



Guidelines for Landscape Design Competitions



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1 Introduction

1.1 *Good design*

The New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects (NZILA) supports the development of good design, and sees design competitions as a useful method of encouraging a broad range of solutions for suitable projects. Such competitions are most appropriate if:

- (a) a sponsor wishes to examine particularly innovative solutions or a wide range of design options;
- (b) if a project is of public significance, or would benefit from the increased public interest that can be generated by a competition.

The following guidelines have been developed to assist potential sponsors of a landscape architectural competition to develop suitable policies and procedures to run such a competition successfully, and meet their design objectives.

2 Types of competition

2.1 *Types of competition*

A competition allows a range of individuals or groups to prepare and submit design proposals to meet the sponsor's brief, according to a specific set of rules or requirements, in a specified order, format or size, with written documentation where required. There are three main types of competition:

- (a) for a specific project
- (b) to explore a range of theoretical design ideals
- (c) for a special purpose such as highlighting a particular issue.

All of these may be run in open or limited format.

2.2 *Competition format*

An **open competition** may be more appropriate when the project requires the widest exploration of potential solutions, or when all entrants have an equal chance of selection by design merit.

A **limited competition** which restricts entry may be more appropriate where designers should reside within a specific area, or otherwise demonstrate an awareness of and sensitivity to particular regional styles or concerns; where a small number of individuals or groups whose work is of interest to the sponsor are invited to submit proposals; or where for example, entry should be limited to students currently enrolled in a recognised landscape architectural qualification.

Either form may be offered as a one or two stage competition.



2.3 **Competition stages**

A one-stage competition usually selects a winner, and ranks other entrants from the first round of submissions. A two stage competition generally shortlists the most appropriate, innovative, or realistic entries at a broader conceptual stage, and then invites those shortlisted entrants to develop their ideas further.

A two stage competition:

- (a) attracts more entries by reducing the amount of work required in the first-stage submission;
- (b) is an excellent process for selecting promising concepts that can be further developed in the second stage;
- (c) provides the opportunity for comments by the sponsor and jury to be incorporated in a second stage development.

3 **The sponsor**

3.1 **Benefits to the sponsor of running a competition**

In addition to identifying a design proposal that best meets the client's requirements, design competitions offer several other opportunities:

- (a) for design innovation and excellence
- (b) to test and further develop the brief
- (c) to fully realise the potential of the project through a wider choice of possible solutions
- (d) to promote the project through publicity and exhibition
- (e) increased confidence that the most appropriate landscape architect has been selected for the project.

3.2 **Costs to the sponsor of running a competition**

A competition enables the sponsor to investigate the relative merits of different design proposals without the cost of an equivalent number of commissioned designs. Holding a competition will usually cost more than commissioning a particular landscape architect directly, but typically will achieve a better outcome. Actual costs depend upon the size and complexity of the project.

It is customary for competitors to receive remuneration for competition submissions. This may include prize money for successful entrants, or an agreed fee for each competitor, depending upon the type of competition and the extent of submissions required. In addition to prize money or other remuneration, primary costs are likely to include the work of a professional adviser, the jury, and possibly technical advisers in more complex projects.



Allowance should also be made for administrative and promotional costs where appropriate.

3.3 *Responsibility of sponsor*

The sponsor has an obligation to run the competition according to the conditions and procedures published, including any prizes or honoraria. Any contract for landscape architectural services must be awarded according to the rules.

4 Competition information

4.1 *Invitation*

Invitations to enter a competition should contain the sponsor's name, and the following basic information, allowing potential entrants to decide whether or not they wish to prepare a submission.

4.2 *The design brief*

Each competitor's design must address the requirements of the design brief, which will state the project's major goals or themes in general terms. This brief could comprise:

- (a) a relevant history of the project and the sponsoring organisation, its interests and intentions;
- (b) a clear presentation of the competition objectives and constraints, to inspire the imagination of potential competitors;
- (c) information about spatial relationships, and technical details including any cost limitations;
- (d) the criteria the sponsor expects the jury to follow in evaluating the competitors' entries.

For complex design briefs, or where a large amount of interest is expected, the appointment of a professional adviser to co-ordinate all facets of the competition is highly recommended. The NZILA has a register of suitable advisers available upon request.

4.3 *Type of competition and stages*

The rules should state whether there are to be one or two stages, and if participation is:

- (a) private (invited entrants only);
- (b) open;
- (c) limited (by residence, place of registration or other qualification);
- (d) commissioned.

In a commissioned competition, the competitors are each paid an agreed fee with the amount stated in the conditions.



4.4 Awards

The nature and amount of the prizes to be awarded to the competition winner and place-getters should be outlined, including:

- (a) the specific amount of money for each place;
- (b) the method of awarding a commission to develop the winning design, or for the winner to recover the costs of entry;
- (c) any money that may be deductible wholly or in part from a commission;
- (d) details of a scholarship for study or travel in the case of a student competition;
- (e) a specific acknowledgement of the intention to proceed with the project.

4.5 Calendar

A calendar of events should be included that typically establishes the following dates:

- (a) the final date for registering as a competitor;
- (b) the final date for submission of questions to the sponsor (preferably no later than one third of the way through the design phase), and date by which further information raised by questions will be distributed to all competitors;
- (c) the date for any proposed site visit(s);
- (d) the date by which design submissions must be postmarked or date and time by which submissions must be received to be included in the competition, and the location for submitting entries;
- (e) the dates of the jury's deliberation (both first and second stage in two stage competitions).

4.6 The jury

The names and expertise of jury members, and their criteria for assessment should be available as soon as the competition is announced. See section 6 for further details regarding the jury.

4.7 Restrictions

Any restrictions pertaining to eligibility must be stated. The rules should state that no associates, employees or direct family of the sponsor, jurors or any professional adviser are eligible to compete.

4.8 Address for service and registration

An address for service, from which competition conditions and registration forms may be obtained should be provided. If registration is not required, and no further information



forms part of the conditions, the address to which entries can be sent can be included here.

A registration fee may be charged for entering a design competition and should be clearly stated in the conditions. The fee should be returned to all competitors who complete the competition. The object of such a fee is to restrict entry to serious competitors only.

5 Conditions of entry

5.1 *Competition conditions*

Once competitors have registered for the competition, further information regarding the conditions should be provided, as follows. If registration is not required, this information could be included with the invitation.

5.2 *Submission requirements*

In general the submission requirements should:

- (a) be clear and concise;
- (b) keep the number of drawings to a reasonable minimum;
- (c) stress design information in preference to graphic presentation;
- (d) allow competitors the freedom and opportunity to express their ideas in a manner compatible to all.

Instructions regarding the number, mounting, size and relationship of drawings, panels or other submission items must be precisely described. The instructions should stipulate whether or not models, perspectives or additional drawings will be accepted.

5.3 *Authorship, and approval to enter*

A declaration of authorship should be obtained from each competitor, with specific acknowledgement made of the involvement or contribution of others. Any other parties involved should also indicate their willingness for the competition entry to be submitted.

5.4 *Copyright*

Competitors retain the copyright to their entries even if no notice of copyright has been affixed. The sponsor may exercise the right to make certain uses of the work submitted and this should be stated in the competition conditions. In the case of government or other such bodies there may be a need to assign copyright. Sponsors should request permission to photograph or otherwise record all submissions for archival and publicity purposes. The rules should state that relevant information will be included in the archive and may be released to the media.

5.5 *Anonymity*

Anonymity is to be protected in all competitions. Competitors should be instructed to submit their designs in an appropriate and convenient manner. Identification is achieved by fixing a sealed envelope to the rear of a specified drawing, which contains the



competitor's name, address and telephone number. No other form of identification is permitted on competition entries.

5.6 *Disqualification*

Registered competitors may not communicate regarding the competition with either the sponsor or jurors or any other consultant involved in the competition under penalty of being disqualified. The rules should describe exactly the disposal of a competition entry that fails to meet the requirements set forth in the design brief and the design exhibit instructions.

5.7 *Use of features from unsuccessful submissions*

The rules should state that no feature from an unsuccessful submission will be incorporated into the execution of the winning design without the permission of the author of the specific design feature referred to. A statement of agreement to respect all the rules of the competition should be attached to the registration form. The conditions should require the competitor to sign and return such a statement as part of the official registration.

5.8 *Appointment of landscape architect*

For a project competition the procedural rules should stipulate that the winning landscape architect will be employed by the sponsor, or receive additional compensation should the project not proceed. The conditions should describe the proposed contractual relationship.

6 The competition jury

6.1 *Jury composition*

The use of a qualified jury ensures expert judgement is used when applying the competition selection process. Design competition juries should be small enough for members to exchange views readily; a minimum of three and a maximum of five jurors facilitates discussion and decision-making. Competition juries may include the following:

- (a) practising landscape architects;
- (b) landscape architectural scholars;
- (c) consultants from fields related to the specific requirements of the competition;
- (d) representatives of the sponsor or eventual users.

Where the skills of such design disciplines as town planning, building architecture, structural engineering or ecology, for example, are essential, persons from these disciplines should also be on the jury. Consultants who are not members of the design professions may also serve where appropriate. The goal of jury selection is to assemble a small group of highly qualified people capable of exercising sound judgement. It is a jury's obligation to abide by the competition conditions in judging all submitted work.

6.2 *Authority of the jury*

The conditions should state that the sponsor will be bound by the decision of the jury.



6.3 *The jury's report*

The main function of this report is to provide written evidence to competitors, sponsor and public alike that the evaluation and selection proceedings were executed with fairness and care, thus conferring legitimacy on the prize-winning designs. A jury report should be accurate, comprehensive and succinct, and should list the award winning designs and honourable mentions with appropriate statements of the reasons for the jury's decision in each case.

7 NZILA support

7.1 *Endorsement of competitions*

The New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects supports professionally run competitions organised according to its published guidelines. However, the NZILA declines to specifically endorse any particular competition.