



Pitching Guidelines

Public Relations Agency Pitching Guidelines

For Marketers, Agencies & Pitch Consultants



Introduction

These guidelines are published by the Creative & Communications Association as a professional standard for agency selection across Ireland's creative and communications industry. They cover three parties: the marketers who initiate and lead selection processes, the agencies who respond to them, and the pitch consultants who manage them.

The case for change

PR agencies in Ireland are absorbing the cost of a pitching model that is under increasing strain. The 2025 Census and the 2024 Sentiment Survey put numbers on what the industry already knows: pitching has become a significant and growing burden on agencies, with real costs for people, businesses, and the industry as a whole.

28

Average pitches per agency in 2024, up from 20 in 2023

€1.1m

Average annual cost of pitching per agency in 2024

€40.8k

Average cost per individual pitch

4 months

Average time to break even on a new business win

10,000

Staff hours spent on pitching per agency in 2024 - equivalent to 5 full-time employees

65%

Of agency revenue represented by staff costs

41%

Of senior managers reporting always being stressed at work

40%

Rise in pitch volumes year-on-year

For PR agencies specifically, the 2025 Census shows an average pitching cost of €17.3k per pitch, the highest year-on-year increase of any agency type. With pitch volumes rising and PR accounting for just 8% of total industry revenue, the return on pitching investment is proportionally lower here than in any other discipline. The financial and human cost is not sustainable, particularly for the smaller independent agencies that make up the majority of the Irish PR sector.

Businesses that commit to responsible supply chain practices need to include how they select PR partners. These guidelines set out what fair, proportionate, and professional PR agency selection looks like.

While much of the focus on pitching has rightly centred on the strain placed on agencies, it is equally important to recognise the demands placed on marketing teams. Running a pitch process requires significant time, coordination, and accountability; from developing the brief and aligning internal stakeholders, to evaluating proposals

and managing sometimes complex decision-making. These processes often take place alongside day-to-day business pressures and competing priorities. A well-structured, transparent approach to agency selection is therefore not only fairer for agencies, but also supports better, more efficient outcomes for marketers, enabling them to make confident decisions and build stronger, more effective partnerships.

The Creative & Communications Association will review and update these guidelines regularly in consultation with members, brands, consultants and the broader industry.

Guidelines For Marketers

01 Establish whether a pitch is necessary – use Profile & Project routes

- PR pitches are not one size. A focused corporate or public affairs brief may require nothing more than a credentials assessment. A large, multi-year integrated communications brief warrants a more rigorous process. Match the selection approach to the scope and value of what you are appointing.
- Profile-only selection is recommended for accounts under €150,000 or for project-based work. Assess agencies against the 5Cs: Credentials, Capabilities, Chemistry, Culture, and Client references.
 - Credentials – agency track record, sector experience, case studies, awards, scale of clients.
 - Capabilities – disciplines and services offered, specialist skills, breadth of resourcing.
 - Chemistry – the fit between proposed team and client, communication style, energy, and day to day collaboration.
 - Culture – agency values and ways of working: internal culture, D&I practices, sustainability approaches.
 - Client – the client servicing model. How the account will be run; team structure, seniority and continuity of staffing, responsiveness, governance and reporting processes and commercial transparency.
- The Project route involves commissioning an agency on a defined, paid piece of work such as a strategic communications review, a campaign, or crisis counsel. It is the most effective and underused option in the Irish PR market.

- If a competitive pitch is necessary, limit final-stage participation to a maximum of three agencies. Courtesy invitations to agencies with no realistic chance of winning waste industry resource and should not happen.

02 Write a clear brief and be transparent about the process

- Provide as much business context as possible. Specify whether the appointment is for a project or a retained relationship, how many agencies are being considered at each stage, the contract term, and indicative annual or project budget including the split between agency fees and third-party costs.
- Ensure key decision makers are part of the process from the start and have authority to appoint without further internal delays. Agencies should not be kept in a process while internal sign-off is resolved.
- Define what each stage requires. Be specific about what a Chemistry or Tissue meeting is expected to produce. Confirm in writing when a final decision will be made.
- Disclose the evaluation criteria and their weighting before agencies begin work.

03 Limit what you ask for and design a proportionate process

- The brief should define the minimum required to make an informed appointment decision, not the maximum you can extract from the process. Asking agencies to develop detailed strategic platforms, campaign plans, or executional ideas without payment is asking for work.
- The scope of strategic or creative output requested must be proportionate to the contract value. An agency pitching for a €30,000 account should not be asked to produce the same level of output as one pitching for a €150,000 retained relationship.
- Chemistry meetings and final presentations should take place in person. Where the brief includes a creative or integrated communications element, tissue meetings should also be in person. Virtual is acceptable only where geography makes in-person genuinely impractical. They are not appropriate for major agency appointments.
- A pitch fee is best practice and the Creative and Communications Association encourages it, particularly where the brief asks for significant strategic thinking. Where that is not possible, reduce what you ask for rather than expanding the scope of unpaid work.

- For larger integrated communications briefs, follow the Creative & Communications Association's creative pitch guidelines, which set out additional considerations for processes involving significant creative output.

04 Commit senior time, eliminate fairly, and debrief properly

- The most senior marketer responsible for the decision must be actively involved from day one, not only at the final presentation. Include procurement from the start to avoid conflicting signals on commercial terms.
- Treat all agencies consistently. Do not share information with some agencies informally and do not retain agencies beyond the point at which they have a realistic chance of appointment.
- Communicate decisions promptly at each stage. Every finalist is entitled to a verbal debrief with specific, substantive feedback within ten working days of the decision.
- Compressed timelines, late changes, and unexplained delays place real pressure on PR agency teams and undermine the quality of what you receive. Manage the process with the same rigour you would apply to any other business decision.

05 Champion fair and transparent commercial terms

- PR Agencies operate on standard 30-day payment terms. Extended terms have a direct impact on cash flow and the agency's ability to pay staff and suppliers.
- The agency sets its price based on the scope of services. Negotiate from there. Do not ask agencies to reduce fees before scope is agreed, and do not use the pitch process to drive fees to an unsustainable level.
- Where risk/reward structures are appropriate, agree these as part of the commercial negotiations, not as a substitute for fair base remuneration.

06 Respect PR agency expertise and protect IP

- Strategic communications counsel developed during a pitch, including positioning frameworks, messaging hierarchies, campaign strategy, and media approach, belongs to the agency unless explicitly transferred on agreed commercial terms.

- Do not brief against, adapt, or use thinking presented in a pitch by an agency that was not appointed, without their consent and fair compensation.
- Require agencies to disclose what AI tools were used in developing their pitch response and in what capacity. Where AI has been used to generate strategic recommendations, content, or media analysis, this must be declared.

Guidelines For Agencies

01 Know your right to decline

- Participating in a pitch is a commercial decision, not an obligation. Assess each opportunity against the contract value, the likelihood of appointment, the resource required, and whether the process meets the standards set out in these guidelines.
- Ask for a pitch fee before committing to a process that requires significant strategic output. Even where no fee is offered, making the request signals the value of what is being asked for and moves the market in the right direction over time.
- If a process asks for disproportionate output relative to contract value, push back or suggest the Profile or Project route. Declining a poorly structured process raises the standard for the market.

02 Protect your creative team's wellbeing & the sustainability of your business

- Your team's wellbeing during a pitch is your responsibility. Do not pressure them to over-deliver. Strategic pitches are won on quality of thinking, not volume of output.
- Price your services to reflect the team and expertise required. Build in annual inflationary increases from the outset and account for the onboarding investment the first three months of a new relationship demands. Do not race to the bottom on fees.
- Monitor workload actively. If the demands are creating unsustainable pressure, escalate internally and, if necessary, raise it with the client or withdraw.

03 Assert your IP and be transparent about AI from the outset

- State IP ownership explicitly in any documents or presentations provided as part of a pitch. Strategic thinking, positioning frameworks, campaign ideas, and communications plans remain your property unless transferred on agreed terms. Do not assume this is understood.
- Disclose clearly what AI tools were used in developing your pitch response, whether for research, content generation, media analysis, or monitoring, and in what capacity. If you believe work developed in a pitch has been used without authorisation following an unsuccessful process, raise it formally.

04 Present your real team & respect the process

- Present the team that will work on the account. Do not showcase talent that will not be actively involved in day-to-day delivery. If you plan to recruit upon appointment or outsource elements of the brief, say so.
- If you commit, deliver. Respond to the brief as set, demonstrate your strategic thinking clearly, and represent your agency honestly. You will not always have full visibility of the business context. Where you have genuine concerns, raise them.
- Where a process does not specify in-person attendance for chemistry meetings and final presentations, request it. PR relationships depend on personal trust and that trust is established in person.

05 Understand the public sector pitch environment

- These guidelines are primarily designed for private sector pitches, but the principles apply equally to government and semi-state body processes. Where public sector rules apply, agencies must also comply with public procurement rules and Office of Government Procurement guidelines.
- Public sector procurement operates under defined EU and national thresholds and formal procedural requirements that differ significantly from private sector processes. Understand these before committing to a public sector pitch.
- Public sector procurement timelines are typically longer and more complex than private sector processes. Plan resource accordingly from the start.

06 Give and receive feedback constructively

- You are entitled to a meaningful debrief on your work, win or lose. If specific feedback on the work itself is not offered, request it. Generic process feedback is not sufficient when you have invested significant resource in a pitch.
- Receive feedback professionally. Honest criticism is more useful than reassurance. Debrief internally after every pitch and share what you learned with your team.
- Give feedback on the process through the right channels. Raising concerns about process conduct with the Creative and Communications Association is appropriate.

Guidelines For Pitch Consultants

01 Disclose your commercial model — fully and upfront

- Before accepting any engagement, disclose to the marketer exactly how you are remunerated, whether client-funded, agency-funded, win fees, or a hybrid model.
- Any financial relationship between you and a participating agency must be declared to the marketer before the process begins and communicated to the agencies involved.

02 Act in the marketer's interest and recommend the right process

- Your primary obligation is to the marketer. Every recommendation must be grounded in the client's needs, not your commercial relationships.
- Do not favour agencies with whom you have financial arrangements or disadvantage those with whom you have none.
- Actively recommend the Profile or Project route where a competitive pitch is not necessary.

03 Design a fair process and limit what agencies are asked to produce

- All agencies must be briefed simultaneously, in the same format, with equal access to information. Any question raised by one agency must be shared with all. The brief must include the evaluation criteria and their weighting.
- The scope of strategic output requested must be proportionate to the contract value. Do not design a process that extracts communications strategy, campaign thinking, or positioning work beyond what is genuinely needed to assess agency capability.
- Set a realistic timeline and hold to it. Confirm the decision date at the outset and communicate it to all agencies. Late changes and unexplained extensions place disproportionate pressure on PR agencies, which are predominantly small teams.
- Require in-person attendance for chemistry meetings and final presentations. For briefs with a significant creative or integrated element, this applies to tissue meetings too. State the in-person expectation in the brief from the outset. Accommodate remote only where location makes attendance genuinely impossible.

04 Treat agencies with professional respect

- Agencies investing in a pitch are entitled to be treated as professional partners. Communicate clearly, respond promptly, and keep them informed of their status.
- Eliminate fairly and early. If an agency no longer has a realistic path to appointment, tell them directly.
- Every finalist is entitled to a specific verbal debrief within ten working days of the decision. As process manager, this is your responsibility to ensure.

05 Uphold IP and pitch fee standards

- Strategic communications thinking developed by agencies during a pitch belongs to them unless transferred on agreed terms. Do not allow ambiguity on this point to persist in any process you manage and ensure the client understands this before the process begins.
- Advise your client to consider offering a pitch fee where the scope of strategic output is significant, it is best practice.

- Ensure the brief does not ask agencies to produce strategic work the client intends to use regardless of the outcome. The pitch should evaluate thinking and capability, not extract free consultancy.

06 Be accountable to industry standards

- As a consultant managing PR pitch processes in the Irish market, you are a steward of the standards these guidelines represent.
- The Creative & Communications Association's pitch consultant accreditation framework sets out the competency and conduct standards expected of consultants working with member organisations.

07 Champion fair and transparent commercial terms

- Be clear with the commercial ask e.g. hourly rate, level of hours/ scope of work that needs to be priced.
- Ensure all commercial requests can be reviewed on a like for like basis e.g. annual production estimates are not realistic and may vary wildly.
- Be clear if a high level of seniority is required on a team, as this will need to be priced accordingly.

Summary

These guidelines are intended to set a clear and consistent standard for how agency selection should be approached across the industry. They are not about restricting choice, but about improving how decisions are made, ensuring that every process is fair, proportionate, and aligned to the value of what is being commissioned. When marketers, agencies and consultants each play their part with transparency, respect, and professionalism, the result is stronger partnerships and a more sustainable industry for all. The responsibility is shared, and the opportunity is collective: to raise the standard of pitching in a way that benefits not just individual organisations, but the long-term health and reputation of the communications sector as a whole.

The Creative & Communications Association is the business representative organisation for Ireland's creative and communications industry, providing professional member services to more than 70 companies.

Supported by a full-time executive team and governed by a board of ten directors, CCA brings businesses from across the industry together, represents their shared interests and helps create the conditions in which they can thrive.

CCA builds evidence, brings the industry's priorities to government, regulators and other decision-makers, provides practical business and regulatory support, develops people and creates opportunities for the industry to connect, learn and share expertise.

CCA is a member of the European Association of Communications Agencies, the licence holder and official representative for the Effie Awards in Ireland, and the Irish representative for Cannes Young Lions. It also has representation on the Advertising Standards Authority, the Government's Creative Industries Forum and JNLR.

CCA is the proud collective voice of Ireland's creative and communications industry.

What we share, we strengthen.