

# Construction Sector Transparency Initiative (CoST)

## The Assurance Team – Orientation note

### Introduction

Congratulations on having been appointed to the Assurance Team in your CoST pilot country. The International Secretariat (IS) and your National Multi-stakeholder Group (NMSG) look forward to working with you.

The aim of CoST is to enhance the accountability of Procuring Entities (PEs) and construction companies for the cost and quality of public sector construction projects. As you are aware, this will be achieved by disclosing to the public 'Material Project Information' (MPI) at all stages of the construction project cycle, from the initial identification of the project to the final completion.

CoST is principally about increasing transparency through the release of project information into the public domain. But it is recognised that the disclosure of this information may not be sufficient on its own to achieve greater accountability. This is because some of the information is likely to be complex and not easily intelligible to the general public. For example, there are many reasons for time and cost overruns on construction projects that may be quite legitimate and not necessarily an indication of poor governance of the procurement process.

To ensure that the information that is released is both accurate and available in a form that can easily be understood by stakeholders it may need to be verified and interpreted by you, the 'Assurance Team' appointed for this purpose. Thus the role of the Assurance Team is crucial to the success of the pilot.

Your appointment will have been based on your ability to achieve the objectives and scope of work as set out in the Assurance Team Terms of Reference. It is anticipated that there will be an orientation workshop organised by the NMSG Coordinator with the NMSG and a member of the International Secretariat.

The aim of this note is to assist you in obtaining the information you require to feel fully briefed before embarking on the work.

### Familiarisation

As well as the Assurance Team Terms of Reference and Supplement to the Terms of Reference, it is important that you familiarise yourself with the following guidance notes:

- Project selection
- How is information disclosed?
- Template for collecting project information
- Guidance note for procuring entities

These guidance notes are available from the NMSG Coordinator or the CoST website.

## **MSG policies and procedures**

It is the responsibility for the NMSG to set policies and procedures concerning your role and responsibilities. The following questions may help to clarify your responsibilities and the agreed procedures. It may also help to identify areas where the responsibility and or procedure have yet to be agreed.

### **CoST projects and the procuring entities**

1. Has the NMSG selected the projects?
2. Are the procuring entities and their suppliers aware that they will be asked to disclose information from the selected projects and have they agreed to cooperate?
3. Is there a formal written agreement to disclose the information between the procuring entity and the NMSG?
4. Is there a contractual obligation or written agreement to disclose the project information with the consultant and contractor?
5. Who are the key contacts in the procuring entities and on each project?

### **Information disclosure and data verification**

1. Will we be required to collect the project information? If not, what is the process for collecting and disclosing the project information?
2. If required to collect the project information, are we required to keep it confidential or to disclose it to:
  - a. the NMSG or
  - b. directly to the public?
3. Is there a template for collecting the information?
4. Is there a policy in place for the eventuality of not being able to collect some project information?
5. The Terms of Reference state that differing degrees of verification may be required. Are we expected to
  - a. Ensure the information is accurate and complete and or
  - b. Ensure the information is accurate and complete and undertake further scrutiny of the information concerning cost, time and quality of the project
6. Where is the project information going to be published?
  - a. On the PE and or CoST website or

- b. As part of the Assurance team report on the PE or CoST website

### Assurance Team reports

1. How often and how many reports will I be asked to produce?
2. We are asked to set out any 'causes for concern' where there is insufficient or inadequate information to account for changes in the e cost, quality and time of the project. . Are we able to use alternatives to the standard phrases developed by the International Secretariat?
3. Will the report be subject to review and comment from the NMSG and or the procuring entity?
4. To what extent will the NMSG and or procuring entities be able to change the report?
5. Where will the report be published?

### Contract and project management

To ensure the process of disclosing the project information, the verification of the information and the production of reports, it will be essential to have clear contractual arrangements and project management procedures. The following Q&A will assist you to ensure these are put in place.

1. Who will the contract be with?

The NMSG will decide if the contract is with either the host organisation or the International Secretariat. The contract will be approved by the International Secretariat.

2. What is the payment schedule for this contract?

This will be based on the scope of work and deliverables set out in the Terms of Reference.

3. Who is the project manager?

The NMSG will inform you if this is either the NMSG Coordinator or a Representative of the NMSG.

4. Who should I approach if there is a problem in obtaining the project information?

You should inform the project manager and the lead person at the procuring entity. A decision should be reached on how to take the matter forward. Ultimately, you may have to record that the information was not disclosed.

5. Who should I approach when there is a technical problem?

This will depend on the specific nature of the problem. Please approach the International Secretariat, the NMSG Coordinator or a Representative of the NMSG as appropriate but please ensure that the project manager is copied into all communications.

6. It is unlikely that I will be able to deliver the Scope of Work to time and or budget. What should I do?

You should inform the project manager as soon as you become aware with reasons for the potential time and/or cost overrun. The Project Manager and the NMSG will discuss with you and the IS and agree a way forward. This may include an instruction from the project manager to stop work while the matter is resolved.