

Annex 1 - Working with Outside Consultants

A Project may not have sufficient staff resources in the Communications Team to carry out all of the required communication tasks. In this case, outside consultants may be brought in to provide specific services.

Typical areas of activity which may involve outside consultants include:

- > Design of printed and electronic materials (leaflets, brochures, posters, website etc.)
- > Copywriting for printed and electronic materials
- > Logo and identity design
- > Media work (PR, production of press releases, story placement, article writing etc)
- > Event organisation
- > Target audience research
- >

The most important aspects of successful interventions by external communication consultants are:

- > Effective **briefing**; and
- > Effective **management**

Briefing

By ensuring that the outside consultant is fully and accurately briefed, the Project Manager can avoid the difficulties that sometimes arise with outside consultants. Effective briefing ensures that the consultant understands:

- > The background to the communication task
- > The (achievable and measurable) communications objectives
- > The Project's expectations
- > The timeline, implementation schedule and budget
- > The management of the work

With this understanding, it is much less likely that the work will run over time, over budget, or fail to produce what is required.

A sample brief (for the integrated visual identity of the Black Sea Ecosystem Recovery Programme) is [Appendix X] to this Guide. Although it refers to a particular communication task, it can easily be adapted for use in other tasks.

Certain key elements are always very useful to include within a brief. The following elements are included within the attached example of a brief (Appendix X).

Background

Briefly inform the supplier about the Project (web-links are useful to avoid making the Background too long).

Inform the consultant about the communication task and the reasons for carrying it out.

Background materials can be divided for convenience if required (for example, in the sample brief [Appendix X] the Background is divided into a general Background and some more specific background on visual identity).

Existing materials

The consultant should be provided with existing materials – this helps them get a ‘feel’ for the Project and demonstrates the style and approach used to date.

Core values and tone of voice

The core values are those values which are central to the Project – for example commitment to stakeholder involvement, cross-boundary relevance, and environmental improvement.

The consultant needs to understand the core values of the Project to produce appropriate materials.

The tone of voice refers to the style (‘feel’) of the materials, especially written materials. So it is possible to use words and phrases such as ‘dynamic’, ‘professional’, ‘expert’, ‘popular’, ‘community-oriented’, etc.

The brief

The actual nature of the finished product is stated simply here.

Materials: technical requirements

This covers the technical requirements the consultant must meet, for example the electronic formats.

A Project Manager may not feel confident to state all of these, and in such a case, it is acceptable practice to ask the consultant to state and explain the technical requirements as they see them.

Applications

This states the uses to which the work will be put. In the sample brief [Appendix X] a wide range of applications is stated, ranging from letterheads to PowerPoint templates. Clearly applications will vary from brief to brief.

Production

The production aspects of the work may be handled by the Project or by the consultant. In the latter case, this section can simply be used to inform the consultant that production aspects of the work need to be carried out cost-effectively.

Timescale

Stating the timescale clearly at the briefing stage helps to ensure that the work runs to schedule – any over-run would be the responsibility of the consultant.

Project management

Effective management is vital. It begins with the Project Manager's clarification of responsibilities within the team, including the person who will lead on managing the consultant.

Subsequent steps in successful management may include:

- > Team meeting to clarify the nature of the communication work, its contribution to the Project Objectives and what it is expected to deliver
- > Drawing up of the brief
- > Circulation of the brief to a small number (usually 2-4) of potential suppliers
- > Interviewing the potential consultants
- > Selecting and appointing the successful consultants
- > Managing the relationship with the consultants during the course of the work.

Note that the sample brief Annex 4 includes some useful questions under the heading 'Project management'. These help to ensure that the management arrangements (and the allocation of tasks within the consultant team) are clear from the start.