

How to tender a catering contract

To inspire confidence and spread knowledge, we have developed Bartlett Mitchell's recipe for success guides for workplace contract catering. You can download other guides from our website www.bartlett-mitchell.co.uk/expert-guides

The tender process for catering follows a similar process to buying many goods and services. It's a detailed process and adequate time needs to be allowed, around three to four months is usual.

Clients may choose to engage with a catering consultant. The Foodservice Consultants Society International (FCSI) is the trade body for catering consultants. The process and stages are broadly similar though they may be in a different order. Clients work with a catering consultant because it can reduce the amount of time they spend on the tender project and the consultant can provide specialist knowledge that the client may not have.

Stages

1. Pre-qualification questionnaire process (PQQ)
2. Invitation to tender (ITT)
3. Contractor's visit to client site
4. Tender document
5. Visits to shortlisted catering contractor's sites
6. Final presentation

1. Pre-qualification process

A pre-qualification questionnaire should set out a series of questions for potential tenderers to answer regarding their level of experience, geographical spread, who they currently cater for and their financial detail (last three audited accounts) and liability insurance. The answers to these questions should enable the client to produce a short-list of suppliers that most closely fit the client's business and catering requirements. Short-listed suppliers are then invited to tender for the contract.

2. Invitation to tender (ITT)

Upon review of the PQQ, the client will typically create a shortlist of caterers to submit a full proposal. Typically, four or five caterers will submit full proposals.

The ITT should include;

- General background to the company
- Overview of the catering services
- The reason for tendering the service
- Evaluation criteria
- Timetable
- Response format required
- Contract type
- Costs to be included and not included
- How TUPE will be handled
- A list of questions / requirements to respond to
- Proposed contract
- Spreadsheets for completion: shopping basket, cost and sales analyses, labour schedule and costs, mobilisation costs, management fee.

3. Contractor's visit to client site

The client invites all bidders to a briefing which outlines their catering objectives and includes a tour of the facilities, both back and front of house.

Contractors are given an opportunity to view the facilities, equipment, services and standards required, test their understanding of the tender document with a Q and A session and get an insight into the client company's ethos and culture.

4. Tender document

Tenders are often submitted in both hard and soft copy formats and some clients and consultants choose to use a procurement portal to assist in the evaluation of tenders. The contractor's response should include:

- Sample menus for each service
- Method statements for staff dining, beverages, vending and hospitality
- Description of support resources, i.e. marketing, training, development, H&S etc.
- Mobilisation plan
- Supply chain information
- People: Organogram, job descriptions, training
- Specific company policies
- Service innovation
- Alternative proposal if appropriate
- What differentiates the contractor

It's best practice if a range of stakeholders are involved in the evaluation process of the final stages (5 and 6). Ideally procurement, executive management, facilities management, hospitality user, HR wellness professional and customer representatives.

5. Site visits to shortlisted contractor's sites

Following evaluation of the tender document, visits to the shortlisted contractor's sites should be arranged. The purpose is to see the bidder's catering in real life. It's important to focus on the menus, food presentation, customer service, merchandising and marketing materials and the managerial style.

The operations manager should be at the site visit; they will be your main point of contact should the contractor be successful. You need to feel that you could forge a good working relationship with them. It is also good to request to meet the site client for a private conversation about the contractor.

6. Presentation

The final presentation is the opportunity for the contractor to bring their tender proposal to life. A presentation brief of client expectations should be provided to all shortlisted contractors with details of the client's attendees. Adequate time should be given for a detailed presentation and an allowance for the contractor to set up prior to their presentation. Leave time between presentations so that the stakeholders have an opportunity to complete a detailed evaluation.

Following the presentation, a letter of intent to the preferred supplier should be issued whilst contractual negotiations take place. A project initiation document should be circulated and the first mobilisation meeting should be scheduled with the project team.

It's best practice and courtesy to debrief all unsuccessful bidders.

5 ways bartlett mitchell powers your business

Great food, eaten in great surroundings, can make a huge difference to your business. It's our job to help you make the most of this, in five ways...

1. Attracting the best people

Today's employees expect more from their workplace, and the food you provide is a crucial part of that – especially as many people now care more about what they eat. We can help you enhance your 'employer brand' by creating a food and drink offer that sets you apart from other companies. You'll have a happier, healthier, more engaged workforce, and find it easier to recruit and retain the most talented people.

2. Improving productivity

Well-fed employees are more productive. In 2013, the Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine argued that employees who eat well are 25% more likely to perform better. And, of course, if there's an appealing restaurant or café in the workplace, they will stay on site. More importantly, taking lunch and coffee breaks with colleagues encourages interaction. People talk more freely, information flows more easily, and your business benefits.

3. Enhancing your reputation with customers

When customers and other guests visit you, you want them to enjoy the experience and be impressed by your workplace. An appealing, well-run café, restaurant or executive dining facility, serving great food, says a lot about your business. We can ensure your food, drink and hospitality reflect your brand style and values, and uphold its reputation.

4. Providing return on investment

Every square foot of your business premises is highly valuable, and the space you dedicate to catering and hospitality has to work hard for you. We ensure these facilities work efficiently and cost-effectively, making best use of your resources. Also, choosing us to manage your food and drink services leaves you and your team free to focus on running all the other vital aspects of your business.

5. Collaboration

You want your business to have a positive impact on the environment and your community – and your customers, staff and shareholders want to know about it. We can boost your reputation as a responsible organisation through our strong track record in sustainability. Our achievements become your achievements. And inspiring stories – like the Thirsty Planet water we sell helping to pay for clean water in Malawi – can be associated with your brand.

About bartlett mitchell

bartlett mitchell is a multi-award-winning contract caterer. Our experienced, energetic and enthusiastic team takes a fresh approach to food and drink – with delicious results for you and your business.

We've grown steadily to a team of over 800 experienced foodies, serving 40,000 customers every day in over 90 locations in the UK.

We're also a responsible company, and can help yours to be one, too. We were the first contract caterer to achieve the Sustainable Restaurant Association Three Star Champion Status, known as the Michelin stars of sustainability.



Fresh ideas every time

Because we're an entrepreneurial business, we don't have a one-size-fits-all template that we attempt to force on each client. Our catering focuses on tailor-made solutions using innovation. We take time to develop bespoke ideas to match the client culture, employees' tastes and the physical environment.

We also recognise the importance of value for money. We work as a tight, agile team to develop solutions that reduce costs and use resources more smartly.

