

# The Importance of Early Engagement

A Guide for Healthcare Suppliers



# Contents

---

## Introduction

**Section 1: Understanding Public Sector Procurement**

**Section 2: Benefits of Early Engagement**

**Section 3: Common Barriers to Early Engagement**

**Section 4: Initial Steps for Businesses**

**Section 5: Strategies for Effective Early Engagement**

**Section 6: Your Personalised Demo**



# Introduction

**Early engagement is an increasingly important part** of the public procurement process. While Contracting Authorities (buyers) may have a clear idea of what they want to achieve via a procurement exercise, they are not necessarily the experts in how to achieve it. Suppliers – and particularly small and medium sized enterprises – have more insight into innovations and developments that could help buyers achieve much more from their procurement spend.

There is a myth that buyers cannot engage with suppliers outside of a formal tendering process. This isn't the case – and **Early Engagement is a legitimate part of public procurement that is encouraged**. In fact, the **Procurement Act 2023** has a number of provisions that make it even easier for buyers and suppliers to discuss solutions prior to a formal procurement process starting.

Suppliers can create **significant competitive advantage through early engagement**. Not only does this provide more insights into potential new opportunities, it also enables them to shape requirements to suit what they can offer. It's OK for the first response to a contract notice to be when it is published – but smart suppliers will have prepared the groundwork long before that happens.

This guide has been created to help suppliers interested in public healthcare sector contracts.

**The importance of early engagement can't be understated.**

This guide will explain what early engagement is, why it is important, and strategies to help businesses start to engage and influence key decision makers.

# Understanding UK Public Sector Procurement

## Public Procurement

Public procurement is currently regulated by the **Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR2015)** but soon to be the **Procurement Act 2023**.

There are exceptions, but these cover the bulk of public procurement activity.

The Procurement Act 2023 is encouraging **more market engagement**.

There are new procurement procedures and more information about upcoming requirements to help suppliers **engage earlier**.

## Differences to Private Sector Procurement

Private sector procurement is not regulated in the same way as public sector procurement.

Buyers are free to choose who they wish to work with and are under no obligation to advertise requirements to the market.

They often have established supply chains which can be difficult to break into.

## Government Policy

With annual procurement spend approaching **£400bn**, this area is vitally important as a lever to deliver government policy.

This can be in areas such as sustainability and economic regeneration.

The public sector supply chain is a vital part of the UK economy – so engaging with more businesses creates economic benefit.

# Benefits of Early Engagement



Increased visibility of potential future opportunities



Ability to help buyers shape their requirements by providing expert feedback early in the procurement process



Ability to demonstrate innovative new approaches that buyers may not have considered



Ability to better plan business strategy on the basis of potential future opportunities



Time to understand and meet buyer requirements



Ability to gather necessary documentation and certifications



Enhanced relationships and networking



Opportunity to understand what the buyer needs before they commit to a formal tendering process

# Common Barriers to Early Engagement

Identifying future opportunities, knowing who to speak to

---

It can be difficult for SMEs to know where to start with early engagement.

As well as **limited resources and time constraints**, there can often be **complex procurement processes** to navigate.

Thankfully, there are ways to overcome this.



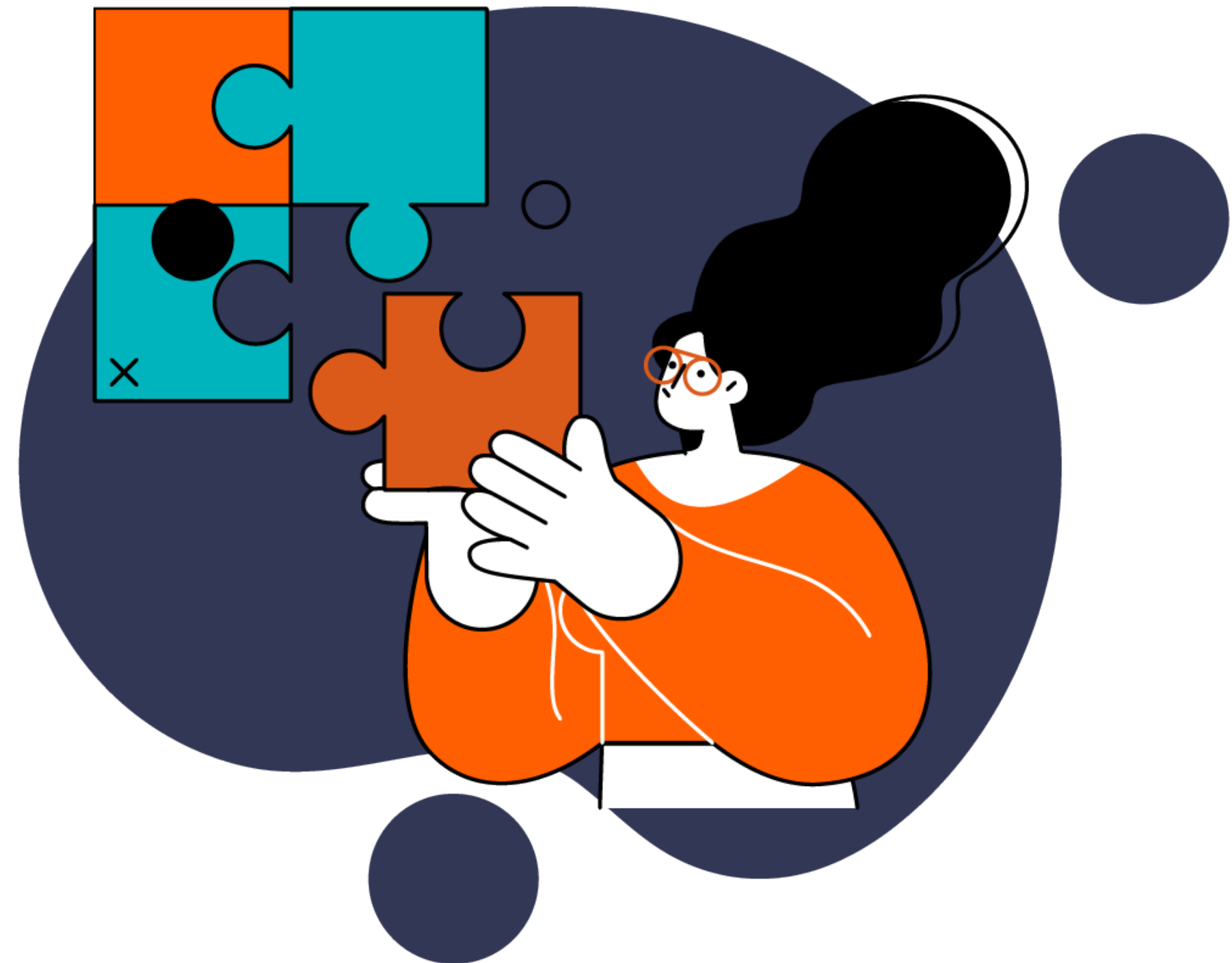
# Initial Steps for Businesses

Register on **HCI** and set up alerts for procurement opportunities.

Build a long term engagement plan.

Develop a strategy for continuous engagement with the public sector.

Regularly update capabilities and understand sector-specific needs.



# Strategies for Effective Early Engagement

- Monitoring Procurement Pipelines (including the new pipeline notices being published under the Procurement Act 2023)
- **Identifying existing healthcare contracts that may be renewed**
- Using the **HCI platform** tools and platforms for upcoming opportunities
- **Establishing connections with procurement officials**
- Participating in Pre-market Engagement Activities - often advertised via a Prior Information Notice (PIN)
- **Attending webinars and workshops**
- Engaging in market sounding and feedback exercises
- **Networking and relationship building**
- Joining industry associations and forums



## Did you know?

Did you know? HCI has access to the UK's **most accurate database of public healthcare procurement key decision makers**. By engaging with them ahead of a contract notice being published you can influence their requirements. HCI connects you to the right buyers and helps build your network.

# How to Engage Early with HCI

Ready to get ahead of your competition and win more public sector business?

## **BOOK YOUR FREE PERSONALISED DEMO**

We'll tailor the demo to your specific business needs.

**FREE DEMO**