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Connecting for Success

The GO National Collaborative Procurement Conference and Exhibition 2008, Connecting for Success, offered delegates an insight into how collaborative practices can benefit both buyers and suppliers.



Nigel Smith, Chief Executive, OGC

Collaborative procurement is an effective way in which to deliver value for money savings, share expertise and promote efficiency – that was the key message from speakers at the recent GO National Collaborative Procurement Conference and Exhibition held at the Marriott Grosvenor Square, London.

‘CompeteFor increases efficiency in the tendering process, both for the buyer and the supplier, particularly around the prequalification process’ – Roger Simpson-Jones, LDA

Organised by *Government Opportunities (GO)* magazine – the UK’s premier public procurement publication – in partnership with BIP Solutions, the conference, entitled ‘Connecting for Success’, covered areas such as the role of the third sector, how to stay EU-compliant, consortium perspectives, the benefits of collaboration for local authorities, and how suppliers can gain from closer working relationships.

Keynote speakers included Nigel Smith, Chief Executive of the Office of Government Commerce; Roger Simpson-Jones, Director of Procurement at the London Development Agency; Helen Hughes, National Adviser, Voluntary and Community Sector, IDeA; and Neil Jones, Chair of the Central

Buying Consortium.

Chairing the conference was GO Managing Editor Grahame Steed. He stressed that collaboration has become established as a core part of the public sector procurement ethos, and in recent years has become better defined and understood.

He said: *“Handled well, collaborative procurement exercises can reduce costs and provide higher-quality solutions. However, handled badly, collaborative procurement can achieve the exact opposite; which is why having a thorough understanding of the issue is essential, regardless of which side of the table you are sitting on.”*

“But where do suppliers fit in this collaborative world? Does this approach



Neil Jones, Chair, Central Buying Consortium

reduce the opportunity for businesses – and particularly SMEs and micro-SMEs – to work with the public sector? Is there a risk that collaborative procurement suits the buyer, but potentially risks disenfranchising suppliers, thereby

with suitable suppliers. However, to make CompeteFor successful and not just another portal that looks good but does little, we need wider support.”

Nigel Smith discussed the OGC’s agenda with regards to collaborative procurement and how collaboration means better value for money. He said: *“We are really trying to drive value for money, but it’s also about the effectiveness and efficiency of the procurement process. You may have heard about the Operational Efficiency Programme in the Pre-Budget Report 2008. This was launched by the Chief Secretary of the Treasury, Yvette Cooper, and its primary focus is driving value for money through greater collaboration. It also looks at the opportunities for driving vfm out of the central government estate, back-office services, ICT, and general assets.”*

‘There are an amazing amount of opportunities which will increase value for money. We’ve concentrated on six categories but are looking to extend these categories for commodities procurement in the future’ – Nigel Smith, OGC

cutting off a strong source of innovation? For collaboration to be an effective long-term proposition, it needs to take account of a broad range of issues, of which best value is but one.”

Roger Simpson-Jones discussed CompeteFor – www.london2012.com/business – the chosen portal of London 2012 for the publication of Olympic Games-related contract opportunities.

Mr Simpson-Jones said it was expected that 15,000 contract opportunities will come from the London2012 supply chain. Essentially, CompeteFor increases the openness and visibility of these public and private sector procurements, stimulating competition.

He explained: *“CompeteFor increases efficiency in the tendering process, both for the buyer and the supplier, particularly around the prequalification process. Supplier feedback on the service has been particularly encouraging. It’s like an online dating agency, the idea being to match buyers*

with suitable suppliers. However, to make CompeteFor successful and not just another portal that looks good but does little, we need wider support.”

Neil Jones discussed CBC’s involvement with collaborative procurement. CBC is the largest purchasing consortium in the UK. Since its formation in 1991, it has increased its membership from six to 17 local authorities and now represents most of the major authorities outside London, from the Midlands to the South East.

He said: *“To be successful you’ve got to make the case that you’re an effective bridge between the people with the cash (the budget holders) and the suppliers – both have to find what you’re doing credible, and probably the best way of doing that is to have some good contracts. If you can demonstrate success then other local authorities will beat a path to your door.”*

Mr Jones is also Head of Business Services at Hampshire County Council. He explained that Hampshire has now been involved in collaboration for

13 years, spending 55 per cent annually (£750 million) within the administrative boundaries of the authority, with over half of those contracts being awarded to SMEs.

Summing up, Grahame Steed said: *“I think it’s fair to say that we have been given a very solid overview of collaborative procurement by today’s speakers – and I’d like to thank each of them for their contribution. We’ve heard about the ways in which collaborative procurement exercises can work, the potential benefits and downsides, and also the risks.”*

Full speaker list...

- Mike Greatwich, Commercial Director, Office of Government Commerce
- Helen Hughes, National Adviser, Voluntary and Community Sector, IDeA
- Neil Jones, Chair, Central Buying Consortium
- Dr Peter Kyle, Director of Strategy and Enterprise, acevo
- Nicholas Maxwell, Head of Contracts and Voluntary Sector Partnerships, Westminster City Council
- Eddie Regan, Senior PASS Consultant, BIP Solutions
- Sarah Rushton, Head of Joint Mental Health Service Development, Westminster City Council
- Roger Simpson-Jones, Director of Procurement, London Development Agency
- Nigel Smith, Chief Executive, Office of Government Commerce
- Grahame Steed, Managing Editor, *Government Opportunities*
- Peter Wozywoda, Commercial Director, Healthcare Purchasing Consortium

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