

best practice paper:

soliciting work from professional designers

ico-D. Leading creatively.

ico-D is the world body for professional design. It is a non-profit, non-partisan, member-based network of independent organisations and stakeholders working within the multidisciplinary scope of design and expanded media. Founded in 1963, ico-D actively promotes the value of design practice, thinking, education, research and policy, representing more than 140 organisations in 67 countries and regions globally.

ico-D's members believe in interdisciplinary collaboration and the effectiveness of a collective voice to represent the design industry.

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Defining speculative practices

‘Speculative practices’ for our purposes are defined as: design work (including documented consultation), created by professional designers and organisations, provided for free or at nominal fee, often in competition with peers and often as a means to solicit new business.

In harmony with ico-D’s **Model code of professional conduct for designers**, ico-D recommends that all professional designers avoid engaging in such practices.

We know that this position is in the best interest of both designers and their clients because neither designers nor their clients benefit from this practice.

Speculative Calls for Proposals are exploitive because they demand work without guarantee of compensation. When work is done on a speculative basis, designers are unlikely to conduct the research and analysis needed to produce the best result because they have no guarantee of remuneration. This undermines the tenant that professional designers act as consultants, partners or members of a client’s strategic team.

Why we discourage it

In recent years, many of ico-D's member associations and others have articulated their disagreement with speculative practices and have launched programmes to raise awareness of:

- the detrimental impact on the quality of business outcomes from such practices,
- resulting restraints on developing the status and standing of design as a respected profession, and
- the detrimental impact on the economy.

These organisations include, but are not limited to:

AGDA	Australia	Australian Graphic Design Association
AIGA	United States	the professional association for design
APDF	United States	Association of Professional Design Firms
BNO	Netherlands	Association of Dutch Designers
BDI	United Kingdom	British Design Innovation
CSD	United Kingdom	Chartered Society of Graphic Designers
CDF	United States	Corporate Design Foundation
DA	Austria	Design Austria
DD	Denmark	Danish Designers
DBA	United Kingdom	Design Business Association
DC	United Kingdom	Design Council
DIA	Australia	Design Institute of Australia
DINZ	New Zealand	Designers' Institute of New Zealand
DMI	United States	Design Management Institute
GAG	United States	Graphic Artists Guild
HKDA	Hong Kong	Hong Kong Designers Association
IDI	Ireland	Institute of Designers in Ireland
IXDA	International	Interaction Design Association
No!Spec	International	No!Spec
RGD	Canada	Registered Designers of Ontario
GDC	Canada	Society of Graphic Designers of Canada
SND	United States	Society of News Design
think	South Africa	South African Graphic Design Council

Running Calls for Proposals that avoid speculative practices

The most effective and economical method of resolving a design problem is to engage the services of an appropriately qualified and experienced designer, design team or design company and to collaborate closely throughout the design process. A recommended approach to evaluate competing designers is to request samples of work from previous assignments that are similar in nature to the project for which you require design services. After this review, if initial concept work is necessary to make a final selection, full fees should be paid to each designer asked for submissions.

Special considerations include:

Limited Calls for Proposals

If you want to limit the Call for Proposals to a finite list of designers, the complete list of invitees should be disclosed to all those invited to submit proposals.

Open Calls for Proposals

If you do not want to limit the Call for Proposals to a finite list of designers, the solicitation should nonetheless be limited to professional designers and design students.

Calls for Proposals from students

If you want to limit the Call for Proposals to students of design, you must define the learning outcome of the assignment. It is not appropriate to publish a Call for Proposals for design work that is limited to students simply for budget considerations.

Public Calls for Proposals

A public call (one in which you are also inviting people who are neither professional designers nor design students to respond) must be limited in scope to thematic ideas that might guide a design assignment. However, the selection process still needs to adhere to the same guidelines as given in Limited Call for Proposals.

Requests for Creative Content

If you are certain you require a presentation of creative ideas from those responding to a Call for Proposals, limit the Call to a predetermined list of firms and pay a fee to each competitor. The amount should be equivalent to what a reasonable design fee and expenses would be for a similar project under normal circumstances.

What governs ico-D's position on speculative practices?

ico-D's **Model code of professional conduct for designers**, adopted by our membership in 1983 and amended in 2011, states that:

“A designer shall not undertake any work at the invitation of a client or participate in competition with peers for any work without payment of an appropriate fee. A designer may, however, undertake work without a fee or at a reduced rate for charitable or non-profit organisations at the invitation of a client, when the designer will be publicly recognised as a sponsor of the project for the full value of the fees.”*

“Before accepting an assignment, the designer shall define exactly and comprehensively for the client the basis on which total remuneration is calculated.”

*Note: Public sector institutions, such as government, are not considered as non-profit organisations.

Support for this policy

The ico-D Secretariat works actively with its professional Members to guide the implementation of this policy. It is a voluntary position that has been ratified by the ico-D Executive Board and is supported by ico-D's Membership. While ico-D encourages Members to adopt this position as a national policy, it respects that there are cases where national legislation may govern a Member's ability to adopt this position.

