

Introduction to Procurement at The Commonwealth Secretariat (the “Secretariat”)

January 2026



The Commonwealth

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Background

The Secretariat is an international organisation established by Agreed Memorandum, which is given privileges and immunities under the domestic law of the United Kingdom by the Commonwealth Secretariat Act 1966 (as amended by the International Organisations Act 2005). Under this legislation, the Secretariat is not subject to UK jurisdiction and enforcement. This status has an impact on our standard terms and conditions. Our dispute resolution clause refers disputes to the exclusive jurisdiction of the Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitration Tribunal (CSAT). The 8 members of the Tribunal are selected by the Board of Governors and come from Commonwealth member countries. Information about CSAT, including its governing statute and procedure are available on its website at <http://thecommonwealth.org/tribunal>.

The Secretariat’s Procurement Policy is part of our Procurement Manual and is a fundamental component that governs procurement supporting the implementation and delivery of the Secretariat’s Strategic Plans. Procuring (buying) goods and services in the right way is essential to ensure value for money is achieved for our funding Donors.

The Secretariat’s Procurement policies and procedures constitute the rules that must be followed when any procurement is undertaken by the Commonwealth Secretariat and are designed to ensure that risks are minimised and tendering activity is based on international procurement best practice, in a way that is proportionate to the size of our business and the nature of the goods and services we purchase.

Governance and Principles

The procedures for the procurement of all goods and services at the Secretariat give due consideration to the principles of Value for Money, Fairness, Integrity, Transparency, Effective international competition, Gender Equality and Diversity and Sustainability.

The Procurement Manual is normally reviewed every two years. All proposed changes are reviewed by the Secretariat’s Corporate Affairs Committee (CAC) and approved by the Senior Management Committee (SMC).

The Procurement Manual is subject to scrutiny by the Secretariat’s Audit Committee, internal and external Auditors.

Tenders

Procurement activities over £30,000 are conducted through a formal competitive tendering process managed by the Secretariat’s Procurement Team. Tender opportunities are

advertised on the Secretariat's Procurement website¹, and external platforms (e.g., Devex) as relevant for the opportunity.

Terms and Conditions

The Secretariat' terms and conditions can be found on our website².

Supplier Code of Ethics

The Secretariat has a reputation for integrity, openness, non-discrimination, and respect for others. Therefore, the trust and confidence of those the Secretariat deals with is essential. The protection of its reputation and relationships is of fundamental importance to its long-term sustainability and compliance with the Commonwealth Charter. The Secretariat recognises its obligations to all those with whom it has a direct relationship.

The Secretariat's suppliers are expected to adhere to the Supplier Code of Ethics³, which is an integral part of their contract with the Secretariat. The Contract and Code of Ethics include commitments to adhere to anti-fraud, anti-corruption and anti-bribery terms and practices.

Sustainability

Supporting the achievement of environmentally sustainable development in its member states is one of the Secretariat's primary goals and an essential value of the Commonwealth Charter. The Secretariat is committed to ensuring that environmental best practice permeates through the day-to-day and strategic operations of its premises, facilities, procedures and practices and it expects its partners to adopt similar or better standards.

Through our procurement policies and processes we are committed:

- To ensuring, that initiatives do not compromise the neutrality of the Secretariat.
- To ensuring, that suppliers' activities are consistent with our organisational values.
- To enhancing gender equality and non-discrimination.
- To encouraging SMEs to apply for relevant tenders.
- To monitoring the environmental awareness of our contractors and partners with a view (where relevant to the subject matter of the contract) to only doing business with ISO 14001 Environmental Management or ISO 50001 Energy Management accredited organisations.

We expect our suppliers to be able to demonstrate, within their business practices, where efforts are being made to embed Environmental Sustainability.

Further information

For further information about the Secretariat's Procurement Policy/Procedures, please email the Commonwealth Secretariat's Procurement team at:
procurement@commonwealth.int

¹ <https://thecommonwealth.org/procurement>

² <https://thecommonwealth.org/terms-and-conditions>

³ <https://thecommonwealth.org/corporate-policies>

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