert support needs to be used in assessments, both for coaching and guidance as well as for monitoring and evaluating developments.
3. It is essential in the quality development and control of CV evaluation to increase transparency of evaluations of applicant/participant-experts, ensuring that every candidate expert gets an:
 - a. Individual justification of assessment results, and
 - b. Is entitled to make an appeal against the evaluation.
4. The next improvement is to introduce certification of experience, divided into steps for experts that have already 'entered the system' and one for 'new entrants'
 - a. Create possibilities for experts to objectively certify their CVs using third parties. This guarantees that a consultant/expert's CV/experience is objectively verified and classified (junior expert, mid-level expert, senior expert, managing expert, etc);
 - b. Consequently a 'competence profile' of experts/consultants will be introduced and implemented; this will standardise the assessment of experts' qualifications in the various occupational areas
5. Endless repetition of submission of CVs and supporting documents should be eliminated: central registration of this documentation, their certification and the competence profiles will ensure efficiency and improve matching.
6. Steps 2, 4 and 5 will allow assessments based on competencies, using (certified) competence profiles.
7. The next step in advanced evaluation is team assessment: assessing the complementary qualities of the team members and the team as a whole compared to the ToR demands. (Previous experience working successfully as a team counts, experienced teams will score higher).
8. The last step in this respect is introducing and implementing performance evaluation of experts after their assignments; obviously this will require checks and balances in terms of various stakeholders to be consulted, the individual consultant expert having an active role, transparency of assessments, accountability and appeal possibilities. bringing assessors up to standard according to the code of conduct and 'put them to the test' before they evaluate