

Voluntary Sector Studies Network

INVITATION TO TENDER FOR

PROVISION OF A VSSN “EXECUTIVE OFFICER” ROLE

April 2007 – March 2010

Deadline for tenders: 28 Feb 2007

About VSSN

The Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN) is a UK-wide association, and a registered charity, which aims to “promote understanding of the UK voluntary sector through research”.

VSSN brings together academic researchers, research students, and researchers based within voluntary organisations who have an interest in any aspect of the work of the UK voluntary sector. Researchers interested in the sector can come from almost any discipline: current members come from social science, management and organisational studies, social policy, law, history, accounting, information systems, and more.

VSSN seeks to act as an umbrella for such work, arguing for the importance of voluntary sector research, and providing opportunities for networking and research collaboration between voluntary sector researchers.

VSSN current has approximately 80 paid up members (with aims to grow this figure in the future) and nearly 300 people who belong to a wider e-mail discussion list.

Almost all UK universities with specific work on the voluntary sector are involved in VSSN, and many charitable organisations with their own research departments are also actively involved.

Main Activities

The main activities of VSSN at present are:

- Twice-yearly VSSN one-day seminars with a range of research papers – the venue rotates around the UK at the invitation of members
- Joint organisation with NCVO of the annual *Researching the Voluntary Sector Conference* each September
- An active web site at www.vssn.org.uk with details of events, news, contacts and a wide range of information likely to be useful to voluntary sector researchers
- A *VSSN Members Research Directory* currently published every two years
- The VSSN e-mail discussion list

For further details, see the VSSN web site as above, and you may wish to download the most recent Annual Report (available at www.vssn.org.uk/events/agm2006/index.htm).

Organisation

VSSN was founded in 1996 and became formally constituted in 2003 and a registered charity in 2006. The trustees (who are elected by the members at the AGM) are referred to as the *Steering Group* (SG).

Until now, all activities of VSSN have been undertaken on a voluntary basis by the SG members themselves, and a few other willing helpers. However, the SG believes that VSSN has now reached the limits of what can be done on a purely voluntary basis – hence this invitation to tender.

The Executive Officer Role

In order to support the strategic development of the Network, the VSSN trustees (Steering Group) are inviting applications from institutions or individuals to act as VSSN Executive Officer. VSSN has set aside a budget of £3000 per annum for this role (found mainly from subscriptions) for which you would be required to provide a variety of services.

The broad requirements of the role are set out below. *However, the SG recognises that it is unlikely that one person will be able to provide all of this – and we also recognise that it is unlikely that anyone will be able to do all of this within the fee of £3000. **We are therefore open to tenders that include certain functions and exclude others, according to the strengths of the individual or organisation concerned.***

Functions of the Executive Officer

It is not expected that you will cover all of these functions – see notes on emphasis and skills below.

- 1 The tender may be made in the name of an organisation or business or an individual. However, in all cases the successful tenderer will provide a named person to act as Executive Officer of the network. You would be the principle point of contact for people with enquiries about VSSN, and would be primarily responsible for the promotion of the network.
- 2 Core functions would include receiving applications for membership (by post or electronically), attending VSSN seminars and meetings of the Steering Group and supporting the maintenance of the VSSN web site.
3. A primary role is to *support the development/marketing of VSSN* – i.e. this is more than an administrative role on the one hand or a pure web management role on the other. We are open to suggestions in your tender as to *what you feel you can offer* – possible tasks you might undertake include:
 - staff stalls at other professional associations' conferences
 - prepare handouts for conferences
 - prepare and place advertisements in journals
 - prepare a resources guide
 - promote the website and establish web links
 - place messages on appropriate external email lists drawing attention to VSSN events and the benefits of membership
 - follow up communications to conference attendees who are not members
 - direct mail to people undertaking/commissioning/publishing research relevant to the voluntary sector
 - direct mail to consultants, policy makers and practitioners
 - develop regional contacts
 - publicise VSSN web updates to appropriate audiences.
- 4 Another primary role is to develop the contribution of the Internet to VSSN: the SG believes that increasing use of the web is vital to the development of VSSN, and its promotion to a wider audience.

We are approaching a critical milestone in this regard: we currently employ a traditional authoring/publishing model that leaves us dependent on a centralised web maintenance role, but intend to move as soon as practicable to a distributed model employing contemporary content management technology to support collective contributions. At the same time we envisage integrating e-list, web site and membership management functions together with intranet facilities for the SG, specific member groups, etc.

This means that we hope you will play a leading role **either** in maintaining the current web site (to free up the web officer to lead development of the new version) **or** in procuring and establishing the new version. We are prepared to consider providing training in these areas.

More specifically, the *core operational website tasks* currently involved are mainly to:-

- manage domain registration, virtual email and web-hosting infrastructure
- solicit and mount new content on the website
- modify the website structure to accommodate new sections etc
- maintain the current website content, including quality checks
- monitor website use.

The procurement and set-up of the new web site would involve tasks such as the following:

- establish in more detail the requirements of the new system
- identify alternative content management systems in the light of the above
- investigate, evaluate, demonstrate and prototype the new site using the chosen system (probably using an evolutionary approach)
- review and re-design as necessary the 'look and feel' of the website, including navigation
- lead the implementation and testing of the new site
- evaluate accessibility and identify necessary design improvements
- solicit feedback and evaluate user satisfaction.

5. You will provide your own IT facilities for the role, including a reliable PC with printer and internet access. As a minimum you will need Word, Excel and PowerPoint, and a suitable e-mail client. In addition, it would be useful if Microsoft FrontPage 2003 were available to you (though VSSN is prepared to consider funding a licence for this software if needed.) VSSN will provide you with an e-mail address (e.g. info@vssn.org.uk) for incoming messages. You will need to configure your e-mail program to send and receive messages from this address, separately from any other e-mail accounts you use, and your outgoing messages will be routed through your existing Internet Service Provider. (VSSN can provide advice on the details of this if needed, but in general you will need your own IT support arrangements.)
6. You will provide a clear UK postal address and telephone number for VSSN which will be advertised as the central point of contact on all VSSN publications. You will be expected to provide an answering machine or voicemail to receive calls when you are not available, and this should mention VSSN in the message. (However, we are *not* requiring the provision of an exclusive telephone number.)
7. You will also provide reasonable storage facilities for VSSN paper-based documents.

You will deal promptly with incoming post, e-mails and telephone calls.: please indicate in your tender what kind of response you believe you can offer – including allowance for holidays etc. (Bear in that this is not a full time role, and we realise you will have other commitments).
8. You may also wish to propose a key contribution to *VSSN Publications*:
 - Edit and distribute a newsletter
 - Produce and distribute the members' directory.

Your Emphasis and Skills Required

We will be pleased to consider:

- (a) Tenders where the main emphasis of the Executive Officer will be on **web work**, *focused either on maintenance of the existing site OR development of the new one outlined above*, and related web marketing, *OR*
- (b) Tenders where the main emphasis is on **organisational support** to VSSN (including outreach/marketing) that would release SG and other VSSN members' efforts to focus on development *OR*
- (c) Some combination of *both* of these aspects

However, good IT skills/internet competence *and* strong administrative/customer relations skills are vital in all cases:

- if you decide to emphasise the *web work*, you will still be expected to manage a membership database (possibly web-based), handle communications with individual members regarding subscriptions, and ensure incoming monies are passed physically or electronically to the treasurer
- if you decide to emphasise *organisational support*, you will still be expected to contribute to the VSSN web site (e.g. meeting announcements and reports presented in a suitable format) even if you do not handle the final web creation.

Essential skills

- Highly organised
- Good communication skills, written and oral
- *Either* ability to author and publish web content, preferably using Microsoft FrontPage 2003 (our current client/server software environment), *or* experience or confidence in specifying, selecting and using content management systems
- Able to provide all the essential facilities for the role (PC, office, etc) and appropriate IT skills (according to the emphasis chosen).

Desirable skills

- Knowledge of voluntary sector research
- Knowledge of the UK voluntary sector including contacts with relevant agencies
- Experience of working in an academic environment

Custody of Information

All VSSN materials – whether paper-based or electronic – remain the property of VSSN and must be passed immediately to the relevant member of the Steering Group at any time on request, or immediately if this contract is terminated for any reason. All intellectual property in any materials created by you for VSSN under this contract is to be assigned to VSSN. The role will include custody of information about individual VSSN members and others which constitutes personal information under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998: you will manage this information in accordance with the requirements of the Act and the specific directions of the SG.

Fees

VSSN will pay a flat fee of £3000 p.a. for the service, to be paid quarterly in arrears (£750/quarter) upon receipt of invoices (to be submitted to the VSSN Treasurer).

This is intended to cover provision of the Executive Officer's services to VSSN for up to 150 members – in the event of membership numbers exceeding 150, VSSN will pay £5 per year per additional member towards the additional costs and time involved.

Unless otherwise agreed, the fee is intended to *include travel expenses* for attending up to three VSSN meetings per year which may be at various locations in the UK: the remainder of the work may be undertaken from a location of your choice. In the event of VSSN asking you to travel beyond this, travel expenses will be reimbursed at cost. Some of these visits may require an overnight stay: for example the SG often meets at 6pm on the evening before a VSSN seminar the following day – where this arises, VSSN will cover the costs of overnight accommodation and meals.

If you are asked to undertake a postal mailing to members (or external parties) VSSN will reimburse the postal costs involved, and reasonable costs for photocopying and envelopes. However, you are responsible for any stationery costs related to your own role.

Please note that if this tender is won by an individual, you will be *supplying services* to VSSN (a contract of service) and will be responsible for your own tax and national insurance as a self-employed person: you will *not* be an employee of VSSN.

If you will need to charge VAT, the figures above should be taken to be VAT-inclusive: i.e. VSSN will not pay any amount for VAT in addition to the fees stated.

Time Commitment

You will be providing a service to VSSN and will not be required to work specific hours for VSSN (except when attending meetings). However, please indicate in your tender the amount of time (in hours per week or days per month) which you expect to devote to this role. Note: Whilst a good deal of the work could (if desired) be done in evenings or weekends, you will need at least some times when you are contactable during office hours.

Accountability

Your contract will be with the VSSN Steering Group collectively, as trustees of VSSN. However, the SG will appoint one member to be the principal point of contact, with whom you will be expected to liaise with any queries.

Once a year you will be asked to attend a meeting with two members of the SG to review the operation of the role (such a meeting will normally be arranged to coincide with a VSSN seminar).

Contract Term

VSSN's intention is that once the contract is awarded, it will be for a period of three years – however, it will be subject to termination by either party upon three months notice.

The successful tenderer will be required to sign a contract with the VSSN SG, which will be based on the information in this document, modified according to the specific services to be undertaken. If your tender is conditional on the inclusion of specific clauses or conditions, please make this clear.

Information to be provided in the tender

In your tender, please indicate:

- Who would be doing the work – in particular the named person to act as Executive Officer. Please make clear whether this person would be providing all aspects of the role or whether others would be involved.
- What specific personal qualities you could offer to this role: including experience of similar work, knowledge of the voluntary sector, understanding of research processes, experience of promotional work amongst researchers in various settings
- Which parts of the role you would wish to emphasise, where you would like to focus your contribution (refer to the section above on “Functions of the Executive Officer”). Please make clear those functions which you would not wish to undertake. (Note: As indicated, there are certain core aspects to the role, but beyond these we are seeking someone who put energy into doing two or three things well, rather than trying to contribute to everything.)
- What specific facilities (IT, office, etc) you could offer – and details of how the work would be managed in practical terms.
- Approximately how much time you would anticipate devoting to this work and whether you would have anyone who would be able to provide deputise if you were unavailable for an extended period (e.g. holiday/sickness).
- Please include the names and contact details of *two referees* who could comment on your suitability/experience to undertake work of this kind.
- How soon you would be able to start if your tender is accepted (ideally, VSSN would hope the work could begin from 1 April 2007).

Submission of Tenders

Tenders should be submitted (by e-mail if possible) to:

Gareth Morgan
VSSN Treasurer
Sheffield Hallam University
Stoddart Building, City Campus, Sheffield S1 1WB
E-mail: gareth.morgan@shu.ac.uk

to arrive not later than 17.00 on Wednesday 28 February 2007.

If you wish to discuss the role informally before tendering, please feel free to contact:

Prof Peter Halfpenny (VSSN Chair) – University of Manchester
E-mail: chair@vssn.org.uk Tel: 0161 275 2493
Primarily for queries on the overall vision/purpose of the role

Dr Gareth Morgan (VSSN Membership Secretary/Treasurer) – Sheffield Hallam University
E-mail: treasurer@vssn.org.uk Tel: 0114 225 5231
Primarily for queries about the support to members/customer services aspects

Dr Nick Plant (VSSN Web Officer) – University of the West of England, Bristol
E-mail: webofficer@vssn.org.uk Tel: 0117 328 3170
Primarily for queries related to web maintenance/development

The Selection Process

Tenders will be reviewed by the SG. Those shortlisted will be invited to attend an interview at a mutually convenient time and location in the week beginning 12 March. The outcome will be advised to all parties by 19 March 2007.