Commission for research into the social work workforce Tender - Social Work England 10436. Clarification Questions and Answers.

Q) How much collaboration are Social Work England planning on there being with the winning bidder? Do you want to, right from the start, sit down with the successful bidder and outline how the research will be put together?

A) We would usually sit down upon award of the contract and discuss the implementation of the contract, the planned timelines, key milestones etc. We would normally work with the successful bidder via weekly check-ins around the project’s progress, and to ensure everything is on track as planned. This method is obviously negotiable and up for discussion. Social Work England are a very collaborative organization.

Q) What access are you able to give us to social workers? I would you give us a complete list of e-mail addresses so we can conduct our own polls or do you want us to go out and find that information?

A) Although Social Work England hold the register for social workers, we are not able to share contact details. One of the reasons that we commissioned the research to be independent, is that we cannot be involved. We have to be independent of that, and we are only allowed to contact social workers if it's for a regulatory reason. So unfortunately we wouldn't be able to provide the successful bidder with a list of contacts/emails, and we wouldn't be able to contact those social workers for you either. What we can do, is advertise the research in a more general way to say that we have commission the research is taking place, and ‘if you would like to be involved please get in touch with the following people’.

(Follow on)

Q) So in terms of advertising the research, Social Work England would e-mail from your side to the social workers and say this is available should you want to sign up for it?

A) We have social media where we could advertise it. We have not done this before, but we could also explore in terms of advertising research on our own website. We also have a newsletter that goes out bi-monthly. So whilst we can't e-mail directly to the social workers, this newsletter goes out in the register which has just short of 100,000 social workers registered in total, and between there are circa 90,000 social workers signed up to the newsletter.

(Follow on)

Q) Would this extend to sharing a survey link with social workers?

A) Yes this would be possible. Researchers can say something along the lines of - ‘if you are interested, here is the relevant link to sign up’. Without directly encouraging them to sign up.

Q) I just wanted to inquire around getting a picture of the workforce in the non-statutory sector, and the kind of detail Social Work England are expecting on that, because outside of the statutory sector the workforce is quite fragmented, with lots of very small regional providers. So basically, what level of detail are you looking for, or is it more of a case of just getting a sense of what is out there?

A) One of the reasons Social Work England are asking for this research, is because the workforce is quite fragmented, and because it is less defined and clear than it is in statutory settings. The motivation for us asking for this research to be undertaken to a certain extent, is that are more aware of what the issues are in statutory settings, and less aware of what they are in non-statutory settings. And that is why we want to know more. The data is telling us that the picture is bad in statutory, but because we don't have the non-statutory picture, we do not know if it is bad in that area there as well, and we can't say through evidence that it is bad in that area as well. We do appreciate that there are limitations involved, but we are interested to hear what you think is achievable, and the more we can learn the better essentially.

Q) Obviously access is a key issue. Would you be able to facilitate access to local authorities, which is a large area of employment?

A) Whilst we do have a relationship with local authorities, it is not an explicit one. It is only through our own engagement etc., so we can put you in contact with the local government DLG, a local government authority for e.g. But other than that, it is our own contacts through stakeholders really.

Q) Regarding the Project timescales - Projects typically need to go through the research ethics and review and that can take a couple of weeks, so that might take time out of the field work you actually do. You have the opportunity to extend by a month, but I am not quite sure how it would work because there is the report that would need to be ready in order for the resources to be released. The interim report also needs to be ready by the middle of June. There are four/five weeks during the field work, and also the need for initial findings. Are there any comments that you wish to make around the project timescales?

A) Social Work England would be interested as part of bidders tender responses, for them to explain what they think is achievable and when it is achievable by. With this research, we are quite keen to deliver it by the end of the summer as it may potentially inform other areas of work, or other pieces of work. And so therefore, it is quite time sensitive. We do appreciate that the timelines are tight.

Q) Will the research be available to the public, or is it an internal document that will get turned into something for public? What is the approach?

A) When Social Work England Commission research, we can't promise publication. We aim to publish our research pieces and usually do, but there are external factors that influence this decision. Essentially we just do not know at this point sorry.

(Follow on)

Q) It is just the style that bidders would use when produce the final output/report that we are interested in.

A) Social Work England would encourage any researcher/or any organisation who is carrying out a piece of research to produce a report that is intended to publish essentially, so to a publishable standard.

Q) I just had a question around what would want to see, in terms of the balance between qualitative and quantitative methods?

A) From experiences with previous pieces of research that Social Work England have commissioned, people do tend to bring a balance between the quantitative and qualitative research methods. As the experts, we would be looking for bidders to say what you think is the right balance. Traditionally, we are used to seeing a survey, focus groups, interviews, etc. But it is about what methods bidders feel would be best to answer the questions that we have asked.

Q) There is reference to analysis by subgroups such as gender, age, ethnicity (section 5.10 of the ITT) – is this relevant just for quantitative aspects of the work rather than the  qualitative?

A) In terms of the subgroups, Social Work England are always keen to increase our knowledge in terms of protected characteristics and other areas of EDI, and to be able to look at be able to look at people who are being differently affected potentially because of protected characteristics. Quantitatively we would like demographic data to be collected to be able to provide that. We also apply it to examples where you are holding focus groups and interviews, etc., so we would also like to see diversity across those groups as much as possible, so that are getting a balanced set of feedback.

Q) We are looking at considering the limitations in terms of reaching out to the social workers, and making sure they actually respond to the survey. Do you have a particular threshold for samples? You have almost 100,000 people on the register. How many would you ideally like bidders to reach out to?

A) One of the questions in the Invitation to Tender asks bidders to explain what your sample sizes would be, and what your rationale is for those sample sizes. We do not have a threshold. We won’t say if you don't hit this percentage- then we won’t consider your bid for e.g. Again, we would look to the bidders as the subject experts, to tell us what the appropriate sample sizes are.

Q) Obviously we know that it is important we liaise with people with lived experience (social workers who work with children/adults). This could be quite challenging to liaise with them given the time scales of the project. Would it be conceivable for us to just to focus on adults, because it would just make it work that little bit easier. If we worked with children, then we would need to get consent from the parents and so on.

A) Social Work England appreciate it would be easier to just focus around an adult perspective, but unfortunately we are a single profession regulator. So to provide useful feedback to inform our future work, it needs to be a whole profession.

Q) Around acknowledging some of the challenges in trying to people with lived experience involved in the actual research - would it suffice to cover that within the literature review, and looking at views from? More recent studies that have considered the impact of staff turnover and retention rates on service users.

A) Social Work England’s inclination, is to say we would want them involved across the research. Generally, when we Commission research would hope involvement from people who have experience across a whole piece of research, and not just in the literature review. But we appreciate that every piece of research is different. Potentially people could be involved, although we do appreciate the difficulty in engaging with groups is probably more on the Focus Group side of things. But again, we would be interested to bidders thoughts in their tender submissions around how you think might be able to engage because there might be creative ideas that we've not thought of ourselves. We appreciate the difficulties and the challenges that that might provide, and we always want it to be meaningful engagement. We do not want you to include certain groups for the sake of including them. This piece of research is to understand why vacancies are as high as they are, and is about thinking about where people with lived experience helpfully fit into that exploration essentially.

Q) There is a requirement to submit a completed research ethics checklist as part of the bid submission – is this a formal checklist or can this be the bidders own internal ethics checklist?

A) Bidders own internal check ethics checklists are essentially fine. We just want to make sure that you are giving adequate consideration, to the potential ethical considerations of the piece of research.

Q) Can confirm that Social Work England is an eligible body for VAT purposes?

A) We can confirm that as an organisation, Social Work England are not VAT registered.

1. At section 5.5 (on page 5) it says ‘Potential Providers are also expected to deliver vignettes, and a final report as part of their research delivery.’ Can you please clarify what you mean by vignettes?  We understand them as a means by which to help explain research but wanted to get your view.  In addition, would you like them within the final report or separate to it?

A) By vignette we mean to include case studies/quotes/accounts of participants all of which should be included within the final report, not separately.

1. Will Social Work England provide access to potential participants, such as existing and former social workers and related stakeholders for this research project?  Or is it expected that the Provider identify all participants?  There may be a corresponding increase in survey returns (as an example) if Social Work England has provided access to potential participants.

A) Social Work England are only able to contact social workers for a regulatory reason, and as such we would not be able to provide access to participants. We would be able to discuss the possibility of promoting the research through our social media channels/newsletter. We go into more detail about this in the Drop In recording which is accessible through the contracts finder page.