

SME Guide

for Government Buyers
of Consultancy

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This guide has been compiled by the Management Consultancies Association, the trade association for the consultancy sector, for all buyers considering using a SME consultancy firm within public services.

THIS GUIDE WILL:

Provide you with a definition of an SME Consultancy firm

Give an overview of what to expect from working with an SME

Show you how to find out more about SMEs and those working within government frameworks

WHAT IS AN SME CONSULTANCY?



The definition of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) is any business in the UK with fewer than 250 employees. SME consultancies account for around 70% of all members of the MCA and form an essential part of the UK consulting industry. The MCA is the trade organisation for the leading consultancy firms in the UK. Through the MCA's Consulting Excellence scheme, all members are committed to the highest standards of ethical behaviour, client service and professionalism. Firms must provide evidence of excellent client references in order to be considered for MCA membership.



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What can you expect from working with an SME?

DIVERSITY

There is a huge diversity of SMEs in the market and they offer a vast range of consulting services to support UK government bodies. Many SMEs have decades of experience of working in the public sector, working with local and national organisations. Some companies are solely focused on working with public sector bodies and others work with a mixture of both public and private sector clients.

COLLABORATION

SMEs encourage collaboration, both with peer SME organisations and other consultancies in order to deliver outcomes for their clients. In collaborating, SMEs achieve capability and capacity matching that of other organisations, whilst maintaining the absolute focus on their client.

EXPERTISE

MCA SMEs have high levels of experience and capability and are true experts in their area of competency. They are dedicated to delivering results that are right for their clients. SMEs are regular winners of the MCA Awards, the UK's highly respected industry awards which are judged by an independent panel including many public sector experts. The nature of smaller, more experienced SME teams, means that the individuals have a mature, experienced set of skills and rounded expertise.

RELATIONSHIPS

Working with a smaller organisation can create deeper relationships based on common goals and outcomes, with a mature and highly experienced team. Delivering excellent outcomes and maintaining strong and trusting relationships is a key feature for many SMEs.

FLEXIBILITY

Due to their size SMEs are flexible and agile and develop bespoke solutions based on best practice.

PROVEN EXPERIENCE

There is a difference between an organisation having previously delivered a similar project, and the actual consultants who arrive to deliver the project. With an SME, the individuals and profiles presented, are the same people who will deliver the work. Consultants working in SMEs are often experienced and mature professionals, who have previously operated in a broad range of consulting environments and business models. Individuals operating in mature teams, have the expertise to deliver on a broad range of tasks to meet project needs, drawing from their depth of knowledge and experience.

CULTURE

Culturally, SMEs work in close partnership with clients, spending time to understand organisational challenges, and not seeking to rush through solutions. SMEs bring expertise, passion, tools and techniques to these partnerships, and seek to leverage the knowledge and experience that exists within the organisation to drive the right outcomes.

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Can SMEs offer specialist advice?

SME members can provide organisations with a more niche or specialist consultancy offer that may better meet the clients' needs in the market. SME organisations are often more aligned to a single sector or a more discerning range of services and skills, and are more likely to have similar clients, where experience and best practice may be shared.

Working in a more focused way with a narrower client base means that SME consultancies often build up a depth of experience and a consultancy staff with direct sector experience.

What makes an SME different from a larger consulting organisation?

SMALLER TEAMS

Working with an SME is different in terms of both culture and approach. SMEs mostly function as a closely-knit team of expert resources. Frequently they will have a higher than average level of experience across team members and because of their smaller size they are able to offer bespoke advice and solutions. Some SMEs are specialists in key areas (such as cyber security) and others offer a more diverse range of services.

AGILITY

The agility and organisational style of an SME works well as a single provider. Additionally, many SMEs are familiar with operating as part of a consortium to combine the working styles and approaches of both large and small organisations to best meet the needs of the client.

CLOSE COLLABORATION

SMEs try to maintain a very close working relationship with customers to provide the level of contact between expert consultants and senior customers needed to deliver well-tailored results. This means the relationships are often deeper and more focussed, providing a different experience from a customer perspective. You are more likely to work with the same consultants who know your organisation.

How to find SMEs

The government frameworks provide a list of SMEs who are pre-selected to be credible and compliant with a broad range of requirements.

The MCA directory also has a full list of SME Consultancies and the sectors they specialise in. [PLEASE SEE HERE](#)

The Crown Commercial Service (CCS) has built an understanding and knowledge of a number of SMEs who are active and committed to public sector consultancy and delivery.

MCA AWARDS SME ENTRANTS SEE HERE

www.mca.org.uk/consulting-case-studies/public/carnall-farrar-and-isle-of-wight-care-system
www.mca.org.uk/consulting-case-studies/coeus-consulting-and-southend-on-sea-borough-council
www.mca.org.uk/consulting-case-studies/impower-consulting-with-ealing-borough-council
www.mca.org.uk/consulting-case-studies/inner-circle-consulting-and-london-borough-of-newham
www.mca.org.uk/consulting-case-studies/necs-consultancy-and-nhs-national-cancer-programme



Some common myths

THERE IS A RISK WORKING WITH SMEs AS THEY MAY NOT BE BIG ENOUGH TO MEET MY NEEDS

SMEs have access to both permanent employees as well as proven associates, meaning that they can flex the size of teams upwards when needed. SMEs are also highly effective at working with other large and small consulting organisations as part of an eco-system, managing the delivery between the organisations to ensure that client needs are met effectively.

SMEs ONLY MEET SPECIALIST NEEDS

There are many SMEs that exist within a particular market niche but there are also many that cover a much broader range of services. In the consulting marketplace, as with almost all other markets, it is important for the buyer to have a good view about what they need to help decide what product or service is likely to be the most appropriate.

SMEs DELIVER A LOWER QUALITY

SMEs have many repeat clients because of the high-quality work they deliver and real results. The MCA recognises that quality consulting can be delivered irrespective of firm size.

IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO MANAGE A CONSORTIUM OF SMEs

SMEs have contacts in the industry that support regular and re-occurring partnerships with big and small firms on a regular basis. Working in a consortium is an increasingly common arrangement for consultancies to help deliver the skills and knowledge needed for clients. Contrary to the assumption only larger firms can lead consortiums and oversee diverse and complex programmes of work, there are many examples where the SME is the prime who leads and manages the consortium.

GOVERNMENT TARGETS

The UK Government is committed to levelling the playing field for smaller organisations. Government has a target of committing 33% of procurement spend to SMEs through direct and indirect spend by 2022 and has implemented a number of measures aimed at ensuring departments are considering SMEs in their supply chains. The MCA is working in partnership with the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) to engage in feedback around the new frameworks and to promote the value of SME consulting alongside that of larger firms.



Who are the MCA?

The Management Consultancies Association (MCA) is the voice of UK consulting sector. The MCA is the representative body for the UK consulting sector and has been at the heart of the industry for over 60 years. We have a wide membership base and our members include PwC, Deloitte, EY, KPMG and IBM as well many other medium size firms and small specialist consultancies. Management consulting firms provide a broad range of services, from help in defining strategies to implementing large-scale IT and change programmes, and from coaching individuals and teams to providing expert advice in specialised fields.

The UK consulting industry is extremely competitive and includes a wide diversity of types

of firm and specialisms, providing clients with the means to access precisely the support that they need. Requirements vary enormously – from highest level strategy and policy development to the achievement of specific financial and organisational goals. Common to them is the need to deliver tangible value for the client organisation.

Through our Consulting Excellence principles, which our members sign up to – members commit themselves to high standards in terms of ethical behaviour, clients service and value and professional development. They provide excellent consulting services which deliver the outcomes clients seek and need and they always strive to improve the value we can deliver to clients.

