

Office for
Students



Office for Students funding competitions

Bidding guidance

Reference OfS 2020.01

Enquiries to info@officeforstudents.org.uk

Publication date 14 January 2020 (revised 5 March 2020)

Contents

The bidding process – how we assess bids	2
How to structure a bid	2
Defining the issue, aims and student population	3
The proposed project activities	4
Partners and collaborators	4
Methodology, risks and mitigations	5
Value for money	5
Evaluation and dissemination	6

This guidance is for higher education providers submitting bids for funding under OfS funding competitions¹. It does not provide guidance regarding the specific competitions for bids, but rather overarching principles which providers should consider when constructing their proposal and filling out a bid template.

The bidding process – how we assess bids

The bids are usually assessed by Office for Students (OfS) staff and external experts through a competitive process. We publish specific bidding guidance for each competition with the criteria that we will use to assess each bid. The criteria for each competition will be different, depending on the specific aims and the issue or topic it is designed to address.

The competitive element of our competitions means that not every bid that meets the assessment criteria will be awarded funding. If we receive multiple bids of sufficient quality, we will fund the projects that most closely meet the criteria. Additionally, we also aim to compile a balanced portfolio of funded projects. This may be a geographical or contextual spread - to test interventions in different regions or with different types of students and graduates, or it may be to test a broader range of activities and approaches.

Many of our funding competitions are run as OfS Challenge Competitions, which are used to target funding to address priority issues which affect students. You can find more information on these competitions on our website².

How to structure a bid

The following list demonstrates the broad areas which providers should consider when submitting a proposal to us:

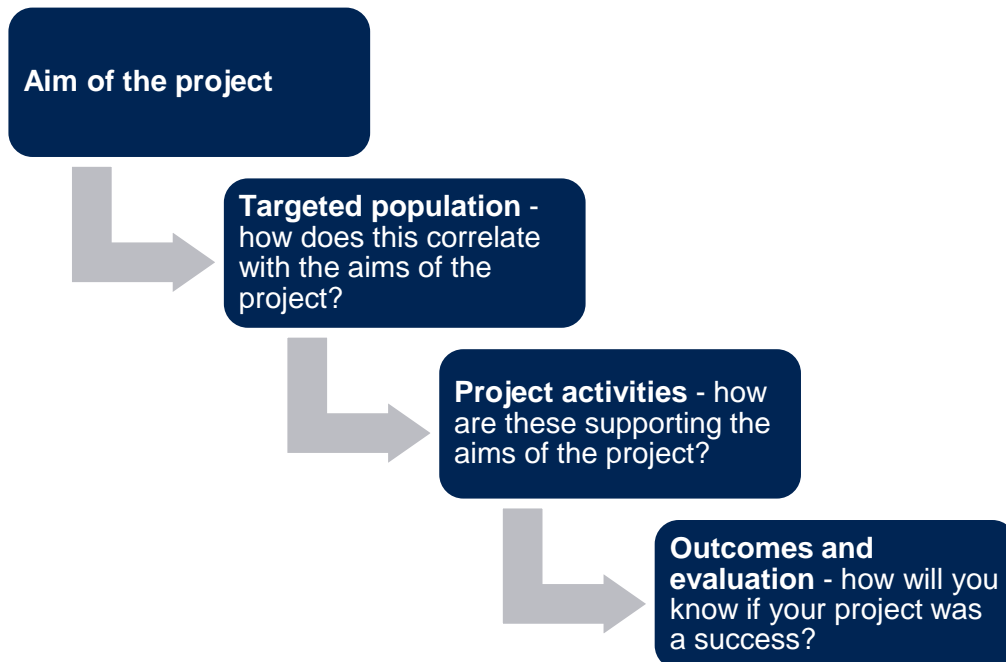
- **Defining the issue, aims and student population.** What do you want to achieve with the project, and which students are you targeting?
- **The proposed activities.** What are you going to deliver and how will this address our and your priorities?
- **Partners and collaborators.** How will the collaboration help you to achieve the targets that you have proposed?
- **Methodology, risks and mitigations.** Have you explored all the potential risks for the delivery of your project; how will you mitigate against these?
- **Value for money.** How will your project deliver value for public money, beyond the immediate impact at your provider?

¹ For more information on OfS funding competitions, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/funding-for-providers/funding-competitions/

² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/funding-for-providers/funding-competitions/about-ofs-challenge-competitions/

- **Evaluation and dissemination.** How will you measure the impact of your project and how will this be shared with other providers?

While the bid template may separate these different criteria, the overall proposal should demonstrate how each element is considered in conjunction with the others and with the aims of the project. The following diagram demonstrates this principle:



There should be a common thread throughout the proposal which shows how the activities being proposed support the aims of the project and the targeted population.

You should show what measures will be in place to determine whether the proposed activities are successful or not.

Defining the issue, aims and student population

We're looking for bidders to demonstrate that their proposed project is targeting the student or graduate population defined within the competition guidance. Why is your provider well placed to implement the proposal?

Use **evidence** and **relevant data** to:

- state which priority or priorities your project will meet. For some competitions there will be more than one priority stated – if so, then your project should address at least one of the priorities and might address more than one
- describe the outcomes that you want to achieve and what success would look like. The rest of the proposal should then set out your plan to achieve this
- clearly define the issue in the strategic context of your provider and why this bid is therefore a priority

- clearly define a group of students or graduates with characteristics who are affected by the issue or whom will benefit from the project. Ensure that all the students or graduates identified in the project proposal are within scope of the competition
- clearly explain how you will overcome the barriers and challenges faced by students that may prevent them from benefitting
- show how the impact of current student support and other interventions are being effectively monitored, to determine whether the new activities will achieve a step change.

The proposed project activities

We're looking to fund innovative and ambitious proposals, so this should be reflected both in the scope of the bid and the activities. What are the interventions you will make to achieve a change?

- Provide a concise description of the activities and demonstrate how they will meet the priority or priorities you have set out to address.
- Describe how the project will be managed, and specifically who will be responsible for its successful delivery, e.g. managing risk, reporting, budget, procurement, contracts.
- Describe how the proposal aligns with and delivers your provider's strategic priorities.
- Explain how the students and graduates will be engaged, and how they will support the development, implementation, and evaluation of the project and its activities. The student role should be embedded throughout the project cycle.
- Describe how the activities will be supported by the senior management at the lead provider, and by those at any partners or collaborators. Projects put forward through Funding Competitions must be a strategic priority for the providers and organisations involved.
- The bidding guidance for a specific competition may ask you how the proposal will have an impact across the whole provider. Even where this is not the case, you must still demonstrate how the project will be incorporated into and run alongside the regular functions of the provider.
- Clearly demonstrate exactly how the activities will test new and genuinely innovative approaches or explain how the activities will extend or scale up existing practice. These should be additional to activities already planned and underway. Providers should not seek funding for activities already underway.

Partners and collaborators

While some bids will be a collaboration between two or more higher education providers, it is also common for individual bidders to work with external partners. We will be looking for a demonstration that the arrangements are strategic and appropriate for the proposed activities.

- If the proposal is a collaboration between higher education providers, provide a clear explanation of each provider's role and how the collaboration will work e.g. communication, sharing progress and keeping track of work. What is the benefit of working in this collaboration?
- If it is an individual bid with external partners, the bidder should provide a clear rationale for bringing the partner on board, e.g. what do they have to offer? Explain their role and how you will work together to deliver practical outcomes for students, graduates or both.
- Partners may be requested to provide some form of co-investment to demonstrate their commitment to the project.
- Bids should include a letter of support from each partner and any other key stakeholders, clearly stating what each partner or stakeholder is contributing towards the project. Including, for example: whether cash or investment in kind, and the monetary value of the latter; any conditions on investments; any issues of timing on investments.
- The bid must have explicit support from students, employers (if applicable) and any relevant local agencies, as well as from the provider itself.

Methodology, risks and mitigations

While demonstrating ambition and innovation, the bid should be underpinned by appropriate risk management.

- Bidders must demonstrate a rigorous approach to the design of the project by providing a credible methodology based upon a sensible use of resources and a timescale that is appropriate to the activities being proposed.
- If recruitment of staff is either crucial to the delivery of the project, or is included in any costings provided, this should be listed as a risk. Information on mitigating any delays in staff recruitment should be included.
- Any risks associated with working in and managing a partnership or collaboration should be included, with details on any mitigating actions you will take to reduce these risks.
- Identify any ethical issues and explain how these will be addressed.

Value for money

We are looking to fund projects which provide value for money for students, the OfS and the wider public. As we are using public money to fund these projects, the proposal should clearly demonstrate how value will be achieved.

- Ensure you are only requesting revenue funding; the funding cannot be used for capital expenditure, i.e. for fixed assets.
- All OfS funding must be spent by the deadline set out in the specific competition's bidding guidance. The timeframes for activities and expenditure should be clear and realistic.

- Set out how the money will be spent. The budget should be realistic and costed against all the key activities, with approximate timeframes.
- The level of co-investment provided by the provider and key partners must be set out and costed where there are contributions in kind. We expect the funding contributed by the provider and partners to be proportionate to both the funding requested from the OfS and the scope of the proposed project.
- Describe clearly what the output(s) of the project will be. These should be practical – for example, we are not able to fund research.
- Describe how the activities will be sustained and embedded beyond the project lifetime – what will happen when the funding ends?

Evaluation and dissemination

We will require robust evaluation and dissemination of results and best practice, to realise and promote the benefits of our investments for all students. Bids should demonstrate a rigorous approach to providing evidence of the impact and outcomes of the project.

We will assess the ambition and likelihood that the activities will secure a significant change in current practice and continue to improve outcomes for students over the medium to long term.

Bids should:

- Describe well-developed evaluation and dissemination plans clearly and credibly
- Ensure there is a clear and realistic timeline to accompany your evaluation and dissemination activities
- Demonstrate how you will measure the outcomes beyond the funding period
- Describe how you will share the good practice, learning and resources from your project across the sector.
- Explain how the outputs from your project could be scaled up or applied to different settings or in different providers
- Explain the baseline data you will use to determine whether the intervention has been successful. This baseline evidence should be relevant to the desired outcome of the project.



© The Office for Students copyright 2020

This publication is available under the Open Government Licence 3.0 except where it indicates that the copyright for images or text is owned elsewhere.

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/