



Open Supplier Meeting Outcomes - Future National Civil Engineering Framework for Works & Associated Services, including Roads & Roads Maintenance

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Jennifer Payne, SDP Development Officer – Events and Marketing

jennifer.payne@southlanarkshire.gov.uk

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The Scottish Government, in partnership with the Supplier Development Programme (SDP), delivered an Open Supplier Meeting along with representatives of Scottish Procurement and Property Directorate, Contracting Authorities and Industry on 27 January 2022.

This event was organised to hear the initial thoughts and views from contractors of all sizes including Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3, and SMEs who are interested in bidding for the future contract opportunity or being part of the supply chain for the National Civil Engineering Framework – for Works & Associated Services, including Roads & Roads Maintenance.

The Supplier Development Programme offered event management and project management services to the Scottish Government in advance of the event, to maximise supplier attendance and engagement.

The Supplier Development Programme promoted the webinar widely in advance. The majority of attendees (71%) heard about the event through SDP's marketing and communications efforts.

Supplier Engagement and Feedback

Prior to the event, 123 attendees registered, and, on the day, 76 individuals attended from 53 unique businesses. Of these, almost three quarters - 39 unique businesses - were Scottish SMEs. Most SME businesses were based in the Highlands (14%) and Glasgow City (11%), with 8% of businesses coming from South Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire, Aberdeenshire, and Fife Councils respectively. In total, SMEs based in 15 local authorities were in attendance.

SDP also conducted an online survey after the event concluded, and there were 21 responses. The majority of those who responded to the survey were businesses with a predominantly 'UK-wide' geographic focus for their business (52%), 33% of respondents had a 'Scotland-wide' focus, and 14% had a 'Regional' focus for their business with only one business (5%) having a predominantly 'Local' geographic focus.

Responses to this survey conducted by SDP showed that businesses are keen to continue engaging with SDP further now that they have attended this event with:

- 95% rated the webinar process with SDP as either 'Excellent' or 'Good'.
- 95% would also recommend this type of SDP event to other businesses; and
- 85% plan to attend and participate in future SDP training and events.

Attendees were also asked which parts of this Open Supplier Meeting they particularly enjoyed and found useful. The top three responses included:

- 91% - Background on the Framework and Tender delivered by the Scottish Government Collaborative Construction Team
- 81% - Client's Perspective presentation from Transport Scotland
- 76% - Industry View presentation delivered by Robertson Construction

The survey also highlighted that 100% of respondents found the quality of information that was provided at the event to be either 'Excellent' or 'Good'.

Scottish SME Engagement

SDP was keen to focus on the feedback given by those businesses that are SMEs based in Scotland when conducting this post-event survey as it is these types of businesses who are at the heart of SDP's training and economic development programme.

Out of the 21 responses received, 8 were Scottish SMEs based in various local authorities including Aberdeen City, East Lothian, Fife, Glasgow, and South Lanarkshire – the following stats reflect responses from only Scottish SMEs.

Responses from this set of suppliers showed that nearly all (88%) now felt much more confident that their tender will be stronger than it would have been without this event. Half of those SMEs also felt more positive about potentially bidding for this framework.

The post-event survey highlighted that:

- **100% of Scottish SMEs said they are more likely to engage with the future supplier events in relation to this contract opportunity; and**
- **100% of Scottish SMEs felt that their business could benefit from the future framework opportunity delivered by Scottish Government having participated in this event.**

This sort of feedback goes to show that SDP is sharing the best practice on supplier engagement and how it is very welcomed by those SME suppliers, with the proactive approach SDP are taking by organising these types of events with Scottish Government.

Supplier Experience and Confidence

SDP gauged the experience and confidence of those businesses who attended the event in relation to bidding for public sector contracts.

All Scottish SMEs that provided feedback did have previous experience of tendering with the Scottish public sector. Five out of 8 SMEs had significant experience with over 20 years of tendering with the public sector, two businesses had 6-10 years of experience and the remaining SME had less than two years of experience. Responses from SMEs demonstrated that regardless of tendering experience, this event has had a positive impact on their confidence when tendering in the future.

For example, among Scottish SME businesses with significant experience (over 20 years):

- 80% now said they are more confident that their tender would be stronger than it would have been without this event.
- 60% feel more positive about potentially bidding for the framework after attending.

For those Scottish SME businesses that said they have two years of experience or more in tendering for public sector contracts:

- 86% of respondents agreed that their tender will now be stronger than it would have been without this event.
- 43% of those also agreed that they feel more positive about potentially bidding for this framework now that they have attended this event.

The sole SME with less than two years of experience that responded agreed that their tender will be stronger and that they feel more positive about potentially bidding for this contract opportunity.

The responses to the questions in this survey related to those topics provided an insight into how those businesses who may have experience – and in some cases significant experience – when tendering for public sector contracts now feel stronger and more confident about their bidding capability, particularly for this framework opportunity, having received the help and support after participating in this event.

100% of businesses of all sizes, which said that they have less than two years of experience in bidding, agree that their tender will be stronger after attending this event and that they feel more positive about potentially bidding for this framework.

Larger businesses and primary contractors that have significant experience in bidding for contracts – over 20 years' experience – were also very positive about their future tender potential with 60% agreeing their tender will now be stronger and half of these also feel more positive about now potentially bidding for this framework.

Contracting with the Scottish Public Sector

Businesses who attended the event were also asked about their experiences when contracting with the Scottish public sector and what benefits their business has gained through this process.

With all Scottish SMEs having some degree of experience of tendering with the Scottish public sector, many of them were able to mention the ways that contracting with the public sector has benefitted their business:

- Over half (57%) said the 'Security of public contracts (e.g. financial security)' was the major benefit for small to medium sized enterprises.
- 'Favourable payment terms (e.g. SMEs paid within 30 days)' and 'Access to interesting and/or unique opportunities' are the other main ways.

When businesses of all sizes are included, the figures are even better:

- The majority of respondents (65%) said that the 'Security of public contracts (e.g. financial security)' was the main benefit when contracting with the Scottish public sector.
- Other benefits included 'Access to interesting and/or unique opportunities' (45% of responses) and 'Transparent procurement processes' (35% of responses) being some of the other main benefits for businesses.

One primary contractor with a Scotland-wide focus commented on a specific benefit that contracting with the public sector has brought:

"Meaningfully and transparently contributing to progress and better services across Scotland, benefiting local businesses and people. As a Scottish business and significant employer, it's really important to our people to have that local connection and presence."

Barriers to Bidding

Responses to the survey did not just focus on the benefits in tendering for public sector contracts. Some respondents who expressed that they had experienced some difficulty in their organisation when bidding for Scottish public sector contracts.

Of those businesses that had experienced difficulty when bidding:

- 30% said that they did not have the staff capacity; and
- 15% also said they did not have the staff expertise, either.

A quarter of responses cited that the opportunities available in the Scottish public sector are not relevant for the type of work their organisation does.

This data suggests that an expansion of awareness building and education work through the Supplier Development Programme in partnership with the Scottish public sector should be considered.

Supply Chain Transparency

A final difficulty that 15% of respondents said applied to their organisation was that they did not know where to look for public sector contract opportunities, perhaps highlighting that some businesses are still yet to be made aware of supply chain opportunities, Public Contracts Scotland and other relevant portals.

Events like this partnership approach to an open supplier meeting between Scottish Government, SDP and industry demonstrate there is a proven benefit to advertising and opening supply chain opportunities to those businesses that are as yet unaware in Scotland through the established structures of the Supplier Development Programme.

Qualitative Supplier Feedback

Some final comments from those who responded demonstrates the positive impact that this event had on their experience with bidding for public sector contracts include:

- “As a sales manager I have gained some very good and relevant information from this process, sometimes the ability to discuss specific projects and ensure that the correct people are contacted can be an advantage to both my organisation and the customer.”
- “Excellent and informative presentation. Looking forward to the next supplier engagement event post contract notice.”
- “Thanks again! A really well-run and informative session.”
- “Really useful and well-delivered. Great to see a range of presenters, particularly including supported businesses.”

Finally, every respondent - 100% - said they were more likely to engage with the future supplier events that would be related to this framework opportunity, having participated in this event.

Contact

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More information on the Supplier Development Programme can be found at www.sdpscotland.co.uk and on social media via [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#).