



**BRINC**

BROKERING CROSS-BORDER  
INNOVATION THROUGH CLUSTERS

# INNOBROKER MODEL

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF INNOBROKERS  
IN PROCURING INNOVATION



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
What is an InnoBroker .....	5
Why InnoBrokers .....	5
How to Innobroke? .....	5
<b>Background</b> .....	6
The BRINC Project .....	6
Building on Previous Project's Work .....	7
<b>The InnoBroker Model</b> .....	12
Clusters as Key Connectors of the Innovative Ecosystem .....	12
Expanding the Search for Innovation .....	12
Public Buyers Sharing Experiences .....	13
<b>InnoBroker Support</b> .....	14
Strategy .....	14
Needs Assessment .....	17
Market Engagement .....	22
Tender Dissemination .....	30
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	35

# LIST OF PROCUREMENT CASES

Case #1 – Treatment of Diaper Waste .....	8
Case #2 – Circular Demands on Electrical Vehicle Chargers .....	9
Case #3 – Recycling Waste from Single-use Sanitary Safety Materials .....	10

# LIST OF GOOD PRACTICES

Sardinia's Green Public Procurement (GPP) Strategy .....	15
Embracing Change: Key Insights for Scaling Circular Procurement .....	16
Green Demands in Tenders .....	16
Integrating Circularity in Public Procurement .....	17
Embracing Small Steps: Key insights of Effective Innovation Procurement .....	18
The Diaccess Project: Innovation Procurement in Växjö .....	19
Federated and Joint Public Procurement: Lessons from an Innovative Experiment .....	21
Southern Swedish Municipalities Lead the Way in Innovation Procurement for Small and Medium-Sized Municipalities .....	22
Enhancing Green Public Procurement Skills in SMEs .....	24
Proactive Preparation Key to Success in Public Procurement .....	24
Empowering Small Businesses in EU Public Procurement .....	25
Pioneering Road Weather Intelligence: Insights from Klimator's Partnership with Växjö Municipality .....	26
Transforming Public Procurement with Demand Acceleration .....	27
Strategic Management of Intellectual Property in Innovation Procurement .....	28
Driving Efficiency through Procurement: Limburg.net's Approach to Waste Collection Innovation .....	29
Navigating Public Procurement .....	30
Small Company, Big Impact .....	31
Mediate Nordic's Key to Success: Leveraging Public Procurement .....	31
Rekomo's Journey in Sustainable Public Procurement – Setting a Standard for Circular Office Solutions .....	32
EGEN – Tackling Funding Challenges in Circular Economy Projects .....	34
BRINC Key Learnings: 6 Tips for Innovation Procurement .....	35

# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT IS AN INNOBROKER

InnoBrokers are organisations that help bridge the gap between public buyers and innovative companies. The InnoBrokers support public buyers to identify their needs of innovation and, once ready, connect them with innovative SMEs to make the interaction more successful. Many challenges exist when public buyers and SMEs meet, as in many ways they communicate differently and work on different time scales. The InnoBroker has the competence to engage both groups and to facilitate dialogue that is beneficial for all. The ultimate goal for the InnoBroker is to stimulate the innovation uptake through public procurement.

## WHY INNOBROKERS

Public procurement account for approximately 14% of the EU's GDP<sup>1</sup>, however, tenders are often catered to off-the-shelf solutions. With the significant budget that goes into public procurement every year, public buyers can play a pivotal role in innovation and the circular transition, but there is a huge untapped potential in using innovation procurement strategically<sup>2</sup> as a tool to push development of new innovations and uptake of existing innovative technologies to support a more circular economy. However, public authorities tend to be risk averse, thus often resorting to proven technologies<sup>3</sup>, and they also often do not have the necessary connections within the innovation ecosystem allowing them to effectively engage the right stakeholders and obtain the necessary input to draft tenders that are both realistic and ambitious. Therefore, InnoBrokers have an important role to fill by connecting the right stakeholders, pushing public buyers to dare to choose innovation, and convincing SMEs that public tenders can be worth the effort.

## HOW TO INNOBROKE?

This report outlines the InnoBroker model and explores the role of InnoBrokers. It is written as a practical guide for anybody interested in assuming the role of InnoBroker or interested in understanding the concept. The following pages provide an overview of how an InnoBroker can support the different phases of procurement. The report includes best practice examples and is accompanied by a Toolkit with practical tools and methodologies that can be used in the InnoBroker facilitation.

This report will get you off to a good start with offering InnoBroker services.

1. Public procurement. (n.d.). European Commission - Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs. [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/public-procurement\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/public-procurement_en)

2. European Commission. (2021). Commission Notice. Guidance on Innovation Procurement, 3-63

3. Ibid

## THE BRINC PROJECT

This report is produced as part of the BRINC project: Brokering Procurement of Innovation Through Clusters. The BRINC project is co-funded by the European Union's COSME programme.

The BRINC project seeks to accelerate the uptake of innovation within the circular economy. Increase the use of joint public procurement of innovation across borders by facilitating procurement of innovation and offering training sessions for Public Buyers, SMEs and InnoBrokers.

The BRINC project has supported 3 main cases of public procurement of innovation (PPI) within circular economy, which will be further elaborated later in this report, and supported several other public buyers in exploring PPI in different ways and at different stages of the procurement process. The project has additionally produced 5 trainings for each of the three target groups: Public Buyers, InnoBrokers, and SMEs and created a professional network of public buyers and one for InnoBrokers to share knowledge on PPI.

The BRINC consortium consist of four partners:



**ACR+** is an international network of cities and regions sharing the aim of promoting sustainable resource management and accelerating the transition towards a circular economy. ACR+ has extensive experience in strengthening the ability of public authorities to leverage PPI to accelerate the circular economy.



**Hållbar Utveckling Skåne** is a membership-based organisation based in southern Sweden, and counts over 30 municipalities and public authorities among its members. Hållbar Utveckling Skåne has long worked with sustainable and circular procurement, and procurement of innovation in multiple projects. Hållbar Utveckling Skåne has also collaborated with Sustainable Business Hub since 2018 to help create an understanding in municipalities in the region of how to act on a strategic level to introduce innovation procurements in the organisation.



**Clean** is Denmark's national environmental technology cluster and has played a pathbreaking role in facilitating PPI, notably leading a tender for innovative plastic sorting solutions. This tender was developed and carried out on behalf of 40+ municipalities in Denmark. Clean hosts the secretariat of the International Cleantech Network, a long-standing strategic partnership of 22 cleantech clusters around the world, including 13 in Europe.



**Sustainable Business Hub** is a cleantech cluster based in Malmö, Sweden and has long-standing experience organizing market consultation activities targeting SMEs for both public and private challenge owners. Sustainable Business Hub was the coordinator of the Techbridge ESCP-4i, which includes implementation of market consultation and matchmaking activities between municipal entities in North America and start-ups and SMEs in Europe.

## BUILDING ON PREVIOUS PROJECT'S WORK

The BRINC project builds further on the project Innovation Procurement Brokers (InnoBrokers) which ran from August 2018 to August 2020. The InnoBrokers project similarly worked to facilitate the procurement of innovation by strengthening links between public buyers on the demand side and innovative companies on the supply side. The project piloted a total of 5 regional procurement of innovation broker schemes and based on that developed an InnoBroker model for future replication and tools. More information about the project, the InnoBroker model and tools can be accessed on the [InnoBrokers project website](#).

The BRINC project has developed the InnoBrokers methodology in several key ways. Firstly, BRINC has focused on adapting the model to cross-border collaborative procurement and on exploring the benefit of public authorities working together cross-borders to accelerate the adoption of circular innovation. Secondly, the embedding of professional networks for public authorities and for innovation procurement brokers in the International Cleantech Network (ICN) upon the termination of the EU support, as well as engaging ICN's member clusters to support market consultations. Using the network of clusters (InnoBrokers) in market dialogue helps expand the market engagement to more effectively provide SMEs across the EU access to innovation procurement opportunities, regardless of their home market. Lastly, the project had a cross-cutting focus on capacity-building and collaboration to support replication and scalability.

The InnoBroker model presented in this report builds on experience and learnings from the activities in the BRINC project and from the supported procurement cases. The BRINC project has supported three main procurement cases, described more in detail in the next pages.



Figure 1 - The three procurement cases supported by the BRINC project

# TREATMENT OF DIAPER WASTE

## BRINC CASE #1

**Buyer:** City of Copenhagen

**Need:** Diaper waste is a large bulk of the residual waste in many European countries. To reach the EU goals that EU Member States must recycle or prepare for reuse at least 60% of their municipal waste by 2030, diaper waste can be a significant fraction to target and find a recycling solution for. Therefore, the City of Copenhagen formed a needs statement for treatment of diaper waste. The need covers the receipt and processing of the municipality's diaper waste with the aim of maximising recycling, and the disposal/handling of any waste fractions from treatment of the diaper waste.

**Cross-border interest:** Only a scarce few diaper recycling facilities (with different techniques) are located around the world and no facility is located in the Baltic Sea Region. Depositing diaper waste to an already established recycling facility would require extensive use of transports. However, to get someone to establish a recycling facility in the Copenhagen region, the public authorities need to prove that such a facility could be profitable. Hence, they need to show that they can collect a minimum 10 000 tonnes of diaper waste in their tender.

Pre-studies in the City of Copenhagen have shown they have the ability to sort and collect diaper waste both in preschools and households to an estimated amount of 5 000 tonnes. They therefore needed other public authorities in Denmark, Norway and Sweden to show interest in using the facility, if built. Such interest was found, and Letters of Intent (Lols) from one other Danish municipality and four Swedish municipalities were attached to the tender.

**InnoBroker services:** The City of Copenhagen already had a clearly formulated need and the BRINC project has added value by facilitating the cross-border connections both to public authorities and the business sector. The project connected the City of Copenhagen to other interested PAs in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, both through a webinar and through one-on-one meetings, and assisted in obtaining Lols to complement the tender documentation. Also, the projects networks were used to spread the word to businesses of the upcoming tender, so that they have the chance to build a consortium to be able to put in offers once published.

# CIRCULAR DEMANDS ON ELECTRICAL VEHICLE CHARGERS (EVCS)

## BRINC CASE #2

**Buyer:** Parkering Malmö

**Need:** Public buyers are committed to creating a circular economy by buying products, services, and infrastructure that are designed, used, and operated to maximise value and minimise waste, reducing demand for primary resources, lowering carbon emissions, and allowing the regeneration of natural systems. ECOS (Environmental Coalition on Standards) who work on the communication standards needed for smart charging have published this guide for public authorities last year. In it they explain the benefits of smart charging, the standards needed and provide recommendations regarding the implementation of standards and the upgradability (which they see as key for circularity).

In a prior EU-funded project, ProCirc, new innovative demands were formulated in a [joint statement of demands on EVCs](#), and Parkering Malmö wanted to integrate some of them in an upcoming tender. This to fulfill their need of procuring more circular and sustainable EVCs.

**Cross-border interest:** To reach sustainability goals, countries in Europe are increasing the use of electric vehicles but also the charging infrastructure needs to be sustainable, if to meet the goals. The joint statement of demands shows a cross-border interest among public authorities on pushing the EVC market forward towards a more circular and sustainable product. Hence, the outcome of Parkering Malmö's tender has high interest among the ProCirc organisations signing the statement, but could also reach further as it is of interest for all countries increasing their use of electric vehicles.

**InnoBroker services:** Parkering Malmö wanted to get knowhow from other public authorities on how to incorporate the joint demands in a tender and BRINC set up a cross-border dialogue meeting to facilitate that. Finding that several of the demands in the joint statement had not been incorporated in any tender, Parkering Malmö wanted to have a pre-tender market dialogue and tapping into the SME connections in the clusters, BRINC arranged such a meeting. The outcome of the meeting was that Parkering Malmö knew just how far they could push the market in their tender demands.

# RECYCLING WASTE FROM SINGLE-USE SANITARY SAFETY MATERIALS

## BRINC CASE #3

**Buyer:** Institut Català de la Salut (ICS)

**Need:** To ensure the safety of patients and their workers, large quantities of health safety materials and single-use personal protection are used, items which must be discarded once they have fulfilled their purpose. In the 8 hospitals managed by the ICS, on average, large quantities of disposable sanitary safety items are consumed every month: 60,000 gowns; 30,000 aprons; 200,000 surgical drapes, sheets, and other cloths; 1,000,000 masks; 17,000,000 gloves; and 400,000 caps, pants, gloves, overalls and other protective equipment. Once used only once, these materials are rejected as group II sanitary waste, destined to landfill, despite the fact that they are high-quality materials with many opportunities for recovery.

ICS needs ways to recycle these single-use sanitary safety materials. When they contacted BRINC they had recently published a preliminary market consultation hoping to find one business able to treat the entire volume of their mixed non-hazardous waste. However, the call only received one substandard response.

**Cross-border interest:** During BRINC events, several hospitals and public entities in charge of hospitals raised interest in reducing their waste. Hence, the outcome of ICS tender is of interest to all of them. In addition, SMEs in the clusters in BRINC have shown interest to expand their solutions cross-border but have found it difficult to communicate with their potential buyers.

**InnoBroker services:** BRINC put ICS in contact with several other public authorities implementing innovative solutions to reduce and recycle sanitary waste in their hospitals (Ghent University Hospital) or that are looking for solutions (Navarra Health Service). Following BRINC's efforts to establish cross-border joint dialogue meetings and one-on-one discussion among public buyers, as well as organising cross-border pre-tender market dialogues with potential suppliers, ICS decided to target specific single-use sanitary products: blood collection tubes, and sterilization wraps.

*The eight hospitals managed by ICS are: Arnau de Vilanova University Hospital, Bellvitge University Hospital, Germans Trias i Pujol University Hospital, Joan XXIII University Hospital, Josep Trueta University Hospital, Tortosa Verge de la Cinta Hospital, Viladecans Hospital)*

In addition to the three procurement cases of the BRINC project, other needs have been found during need assessment dialogues and workshops with public authorities in the project duration. The needs have been rejected to get further help to evolve into procurements within BRINC, mostly due to not finding cross-border interest or finding solutions already on the market. Some examples:

- Find new ways to use residual waste from biogas production: Today, residual waste from biogas production is commonly used as a biofertilizer. Could it be used for something else?
- Get bulky waste in a circular system: Municipalities need to get bulky waste (i.e. furniture no longer in use) onto the market instead of sending them away as waste. There are legal matters hindering municipalities from giving away or selling disposables. Can a system be set up to overcome this?
- Method to reduce bulky waste: To decide which measures to take to reduce the amount of bulky waste, municipalities need a method to trace what happens with large inventory like furnishing in their organisation.
- A method to enforce a buying behaviour that reduces bulky waste: Municipalities need to be able to take efficient measures to reduce bulky waste using a method to enforce the buying behaviour to keep the furniture in use for longer, promoting reuse and refurbishing before discarding and buying new.
- Prolonging life of textiles: Textiles have a significant environmental impact when produced and once made its use needs to be maximised. How do we set a system that prolongs the lifespan of textiles?
- Reuse of worn out textiles: At some point clothing is worn out. Preferably, municipalities and/or their suppliers would be able to reuse worn out clothes, as new products (e.g. give-aways or shoe covers), or mechanical or chemical fiber reuse.
- A solution that enables public buyers to conveniently purchase second-hand goods: Despite a booming second-hand market, several barriers prevent municipalities from purchasing second-hand goods. Is it possible to procure an innovative solution within current legislation that enables public buyers to purchase second-hand goods conveniently and effectively?

In many of these cases, the BRINC project has facilitated e.g. dialog among different public buyers or preliminary market engagement. The adaptation of the model is also based on experience and learnings from these cases.

Furthermore, a survey was conducted with key stakeholders involved in the project and brainstorm evaluation exercises conducted with the project group as well as the InnoBrokers involved in the network of clusters, to evaluate and develop the InnoBroker model.

These insights and learnings from the project have in this report been turned into a concrete guide and analysis of the role of InnoBrokers to allow for replication and continued learning based on the takeaways from BRINC.

# THE INNOBROKER MODEL

The InnoBroker's role is to enable better engagement between public buyers and providers of innovative solutions. The InnoBroker supports the use of PPI strategically to drive innovation and the creation of new solutions addressing societal challenges such as climate change. The underutilization of PPI clearly demonstrates the need for a role like that of the InnoBroker. Below is firstly described some of the key features and considerations concerning the InnoBroker role explored in the project. The following section provides concrete guidance on how the InnoBroker can offer support across the different phases of the procurement process.

## CLUSTERS AS KEY CONNECTORS OF THE INNOVATIVE ECOSYSTEM

Personal connections and direct contacts are key in mobilizing innovative suppliers and more effective than platforms such as the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)<sup>4</sup>. As triple helix organisations, clusters are ideally placed to act as InnoBrokers. The Cluster organisations are well connected in the regional innovation ecosystems and are often already used to assuming the role of facilitators of innovation and running different activities to support innovation<sup>5</sup>. Cluster organisations typically have strong links and personal connections in the innovation ecosystem and therefore the ability to effectively mobilize relevant actors in connection with PPI.

However, other types of organisations can also use this guide and assume the role of InnoBrokers, the key factor is the strong network and ability to engage the innovation ecosystem and a broad array of relevant stakeholders. In the BRINC project, some project partners have had stronger links to the SMEs, and other partners have strongholds with the public authorities. In this way, different organisations can also benefit from working together to provide the InnoBroker support.

12

## EXPANDING THE SEARCH FOR INNOVATION

The BRINC project has tested the cross-border aspect of procurement based on the assumption that the best innovative solution might not be in a public buyer's own backyard, but a good solution could exist or be in development in another corner of Europe. Making tenders more easily available for innovative SMEs from other regions will help increase the market opportunities for innovative companies and eventually accelerate innovation and the uptake of innovative solutions. Public buyers might have a tendency to prefer local solutions since language and legal barriers generally make local solution providers more favorable. A key element of this report is its emphasis on cross-border collaboration and exploring innovative solutions beyond national boundaries. The InnoBroker model report will showcase how InnoBrokers can help push public buyers in this direction ultimately creating more opportunities for SMEs and promoting innovation.

4. Buchinger, E., & Kienegger, M. (2020). Innovation Procurement Brokers. Innovation Procurement Broker: Business Model, 3-67 [https://innovation-procurement.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/InnoBrokers/D1.1\\_Innovation\\_Procurement\\_Broker\\_business\\_model.pdf](https://innovation-procurement.org/fileadmin/user_upload/InnoBrokers/D1.1_Innovation_Procurement_Broker_business_model.pdf)

5. Cluster Definitions | European Cluster Collaboration Platform. (n.d.). <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/cluster-definitions>

## PUBLIC BUYERS SHARING EXPERIENCES

Collaborative procurement has been explored as a tool to pool demand to accelerate the widespread adoption of innovative solutions. Although collaborative and joint procurement indeed will can reach a larger market for innovative solutions, it is also found that innovative solutions are not always geared towards serving a large demand, which is why scaling down demand sometimes allows for an innovative solution to be implemented and then subsequently scaled. Therefore, joint procurement has been found to not necessarily be the best way to effectively accelerate the implementation of innovative solutions. However, cross-border dialogue between public buyers can be valuable in helping them finding the means and the courage to take on public procurement of innovation.

Despite regional differences in needs and legal differences making some solutions more suitable in some places than in others, public buyers across the EU are largely facing the same needs and challenges. This is particularly evident when addressing major sustainability challenges, such as reducing waste generation, promoting reuse and recycling, ensuring more sustainable transport systems, or better preparing for extreme weather events. Public buyers across the EU face similar challenges and can greatly benefit from knowledge sharing. This report highlights how InnoBrokers can support collaboration between public buyers through more flexible structures than formal collaborative procurement arrangements.

# INNOBROKER SUPPORT

The procurement process is not linear and the buyer might have to go back and forth between different steps or steps might be overlapping. For simplicity we have split the process in four stages: strategy, needs assessment, market engagement, tender dissemination. Especially, needs assessment and market engagement might often work together in an iterative process, where contact with the market and broader stakeholders feed into the refinement of the needs. Much of this support comes prior to the public buyer starting the formal procurement process.



Figure 2 - The different phases of the procurement process

The support provided by the InnoBroker should be customized to meet specific needs of the public buyer. InnoBrokers can offer assistance throughout the full process or only at one or several stages. The list below shows how the InnoBroker support should be guided by the need of the public buyer. It should be seen as a source of inspiration, allowing the InnoBroker to select and tailor approaches to suit the specific case they are handling.

## STRATEGY

*The first stage focuses on identifying potential areas where innovation can address public sector challenges or serve as a tool to achieve strategic goals. It includes strategic planning and setting priorities by public buyers. The main role of the InnoBroker in this stage is to inspire and assist in identifying opportunities, and encourage innovative thinking and approaches.*

- **PROMOTING PUBLIC PROCUREMENT OF INNOVATION**

The InnoBroker has a role to play in helping promote the knowledge and use of public procurement of innovation as a tool, even before the start of the procurement process. The InnoBroker can do this through conversations, sharing of resources and ideas, and pushing the use of innovation procurement as a strategic tool. The InnoBroker's goal at this stage is to challenge the public buyer to do things differently, and explore the potential of public procurement for driving innovation.

The best practices shared in this report can serve as inspiration. Below you can find a tool which provides an outline of an in-depth workshop which focuses on strategic priorities and innovation procurement. It does not take its starting point in any set idea or need. The workshop will help think over priorities and strategies and the InnoBroker can push the thinking towards the use of innovation in public procurement.



### Relevant tool of the InnoBroker Toolkit

- Tool 1 - Need identification workshop

In this best practice, the political layer of the public administration is very important as public procurement can be used as a strategic tool to reach political goals. Having a procurement strategy that includes innovation will help pave the way for more PPI.

Public buyers who have ambitious sustainability goals are also more likely to engage in public procurement of innovation as more ambitious targets are more likely to require solutions not yet existing on the market. High sustainability goals can therefore be a good starting point, and InnoBrokers can play a role in promoting the setting of ambitious targets or by promoting PPI as a tool to reach already set goals.

Facilitation on this level might not lead to a specific PPI case right away, but potentially it can lead to changed political priorities, changed ways of working, and more knowledge about PPI as a strategic tool that can lead to more PPI in the future.

## SARDINIA'S GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT (GPP) STRATEGY

### BEST PRACTICE

The autonomous region of Sardinia is leading in the integration of sustainability within public procurement. The region of Sardinia developed a comprehensive GPP strategy that aligns with the region's broader sustainable development goals. With over 85,000 public lighting points replaced by energy-efficient LEDs, and nine out of ten public procurements now integrating GPP criteria, Sardinia's strategy showcases how green purchasing can drive economic, environmental, and social progress.

Gianluca Cocco, Director of Environmental Sustainability in Sardinia, highlights how the region has been working to embed GPP into its long-term plans. In 2021, Sardinia launched its regional sustainability strategy, "Sardinia 2030," aiming to balance economic, environmental, and social priorities.

The region's circularity approach centers on sustainable public procurement as a key mechanism for fostering innovation and addressing the climate crisis.

Cocco emphasizes the importance of collaboration across public and private sectors, noting that Sardinia's GPP strategy was built through an inclusive process involving over 3,300 stakeholders. This participatory approach has enabled the integration of sustainable procurement criteria across various sectors, from public lighting to agri-food initiatives, contributing to Sardinia's leadership in GPP across Italy.

Key learnings from Sardinia's GPP journey include:

1. Collaboration with both public and private stakeholders is crucial.
2. GPP supports innovation by encouraging small companies to compete with larger ones.
3. Dedicated resources, such as technical assistance, are vital for successful implementation.
4. A continuous focus on behavior change is essential for long-term sustainability.

## EMBRACING CHANGE: KEY INSIGHTS FOR SCALING CIRCULAR PROCUREMENT

### BEST PRACTICE

An important factor to recognize when working with procurement in the context of circular economy is the need to embrace change and be prepared for a shift in mindset.

Joan Prummel, International Circular Economy Advisor at the Dutch Infrastructure and Water Ministry, explains that while successful pilots in circular procurement can yield positive outcomes, scaling them up can be challenging due to organisational attitudes, such as internal agreements, cultures and values. Prummel highlights that many factors contribute to

the difficulty of scaling, but the most crucial lie in supply chain collaboration, internal commitment and organisational mindset.

Prummel shared several key learnings to consider:

1. Understand what is needed in your organisation to drive change.
2. Expect and accept the possibility of change.
3. Focus on measuring the impact rather than the level of circularity.
4. Remember that circular economy is not the end goal, but an approach.

## GREEN DEMANDS IN TENDERS

### BEST PRACTICE

Green public procurement is emerging as a powerful tool for addressing climate challenges, as highlighted by Lena Brogaard, Associate Professor and Vice-Leader of the Center for Research on Public-Private Collaboration at Roskilde University, Denmark. She emphasizes its vast potential to address climate challenges through strategic purchasing that incorporates the full environmental costs of production and consumption.

In her research, Brogaard highlights that while many public tenders incorporate minimum green requirements, only a small fraction utilize competitive green award criteria, which hold the most potential to drive sustainable innovation.

For instance, evaluating bids based on criteria like reducing climate impact or increasing recycling rates demonstrates how procurement can incentivize greener practices.

Brogaard underscores that fully leveraging green public procurement requires investments in trained procurement officials and the development of standardized green criteria. Streamlined processes and shared frameworks could amplify the public sector's ability to act as a powerful force for market-driven environmental change.

## INTEGRATING CIRCULARITY IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

### BEST PRACTICE

Circular procurement brings new opportunities and elements when implemented, but such changes are only possible through dedicated team effort. The City of Malmö is a prime example of how organisations can integrate circular economy principles into public procurement, starting with a pilot on reused furniture in 2018. This initiative not only raised awareness internally but also garnered media attention, helping to build momentum for further circular procurement projects.

Emma Borjesson, a member of the Circle Economy Team at the Environmental Department in the City of Malmö, highlights that starting with simple project and gradually building momentum was key to their success. Early wins, like their circular furniture pilot, attracted political support and media support, embedding circular principles deeper into Malmö's procurement processes.

Borjesson also stressed the importance of focusing on behavior change, noting that circular tenders alone are not enough—products must be used in ways that extend their lifecycle, such as through renovation and refurbishment.

Key learnings from Malmö's journey include:

1. Start with straightforward projects to achieve early success.
2. Empower champions within the organisation to lead the transition.
3. Embed circularity into procurement processes, from job descriptions to templates.
4. Collaborate across departments to sustain progress.

Malmö's experience underscores that circular procurement is a continuous process, requiring both organisational change and a shift in mindset.

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

*In the needs assessment stage, specific needs and requirements are defined in detail. This involves engaging with a broad range of stakeholders to understand the exact problems and desired outcomes. In this stage, the InnoBroker's access to relevant stakeholders is very valuable as well as the ability to facilitate workshops and exercises to guide the process with shaping the needs and gathering input from different actors.*

### • OPENING NEEDS TO INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

Innovation procurement begins when a public buyer faces a need that cannot be met with existing market solutions or seeks to find a new, innovative solution to address a specific challenge. Public buyers may often fall into the habit of "doing what they've always done," relying on familiar solutions when specifying their procurement needs. To foster greater use of public procurement for innovation, they must broaden their perspective and design tenders that encourage and accommodate innovative solutions. The InnoBroker's role in this stage is to help the public buyer (re)consider needs to shift the focus away from the solution they think they need and to instead focus on the problem they are trying to fix.

In other words the InnoBroker can help the public buyer to focus more on functional specification rather than technical specification. Functional specification focuses on ‘what’ the public buyer needs, whereas technical specifications focuses on how this should be done. In a very simplified example, a need expressed in functional terms could be “we need clean floors” whereas a corresponding technical specification would be “we need the floors mopped twice a week”. The functional way of expressing this need allows for innovative solutions such as: floors that cannot get dirty, robots that senses dirt-levels and automatically cleans as needed. This is of course a very simplified example but the core idea is that the InnoBroker can help the public buyer take one step back and carefully consider what they need, without describing this with a specific solution in mind.

There are many ways the InnoBroker can do this. It can be through conversation, discussion and asking critical questions to the public buyer to prompt them to consider other angles of perspective. Workshops are another very effective tool to go one step deeper into the needs assessment. Workshops can be hosted with just a few people engaged with the procurement in question, with a broader group of people from across the public departments (which can also help break down organisational silos) or with a broad stakeholder group including citizens, groups that might be impacted by the procurement, NGOs, researchers, solution providers etc. Both options can present benefits and the most appropriate size and participant group will vary depending on the need and time. Resources available will also impact what is feasible at this stage. The following tools consist on workshop exercises and design thinking that can be effectively used for this purpose.

## EMBRACING SMALL STEPS: KEY INSIGHTS OF EFFECTIVE INNOVATION PROCUREMENT

### BEST PRACTICE

It is not about big leaps, but small steps. This is the key message from Advisor Innovation Procurement, An Schrijvers, regarding the importance of needs assessment when considering innovation procurement — not only for end users but also for the market.

Drawing from her experience with the Programme of Innovation Procurement (PIP), a project by Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (VLAIO) aimed at encouraging public organisations in Flanders to procure innovation, Schrijvers emphasized the need to truly understand and engage with the users’ needs when

seeking innovative solutions. According to Schrijvers, innovation procurement is not about large-scale, disruptive innovations but rather exploring possibilities for change, no matter the scale or scope.

Key takeaways included:

- Keeping things simple
- Assessing needs vs. capabilities
- Engaging stakeholders within the given context
- Creating small pilots in real-world settings to test solutions
- Remembering that innovation often lies in the user-experience.

## THE DIACCESS PROJECT: INNOVATION PROCUREMENT IN VÄXJÖ

### BEST PRACTICE

Andréa Swedenborg, project manager for the Swedish municipality Växjö, shared her experience driving an innovative procurement approach to address complex local challenges. This method arose from the realization that conventional market solutions often lacked the specificity needed for municipal issues, such as optimizing winter maintenance and waste collection. To tackle these challenges, the municipality embraced a model of innovation procurement, inviting private sector partners to co-create tailored solutions.

Swedenborg explained that the approach hinged on mutual commitment: while the municipality provided expertise and a testing environment, private partners contributed time and resources, keeping commercialization rights to their solutions. This arrangement helped the municipality avoid ongoing maintenance costs while fostering local entrepreneurial growth.

The procurement process unfolded in three phases:

- needs assessment to prioritize challenges;
- a dialogue-based procurement phase to collaboratively refine solutions;
- a flexible development phase that allowed for contract adjustments as solutions evolved.

While only three out of seven projects reached full implementation, the process yielded valuable lessons on the importance of patience, adaptability, and trust, especially with smaller, innovative companies unaccustomed to public procurement.

Swedenborg highlighted key takeaways: secure ample time, approach procurement as a partnership rather than a product purchase, focus on needs over requirements, and maintain innovation within a manageable scope. Växjö illustrates that municipalities can achieve tailored solutions to unique challenges, while supporting local innovation and contributing to the broader public sector's sustainable growth

## • LEARNING FROM OTHER PUBLIC BUYERS

As mentioned many of the challenges faced by public buyers especially related to the sustainability agenda are similar across countries. Even though differences exist and some solutions might be a better fit for some locations than for others, the general challenges faced both when it comes to the needs as well as when it comes to specific procurement considerations are still largely similar across countries and regions. Knowledge sharing with other public buyers can therefore be very valuable. By sharing knowledge and experiences public buyers can accelerate learning and avoid making the same mistake as others.



### Relevant tool of the InnoBroker Toolkit

- Tool 6 - Collaborative Procurement Guidelines

Knowledge sharing with public buyers who are interested in the same need, can also be very beneficial. In the BRINC project, any need was shared with a broad network of public buyers to find public buyers already exploring or interested in exploring the same need. This dialogue in a smaller group of public buyers interested in the same need provides value both to the procuring authority and the other public authorities. Topics to explore in these groups are what actions/plans are being considered by the different participants, what kind of data do they have, or want to have, have they already explored different solutions, and what are their concerns regarding an innovation procurement in relation to the need in question or in relation to specific solutions/approaches.

This type of dialogue can give the procuring authority valuable inputs and help them think through new ideas or concerns. Engaging other public buyers in the process (market engagement and tender formulation) will enable them to learn and sometimes even start a similar innovative procurement. In this way, these knowledge sharing meetings work as capacity building and help accelerate the use of PPI strategically.

Practically, the InnoBroker engages the relevant public buyers and can be the facilitator and host of meetings throughout the procurement process facilitating the dialogue and encouraging the open sharing of information. The InnoBroker should always encourage the procuring authority to share as much information as possible throughout the entire procurement process as well as the monitoring and evaluation of the final procurement.

## FEDERATED AND JOINT PUBLIC PROCUREMENT: LESSONS FROM AN INNOVATIVE EXPERIMENT

### BEST PRACTICE

A pioneering initiative in public procurement between eight European cities has provided valuable insights into overcoming challenges related to multi-country procurement. The experiment, conducted by ANCI Toscana (the Association of Municipalities in the Italian region of Tuscany) in the framework of the European-funded project CLIMABOROUGH, bridges the gap between federated and joint procurement models. This innovative approach aims to address climate change challenges by leveraging an integrated, yet flexible procurement system.

The experiment, which began with a preliminary market consultation in each city, reflects an important distinction between "federated" and "joint" procurement. Federated procurement involves multiple procurers from different regions or countries working independently but benefiting from a central or shared framework, while joint procurement consolidates purchases through a single entity. ANCI Toscana's initiative incorporated elements of both approaches, creating a hybrid model that balanced individual city needs with centralized procurement efficiency.

The experiment highlighted several critical lessons for successful multi-country public procurement: clear definitions between federated and joint procurement models are essential for balancing individual and collective needs. Strong communication and collaboration between all stakeholders, along with flexible procedures for legal and cultural differences, helped align expectations and streamline the process. Early market consultations allowed cities to identify specific challenges, ensuring tailored solutions. Finally, standardizing language and simplifying legal procedures made the process more accessible, while the hybrid model's adaptability proved key to its success across diverse urban environments.

The experiment, which has already led to significant engagement from solution providers across Europe, is still ongoing, with continued lessons learned about how to handle logistical complexities, cultural differences, and diverse procurement laws. As ANCI Toscana prepares for future rounds of procurement, scalability and the potential for replicating this model in other urban environments will be critical factors in determining its long-term success.

## SOUTHERN SWEDISH MUNICIPALITIES LEAD THE WAY IN INNOVATION PROCUREMENT FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED MUNICIPALITIES

BEST PRACTICE

Tomelilla Municipality, along with other municipalities in southern Sweden, set out to normalize innovation procurement in small and medium-sized municipalities, recognizing that in procurement, the journey itself often holds the greatest value, where new knowledge and insights truly emerge.

To test their new model, the municipalities organized several workshops to identify needs that could be met with innovation and to pilot the model effectively. Strategic developer Stefan Persson from Tomelilla Municipality noted that the results were surprising even to the national agency.

Two innovation procurements were announced, contracts were signed with four innovative suppliers, and a proven innovation procurement network was established in the region.

Key lessons included the importance of staying technique neutral and focusing on the challenges and needs, being systematic while embracing unexpected changes, and trusting the process. In a surprising turn, the municipalities procured innovation sprints themselves, signing contracts with three different suppliers to run the sprints.

22

## MARKET ENGAGEMENT

*The purpose of the market engagement stage is to gauge the availability of innovative solutions through interaction with the market. It includes market research, supplier engagement events, and consultations to inform potential suppliers about the upcoming procurement and gather feedback. The InnoBroker's network and ability to activate the innovation ecosystem is key in this stage as well as facilitation of workshops.*

### • ENGAGING A BROAD RANGE OF STAKEHOLDERS

The market engagement and the need assessment will often be overlapping processes and the market engagement and input from solutions providers will help the public buyer to shape their need and eventually the tender specifications.

Knowledge of market capabilities and innovation prospects is essential to make a good tender that is open to innovative solutions, sets the bar high for innovation and sustainability, and is at the same time realistic enough to receive a good amount of tenders from solution providers.



#### Relevant tools of the InnoBroker Toolkit

- Tool 7 - Facilitating Market Engagement - Legal guidelines
- Tool 8 - Presenting a Need to the Market
- Tool 9 - Market Engagement Process Guide
- Tool 10 - Early Market Engagement Strategy

This is one of the core values of an InnoBroker. The InnoBroker will be much better connected with the innovation ecosystem than the public buyer and will know much better how to activate and contact relevant stakeholders. The InnoBroker can support and facilitate the entire market engagement process. Below there are links to tools that provide guidelines for how to set up the market engagement process. It should be tailored to the needs of the public buyer.

The InnoBroker should use its network to engage a broad variety of stakeholders. Firstly, the InnoBroker can activate its own national/regional innovation network to engage local solution providers. Secondly, the InnoBroker should link to InnoBrokers from other regions either through personal contacts or through networks such as the International Cleantech Network, or other platforms that help expand the InnoBroker's reach well beyond its own ecosystem. Public buyers might have a preference for local solutions, however, if the priority is innovation and fast-tracking implementation of solutions to tackle sustainability challenges, the best solutions or partner to develop a solution with, might not be the one right around the corner.

Dialogue with other stakeholders than solution providers might also be valuable. For example in the case of the City of Copenhagen tendering for a plant to treat diaper waste, they were interested in dialogue with diaper producers to potentially gather insight into how they see diapers develop in the future. Likewise, other sources of valuable information might be industry associations, and legal sources.

In essence, the InnoBroker should help the public buyer expand the market engagement both across borders and across the value chain.

The InnoBroker is well placed to take the role of facilitator of these sessions. This will make the market engagement process easier for the public buyer and can help them see new possibilities. In the end, leading to a tender that is more likely to be successful. When dealing with public procurement and market engagement, it is of course important to pay attention to legal requirements and rules regarding fair treatment and no preferential treatment. The InnoBroker does not have to be a legal expert, but it is good to be familiar with the rules to ensure not to propose any way forward that is not in line with rules and regulation. The tool provides legal guidelines to help InnoBrokers navigate rules on market engagement.

## ENHANCING GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT SKILLS IN SMES

### BEST PRACTICE

The Erasmus+ Greener Project, which concluded in 2022, aimed to enhance the skills of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Green Public Procurement (GPP). The project emerged in response to the growing recognition that SMEs face challenges in participating in public tenders, especially those prioritizing environmental criteria. Led by partners from Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, and Belgium, the project sought to raise awareness about the importance of GPP while enhancing the employability of professionals trained in sustainable procurement.

The project surveyed SMEs to understand challenges in participating in public tenders. Non-participating SMEs perceived environmental criteria as barriers,

while those engaged in GPP found these requirements more manageable than expected. Both groups emphasized the importance of training and sustainability policies.

Key learnings from the project include:

1. Training and upskilling are essential for enabling SMEs to engage in green public tenders,
2. SMEs need support in navigating environmental criteria and adopting tools such as life cycle assessments and environmental certifications,
3. Effective GPP requires collaboration between SMEs and public authorities
4. Participating in GPP can shift SMEs' perceptions, demonstrating the feasibility of meeting environmental standards.

24

## PROACTIVE PREPARATION KEY TO SUCCESS IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

### BEST PRACTICE

Malin Håkansson, a lawyer specializing in public procurement, emphasizes the importance of being proactive and prepared when small suppliers engage with public authorities. She advises that early involvement in the procurement process helps suppliers better understand the needs of public authorities and ensures they are contract-ready when formal procurement procedures begin. Håkansson highlights the significance of market dialogue, which allows suppliers to provide input before the procurement starts, enabling a more tailored approach to the public authority's needs.

According to Håkansson, suppliers should prepare by thoroughly understanding the specific requirements of a procurement —

from financial standing to technical ability — and ensuring they meet these standards before the formal process begins. By doing so, suppliers can increase their chances of success when submitting a tender.

Håkansson's key lessons for successful public-private cooperation include being aware of legal frameworks, understanding procurement procedures, and ensuring readiness to meet the authority's requirements. This includes having the necessary technical, financial, and professional qualifications. Additionally, she stresses the importance of carefully reading all procurement notices, asking questions when needed, and maintaining clear communication with the public authority.

## EMPOWERING SMALL BUSINESSES IN EU PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

### BEST PRACTICE

Small businesses across the EU often face unique challenges in navigating public procurement, particularly around the complex rules and requirements aimed at ensuring transparency and fair competition. Despite these challenges, approximately 30% of small businesses in Sweden participate in procurement, reflecting substantial interest amid perceived obstacles.

Magnus Johansson, Competition and Public Procurement Expert at Företagarna (the Swedish Federation of Business Owners), explains that public procurement rules, grounded in EU law, establish thresholds for open competition, including the use of the TED portal for higher-value tenders, accessible to businesses across member states. For lower-value contracts, smaller companies can instead access national databases.

Johansson emphasizes that familiarity with framework agreements — a common contract type — is essential, as these agreements provide a structured, multi-year approach to awarding specific contracts.

To support small businesses, Johansson highlighted several key strategies: developing familiarity with procurement principles, leveraging access to prior tenders, and maintaining open dialogue with public authorities. Collaboration among small businesses to meet contract requirements is also encouraged, allowing them to compete more effectively. Additionally, businesses should be reminded of their rights to appeal and use standstill periods if contract decisions are unfavorable. Together, these strategies can help small businesses confidently navigate and succeed within the EU public procurement system.

25

### • SHAPING NEEDS BASED ON THE MARKET

When buying innovation the market has a lot to say in how to best formulate what the public buyer is looking to buy and potentially which type of procurement procedure to use. Through market engagement facilitation the InnoBroker can help the public buyer use input from the market to make decisions on the tender.



#### Relevant tool of the InnoBroker Toolkit

- Tool 11 - Procurement Procedures for Innovation Guidelines

The feedback from the market can lead the way in which type of procurement procedure is most appropriate. Knowing the degree of innovation needed to reach a solution that can solve the public buyers need, can provide a good indication of what type of procurement procedure is most appropriate. The tool below provides guidelines on how you can take a cue from the market when making choices around the procurement decision. The market can also be a good indicator of the criteria the public buyer should set in the tender. It is key that the tender attracts bidders. If no one bids on the tender, nothing will be implemented. Therefore, it is important that the criteria set are something that the market is able to provide/develop within the timeframes set in the tender.

Both downscaling and upscaling of demand can also be tools to make the tender more in line with market capabilities. In some cases the public buyer might want to split the procurement into smaller lots. Many innovative SMEs might not yet be at the scale where they can e.g. treat all of a waste stream in a municipality or deliver furniture to all schools. In this case it might make sense to start with a smaller fraction and implement an innovative solution on a smaller scale and gradually scale up from there. On the other hand, if an innovation requires a big investment, documenting a larger demand and scale might be necessary to make the investment attractive.

## PIONEERING ROAD WEATHER INTELLIGENCE: INSIGHTS FROM KLIMATOR'S PARTNERSHIP WITH VÄXJÖ MUNICIPALITY

**BEST PRACTICE**

Emil Danielsson, CEO of Klimator, shared insights from the company's collaboration with Växjö Municipality to improve winter road maintenance using road weather intelligence. Klimator, a leader in road weather forecasting, utilizes data from various sources, including connected cars and winter maintenance vehicles, to help municipalities optimize road safety. By implementing this approach, Växjö was able to reduce operational costs by 30-70% over the winter season.

This project was a significant milestone for Klimator, as it marked the first time such a comprehensive, data-driven solution was sought in Sweden. Despite the region's harsh winter conditions, Växjö Municipality embraced an innovation procurement process to develop tailored, real-time solutions for winter maintenance. This partnership enabled the municipality to respond more effectively to changing road conditions, from icy patches to snowfall, with clear, actionable data.

Danielsson reflected on the importance of understanding "comfort zones" in an innovation process. He emphasized that while everyone starts an innovation project

with enthusiasm, navigating complex challenges can cause participants to drop off if comfort zones are not respected. He praised Växjö's ability to foster an open dialogue and manage expectations throughout the project, ensuring a collaborative and transparent environment.

Another key takeaway from the collaboration was the difficulty in balancing innovation with the rigid structure of traditional contracting. Klimator's agreement with the municipality included 17 appendices, which highlighted the challenges suppliers face in aligning creative solutions with compliance requirements.

In conclusion, Danielsson stressed two main lessons: first, the importance of staying focused on core objectives, as these are the criteria for success in the long run; and second, the value of creating an open and adaptive environment that respects diverse perspectives. These principles are essential for achieving meaningful innovation in public procurement.

# TRANSFORMING PUBLIC PROCUREMENT WITH DEMAND ACCELERATION

## BEST PRACTICE

Sweden is redefining public procurement through the "Demand Acceleration" model, developed by Compare Foundation and DigitalWell Arena. This innovative approach emphasizes leveraging public procurement not only to meet immediate needs but also to foster scalable solutions and drive market development. Innovation Managers Lina Svensberg and Carolin Maule highlighted how the model empowers public authorities to create value by balancing market demand with the flexibility needed for innovation.

The methodology focuses on shifting procurement practices toward scalability and adaptability. Public procurement is often underutilized, but demand acceleration encourages public buyers to engage suppliers in open, collaborative processes. Suppliers retain intellectual property rights, fostering market competitiveness while enabling municipalities to source solutions that address unmet needs.

A key example is the "Guidance in the City" project, launched in 2018 to develop technology for individuals with cognitive challenges. This initiative used a phased funding approach, with payments made only after each phase's successful completion. By initially funding multiple

suppliers for concept or prototype development, public buyers minimized financial risk while fostering innovation. This method allowed for early-stage exploration and collaboration, ensuring that only the most promising solutions advanced, while limiting losses if a concept proved unfruitful.

Key principles underpinning the Demand Acceleration model include: 1. Public procurement as a driver of innovation and market growth, 2. Flexibility and collaboration to encourage scalable, supplier-driven solutions, 3. Embracing uncertainty, with success emerging from iterative processes, & 4. Scalability as a core consideration for both public authorities and suppliers.

This model illustrates how demand acceleration transforms public procurement into a strategic tool for innovation, sustainability, and economic growth.

# STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY IN INNOVATION PROCUREMENT

## BEST PRACTICE

Jean-Paul Triaille, Legal Officer at the Central IP Service of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, and Prof. Pedro-José Bueso Guillén, International Expert in Public Procurement and Business Law at the University of Zaragoza, highlighted the pivotal role of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in innovation procurement. Both experts emphasize that strategic IPR management can lower costs, foster innovation, and support market growth.

A recurring challenge in public procurement is balancing ownership and licensing. Public buyers often default to requiring IPR ownership, believing it ensures control over the procured solution. However, this approach can hinder innovation, increase costs, and restrict contractors' ability to further develop or commercialize their solutions. Licensing provides an alternative, allowing contractors to retain ownership while granting public buyers the rights they need.

Both Triaille and Bueso Guillén emphasize that licensing agreements can be tailored to address specific needs, such as scope, territory, duration, and exclusivity.

Key insights include the importance of distinguishing between ownership and licensing. While ownership grants full control to the public buyer, it can limit the contractor's innovation potential. Licensing offers a more flexible solution, granting usage rights without restricting further commercialization. The experts advise public buyers to assess each procurement case individually to determine whether full ownership is necessary or if a tailored licensing agreement could achieve the same objectives.

In conclusion, a flexible and strategic approach to IPR in public procurement enables administrations to drive innovation while fostering fair and effective collaborations with contractors.

## DRIVING EFFICIENCY THROUGH PROCUREMENT: LIMBURG.NET'S APPROACH TO WASTE COLLECTION INNOVATION

BEST PRACTICE

Wim Govaerts, Innovation Manager at Limburg.net, discussed the development of an innovative waste collection system. He explained the operational structure of Limburg.net, a partnership of 43 municipalities in Flanders, focusing on optimizing waste collection and recycling. Govaerts introduced a solution using color-coded bags for waste, which could be sorted with optical sorting technology, allowing multiple waste fractions to be collected in one operation. This method aimed to reduce CO2 emissions and costs compared to traditional waste collection.

The key innovation was the development of a new type of waste collection truck, as existing models were not compatible with the new system. Limburg.net initiated a pre-commercial procurement (PCP) process to collaborate with European truck

manufacturers and design a suitable truck. The process included a proof of principle and proof of concept phases, ensuring flexibility in procurement and avoiding vendor lock-in. Two manufacturers participated, and although the prototypes met the requirements, the focus remained on improving the truck's design.

Regarding intellectual property (IP), Govaerts highlighted the importance of securing usage rights. While the truck manufacturers retained their IP, Limburg.net ensured the technology would be marketed within a year at a fair price. The project resulted in a successful procurement process, enabling Limburg.net to acquire the necessary trucks and opening up further opportunities for innovation in waste collection.

## NAVIGATING PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

### BEST PRACTICE

José María Terrés-Nícoli, Managing Director at ORITIA Y BOREAS, shared the company's involvement in a PPI (Public Procurement Innovation) project for advanced wind and weather forecasting in port operations. ORITIA Y BOREAS, a technology-based spinoff from the University of Granada, specializes in wind engineering for high-rise buildings, long-span bridges, and port operations. They developed a high-resolution forecasting system that predicts operational conditions at ports. This system uses advanced data modeling to provide forecasts up to 72 hours in advance, helping port authorities make informed decisions.

The PPI project aimed to create a reliable, high-resolution predictive system for port operations, integrating weather data such as wind, waves, and currents into a decision-making dashboard.

ORITIA Y BOREAS led the project, collaborating with Politécnica and Ayesa. The system was designed to be adaptable to different ports, ensuring scalability beyond the initial application. The project was structured in two phases, with a 2.5 million EUR budget, and saw ORITIA Y BOREAS complete the first phase successfully, moving on to phase two.

Terrés-Nícoli discussed the advantages of the PPI process, particularly its ability to support small companies like ORITIA Y BOREAS in securing large, innovative projects. However, he also pointed out some challenges, including the time-consuming process of defining the project scope and dealing with administrative delays. He stressed the importance of clearly defined intellectual property (IP) rights from the start of the project to avoid complications during development.

## TENDER DISSEMINATION

*This stage involves the formal publication of the tender documents, ensuring transparency and encouraging participation from innovative suppliers. InnoBrokers can support in distributing the tender to their network.*

- **AMPLIFYING REACH**

The broad involvement of different stakeholders and solutions in the market engagement phase is important but in the end, it is the amount of tenders received that matters. Public tenders are often published on platforms not necessarily familiar to most SMEs, such as Tendsign.com or TED. The InnoBroker therefore can play a role in making sure SMEs are made aware of the tender. The InnoBroker should share information on the tender through their relevant channels, this could be newsletters, on their websites, on platforms like ICN solutions, etc.

## SMALL COMPANY, BIG IMPACT

### BEST PRACTICE

Lyhne Design demonstrates that impact comes from skill and dedication rather than size. As a small Danish design firm, Lyhne Design successfully revitalized several elderly homes in Copenhagen and Aarhus municipalities through a public procurement partnership.

Using their innovative biological lighting solution, they improved the light conditions in several selected elderly homes. The project was part of an innovation partnership tender with the municipalities of Copenhagen and Aarhus, which sought solution to address insufficient lighting in nursing homes.

Several key lessons were identified to achieve a successful public-private innovation collaboration: the importance of dedicating sufficient time for aligning expectations during the onset, thorough planning and project management, and extending testing phases to ensure optimal results.

According to General Manager Anita Lyhne three core values became clear during the collaboration: 1) motivation as a driving force, 2) the necessity of setting clear objectives, and 3) the critical role of aligning expectations among all stakeholders.

## MEDIATE NORDIC'S KEY TO SUCCESS: LEVERAGING PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

### BEST PRACTICE

Public procurement represents a significant business opportunity, one that Mediate Nordic has successfully specialized in, generating 90% of its revenue through this channel

Mediate Nordic, a Swedish staffing firm specializing in tailored solutions for the healthcare sector, has built its success on navigating the complexities of public procurement. CEO Mia König emphasizes that forming partnerships through public procurement demands substantial effort due to its intricate structure, time commitments, and resource-intensive nature.

Drawing on the company's experience, König highlights the importance of time management, patience, continuous learning, and the principle that practice leads to improvement.

Despite these challenges, Mediate Nordic's journey underscores four major benefits of public procurement partnerships: a stable and predictable revenue stream, enhanced credibility, the development of long-term relationships, and invaluable learning opportunities.

## REKOMO'S JOURNEY IN SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT — SETTING A STANDARD FOR CIRCULAR OFFICE SOLUTIONS

### BEST PRACTICE

Sebastian God, Sales Manager at Rekomo, a leader in sustainable office furniture, shared insights into the company's success in navigating public procurement to advance circular economy practices. Rekomo, established in 1992 and based in Sweden, has pioneered the sale, rental, and refurbishment of pre-owned office furniture across the Nordic region. Driven by a commitment to "produce as little as possible," Rekomo's approach promotes environmental sustainability while also helping clients significantly reduce costs. Today, Rekomo's operations span Stockholm, Gothenburg, and beyond, with 60 employees and a strong regional network.

Initially, Sweden lacked framework agreements or procurement standards for secondhand furniture. Rekomo spent over a decade advocating for the adoption of sustainable procurement practices, working closely with municipalities, regional governments, and purchasing centers. These efforts paid off, with Swedish authorities recognizing both the economic and environmental advantages of procuring secondhand furniture. Rekomo now holds more than 40 framework agreements with public entities, including two major agreements through Adda (a purchasing center for all municipalities and regions)

and Kammarkollegiet (a purchasing center for all governmental organisations) that make Rekomo's offerings available to Swedish governmental, municipal, and regional organisations.

Rekomo's services go beyond furniture sales, including comprehensive solutions like reupholstering, repainting, and thorough cleaning to extend each item's life. God shared that, thanks to Rekomo's efforts, the company went from zero public sector sales to over SEK 40 million annually within just four years. Rekomo's experience and the appeal of its offerings have made it a preferred provider, setting a benchmark for sustainable furniture solutions within the public sector.

Sebastian God's advice for other businesses seeking public procurement success is clear: be prepared with thorough, data-driven evidence of your product's value, ensure visuals are appealing, and leverage positive customer references. Keeping detailed records and reusing successful proposals can help streamline future applications. Through perseverance and strategic communication, Rekomo has shown that small businesses can indeed drive change in public procurement, aligning profit with sustainability.

## • CHALLENGES

Public procurement of innovation and cross-border collaboration is not easy and straightforward. Here are three challenges that the InnoBroker should be aware of:

### Language barriers

Many still prefer to interact in their own local language, and tenders or requests for information (RFIs) are often published in local languages. This makes it hard for solution providers from other parts of the EU to answer and engage in the procurement process. Posting tenders and RFIs in English, would help open them up to more potential suppliers. The InnoBroker can, if possessing good language skills in the languages in question, help mediate the communication in meetings and dialogues and help limit misunderstandings. The InnoBroker can consider offering help in translating needs descriptions etc., however, being mindful that translation of legal documents would likely be outside of the competences of the InnoBroker. The InnoBroker should address language barriers and promote more accessible documents.

### Legal barriers

Although the procurement directive harmonises rules across the single market, there are still differences in the way the directive is transposed into national legislation. Likewise, there might be different legislation in the different EU countries in relation to the area the procurement is happening within, e.g. different rules for how different waste categories can be handled and treated. Many times the public authority and procurement department will be well aware of relevant regulation, but it is important to be aware of as an InnoBroker and to not take for granted that things work the same way as in other places. This is also a challenge for the SMEs wanting to answer the tender and the InnoBroker can help highlight this. Legal support can be relevant in this regard.

### Funding and decision making

Things take a long time. When dealing with public procurement the process of making decisions in the public authority is longer than when dealing with private buyers and the flexibility is often also more limited. e.g. if the public buyer finds out another type of procurement might be more appropriate or a bigger budget is needed, this might mean a return to political discussions and new mandate. It is therefore important to be realistic when making timelines for public procurement and to allow enough time for processing the input from each phase and understanding what and where different decisions are made. External funding can be a powerful tool to push the public buyer to try something new. As they are dealing with public money, there is some logic to the tendency to focus on costs and stick to tried and tested. If the InnoBroker service comes with financial support for innovation procurement this could make the process of convincing the public buyer to try a new approach easier, and remove some of the risk from the public buyer.

## EGEN – TACKLING FUNDING CHALLENGES IN CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROJECTS

### BEST PRACTICE

Thomas van Nieuwenhuizen, a Green Innovation Consultant at EGEN highlights critical funding challenges faced by circular economy projects, including the difficulty of accessing finance for high Technology Readiness Level (TRL) initiatives, misaligned funding instruments, and the complex processes involved in securing funds. Often, significant financial gaps emerge, particularly in the transition from research and development to large-scale implementation, where funding requirements exceed the scope of grants and subsidies alone.

To overcome these barriers, EGEN emphasizes the importance of integrating funding considerations at early stages of project development. They stress the need for aligning project plans with funding instrument requirements, such as those of Horizon Europe, LIFE, and the Innovation Fund. These programs often require co-funding strategies, necessitating a blend of public and private financing

Tools like the European Investment Bank's Project Development Assistance (PDA) offer critical support, helping project developers conduct cash flow analyses, refine business models, and access blended financing.

By combining grants, debt, and equity across different project phases and leveraging national and European funding instruments, circular economy projects can address funding gaps more effectively, facilitating their path to implementation.

This principle aligns seamlessly with public procurement processes, where carefully structured tenders can act as a bridge between sustainability goals and the diverse funding strategies required for circular economy initiatives. Through this integrated approach, public procurement serves as a catalyst for innovation, driving impactful projects while ensuring they are financially viable.

# CONCLUSION

InnoBrokers can play an essential role in bridging the gap between public buyers and innovative companies, facilitating the uptake of innovation through public procurement. This document has outlined the InnoBroker model with a focus on cross border collaboration and it has hopefully prepared you to assume the role of InnoBroker yourself.

## THE INNOBROKER BRINGS VALUE

1. **Inspiration:** InnoBrokers inspire public buyers to consider innovative solutions and use public procurement strategically to achieve ambitious goals, particularly in sustainability.
2. **Connectivity:** They have strong networks within the innovation ecosystem, enabling them to engage a broad range of stakeholders, including SMEs, public authorities, and other relevant actors from innovation ecosystems all across the EU.
3. **Neutral Partnership:** Acting as neutral partners, InnoBrokers build trust among stakeholders, ensuring fair and transparent processes.

The support of the InnoBroker will help public buyers in discovering better, more innovative solutions while also enhancing their understanding of public procurement of innovation. For SMEs, the support can play a crucial role in uncovering new opportunities of growth and development through public procurement. It can help them better understand the potential benefits, navigate the complexities of the process and become more familiar with the administrative requirements. This support will enhance their capacities to participate effectively in procurement opportunities in the future.

35

## 6 TIPS FOR INNOVATION PROCUREMENT

## BRING KEY LEARNINGS

Six tips for greater success with innovation procurement from the BRINC project:

1. **Consider that it is a new method of procurement:** public procurement of innovation (PPI) is not only about the tender phase, but about planning throughout the entire procurement process. PPI starts already in the tender preparation phase, e.g. with early-stage market dialogue as it informs you about the solutions available on the market.
2. **Create an inclusive process:** involve actors in the value chain and include civil society as much as possible in the process.
3. **Foster an innovation mindset within the organisation:** change mindset to encourage people to get started. Education and training are key to achieving this.

4. **Collaborate:** join networks to stay up to date, discover what has already been done, learn from others and share experiences.

5. **Think strategically and long-term:** PPI is not suitable for emergencies. Strategic and long-term thinking (3-5 years ahead) and planning is required to achieve its full potential.

6. **Get help finding a solution:** the solution you're looking for may already exist, and an intermediary agent can help you find it. Regional programs and competence centers can also help you overcome challenges, such as the capacity to try something new or to find solutions to funding aspects.



**BRINC**

BROKERING CROSS-BORDER  
INNOVATION THROUGH CLUSTERS



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