



GUIDE TO REMOVING BARRIERS TO ENTRY FOR SMES & VCSES

SMEs and VCSEs are the backbone of any healthy economy; they drive growth, provide employment opportunities and open new markets, creating a rich and diverse supply base locally.

It can be difficult for SMEs/VCSEs to find and take part in public sector opportunities, especially in comparison to their larger counterparts. Procurement are key to removing barriers to entry for SMEs/VCSEs and here at Go4Growth, we've been working hard to bridge the gap between the public sector and the provider marketplace. We've gathered evidence-based intelligence about the challenges and barriers SMEs and VCSEs face when seeking to work with the public sector and used this to help procurement teams to unlock some of these barriers for the market.

We wanted to share some of our insights more widely with our procurement colleagues, and whilst we know this guide won't resolve all the issues, we do hope it helps more procurement teams take action to support their smaller local providers.

ACTION 1

Promote the power of procurement!

We may understand that excellent procurement can unlock significant positive impacts, but our stakeholders may need a little convincing. You can maximise your impact by highlighting the community benefits procurement can create alongside delivery of core frontline services.

BASELINE YOUR CURRENT SPEND WITH SMES AND VCSES.

- 1** This is often a gap; we know many organisations don't always measure SME/VCSE spend or capture the demographic in their systems. Identifying how to address that is an important first step.

- 2** **FIND WAYS TO COMMUNICATE THE SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS OF PROCUREMENT** linked to the delivery of core frontline services. This could be a briefing note, part of formal update reports or even through a short film.

- 3** **BUILD STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION** into your pipeline activities so that you can share and align ambitions early enough to make a difference.

- 4** **FORMALISING YOUR RATIONALE AND COMMITMENT** and getting it endorsed by your leadership team will enable you to make this public. If you are committing to removing barriers for SMEs and VCSEs, communicate your ambition and be clear about why it is important.

ACTION 2 Engagement & Signposting

Communicating with the marketplace is an important part of being accessible and inclusive and to removing barriers to entry that SMEs and VCSEs are currently experiencing. We know that this can be challenging, however, when it is done, we see a great response from the market

- 1 DEFINE THE MARKET YOU ARE TRYING TO ENGAGE.** Write down who they are and where they are so you can measure your procurement outputs against this. Plan to build the markets you need and consider how to do this if they don't currently exist.
- 2 COMMUNICATE AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE.** Use your pipeline documents to help signal to the market that you have opportunities coming up and try and make sure this goes down to lower levels of spend (we would recommend from about £25k)
- 3 USE SOCIAL MEDIA.** Don't limit the communication of engagement events or surveys to the procurement portal. Not all providers are on the portals and often this means they don't hear about the opportunity to engage.
- 4 FEEDBACK FROM PROVIDERS IS INVALUABLE** to understand the barriers the market is facing. Analyse your expressions of interest to bid conversion and prioritise asking providers who expressed interest but didn't bid, to find out what prevented them from doing so.



ACTION 3 Process, Practice & Paperwork

Think like an SME or VCSE. The most beneficial and tangible support that you can give the market is processes, practices and competitions that are proportionate to the size of contract, value and risk. Here is a critical question checklist that we use to help make procurement simpler and more accessible:

- 1 REMOVE UNNECESSARY LANGUAGE BARRIERS** by avoiding jargon and acronyms. Are there mechanisms in place to support providers where English isn't the first language?
- 2 ENSURE QUESTION WEIGHTINGS ARE PROPORTIONATE.** This is critical; try to avoid creating a disproportionately time-consuming set of questions in an area that represents only a small part of the total score.
- 3 CONSIDER APPROPRIATE (and compliant) DISAGGREGATION** where this could help expand the market responses.
- 4 EXPLORE THE POTENTIAL TO RESERVE OPPORTUNITIES** for SMEs/VCSEs (in line with PPN 11/20)

We have seen these small changes make a real difference with the teams we work with. We know (and can evidence!) that these simple actions do work with time; we see the quantity and quality of responses improving, and more business is being awarded to SMEs/VCSEs.

Feel free to signpost to the free support for providers (which can be accessed here) and if you'd like to chat some more about marketplace development, we'd love to hear from you.

Give us a shout, we'll get the kettle on.

GILLIAN ASKEW

gill@go4growth.co.uk
07534 114271

LAUREN SIDDONS

lauren@go4growth.co.uk
07557 773837