

Introduction

Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, publishes books on India's history, culture, heritage, biographies, governance and other subjects of national significance.

The Division proposes to produce high-quality audiobooks of approximately **100 selected titles—50 in English and 50 in Hindi—for streaming on digital platforms**. The audiobooks shall be recorded in professional studios using approved human narrators and shall undergo rigorous editorial and technical quality control. AI-generated, synthetic, machine-generated or cloned voices shall be strictly prohibited.

QCBS Evaluation through GeM

The tender shall be processed through **GeM under the Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS) method**, with **30% weightage for technical evaluation and 70% weightage for financial evaluation**. Technical evaluation shall include inspection of the bidder's studio infrastructure by a Publications Division team, verification of supporting documents, assessment of proposed manpower and equipment, and a live demonstration of human-voice recording, editing, mastering and quality-control capabilities. Only bidders achieving the prescribed minimum qualifying technical score shall be considered for financial evaluation.

TECHNICAL SCOPE OF WORK

Production of Studio-Quality Audiobooks Using Natural Human Voice

1. Objective

The selected agency shall undertake end-to-end production of premium, broadcast- and streaming-quality audiobooks from titles supplied by Publications Division. Every audiobook shall:

- faithfully reproduce the approved source text;

- be narrated exclusively by an approved natural human voice artist;
- demonstrate excellent diction, pronunciation, expression and consistency;
- be recorded in a professionally designed acoustic studio;
- undergo rigorous editorial, linguistic and technical quality control; and
- be supplied as archival masters and platform-ready distribution files.

The final output shall be suitable for commercial distribution through leading audiobook, streaming, broadcasting and digital-library platforms without requiring further recording, editing, restoration or mastering.

1.1 Indicative Volume of Work

1. The Publications Division is going to convert approximately 100 books (printed and digital) into audio books as of now, but this quantity is likely to go upto 1000 and more.
2. These quantities are indicative and are provided solely to enable bidders to assess the likely scale of work, studio capacity, narrator requirements, manpower deployment, production schedule and financial implications.
3. The actual number of titles, pages, words and finished audio hours may vary. Title-wise work orders shall be issued according to the requirements of Publications Division.
4. Payment shall be based on the actual quantity of work completed and accepted, measured in the unit specified in the financial bid, such as **per finished audio hour**, and not merely on the indicative number of pages or words.
5. The selected agency shall maintain sufficient studio infrastructure, approved human narrators, recording engineers, audio editors, Hindi and English proof-listeners, quality-control personnel and backup capacity to undertake multiple titles simultaneously without

compromising narration quality, technical standards or delivery schedules.

2. End-to-End Technical Responsibilities

The agency shall provide all studios, equipment, software, voice artists, creative direction, engineers, editors, language experts, proof-listeners, storage systems and project-management resources required for:

1. manuscript and content analysis;
2. script preparation and chapterisation;
3. narrator selection and audition;
4. pronunciation and narration-style preparation;
5. studio recording;
6. direction of the human narrator;
7. editing and restoration;
8. linguistic and textual proof-listening;
9. mixing, loudness control and mastering;
10. metadata and file preparation;
11. multi-stage quality assurance;
12. correction and re-recording;
13. delivery of archival and platform-ready files; and
14. preservation and supply of raw recordings and project files.

3. Mandatory Human-Voice Requirement

3.1 Every word of the audiobook, including opening and closing credits, chapter headings, corrections, replacement passages and pickup recordings, shall be spoken and recorded by an identifiable natural human narrator.

3.2 The following are strictly prohibited:

- text-to-speech narration;
- generative-AI or machine-generated narration;
- synthetic or computer-generated speech;
- neural voice synthesis;
- voice cloning or digital voice replicas;
- voice conversion intended to imitate another speaker;
- AI-generated words, sentences, corrections or pickup

passages;

- creation of missing speech through phoneme synthesis; and
- training of any AI model using Publications Division manuscripts, recordings or narrator voices.

3.3 Conventional audio-processing tools may be used only for professional editing, equalisation, compression, de-essing, restoration, noise reduction and mastering of genuine human recordings. Such tools shall not be used to generate speech, replace spoken words or materially alter the identity of the narrator.

3.4 For each title, the agency shall provide:

- a signed human-voice compliance undertaking;
- the narrator's name and identity particulars;
- a signed narrator consent and rights declaration;
- dates and locations of recording sessions;
- original raw or minimally processed audio files; and
- details of the recording engineer, director and studio.

3.5 Confirmed use of AI-generated, synthetic or cloned speech shall constitute a fundamental technical non-conformity. The entire affected title shall be rejected.

4. Pre-Production Requirements

4.1 Manuscript analysis

The agency shall study the approved manuscript and identify:

- chapter and section structure;
- quotations, footnotes and endnotes;
- captions, tables and other non-prose material;
- names, places and specialised terminology;
- words requiring language-specific pronunciation;
- passages requiring different narration treatment; and

- apparent textual inconsistencies requiring clarification.

The agency shall not omit, abridge, paraphrase, translate or otherwise alter the approved text without written authorisation.

4.2 Narration script

The agency shall prepare a recording-ready narration script containing:

- approved opening and closing credits;
- chapter divisions;
- pronunciation annotations;
- expanded abbreviations where required;
- treatment of dates, numbers and symbols;
- narrator directions;
- pause and emphasis indications; and
- approved treatment of footnotes, captions, tables and references.

4.3 Pronunciation lexicon

A title-specific pronunciation lexicon shall be prepared for:

- names of persons and institutions;
- geographical names;
- Indian-language words;
- Sanskrit and classical-language expressions;
- foreign words;
- technical terminology;
- abbreviations and acronyms; and
- historically or culturally sensitive expressions.

Where necessary, the agency shall consult an appropriately qualified language expert. Pronunciation decisions approved for a title shall be applied consistently throughout the audiobook.

5. Narrator Selection and Approval

5.1 The narrator shall:

- be a natural human voice artist;
- possess professional experience in long-form narration, broadcasting, theatre, dubbing or comparable voice work;
- demonstrate native or near-native command of the assigned language;
- possess clear diction and correct pronunciation;
- sustain a consistent voice and pace over long recording sessions; and
- possess a voice, age profile, tone and delivery appropriate to the title.

5.2 For every audio book, the agency shall submit at least **three suitable human-voice samples** for each language or narrator category requested by Publications Division.

5.3 Publications Division may require an audition based on a common passage supplied to all shortlisted narrators.

5.4 Recording of the complete title shall commence only after approval of:

- the narrator;
- the narration style;
- the pronunciation approach; and
- a title-specific sample of approximately 10–15 minutes.

5.5 An approved narrator shall not be replaced without prior written permission. Corrections and pickup recordings shall ordinarily be completed by the same narrator.

6. Professional Studio Requirements

6.1 All narration shall be recorded in a professionally designed and acoustically treated studio.

6.2 A makeshift room, untreated office, residential room, portable booth without adequate isolation, or other

environment producing audible reflections or external noise shall not be acceptable.

6.3 The recording space shall provide:

- effective isolation from traffic, machinery, air-conditioning and external voices;
- controlled reverberation suitable for dry spoken-word recording;
- acoustic treatment preventing flutter echo and standing-wave coloration;
- a low and stable ambient noise level;
- silent or remotely controlled ventilation;
- proper electrical grounding and protection against hum;
- uninterrupted power supply; and
- a consistent acoustic environment across all recording sessions.

7. Recording Equipment and Signal Chain

7.1 The studio shall use professional equipment suitable for premium spoken-word production, including:

- large-diaphragm condenser or equivalent broadcast-grade microphone;
- low-noise professional microphone pre-amplifier;
- professional audio interface or recorder;
- closed-back monitoring headphones for the narrator;
- accurate near-field studio monitors for the engineer;
- pop filter and shock mount;
- stable microphone stand;
- acoustically appropriate narrator position;
- digital audio workstation capable of non-destructive editing;
- calibrated metering for loudness, true peak, phase and frequency analysis; and

- redundant storage and backup facilities.

7.2 The microphone shall exhibit:

- low self-noise;
- wide and substantially neutral frequency response;
- high speech intelligibility;
- freedom from audible distortion; and
- appropriate control of plosives and sibilance.

7.3 The microphone, pre-amplifier, interface and recording settings used for a title shall remain consistent. Any unavoidable change shall be documented and matched so that no audible discontinuity occurs.

7.4 Audio shall be recorded natively at a minimum of:

- sample rate: **48 kHz**;
- bit depth: **24-bit PCM**;
- channel configuration: **mono**, unless stereo is specifically approved; and
- file format: uncompressed **WAV or BWF**.

Recording directly into compressed formats such as MP3 shall not be permitted.

8. Recording Methodology

8.1 Every recording session shall be supervised by a competent recording engineer and narration director.

8.2 The agency shall maintain consistent:

- microphone selection and placement;
- narrator-to-microphone distance;
- input gain;
- room configuration;
- vocal tone and intensity;
- narration pace;
- pronunciation;

- chapter-heading treatment; and
- room tone.

8.3 Recording levels shall provide adequate headroom. The signal shall not clip, overload or contain unrecoverable distortion.

8.4 Narrator sessions shall be planned to avoid audible fatigue, dryness, loss of expression or deterioration of diction.

8.5 The agency shall record sufficient room tone for seamless editing.

9. Narration Performance Standards

The narration shall demonstrate:

- complete fidelity to the approved text;
- correct and consistent pronunciation;
- natural, engaging and culturally appropriate expression;
- clear articulation and intelligibility;
- controlled and comfortable pacing;
- suitable emphasis and pauses;
- consistent voice, pitch, energy and tonal character;
- appropriate treatment of quotations and dialogue;
- subtle differentiation of speakers where necessary;
- freedom from exaggeration, caricature or distracting mannerisms;
- absence of narrator fatigue;
- continuity between recording sessions; and
- suitability for extended listening.

The narration shall not contain:

- omitted, added or substituted words;
- repeated lines or paragraphs;
- false starts;

- audible page turns;
- intrusive breaths;
- mouth clicks;
- excessive sibilance;
- lip smacks;
- chair noise;
- mobile-phone interference;
- background conversation; or
- other avoidable distractions.

10. Editing Requirements

10.1 Editing shall be performed manually by qualified spoken-word audio editors.

10.2 Editing shall include:

- removal of false starts, repeated takes and director instructions;
- correction of timing and continuity;
- removal or reduction of distracting mouth sounds;
- treatment of excessive breaths without making speech unnatural;
- seamless insertion of human-recorded pickups;
- maintenance of natural pauses;
- consistent chapter starts and endings; and
- verification of correct chapter sequence.

10.3 Edits shall be inaudible and shall not introduce:

- clicks or pops;
- abrupt room-tone changes;
- truncated consonants;
- unnatural word spacing;
- phase problems;

- timbral discontinuity; or
- changes to the narrator's identity.

10.4 Digital repair shall not be used as a substitute for re-recording where the original performance contains a substantive narration error.

11. Audio Restoration and Processing

11.1 Processing shall be conservative and appropriate for high-quality spoken-word content.

11.2 Permitted processing may include:

- high-pass filtering;
- corrective equalisation;
- gentle dynamic-range compression;
- de-essing;
- removal of isolated clicks or hum;
- transparent broadband noise reduction;
- level automation;
- limiting for peak control; and
- loudness normalisation.

11.3 Processing shall not produce:

- metallic or watery artifacts;
- pumping or breathing;
- audible gating;
- spectral holes;
- phase distortion;
- excessive bass or treble;
- over-compression;
- unnatural removal of room tone;
- harsh sibilance;
- clipped transients; or

- audible changes in the narrator's natural vocal character.

11.4 If a defect cannot be corrected transparently, the affected passage shall be re-recorded by the approved narrator.

12. Mastering Specifications

Unless a designated distribution platform specifies a different technical standard, the final mastered audio shall comply with the following:

Parameter	Required standard
Archival format	WAV/BWF, uncompressed PCM
Sample rate	48 kHz
Bit depth	24-bit
Channel format	Mono unless otherwise approved
Integrated loudness	-20 LUFS, tolerance ± 2 LU
Maximum true peak	Not higher than -3 dBTP
Noise floor	-65 dBFS preferred; -60 dBFS minimum
Clipping	Zero tolerance
DC offset	Removed or technically insignificant
Hum/interference	Not audible
Chapter loudness variation	Not more than 2 LU without editorial justification
Start/end silence	Consistent and platform-compliant
Sample-rate conversion	Professional, high-quality conversion only
Dithering	Applied where bit-depth reduction is required

The master shall remain clear and intelligible on studio monitors, headphones, mobile devices, smart speakers and ordinary consumer playback systems.

13. Chapterisation and File Preparation

13.1 Each chapter shall ordinarily be supplied as a separate audio file unless another structure is prescribed.

13.2 File names shall follow a uniform convention containing:

- title identifier;

- chapter number;
- chapter name or abbreviated title;
- language code;
- master/distribution designation; and
- version number.

13.3 Every file shall:

- begin and end cleanly;
- contain no unintended speech or noise;
- be correctly sequenced;
- have consistent silence and room tone;
- contain no duplicate content;
- contain no missing passages; and
- match the approved chapter and cue sheet.

13.4 Opening and closing credits shall be recorded in the form approved by Publications Division.

14. Platform-Ready Distribution Files

In addition to archival masters, the agency shall provide:

- MP3 files at a minimum of **192 kbps constant bit rate**, or a higher platform-prescribed specification;
- M4B/AAC or other format where required;
- chapter markers;
- embedded metadata;
- cover image in the prescribed dimensions and colour profile;
- title-wise checksum manifest;
- duration report;
- platform-compliant file names; and
- any additional derivative required by the specified streaming platform.

Compression shall be performed from the approved uncompressed master and not from another compressed file.

15. Metadata Requirements

The agency shall prepare and verify:

- title and subtitle;
- author, editor and translator names;
- narrator name;
- publisher name;
- copyright statement;
- language;
- abridged or unabridged status;
- chapter titles and sequence;
- synopsis and keywords supplied or approved by Publications Division;
- Embed ISBN or other identifier, where provided;
- total duration;
- chapter-wise duration;
- audio-format details; and
- version and delivery date.

Metadata embedded in the audio files shall match the accompanying metadata sheet.

16. Editorial and Linguistic Quality Control

16.1 Each audiobook shall undergo a complete word-for-word proof-listening comparison against the approved source text.

16.2 Proof-listening shall be performed by a qualified person other than the narrator and, preferably, other than the recording editor.

16.3 The proof-listener shall verify:

- completeness of narration;
- sequence of paragraphs and chapters;

- word accuracy;
- pronunciation;
- treatment of numbers, dates and abbreviations;
- consistency of names and technical terms;
- correct opening and closing credits;
- absence of repetitions and omissions; and
- consistency with approved pronunciation and style sheets.

16.4 For Indian-language titles, at least one proof-listener shall possess native or near-native proficiency in the relevant language.

16.5 All identified errors shall be entered in a time-coded correction log and rectified before submission.

17. Technical Quality Control

17.1 Technical QC shall be performed separately from editorial proof-listening.

17.2 Every final file shall undergo:

- complete real-time listening;
- waveform and spectral examination;
- loudness measurement;
- true-peak measurement;
- noise-floor verification;
- clipping and distortion check;
- file-integrity validation;
- chapter-sequence verification;
- metadata verification;
- duration verification;
- checksum generation; and
- test playback on multiple devices.

17.3 Automated scanning may support but shall not replace

complete human listening.

17.4 A signed title-wise QC certificate shall accompany the final delivery.

18. Error Tolerance and Rejection Criteria

18.1 The following shall have zero tolerance:

- machine-generated, AI-generated or cloned narration;
- omission of a sentence, paragraph, footnote or chapter;
- unauthorised addition or alteration of the source text;
- repeated sentence, paragraph or chapter;
- wrong chapter order;
- wrong narrator or unauthorised narrator substitution;
- clipped or distorted audio;
- missing, corrupt or unreadable files;
- unauthorised music or third-party content;
- mismatch between audio and metadata; and
- inability to provide authentic raw recordings.

18.2 The final submission shall contain no known textual, linguistic or technical error.

18.3 As an objective acceptance benchmark, there shall be no more than **one minor narration defect per finished hour**, and every defect identified by Publications Division shall nevertheless be corrected at no additional cost.

18.4 A minor defect shall not include an omission, addition, repetition, substantive mispronunciation, factual alteration or technical failure. These shall be treated as major defects.

18.5 A title may be rejected in full where:

- major defects are found;
- errors are widespread;
- audio quality is materially inconsistent;
- the studio recording is below the prescribed standard;

- corrections produce audible discontinuity;
- repeated QC submissions fail;
- the narrator is unsuitable or inconsistent; or
- prohibited synthetic speech is detected and confirmed.

19. Submission Stages

For each title, the agency shall submit:

Stage 1: Pre-production package

- production plan;
- proposed narrator profiles;
- audition files;
- narration script;
- pronunciation lexicon; and
- proposed chapter structure.

Stage 2: Approval sample

- 10–15 minutes of edited and mastered audio;
- raw recording of the same passage;
- proposed mastering specifications; and
- sample metadata.

Stage 3: Draft audiobook

- complete edited audiobook;
- chapter and cue sheet;
- editorial proof-listening report;
- technical QC report; and
- correction log.

Stage 4: Final delivery

- corrected archival masters;
- platform-ready files;
- raw or minimally processed recordings;

- relevant project/session files;
- final metadata;
- narrator declaration and consent;
- human-voice compliance undertaking;
- final editorial QC certificate;
- final technical QC certificate;
- checksum manifest; and
- title-wise asset inventory.

Approval of an intermediate stage shall not relieve the agency of responsibility for defects detected subsequently.

20. Mandatory Deliverables

The complete deliverable package for each title shall include:

1. original raw human-voice recordings;
2. edited but unmastered audio;
3. final mastered WAV/BWF files;
4. platform-ready compressed files;
5. recording and editing project files;
6. narrator audition and approved sample;
7. pronunciation and narration-style sheet;
8. narration script;
9. chapter and cue sheet;
10. metadata sheet;
11. editorial proof-listening report;
12. technical QC report;
13. time-coded correction log;
14. narrator consent and rights declaration;
15. human-voice compliance undertaking;
16. checksum manifest; and
17. consolidated delivery inventory.

21. Correction and Re-Recording

21.1 Errors attributable to the agency shall be corrected without additional cost.

21.2 Corrections shall be recorded:

- by the same approved narrator;

- in the same studio or an acoustically matched approved studio;
- using the same or technically equivalent microphone and signal chain; and
- with matched pacing, vocal tone, room tone and mastering.

21.3 A correction shall not be accepted if the inserted passage is audibly different from the surrounding narration.

21.4 Publications Division may require complete re-recording of a chapter where multiple pickups would impair continuity or listening quality.

22. Storage, Backup and Data Integrity

The agency shall:

- maintain at least three copies of all active project data;
- keep at least one backup in a physically or logically separate secure location;
- use version-controlled file naming;
- preserve raw recordings and project files for at least three years after acceptance;
- maintain checksums for final masters;
- protect manuscripts and recordings from unauthorised access;
- promptly report data loss or corruption; and
- restore lost or corrupted material without additional charge where the loss is attributable to the agency.

23. Studio, Infrastructure and Manpower Inspection

Publications Division may conduct a physical inspection and practical assessment of the production facility proposed for the contract.

The inspection shall cover:

- acoustic treatment and isolation;
- ambient room-noise level;

- reverberation characteristics;
- microphones and signal chain;
- recording and editing systems;
- monitoring equipment;
- loudness and quality-control tools;
- power backup;
- data-storage and backup arrangements;
- information security;
- availability of recording engineers and editors;
- language proof-listening capability;
- narrator-management arrangements;
- demonstrated recording workflow; and
- live recording and playback of a test passage.

The bidder shall demonstrate the complete workflow from microphone capture to final master. Equipment or personnel not physically available, verifiably contracted or demonstrably accessible shall not be considered.

Material difference between the declared and inspected facility may result in loss of technical marks or technical rejection, depending upon the nature of the deficiency.

24. Continuity of Evaluated Technical Capability

The selected agency shall maintain throughout the contract:

- the evaluated studio standard;
- the proposed or equivalent professional equipment;
- the required team strength;
- the approved quality-control workflow; and
- secure storage and backup capability.

Any material change in studio, signal chain, key personnel, narrator, production location or subcontracting arrangement shall require prior written approval.

25. Final Acceptance

An audiobook shall be treated as finally accepted only after Publications Division confirms that:

- the narration is entirely in natural human voice;
- the approved text has been reproduced completely and accurately;
- narration and pronunciation meet the required standard;
- audio meets all studio-quality and mastering specifications;
- every chapter has passed editorial and technical QC;
- metadata and file structure are complete and accurate;
- raw recordings and supporting records have been supplied;
- identified corrections have been completed; and
- the complete deliverable package is usable without further technical intervention.

26. Quality Warranty

The agency shall provide a minimum six-month quality warranty from final acceptance of each title.

During the warranty period, it shall correct without additional cost:

- latent recording or editing defects;
- missed textual or pronunciation errors attributable to the agency;
- file corruption attributable to the agency;
- defective metadata;
- mastering non-compliance; and
- rejection by a designated platform caused by failure to follow the prescribed technical specifications.

The warranty shall not cover changes to the source text or new creative requirements introduced after final acceptance.

Two-Stage Technical Evaluation

Technical evaluation shall be conducted in two stages: bidders securing at least **60% marks in the preliminary evaluation** shall undergo studio inspection, document verification and a live demonstration. Only technically qualified bidders shall proceed to financial evaluation under QCBS.

Stage	Evaluation parameter	Basis of assessment	Maximum marks
Stage 1: Preliminary technical evaluation	1. Relevant experience and past performance	Experience in audiobook or comparable long-form audio production, completed projects, finished audio hours, English/Hindi experience and client completion certificates.	20
	2. Qualified manpower and production methodology	Availability and experience of human narrators, recording engineers, editors, mastering engineers, proof-listeners and QC personnel, along with the proposed production and quality-control workflow.	20
	3. Delivery schedule and production capacity	Proposed deadline for completing the work; number of titles that can be produced simultaneously; studio and manpower deployment plan; title-wise production schedule; and ability to meet urgent or phased work orders without compromising quality.	20
	Stage 1 total	Bidders obtaining at least 60%, i.e. 36 out of 60 marks , shall be shortlisted for Stage 2.	60
Stage 2: Inspection and demonstration	4. Professional studio infrastructure	Physical inspection of acoustic treatment, recording rooms, microphones, equipment, editing and mastering	20

		facilities, power backup, secure storage and data-backup arrangements.	
	5. Live demonstration and sample quality	Live demonstration of human-voice recording, editing, mastering and technical QC, including assessment of diction, pronunciation, textual accuracy, noise level and overall studio quality.	20
	Stage 2 total	Only bidders shortlisted in Stage 1 shall undergo studio inspection and live demonstration.	40
	Total technical marks	Only bidders obtaining at least 60 marks out of 100 in the combined evaluation shall qualify for financial evaluation.	100