PIVRA

How to Choose a Consultant or Research Partner in Pakistan: A Checklist for Foreign Clients

A foreign client checklist for choosing a consultant in Pakistan: registration, compliance, sourcing, team, fees, confidentiality, conflicts and data security.

Pakistan Market Guide

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Choosing a partner in Pakistan is often the first real decision a foreign company or organisation makes about the country. A good partner saves months and avoids compliance risk. A poor one produces unsourced reports, unclear fees and, at worst, exposure under anti-bribery law. The market has genuine research firms, sole practitioners, law firms, accounting firms and intermediaries who promise access; the challenge is telling them apart before money changes hands.

This checklist sets out what to ask before signing. It covers the legal entity, compliance, sourcing, team, fees, confidentiality, conflicts, data security, deliverables and contract terms. It is written for a foreign client buying research, advisory or market-entry support, not for a domestic procurement team buying routine services.

1. Define the work before you shop

Three different products are often confused:

Work	What it produces	Who should do it
Desk research	A sourced brief on market structure, regulation, competitors or policy	Research firm or independent analyst
Fieldwork	Survey, interviews, store checks or observation	Research firm with a field team
Legal or tax advice	An opinion, filing or representation	Licensed lawyer or chartered accountant
Government liaison	Meetings, introductions and follow-up	A firm with a legitimate, documented process

A research firm should not give a legal opinion or file a tax return, and a lawyer should not sell a market study as a legal opinion. A good partner tells you which service you need and works alongside your other advisers.

2. Is the firm legally registered?

Ask for the firm's SECP registration and check it on SECP's online services. A registered company can sign a contract and issue invoices in its own name, which your finance and compliance teams will usually require. Ask for the National Tax Number and sales tax registration where relevant. Be cautious about an individual offering firm-level services without a registered entity, and about a firm whose registered object does not cover the work.

Check the name against the contract, the invoice and the bank account. A mismatch is a compliance red flag, not an administrative detail.

3. Will it pass your compliance review?

Under the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and the UK Bribery Act 2010, a company can be liable for bribes paid by intermediaries acting on its behalf. Any partner that will deal with government bodies should commit in writing to:

- no payments, gifts or benefits to officials;
- no claims of influence over decisions and no promises of faster approvals;
- contact with public bodies only through official channels, with you informed;
- written records of meetings, attendees and follow-up;

- no subcontracting to a third party without your consent.

Ask for the firm's anti-bribery policy, its gift and hospitality register and its training record. A partner who promises to "get things done quickly" through personal connections is a risk, not an advantage. Screen the firm and its beneficial owners against sanctions and debarment lists as part of onboarding.

4. Is every finding sourced?

Ask to see a sample. A usable report on Pakistan references every material figure to a source you can check, such as the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the State Bank of Pakistan, SECP, FBR, a sector regulator or a company filing, and states plainly where data are missing, old or contested. Much official material is published only on Pakistani portals or in Urdu, so ask whether the team works with Urdu sources.

Look for the difference between a fact, an estimate and an opinion. A report that presents all three in the same voice is hard to use. A good provider will show the base year, the definition and the method for a market-size figure, and will not present a single number without a range.

5. Who will actually do the work?

Meet the team, not only the business development lead. Ask who will conduct the research, who will write the report and who will review it. Ask for the CVs and relevant experience. If a senior person is named in the proposal but a junior team will deliver, the quality may not match the pitch.

For sector work, ask for a recent example in the same sector and for two references of similar scope. A firm that has worked on the regulatory file, the market model and the client presentation is better than one that has only written a country overview.

6. Are the fees clear before work starts?

Ask for a fixed fee in writing, a defined scope, a delivery date and the number of revision rounds. Published starting fees are a good sign: they let you compare providers before the first call. Be wary of open-ended hourly billing for desk work with no estimate, and of a low headline fee that excludes travel, translation, data purchases or fieldwork.

The proposal should state what is included and excluded, who owns the data purchased for the project, and what happens if the scope changes. A change-control clause protects both sides.

7. Will your information stay confidential?

Check whether the firm will sign a non-disclosure agreement before detailed scoping, who will see your information, where it will be stored and whether commissioned work could be published. Research institutes that also publish should separate commissioned work from their public output and say so in the contract.

Ask about data retention and deletion. A firm that keeps client files indefinitely, or shares them across projects without controls, creates a risk that is hard to remedy after the fact.

8. Is there a conflict of interest?

Ask whether the firm is working for a competitor, a target, a government body or a party to the transaction. A conflict check should cover the firm, its partners and its subcontractors. If a conflict exists, the firm should disclose it and propose a protocol, such as a separate team and an information barrier. If it cannot, decline the engagement.

For transaction work, ask whether the firm will accept a success fee or any payment contingent on the deal. Contingent fees can compromise independence and may be restricted by your own compliance rules.

9. Data security and data protection

Ask how the firm stores and transmits documents, who has access, whether devices are encrypted and what happens if a laptop or phone is lost. Pakistan's data protection law is still developing; the contract should allocate responsibility for personal data, set breach notification and require the firm to follow your security standards.

For sensitive transactions, use a virtual data room, restrict downloads and require the firm to return or destroy the data at the end. Do not send passports, bank statements or title deeds by ordinary email.

10. What will the deliverable look like?

Agree the format before work starts: a short brief, a full report with a data annex, a slide deck, a call or a workshop. Agree the executive summary length, the citation style, the number of charts and whether the underlying data will be handed over. A report that cannot be used by your investment committee is not a deliverable, even if it is well written.

Set acceptance criteria. The report should answer the brief's questions in order, separate findings from interpretation, cite sources and state limitations. A draft for comment and one revision round are standard; additional rounds should be priced.

11. Time zone, language and communication

For clients abroad, check that the firm delivers in English, can hold calls in your working hours and responds within an agreed time. Pakistan is on UTC+5. Ask who your single point of contact will be and how quickly they respond. A firm that is responsive during the proposal stage and silent during delivery is a common disappointment.

12. Red flags

- Promises of access, influence or faster approvals.
- No registered entity, or a name that does not match the invoice.
- Unsourced figures presented as fact.
- A fee that is far below the market with no explanation.
- Reluctance to sign an NDA or a written scope.
- No conflict check or a vague answer about other clients.

- A proposal that is a generic country overview, not a response to your brief.
- Pressure to pay in cash or to an account in another name.

13. Selection checklist

- Scope, questions, deliverable and deadline written down.
- SECP registration, tax number and signatory verified.
- Anti-bribery policy, gift register and sanctions screening reviewed.
- Two references and a relevant sample reviewed.
- Named team and CVs confirmed.
- Fixed fee, inclusions, exclusions and revision rounds agreed.
- NDA, data security and retention terms signed.
- Conflict check completed.
- Acceptance criteria and citation standard agreed.
- Single point of contact and response time agreed.

14. Where PIVRA fits

PIVRA is an SECP-registered research and policy institute in Lahore. It publishes its starting fees, quotes every engagement as a fixed fee in writing, signs NDAs on request, references findings to primary sources in English and Urdu, and follows written compliance standards aligned with the FCPA and the UK Bribery Act. See Investor Support and all services, or request a quote; we reply within two business days.

Sources and standards

This guide reflects PIVRA's procurement and compliance practice and the standards cited below, accessed 24 October 2026.

Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan, company registration and online services.

US Department of Justice, Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

UK Bribery Act 2010.

Federal Board of Revenue, tax registration.

PIVRA's compliance and independence standards and pricing approach.

Questions and answers

How do I check that a consulting firm in Pakistan is registered?

Ask for its SECP registration and check it on SECP online services, then match the name to the contract, invoice and bank account. A registered firm can contract and invoice in its own name; an individual without an entity is a risk.

Why does anti-corruption compliance matter?

Under the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and the UK Bribery Act 2010, a company can be liable for bribes paid by intermediaries acting for it. Ask for an anti-bribery policy, gift register, training record and sanctions screening.

How much do consultants in Pakistan charge?

Fees vary widely by scope and provider. Ask for a fixed fee in writing, a defined scope, a delivery date and the number of revision rounds, and check what is excluded. PIVRA publishes starting fees and confirms every engagement in writing.

Can a Pakistani research firm work remotely with clients abroad?

Yes. Desk research, due diligence and expert consultations can be delivered remotely in English, with calls across time zones and invoicing in US dollars. Fieldwork usually needs a local team.

What should I look for in a sample report?

Every material figure should reference a source the client can check and a date. The report should separate fact, estimate and opinion, state data gaps and answer the brief in order.

How do I know the team that will do the work?

Meet the named researchers and writers, ask for CVs and a recent example in the same sector, and speak to two references of similar scope. Do not accept a senior name in the proposal with a junior delivery team.

What confidentiality terms should I require?

An NDA before detailed scoping, a named list of people with access, secure storage and transmission, a retention and deletion policy, and a rule that commissioned work is not published without consent.

What is a conflict of interest check?

The firm should disclose work for a competitor, target, government body or party to the transaction, and propose an information barrier or decline. A success fee contingent on a deal can compromise independence.

What data security should I expect?

Encrypted devices, access control, secure file transfer, a breach notification clause and return or destruction of data at the end. Do not send passports, bank statements or title deeds by ordinary email.

What should the deliverable include?

A short brief or full report, an executive summary, a data annex, sources with dates and a clear statement of limitations. Agree the format, citation style and number of revision rounds before work starts.

What are the red flags?

Promises of access or faster approvals, no registered entity, unsourced figures, a fee far below market, reluctance to sign an NDA, no conflict check, a generic proposal and pressure to pay in cash or to another name.

Can PIVRA sign an NDA and work in English?

Yes. PIVRA is an SECP-registered research and policy institute in Lahore, signs NDAs on request, works in English and Urdu, quotes fixed fees in writing and follows written compliance standards.