Guidelines for the preparation of ToR's requirements

on the basis of the

analysis of requirements from Terms of References for Phare 2006

projects

Importance

The requirements of ToR constitute the most important aspect of service procedures.

They define the outcome of the contract.

Most common mistakes

Qualifications and skills:

Education

"University degree in …. or related sector"

"University degree in…. or equivalent degree"

"University degree in …. or similar"

"University degree in a relevant field"

Always the accepted fields should be listed. There should be no room left for guesses or different interpretations. If a "related" or "similar" degree will be accepted, then it should be clearly stated what will be considered as such.

Don't refer to anything by describing it just as "relevant" or "specific".
Always specify in detail what is expected.

If other than the listed would be accepted, it has to be specified, it should never be stated as "relevant discipline" or "related field".

Ask for a specific University field only when it is of utmost importance for the project and specify the fields that will be accepted.

In many cases the most experienced and valuable experts possess a University degree in fields not related with the project. It is the professional experience that determines their capabilities and assets for the given project.

"University degree, preferable at Masters level"

For best results, the optimal solution is to ask only for University degree (or Master degree) in the requirements.

The "preferable" advantage is scored in the same way as any other requirement as no additional advantage points are foreseen.
The usage of word "preferably" means that this requirement will be treated as advantage. None of the requirements should be stated as advantages. When something is stated as advantage, an expert that fulfills all the requirements is not awarded maximum points when he/she didn't meet the "advantage". From the other side, an expert that does meet the advantage requirement but not all other basic and necessary requirements may obtain the same amount of points.
In this situation, the advantage is faux, as it will be evaluated in the same way as all other requirements. Such "advantage / asset / preferable" requirement will constitute a waste of valuable points, that can be allocated for issues of more relevance to the project in question.

Language proficiency

Knowledge of ….. is an advantage

Knowledge of Croatian language would be an advantage

Proficient in English, oral and written, knowledge of Croatian a plus

Fluency in English. Knowledge of the Croatian language would be considered an asset

Any (in this case double or even triple) difficulty in evaluation should be avoided.
All requirements should assure the transparency of evaluation process.
First knowledge that cannot be objectively assessed and second advantage, being scored as any other requirement shouldn't be stated as such.
Third, asking for Croatian language can be seen as discriminatory for non Croatian speaking participants and should be avoided.

Computer skills

"Computer literacy (MS office applications, e-mail, Internet)"

(note: this was a requirement stated for programming expert !!!)

"Very good computer literacy"

It is not possible to evaluate the degree of computer literacy without asking for certificates and specifying what will be understood as "very good"

Either it will be enough to require computer literacy or it is necessary for the project that the expert possess knowledge that can be proven by for example certificates.

Other

"Proven management and communication skills"

"Proven organizational and leadership skills"

Always make sure that the requirement can be met. Never ask for proofs regarding skills as skills cannot be evaluated nor proved. If they are of high importance for the project, have to be formulated in form of professional experience and stated under applicable chapter.

Although experience can be proved, with skills it is not possible. When preparing the requirements, first think of what is expected and what will be accepted as proof, then elaborate the requirement making sure that the deliverables will meet expectations.

"Good interpersonal and communication skill"

"High quality analytical and document drafting skills"

The measure "good" is applicable for ex. to language (in accordance with template).
"High quality" will never be applicable for a requirement as it cannot be understood in the same way by all parties involved in the process.
As such elements cannot be evaluated, in those situations they have to be considered in favor of the offerer making the requirement useless.

"Excellent software design and development skills with providing complex IT solutions"

"Excellent communication skills, including excellent report-writing in English language"

"Excellent project planning skills and ability to multi task"

Skills cannot be measured from the CV, thus asking for excellent is not understandable and will have no reflection in scores.

"Ability to organise and oversee administrative and logistical support"

"Ability to gather and analyse both technical and business requirements"

Avoid the usage of "ability" and "skills" (with the exception of English language) when formulating requirements.

"Ability to apply architectural and engineering concepts to design a solution that meets operational requirements such as scalability, maintainability, security etc."

"Proven capacity to implement and coordinate an EU funded project, including reporting, documentation, evaluation and monitoring in line with the EC project cycle management standards".

Don't ask for capacities as they cannot be properly evaluated.
Don't formulate complex requirements.
When stating the maximum possible scores, award them accordingly to importance and complexity of requirements.

Capacity cannot be proven, the above requirement should be stated as experience in different chapter.

If the intention was experience, then it has to be placed under a different chapter and all that is expected to be proved for each of the components of the requirement has to be clearly defined. In this case the expert is required to prove experience in implementing, coordinating, reporting, preparing of documentation, evaluating and monitoring of EU funded project, on top of that all this in line with EC project cycle management standards. This includes seven actions that have to be proved. To make it worst, this is only one of the requirements of a chapter. This makes no sense, as only one or a fraction of a point will be awarded to its components.

The requirement is too complex and either should be divided into different requirements or stated alone under a chapter that will be awarded an amount of points that will ensure proper assessment. The possibility of proving it has to be analyzed during preparation of requirements.

It seems to be impossible to met as it is hard to understand how an expert is expected to proof all the listed actions in the required context.

General professional experience

In this chapter, the evaluation is focused on professional experience acquired by experts during their lifetime and reflected in their CVs. Any professional experience that fulfills general criteria stated under this chapter can be subject of evaluation.

"Preferably 15, but at least 10 years of working experience"

"Preferably 10, but a minimum of 5 year experience is required"

Only the most important requirements should be listed for evaluation. Avoid usage of words "advantage", "asset" or "preferably".

"Substantial knowledge on…"

"Knowledge about …."

"Knowledge of …."

"General knowledge of…"

Knowledge cannot be a subject of evaluation, it should be stated in form of experience. Knowledge can be either theoretical or practical. When stated simply like "knowledge" must be accepted either way and in itself it is impossible to assess without tests or exams.
The words "substantial" or "general" cannot be measured nor properly assessed.
should be stated as experience instead of knowledge (which not necessarily means practical knowledge).

"At least 5 years project management of large IT contracts"

"Experience in managing at least two major software development projects"

"Working with similar systems"

It is not specified, what is considered as "major", "large", "relevant" or "similar". Every aspect of the requirements should be clearly stated, leaving no doubts or place for different interpretations. Those requirements are not precise and as such cannot be properly evaluated.
It is hard or even impossible to prove that a software development project , IT contract or system cannot be accepted under such requirements.

It is not stated what will be considered as similar, large or major.

In the case of last two examples the extent of the experience is not defined.
This means that any experience whatsoever must be accepted.

"Experience in designing, developing and implementing IT systems and the associated training and development programmes"

This requirement is composed of many elements that have to be met. Such complex requirements should be avoided. To make it worse, it is one of five requirements under the same chapter. That means that none of them will be of much influence for the project. Such number of elements that have to be fulfilled in one requirement reduces the value of each of them and at the same time makes more difficult its fulfillment. In addition a high number of requirements within a chapter, decreases significantly the value of each of them, reducing at the same time the transparency of the evaluation process.

Avoid complicated requirements. Don't state many elements within one requirement at the same time making sure that a low number of requirements is listed under one chapter.

"Good experience with…"

"Good working knowledge of PCM tools and methodology applied to project Management"

It is impossible to assess. Even hard to understand what is "good experience" and what will be expected from the expert.

In this case the word "good" is used to indicate the required extent of working knowledge (experience). As such measure is not applicable for "working knowledge" it will be not possible to assess. In this regard, any experience meeting all other elements of the requirements should be accepted.

Professional experience cannot be defines as "good" or "bad", instead it can be defined by years, fields, positions, duties, responsibilities, etc….
Requested experience should be clearly defined in measurable terms like for ex. Number of years or projects.

Specific professional experience

In this chapter, the evaluation is focused on the professional experience relevant to the project. In this sense, only that experience should be subject of evaluation.

"Excellent knowledge of ……."

"In depth knowledge of ……… would be an advantage"

"Knowledge about ………"

"Knowledge" shouldn't be subject of evaluation. This word doesn't reflect experience, it can be only theoretical. The depth of knowledge cannot be evaluated. In this sense, always precise and practical requirements should be stated. Instead of knowledge, state experience required in an amount specified in years that is expected from the expert in given field / assignments - this will be measurable and suitable as subject of evaluation.

Instead of using the word "knowledge", the word "experience" should be used. This allows the evaluation of the requirement accordingly to the professional record presented by the given expert in his/her CV.

"Proven experience in project management and coordination of team or experts, preferably in similar technical assistance assignments in the EU member states and/or countries in transition (preferably former and current candidate countries)"

The words "countries in transition" is not only related to Europe and there is no mentioning towards what those countries are transitioning. It is not possible to tell which countries are to be considered as "in transition" (or rather which will not be considered as such). That means, that countries worldwide will be taken into account, (not only those eligible under Phare).
Discrimination for some of EU Member States.
It should be clearly specified what will be understood as similar.
Any advantages should be avoided.

It is important to make sure, that all parts of the requirement as well as the requirement as a whole are suitable for evaluation and formulated in a detailed manner, without possibilities of doubt or misunderstanding.

"Experience in the implementation of projects in transitional countries would be an asset"

The requirement is of a general character and should be stated under general professional experience.

This time, the requirement refers to transitional countries, once again it is impossible to assess which countries cannot be accepted as such.

The extent of the expected experience is not stated, which means that any will be accepted.

No specification as to the kind of projects is provided, that means that all projects should be considered. The word projects is stated in plural without specifying number, which means that a minimum of two is required.

On top of that, it is stated as an asset.

Total waste of valuable points.

This requirement has no sense whatsoever for any Phare project.

 It is wrongly placed and formulated as a whole. Should read for example *five years of professional experience in implementing EU funded project(s) in countries eligible under Phare programme.* Simple but effective. Each element clearly defined. Experience defined as five years, projects as EU funded (accepted in singular and plural, which means that one fulfilling the entire requirement will be enough), countries defined as eligible under Phare programme.

General guidelines

Don't formulate requirements in general terms that are not detailed and can be understood in many ways.
The requirements should be adequate to the position of the expert.

Don't ask for more key experts than three (exceptional cases four).

Only the most important requirements should be listed for evaluation.
Don't state requirements that are meaningless and constitute only a waste of valuable points.

Check proper placement of requirements.
Don't ask for professional experience under qualifications and skills or vice versa.

Avoid usage of words "advantage", "asset" or "preferably".
Avoid usage of general terms like "or equivalent", "related sector" , "equivalent degree" and "similar", etc...
Avoid usage of words that have to be further described/specified (for ex. "complex", "large", "major", etc..).
If a general term like for ex. the word "relevant" is used, define what will be considered as such.

If certificates/diplomas will not be required - don't ask for skills as they cannot be properly evaluated.

If something has to be proven, it has to be stated in a way which will clearly indicate what will be accepted as proof (ex. Diploma or certificate).

Don't ask for capacities or abilities as they cannot be properly evaluated.
Don't ask for "understanding".

Don't formulate complex requirements (composed from many elements or combinations of elements).

When stating the maximum possible scores, award them accordingly to importance and contents of requirements.
Usually the chapter qualifications and skills is less important for successful implementation of projects than other – less points should be awarded as maximum possible. From the other hand, chapter specific professional experience is the most important for the successful outcome of contract and should be award accordingly higher number of maximum possible points.

State only requirements than can be easily and properly assessed

Don't list many requirements under one chapter.

Always specify what is expected (ex in case of assignments duration, scope, subject or position)

Only countries that are eligible under Phare (IPA) programmes can participate in the tender, thus either no countries are specify in the requirements as to experience references (in that situation all professional references from any country will be accepted) or specify that only those in eligible (Phare, IPA) countries will be accepted.

If there are more than a couple of elements to be met within a requirement, it is better to divide it into separate requirements.
There should be no more than three requirements under one chapter.
Only in exceptional circumstances more requirements can be state but on the condition that adequate number of maximum possible points will be designated.
Don't state more than four requirements under one chapter (for ex. the optimal number of requirements for qualifications and skills is three with an equal number in maximum possible points, within them: one regarding studies, one for knowledge of English language and a third one related to the qualifications and skills relevant for the project or asking for a specific certificate, neither of them should be composed of more than one/two elements).

Always state the exact number expected if the element required is not listed in singular.
Use precise formulations or a detailed description instead of generalities like "number" or "other".

Don't list requirements, that can be considered in any way as discriminatory (ex. due to age or nationality).

Assets should not be listed among requirements.

Don't mix together elements that should be listed separately under different chapters.

In order to rationalize requirements, use the words "at least" and "minimum" in cases when the required amount is below 8 years in the case of general professional experience and below 6 years in the case of specific professional experience, taking into account the work/input that is required and character of future assignment.

Formulate simple sentences that leave no space for different understandings/ approaches. Make sure, that the requirements are easily understood and only in the way that is meant as relevant for the evaluation and project.

Every requirement have to be checked for simplicity, wording, definitions, understanding and adequate scoring.

If something is difficult, or there are difficulties with its placement / formulation, always consult before stating the requirement.

Proper location of requirements:

Qualifications and skills:

This requirement concerns solely the education and abilities that the expert has learned during his school/professional life.

Most common requirements within this chapter concern:

- Education
- Language proficiency
- Computer skills

Guidelines:

Education

Ask only for University degree or Master degree.
At the stage of preparing requirements must be decided if Master degree will be requested.
Ask for a specific University field only when it is of utmost importance for the project and will not be considered in any way as discriminatory.
If asked, specify the fields that will be accepted.
Even if it seems obvious, all possibilities that will be accepted should be listed.

Lower number of points should be designated as maximum as it has low (if any) impact on proper implementation of the project.

Language proficiency

Ask for good or excellent knowledge of oral and written English language as this will be reflected in the CVs provided by experts.
This is the only requirement, where the words "good" or "excellent" are applicable as a special table is provided to this end in the template.

Computer skills

Require in general computer literacy (only in exceptional cases ask for certificates – this should be assessed on a case to case basis).
In the majority of cases, the professional experience of the expert in given field determines his computer skills.

If no certificates will be required and no specific knowledge is needed then give a maximum possible of no more than one point as basic computer knowledge is an obvious skill of all international experts, don't waste points on this requirement.

In case that certificates/diplomas will be required - specify all that will be accepted.

List only requirements that are clearly specified and do not introduce any limitations that will affect proper evaluation and are not required for the given project.

Formulate simple requirements. If a complex requirement is needed, then make sure that adequate maximum score will be ensured and no other (or only one another) requirements will be listed under the same chapter to ensure proper scoring and assessment of the chapter.

General professional experience

The requirements listed under this chapter should be of a general character as more specific will be listed in a different chapter.

Guidelines:

Ask for proofs only if needed and when possible.

The requirements should be focused solely on general professional experience.
Define what type of experience is expected and the number (projects, years) that will be accepted as meeting the requirement.

State simple requirements, that can be easily assessed from CV.

Don't state requirements that are not important for the project to save valuable points for next chapter.

Specific professional experience

Make sure, that the subject of evaluation will be ONLY professional experience that is relevant to the given project .

Guidelines:

Use the word "experience" or "practical knowledge" instead of "knowledge".

List only requirements that are of outmost importance for the project.
Avoid, requirements composed of multiple elements.
In case of more complex aspects – divide into separate requirements.

Keep requirements simple and precise.
Each element should be defined.

If it is more than one, always specify the number of elements/components that is expected.

Specify the professional experience that is requested under this chapter.

Don't ask for other issues, that will not be considered as relevant for this chapter.

Don't ask for theoretical knowledge.
Focus on experience (practical knowledge)