

Probity Issues for Referee Checks & Reference Site Visits

The conduct of reference/referee checks and/ or reference site visits conducted as part of a tender evaluation process, if not managed with care and attention to probity, can prejudice integrity of a procurement process.

Protocols:

The principles of reference and/ or reference site checks are to:

- Establish the **independence** of the reference;
- Maintain **confidentiality**;
- Ensure **relevance and relativity**; and
- **Obtain information**, not provide it.

Principles:

1. Referee checks and reference site visits require good planning to ensure probity and effective processes. The conduct of these activities is to:
 - collect information relevant to the evaluation of an offer and the requirement;
 - verify a vendor's claims; and
 - verify the integrity of a vendor through the opinions a third party.
2. Confidentiality is a sensitive issue in these processes.
3. The information sought and obtained must be fully relevant to the requirement being evaluated; otherwise the information collected will be potentially invalid.
4. Referee checks would not normally attract a significant value or weighting in an evaluation scoring methodology, but may be used to moderate scores or values determined through other evaluation methods, provided the information is objective.

Guidelines:

To support these protocols:

- The **Principal's representative must be in control** of all aspects.
- Establish that the Referee **will cooperate** with the process.
- Establish that the Referee **is appropriately independent**, i.e. they are not a subsidiary or aligned partner of the subject vendor.
- Establish the nature of the **product environment** with the Referee to ensure its relevance to the requirement and environment. Do not proceed if the Referee is not relevant.
- Have a **structured questionnaire** prepared for the interview.
- **Do not discuss your requirements unless it is necessary** to establish relativity to the referee.
- **Do not discuss specific comparison with your other tenders** under evaluation; but you can pursue Referee's opinions on broad comparison with competitor products.
- **Do not allow the Referee to question** your process or progress.
- **Do not disclose the relative positioning** of any tender in the evaluation process.
- Always **record responses** in writing.
- It is important to question the **positive and negative features** of the product/service.

