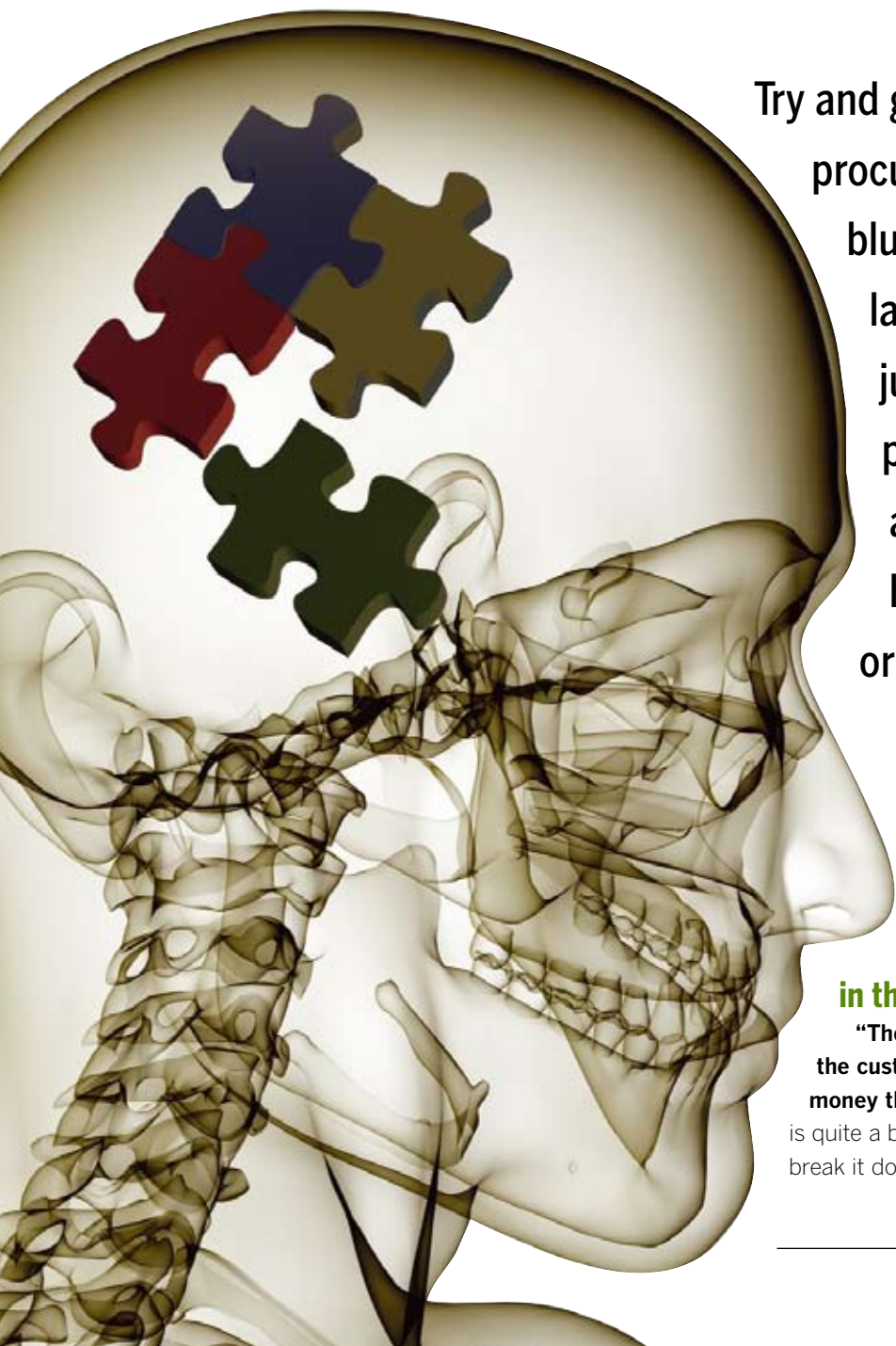


# The Grass is never greener!

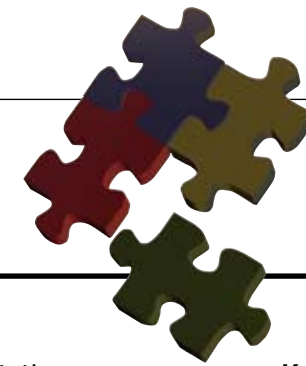


Try and get your head around public sector procurement and you may wind up blurry eyed and speaking a different language. OJEU, PQQ, ITT, ITQ are just some of the terms used in the public buying world and these terms are enough to turn any suppliers head away from public contracts, or so I have heard.

Let's start from the beginning. Well actually let's start from a position that is relevant to you, the small and minority business.

**But first, lets define Procurement. According to public authorities and 'gurus' in the field, procurement can be defined as:**

"The acquisition of goods, works and services which meet the customers and service users needs, whilst ensuring value for money throughout the life of the product including disposal." This is quite a broad statement to understand and despite its truth we can break it down further so that it may become a little clearer.



**Here is my interpretation:**

*Meeting the needs of customers by acquiring products at a cost that does not outweigh the benefits and quality of the product, ensuring that product end life is accounted for.*  
(Product being a good, work or service.)

**But we know there is so much more to procurement, like tendering.**

Tendering for public sector contracts can be a time consuming activity for a small and minority business, trust me I know. My estimate is that it takes a small and minority business a minimum of 2 days to write a proposal which is a lot of time away from everyday business activities. Obviously this depends on a number of factors such as the size of the contract and the experience of writing proposals. I suspect that these businesses are not in a position to lift a proposal off the shelf and change a few details. We can leave that for the businesses that are not really that bothered. The curious thing is some of these businesses keep winning contracts.

The tendering process is as complicated as people think or like to make out. So here are some of my tips on the tendering process that may help you navigate your way through the public sector jungle:

**Know the public authorities** - get to know people in the procurement team, the strategy team, the functional teams that are relevant to your business such as skills and employment, land, housing etc. Note that you may have to be strategically persistent. Also be familiar with how the public authority advertises its low value contracts. Some use third party providers while others use their own website. This information should be in their 'how to sell to the guide'. This guide sets out how businesses can sell to public authorities and most Local Authorities have it up on their website.

**Read, read, read - read everything, twice. It is important to understand and be clear about everything the public authority requires of a proposal.** If you are unsure just pick up the phone and ask. The most important section to read of any invitation to tender or quote document, is the specification - make sure you understand it and you respond to all the points.

**Time** - when you first identify a contract ask yourself 'is there enough time to submit a proposal?' Then ask yourself 'do I have enough time to submit a proposal?'

A good way to work out if you have enough time is to map out the steps required to submit a proposal setting out durations for each step and use this as a basis to determine if you really have enough time.

**FOI - the Freedom of Information Act** allows members of the public to request certain information from any public authority. So why not ask them who won the last round of contracts and how much the contract was for? The information that can be obtained from asking the right questions can form a good part of your research.

**Readiness** - are you ready to supply to the public sector? Do you know what standards and policies they request before being invited to submit a proposal? No? Then find out! In order to understand their requirements you are going to have to engage with public authorities. And now may be a good time as ever as I sense a change is a coming....

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SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL						
STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5	STEP 6	STEP 7
IDENTIFY CONTRACT	REQUEST DOCUMENTATION	REVIEW DOCUMENTATION	DRAFT PROPOSAL	REVIEW PROPOSAL	PACKAGE PROPOSAL	DELIVER PROPOSAL
THIS COULD IMPACT YOUR TIMESCALES	Questions to authority ↓ Response by authority	Questions to authority ↓ Response by authority	Questions to authority ↓ Response by authority	Amendments to proposal		Submit 1 working day before deadline!