

Design contest

A design contest is a way of bring new ideas or concepts onto the market. You formulate a challenge and award a prize to the parties that submit the best solutions. The ideas are assessed by an independent jury. A design contest is a form of tendering that offers wide scope for creativity.

1. When would you use a design contest?

A design contest can be useful for many reasons:

1. The submissions can result in a design that is actually produced. This is often the case in architectural design contests.
2. The submissions can serve as inspiration, even if they are not actually produced. You can put forward wild ideas from a different angle than normal.
3. A design contest is also a good way of generating a relatively large amount of publicity about a theme with modest expense.

2. Step-by-step plan

We set out below a step-by-step plan for the conduct of a design contest. A need analysis can be useful if you wish to formulate clear goals for the design contest. A market analysis gives you an understanding of the directions to choose from for a solution.

Step 1: decide your goal and target group

To formulate an effective design contest you need to have a clear picture of what you hope to achieve. What might a good proposal look like? Establish your goals. Decide also how you want to use the results of the design contest.

You then need to determine the target group. Where do you expect the good ideas to come from? If the subject area is within a certain technical field, trade journals or university departments could provide assistance. If it is a particular business task that is at issue, you could consult business sector organisations.

If creating publicity is an important secondary goal, you should then decide who you would wish to work with in developing your theme.

Step 2: decide the Prize

Naturally, a 'contest' has a winner and a prize! There are various options:

- The implementation of the design in return for payment. Sometimes the payment will be decided in advance, but often it will be negotiated subsequently.
- A cash prize. Even if the design is not implemented, a cash prize is usual. The amount can range from a few hundred euros to several hundred thousand euros.
- Media attention:
 - An article in a magazine
 - Participation in an exhibition or event
 - A press release about the winner
 - An honourable mention
 - A public award ceremony

- Access to certain people, such as a local government officer or group of users.
- The opportunity to demonstrate a concept (in an operational setting), whether or not for payment.

Step 3: decide on the budget for conducting the design contest

The conduct of a design contest costs time and money. Calculate this necessary investment in advance. Expenses to think about include remuneration for the jury, publicity costs and your own input.

Remuneration for the jury

Decide whether you wish to remunerate jury members. The maximum payment for advisory committees is governed by Dutch law. Whilst this law is not directly applicable to the jury of a design contest, it does provide a good guideline for the maximum amount of remuneration. These are also often governed by local regulations, such as in Amsterdam.

Whether remuneration is paid depends often on:

- The amount of work. In the case of a design contest with a large prize and therefore often many submissions, remuneration is more usual. If you pay jury members, you can also often require more from them.
- Jury members. If the assessment of submissions is similar to the day-to-day work of jury members, then it is logical to pay them remuneration. For example, you are more likely to pay remuneration to a jury of experts (e.g. independent contractors) who earn their income from advisory work than to a jury consisting entirely or mostly of retired directors. In general, jury members in government service will not be paid.
- The intangible value of participation by jury members. It can be of interest for jury members to participate, due to the knowledge that they will acquire or due to the kudos of jury membership.

Publicity costs

The communications strategy that you choose (see step 6) depends naturally on matters such as your target group and budget.

Own input

You should not forget, of course, the time that you and your colleagues invest. Consider what expertise you require from within your own organisation.

Step 4: formulate the design contest

Elements that are covered by the text of a design contest:

- A problem that challenges the target group.
- The goal of the design contest.
- Optional: directions in which you seek a solution.
- Optional: context/preconditions.
- Prizes to be awarded.
- A description of the process:
 - Planning & deadline
 - Method of submitting proposal

- Method of assessment
- Assessment criteria
- Announcement of the result
- If a design or concept is to be implemented: the steps in the negotiating process.
- How the rights to the proposal are to be organised.

Compared to a standard tendering process, the assessment criteria need not be as precisely defined in advance. By appointing a jury, 'softer' aspects can be assessed, so that a design contest lends itself the best to innovative concepts that have not yet been completely developed.

There is a digital manual for drafting design contests: Kompas light. It also assists you with a digital aid to the simple drafting of design contest rules.

Step 5: appoint the jury

Designs will be assessed by an independent jury. The jury members must have sufficient time available to assess the submissions, and sufficient expertise in their area of specialism so that tenderers will accept their judgment. Given that specialist 'heavyweights' usually don't have much free time, it can be useful to appoint a heavyweight as jury chairperson and surround him/her with experts who do have the time to thoroughly assess all the submissions.

When appointing a jury, consider what areas of expertise are needed to arrive at a good judgment. In addition, a jury should not be too small in number: three should be the absolute minimum. A larger jury gives greater weight to the result of the design contest.

Jury members are often found via their own organisation network. A jury is mostly appointed by letter. This is also a good opportunity to remind jury members of any duty of confidentiality.

Step 6: communicating news of the design contest

Ensure that you reach your target group. A general communications plan and a distribution list for the procurement of an innovation can assist you.

Clarify any uncertainties that potential participants may have. Where needed, organise a session to provide people with further information. If it is to be a big gathering, consult the white book for events.

If you want to obtain a lot of publicity, you should think about publishing articles in magazines or newspapers, supplying information on internet fora, distribution via social media and online newsletters. There are a wide range of options for free publicity, but it can also be a good idea to make use of paid services. Here are a few tips:

- You can post a press release in various ways. The chance of increased exposure often outweighs the limited cost of paying for the publication of a press release. There is a skill to writing a good press release. Many tips are available online. There are also many agencies that are able to write a press release for you.
- Supply a ready-to-print article to a magazine.

- Consider placing an advertisement in a magazine, such as a trade journal. This is costly, but it is a good way to attract specific target groups. The combination of a magazine article and a paid advertisement ('you get what you pay for') is also possible.
- Arrange for someone within your organisation with many Twitter followers to tweet.
- Publish on Tendered.

Step 7: assess the proposals

Check whether the proposals meet the minimum requirements (submitted in time, etc.). Arrange for the jury to anonymously assess the qualifying proposals in line with the predetermined process. The PCP instrument sets out an assessment structure that could inspire you. It can also be useful to consult procurement advisers from your own organisation about the assessment method. The assessment must, of course, be open, fair and transparent. Ensure that tenderers are given a detailed explanation of the choice made by the jury.

Step 8: communicate the result

This is a perfect opportunity to generate publicity via, for example, a press release or personal award ceremony. It can be beneficial and practical to reveal the result at an existing event. An award ceremony is a little more exciting if the winner is not revealed in advance. However, if the winner itself doesn't know that it has won, there is the risk that it will not turn up for the ceremony.

Step 9: use the results

A design contest can deliver results that show thinking 'outside the box'. In making an evaluation, think about:

- whether there are unexpected and useable solution options
- whether there are suitable tenderers from an unexpected quarter
- how the results influence any subsequent steps, such as a market consultation

Step 10: option: implement one or more designs

If you want to implement a design, then the design contest will be followed by a negotiating process to arrive at a follow-up contract. You could choose, for example, to negotiate only with the winner, but you could also negotiate with all parties that achieved a certain score. However, you should draw up this process in advance (step 3).

Given that in a design contest the intended result (quality of the design) is central, it is obvious that the negotiating process will focus more on the question of how the designer will organise the development and implementation of its design.

Following a design contest there is a 'negotiating process without prior announcement'. Further information about the negotiating process can be found via PIANOo.

A good example of a design contest, where a lot of information is available, is the design contest of the Rijkswaterstaat for steel bridges in the Netherlands.

3. Legal framework

Design contests are described in Article 2.42, 2.43 and 2.157 to 2.163 of the Aanbestedingswet (Dutch procurement law). Two important preconditions differ from those governing standard tendering processes:

- tenders are assessed by an independent jury.
- tenders are submitted anonymously.

4. Further information

[PIANOO/design contest](#)

5. Source

This information was taken from the “Innovation Procurement for Contracting Authorities” document that was prepared by [PIANOO](#) in 2017.