

Competitive Tendering

Access and Equity?

Competitive tendering and contracting – What is the Government's policy on access and equity?

What is access and equity?

Access and equity is the Commonwealth Government's policy to ensure government services meet the needs of all Australians regardless of racial, cultural, religious or linguistic background or country of birth.

The access and equity strategy is set out in the Government's *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*, copies of which can be obtained from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (for details, see **Further information** at the end of this sheet).

What is Competitive Tendering and Contracting (CTC)?

CTC is the process of selecting a service provider from a range of bidders by evaluating offers against specified selection criteria. By allowing potential providers to develop new approaches to the provision of goods and services, CTC can improve quality and foster innovation. CTC can help achieve better value for money outcomes and improve accountability and transparency in the delivery of public sector activities.

When is access and equity an issue in CTC?

Access and equity is an issue when the Government purchases services to be delivered on its behalf to its clients. When contracting service delivery for all Australians, or even selected client groups, it is important to ensure that the quality and quantity of the service is consistent across all groups. For example, when the Government approached the market for the provision of employment services, they required bidders to demonstrate their ability to provide services to a diverse client base.

When is access and equity not an issue for CTC?

Access and equity is not an issue when a government agency is purchasing services for its own use, for example, services such as cleaning, security or IT.

What are my access and equity reporting requirements?

You are required to report on how well your agency's services, including those

services provided by contract, meet the diverse needs of your clients in:

- your agency's annual report; and
- the whole-of-government annual report to Parliament on access and equity.

At what stage in the CTC process should I consider access and equity issues?

You need to consider access and equity issues from the outset. Mechanisms to integrate access and equity into a CTC project can be written into the specifications and tender documentation. A bidder's capacity to be sensitive to the needs of diverse clients could also be an evaluation criterion. Managers may find value in releasing draft tender documents for industry and client comment before formal release.

The development of access and equity provisions in a CTC process may also be considered in conjunction with the development of an agency's service charter.

How can I ensure contractors enable me to meet my access and equity obligations?

You can ensure your contractor meets access and equity obligations through monitoring and reporting on the contractor's performance and by putting in place a contract that:

- includes clauses that require the contractor to meet access and equity obligations;

- clearly identifies what services are to be provided, who is responsible for the delivery of these services and who the client can approach if something goes wrong; and
- ensures that the contractor collects client information (eg. the number of clients, their backgrounds and levels of satisfaction).

Further information

Commonwealth access and equity policy: *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*, contact Multicultural Affairs Branch, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. Ph: (02) 6264 4106. Website: <http://www.immi.gov.au>

Commonwealth CTC guidance: *Competitive Tendering and Contracting - Guidance for managers*, contact CTC Group, Department of Finance and Administration. Ph: 1800 650 531. Website: <http://www.dofa.gov.au>

Service Charters:

1. *Putting Service First, Principles for Developing a Service Charter* (which, under Principle 3 - Customer Service Standards and Customer Rights and Responsibilities, includes a requirement to comply with the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* and a requirement that indirect service delivery arrangements comply with Service Charter principles) and
2. *Developing Service Charters, A guide for Commonwealth Government Departments, Agencies and Enterprises*, contact the Service Charters Team, Department of Finance and Administration. Ph: (02) 6275 3037 Website: <http://www.ctc.gov.au>