



03 February 2026

Karen Teaha  
Acting Chief Executive Officer  
LGA South Australia  
148 Frome Street  
Adelaide SA 5000

Sent via email: [lgasa@lga.sa.gov.au](mailto:lgasa@lga.sa.gov.au)

## Re: Requests for Project-Specific Design Sketches in Local Government Tender Submissions

Dear Ms Teaha,

The Australian Institute of Architects (AIA) SA Chapter writes to raise an ongoing procurement concern affecting architectural practices across South Australia.

Over recent months, we have observed a number of local government tender processes requesting project-specific concept sketches or preliminary design responses as part of RFT submissions. While often framed as “high-level” or “indicative” concepts, these requests constitute unpaid, project-specific design work and, in effect, amount to a de facto design competition conducted without appropriate remuneration, probity safeguards, or competition protocols.

The Institute strongly opposes this practice for the following reasons:

### 1. Unpaid Professional Services

Concept sketches—even at a preliminary level—require professional skill, intellectual effort, and the assumption of professional responsibility. Requesting such work prior to appointment requires architects to provide services without remuneration, contrary to accepted procurement principles.

### 2. Departure from Best-Practice Procurement

Best-practice selection processes assess capability, experience, methodology, and team fit at tender stage. Project-specific design services should be commissioned only after formal appointment under an agreed contract. This approach aligns with recognised procurement frameworks and ensures genuine value for money.

### 3. Intellectual Property and Probity Risks

Although some councils clarify that intellectual property remains with unsuccessful tenderers, the practical risks remain significant. Concept material can influence subsequent project development, intentionally or otherwise. This creates ambiguity, potential dispute, and undermines confidence in the integrity of the process.

### 4. Barriers to Small and Emerging Practices

Requiring speculative design work disproportionately disadvantages small and medium-sized practices that may lack the resources to absorb the cost of unpaid submissions. This reduces market diversity and runs counter to the objective of supporting local industry participation.



## **5. Professional Liability Exposure**

Even preliminary sketches can create expectations regarding feasibility, compliance, cost, and performance. Requiring such material prior to formal engagement blurs accountability and may expose both councils and practitioners to unintended risk.

The AIA's EOI and RFT Guidelines clearly advise against requesting project-specific design solutions prior to appointment. Where design insight is genuinely required to test approach, alternative mechanisms are available, including:

- Structured interviews and design methodology discussions;
- Presentation of relevant past project case studies;
- Paid design competitions conducted under appropriate guidelines; or
- Early contractor/consultant engagement models where limited concept development is commissioned and remunerated.

## **Call to Action**

We respectfully request that the Local Government Association of South Australia:

1. Formally acknowledge the Institute's position opposing the inclusion of unpaid, project-specific design sketches in tender submissions;
2. Circulate guidance to SA Council Procurement Departments reinforcing best-practice procurement principles for architectural services;
3. Encourage councils to align procurement documentation with established professional standards; and
4. Engage with the AIA to develop clear, sector-wide guidance that supports fairness, transparency, and value for money outcomes.

The Institute remains committed to working constructively with the local government sector to improve procurement outcomes and to ensure public projects achieve high-quality, durable, and community-focused design.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the LGA to discuss this matter further and to collaboratively develop guidance that benefits councils and the profession alike.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Craig Glasson'.

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**Craig Glasson**

*Executive Leader SA (interim)*  
Australian Institute of Architects

**Enclosed:** *Australian Institute of Architects – Guidelines: Expressions of Interest and Requests for Tender for Architectural Services*