



# Guidelines for Drafting Tenders for Conference Interpreting Services

## Introduction

These guidelines are issued by AIIC, the International Association of Conference Interpreters, to assist contracting authorities and event organisers in writing specifications for the purchase of conference interpreting services. Since conference interpreting is a relatively little-known professional activity, such authorities and organisers may require technical advice to draft clear specifications for calls to tender.

These recommendations are based on the requirements laid down by the [Directive 2004/18/EC](#) of the European Parliament and Council of 31 March 2004 on the coordination of procedures for the award of public work contracts, public supply contracts and public services contracts. They may also be useful to other organizations such as national administrations, NGOs and private companies.

For tenders it is advisable to make a clear distinction between supply of “conference interpretation” and “conference interpretation equipment”; both are necessary but the providers are different. The same is true of conference venues, which are also rented from different service providers. It should further be noted that written translation and spoken interpretation are two different professions and such services are not necessarily offered by the same providers.

## Background

AIIC is the only worldwide association of conference interpreters. Since 1953 it has set the professional standards that are recognized and applied by international organizations and professional organisers worldwide. AIIC promotes sound training practices and research in conference interpreting. It champions rigorous professional ethics.

Conference interpretation is a profession in its own right, practised by a small number of competent professionals with specialized post-graduate training. As the profession is not regulated, contracting authorities should check the professional standards of any tenderers, request proof of membership of a recognized professional association (such as AIIC) and evidence of professional experience.

Most conference interpreters are self-employed freelancers. They are recruited by international organizations or by consultant interpreters hiring interpreters on behalf of organizations or corporations, or directly by a client. They are recruited individually, on a daily basis, for each event.

Some conference interpreters specialise in offering consultancy services to customers who require interpretation. They are called **consultant interpreters** and are organised in different legal forms (companies, groupings or sole traders). Unlike other actors on the market, they are both interpreters and consultants and, therefore, knowledgeable in both interpretation and the market.

They put together teams of interpreters in line with AIIC professional standards which cover inter alia:

- Working time per interpreter per day
- Number of interpreters to cover the required language combinations
- Direct interpretation from and into conference languages (as opposed to interpretation from the rendering of another interpreter, known as “relay” interpretation)
- Absolute professional secrecy

For further details see [www.aiic.net](http://www.aiic.net)

# Selection criteria for conference interpreting services

The International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) recommends the following criteria to contracting authorities and event organisers in an effort to ensure the provision of state of the art, professional interpreting services.

<p><b><u>1. INFORMATION REQUIRED FOR SUBMITTING A TENDER</u></b></p> <p>To submit an accurate quotation the tenderer should be given the following information by the contracting authority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The place and number of meetings, with exact dates if possible</li><li>- Subject matter</li><li>- Likely timetable</li><li>- Type of interpretation required (simultaneous, consecutive)</li><li>- Languages that will be spoken at the meeting(s) and languages into which interpretation is required.</li></ul> <p>If the dates and languages of meetings are not yet known, an outline agreement may still be concluded. It should be borne in mind, however, that the availability of local interpreters or those with unusual or rare language combinations cannot be guaranteed if dates are not fixed from the outset.</p>	<p><b>Directive 2004/18/EC</b></p>
<p><b><u>2. PROFESSIONAL SUITABILITY OF A TENDERER</u></b></p> <p>Interpreting is a very demanding mental activity. The service provider must be an expert in interpretation and preferably a working interpreter who knows the recruited interpreters.</p> <p>Membership in a professional interpreters' association should only be construed as evidence of proficiency if such membership is granted on the basis of proven skills. The payment of membership fees alone does not suffice to guarantee a minimum quality standard.</p> <p>Professional associations like AIIC have very strict admission standards for conference interpreters and exacting criteria to list consultant interpreters (see <a href="http://www.aiic.net/hire/">http://www.aiic.net/hire/</a>). Such specific, objective requirements ensure their experience and expertise in selecting and recruiting teams of conference interpreters.</p>	<p><b>Directive 2004/18/EC, Art. 46</b></p>
<p><b><u>3. ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL STANDING</u></b></p> <p>Consultant interpreters may practice alone or in groups. As their legal status and accounting practices may vary based on their incorporation format and country of origin, contracting authorities should be flexible in the forms of proof of financial soundness they require.</p> <p>Because most interpreters work as freelancers and in teams of at least two, the provider of interpreting services must of necessity subcontract by recruiting self-employed freelancers for each language, possibly from other countries. There can therefore be no limit on subcontracting.</p>	<p><b>Art. 47</b></p> <p>(1)</p> <p>(2)</p>

<p><b><u>4. TECHNICAL AND/OR PROFESSIONAL ABILITY</u></b></p> <p>To establish his/her technical and/or professional credentials, the tenderer should give evidence of his or her ability to provide professional service in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prior consultancy services for conference interpreting, indicating the number of interpreters-days recruited in the past three years;</li> <li>- Proof of membership of a professional interpreters' association (AIIC or equivalent) indicating compliance with the rules of the profession. Contracting authorities should ensure that such professional associations have appropriate professional admission criteria and do not accept affiliation on the sole basis of membership fees;</li> <li>- Detailed description of service provided (selection and organisation of human resources);</li> <li>- Description of the tools and infrastructure used to provide the service;</li> <li>- Professional and academic qualifications of the consultant interpreter and the members of the proposed team(s) of interpreters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Formal education (including postgraduate qualification in conference interpreting)</li> <li>✓ Membership of a professional association (AIIC or equivalent)</li> <li>✓ Proof of continuing professional development</li> <li>✓ Accreditation with international institutions as conference interpreter</li> <li>✓ Relevant experience</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Directive 2004/18/EC, Art. 48</b></p>
<p><b><u>5. QUALITY ASSURANCE</u></b></p> <p>In the absence of any international standard for quality of conference interpreting, membership in AIIC (or equivalent) is the best guarantee. AIIC membership is granted only after a stringent admission procedure akin to a certification process. Professional consultant interpreters follow the guidelines and recommendations issued by AIIC and use their extensive knowledge of the market and the profession to provide a quality service.</p> <p>A consultant interpreter is a specialist who uses his/her extensive knowledge of the profession and his/her ability to assess language and interpreting skills and expertise in technical fields to choose the right interpreters for the job and offer a tailor-made solution for the client's needs. These and other factors constitute an effective quality assurance system that should be included in all tender specifications.</p> <p>It is particularly important that the qualifications of the individual interpreter working on the assignments specified in the agreement meet the requirements set forth in the specifications and that they do so throughout the duration of the contract.</p>	<p><b>Art. 49</b></p>
<p><b><u>6. BUDGET</u></b></p> <p>Conference interpreters are usually contracted by the day and their fees include preparation time, as well as statutory taxes and social security contributions. If they are recruited away from home they would normally receive a daily subsistence allowance, travel costs and compensation for the time spent travelling. All interpreters hired for an event are paid for the duration of the event (even when they are on stand-by) as they are not at liberty to accept alternative work for the dates contracted.</p>	

Interpreters each have a specific language combination and as such are not necessarily interchangeable. Some unusual or rare languages may not be available on short notice or at the conference location. Because of the tremendous concentration required, interpreters work in teams of two or more per output language.

Local interpreters are usually given priority in recruitment, provided they have the required languages and level of skill. The service provider, following consultations with the client, may however have to import some interpreters, depending on the languages required, the place of the meeting and the time of year. The client should budget to cover these eventualities.

Given the nature of interpreting services, it is not normal practice to require a financial deposit or guarantee from the service provider.

Tenderers should provide a breakdown of their quote as follows (non exhaustive list):

- Fees per day per interpreter
- Daily subsistence allowance
- Compensation for travel time
- Travel to and from venue (train/plane, class of travel etc.)
- Management and handling fee
- Currency of quotation/tender
- Terms of payment
- Pay review clause (for contracts covering more than one year)
- Cancellation clause.

## **7. CONTRACT AWARD CRITERIA**

For the reasons outlined above, and in the light of the intellectual nature of the work performed, the lowest bid is not necessarily the most economically advantageous. The award criteria set out below will give the client the best value for money:

### a) Technical merit:

- Project proposal
- Relevant experience and references
- Client service and technical assistance

### b) Quality of the teams proposed:

- Interpreters' training, qualifications and experience
- Membership of professional associations and/or accreditation by international organisations
- Quality assurance system

### c) Effectiveness of team composition:

- Direct interpreting (not relay through another interpreted language)
- Native speakers working into each language

### d) Price:

- Management cost
- Cost-effectiveness

**Directive  
2004/18/EC,  
Art. 53**