

Crown Representative for SMEs – Stephen Allott

Tips for SME bidders

Stephen's task is to build a more strategic dialogue between HM Government and smaller suppliers – giving those suppliers a strong voice at the top table.

Here are Stephen's observations of winning bids by SMEs and why they were successful.

- **Build below the threshold**

The quickest way to build up a Government customer base is to start with low value procurements. To start with, aim for opportunities under 100,000 where the Government has abolished PQQs. Building up your base this way is a great foundation for competing for bigger sales in the future.

- **Be part of the conversation**

If the first time you spot the opportunity, it's already formally gone to the market, you are behind the game. Pre-market engagement is your opportunity to shape the formal tender - sign up for email alerts on Contracts Finder, monitor PINs and register your interest in future procurements, attend information days and public sector "product surgeries". Register for the Government eMarketplace.

- **Play to your strengths**

Recent studies of public sector procurers show that they see SMEs as flexible, quicker to react and able to offer better prices. Use the pre-market engagement to show this by reacting quickly to questions, offering options and evidence of where you've responded to change in the past. Realise that you are likely to be cheaper than bigger players and show evidence that you offer value for money.

- **Look good in the exam**

Realise that no matter how good you are you will not win unless you make your strengths clear on paper too. Think of it as an exam - answer the question, don't elaborate and think about getting advice if it's your first time. The public sector is making the process simpler but remember that it will rightly be held accountable for the procurement decisions it makes, in a way the private sector is not. Take the exam seriously.

- **Evidence matters**

Cite evidence in your bid. If you say your system will show or do something, prove it - include a screen shot of how it works or other tangible bits of evidence. Use the clarification questions to highlight whether your key differentiators will be required elements of the specification.

Useful links

Contracts Finder for all public sector contracts over £10,000 - www.contractsfinder.businesslink.gov.uk/

Government eMarketplace (suppliers registration page) - https://buyers.procserviceonline.com/otis/preregistration/splash_page.html

Mystery Shopper to report problems with public sector contracts - www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/cabinet-office-mystery-shopper-scheme

Crown Rep for SMEs page with policy announcements, progress reports, guidance and case studies - www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/crown-representative-smes-stephen-allott

Follow Stephen's Twitter feed [@SMEcrownrep](https://twitter.com/SMEcrownrep) to keep up to date with the work he is doing to open up Government business to SMEs.