



Innovate
UK



Pitching and networking: A no-nonsense guide

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Introduction

Welcome to Pitching and networking: A no-nonsense guide, a practical resource to help SMEs enhance their approach when pitching to local authorities and the wider public sector. Whether you're new to public sector pitching or looking to sharpen your approach, this guide offers clear advice, practical tools, and valuable links to help you create strong pitch decks, connect with key stakeholders and make a lasting impression.

This guide has been developed by Gizem Eren, an impact-driven consultant and regenerative explorer dedicated to fostering systemic change for a future that nurtures both people and the planet. With a background in engineering and an MBA in marketing, Gizem brings together technical expertise and strategic business insight. Her work supports organisations in aligning their operations with environmental responsibility, helping SMEs not only pitch successfully, but also align with the sustainability goals increasingly prioritised by the public sector. Gizem is also a coordinator of the Collective for Climate Action, a collaboration of public sector staff across the UK working towards Net Zero, a group supported by the Net Zero Places Innovation Network.



About the Net Zero Places Innovation Network

The Net Zero Places Innovation Network supports local authorities with their Net Zero journey and engages with many businesses across a wide range of sectors to support them in public sector procurement. It aims to bring the latest products and services to the forefront, to ensure local authorities are aware of the innovations being developed across the UK.

The guide covers everything from improving your pitch, to finding networking events and connecting with influential organisations that can help you scale and grow. It has been created to help demystify the pitching process, giving you practical tools to confidently approach public sector opportunities and connect with the right networks to drive your business forward.

More information:

[Gizem Eren- Website](#)

[Innovate UK Business Connect Net Zero Place Innovation Network- Website](#)

[The Collective for Climate Action \(for the Public Sector\)- Website](#)

How to improve your pitching

Your pitch is more than a presentation, it's your opportunity to showcase how your innovation solves real-world problems, adds value and stands out. This section offers guidance on developing a data-backed narrative, refining your delivery and ensuring you focus on the needs of your audience.

We encourage SMEs to adopt a problem-solution approach, clearly highlighting why your product or service is the best fit for local authorities or public sector organisations. Visual storytelling is key, so your deck should contain more visuals than text, with concise messages that will resonate with your audience. Practice makes perfect, so rehearsing your pitch and tailoring it to each audience is essential.

This section also provides links to practical tools and resources to help you create clear, compelling pitches, whether you're pitching for funding, partnerships or contracts.



Know your audience

Have a strong data-backed narrative.

Keep it inspiring.



Emphasise value

proposition and benefits.

Focus on problem-solution approach

Illustrate why what you're doing is better/innovative



In your pitch deck, have more good visuals than text.

Don't read it; practice delivery



It's good to have both short and longer versions of your pitch.

In a live setting it's also important to avoid falling into a long monologue by asking questions or for thoughts throughout to check it's on point for the audience (for a sales pitch rather than a fundraising one).

Resources to Help with Creating Your Pitch Deck

Crafting a strong pitch deck is a critical part of your journey. In this section, you'll find useful links to resources, templates, and guides that can help you build a professional and engaging deck.

These suggestions represent just a selection of tools available, many others, including free platforms or those offering free trials, are also available. Choosing the right tools depends on your brand, your audience and your technical skillset, so experiment to find what works best for you.

A well-structured deck not only tells your story but also answers the key questions public sector buyers will have, such as: How does your solution meet their needs? Is it innovative, cost-effective and sustainable? Use these resources to refine your message and make every slide count.



[Preparing a Good Investment Pitch A useful step-by-step guide – Innovate UK](#)

[Building and Scaling Climate Hardware: A Playbook](#)

[Work on Climate Pitch Deck Workshop Video](#)



[Know Your Customers' "Jobs to Be Done" - Harvard Business Review Article](#)

[How to create an awesome startup pitch deck for investors - Seedrs Academy](#)



[How To Approach Pitching to Climate-Tech Investors – Medium.com](#)

[Climate-Positive Business Models: Buildings](#)



[Canva Pitch Deck Templates](#)

You Have Improved the Quality of Your Pitch Deck, Now What?

With a polished pitch deck in hand, the next crucial step is building relationships with organisations you want to work with – and with those who can champion your product or service. Public sector contracts often rely on trust, reputation, and visibility, so the more you embed yourself in relevant networks, the stronger your chances of success.

This section highlights practical ways to network, build community connections, and foster collaborations with like-minded businesses and influential platforms. These connections can provide insight into upcoming opportunities, help you refine your pitch for specific audiences, and even open doors to unexpected collaborations.

The suggestions in this section are a great starting point, but remember: the public sector ecosystem is vast, and there are many more networks, groups, and forums you can join depending on your sector, location, and specialism.



Organisations and pages to follow and connect with:

Innovate UK Business Connect

Innovate UK Business Connect Net Zero Places Innovation Network

Climate Connection

Kind Community

The Climate Brick

Ellen Macarthur Foundation (Circular Economy)

Work on Climate

Edie- A business media brand with sustainability content for professionals of all levels



Speak to your local **Chambers of Commerce** or **Growth Hub** who will often have local networking and events available to you. Co-working spaces are also a great place to network and find new connections!

Events where you can exhibit, attend and network

Attending and exhibiting at industry events can be one of the most effective ways to raise your profile, meet potential partners, and gain direct access to decision-makers within local authorities and the public sector. Events offer a platform to showcase your expertise, gather intelligence on market needs, and directly engage with buyers and influencers.

This section lists some key climate and sustainability-focused events, which are particularly relevant for businesses developing solutions aligned with Net Zero and sustainability goals. However, these are just a small sample of the many exhibitions, conferences, and networking events out there. Often a simple online search such as “Net Zero Networking Events Near Me” can provide a varied list of opportunities.

To get the most from events, consider:

- Actively participating in panels or talks.
- Researching attendee lists and setting up one-to-one meetings.
- Following up after events to build long-term relationships.

Local business support organisations, innovation hubs and sector-specific groups often promote events too, so staying connected to these channels will help you discover new opportunities as they arise.



Innovate UK Business Connect Events

Climate Action Week Events

Climate Innovation Forum



Innovation Zero

Crown Commercial Services Events

Reset Connect



London Climate Technology Show

Check local events- your Chambers of Commerce, Growth Hubs, Local Authorities and private organisations often host networking and showcase events!



Built environment focus

The built environment is a significant focus area for public sector procurement, particularly as local authorities work towards Net Zero goals. This section highlights useful resources and platforms that can help you understand current challenges, innovation priorities and procurement opportunities in the built environment sector.

These links provide a starting point, but SMEs should also consider exploring:

- Local authority procurement portals.
- Built environment innovation challenges run by organisations such as the Construction Innovation Hub.
- Partnership opportunities with larger construction and infrastructure firms looking for innovative SME solutions.
- Sector-specific networking groups focusing on sustainable construction and circular economy approaches.

By engaging with these resources and networks you'll gain insight into the priorities shaping future public sector procurement, ensuring your products and services align with emerging needs.



ARUP and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation Circular Economy Buildings Toolkit

Let's Go Zone for Schools



Solar Information- Solar Energy UK

Innovate UK Business Connect- Place



Decarbonisation Scheme

Energy Systems- Catapult

An online search with keywords such as “decarbonisation”, “place based” and “net zero” will provide a rich variety of advice, guidance and information.



What local authorities and the wider public sector are looking for from a pitch

When pitching to local authorities and the wider public sector, SMEs must recognise that public sector buyers have different priorities, processes and constraints compared to private sector clients. Understanding what public sector decision-makers are looking for will help you tailor your pitch and increase your chances of success. Here are some tips to help:

Alignment with Public Sector Priorities

Local authorities are driven by policy objectives, public benefit, and value for money. They are increasingly focused on:

- Net Zero and climate action – solutions that contribute to carbon reduction or environmental sustainability.
- Social value – creating positive impacts for local communities, such as job creation, skills development, inclusion and health improvements.
- Cost-effectiveness and efficiency – demonstrating long-term value, not just short-term cost savings.
- Innovation – particularly solutions that enhance service delivery, digital transformation and public engagement.

Clear Problem–Solution Fit

Public sector buyers want to see that you:

- Understand the specific challenges they face (these could be environmental, economic, social or operational challenges).
- Have a solution that is tailored to those needs, not a one-size-fits-all product.
- Can demonstrate the outcomes and benefits – including clear performance metrics.

Risk Management and Deliverability

Local authorities are risk-averse – they need to feel confident that you can:

- Deliver on time and to budget.
- Meet regulatory and legal standards (especially for health, safety and data protection).
- Adapt to changing requirements or funding constraints.

Including clear risk management plans and contingency strategies in your pitch can reassure public sector buyers.

Evidence and Data-Backed Claims

Public sector buyers need evidence to justify procurement decisions, so make sure you:

- Provide data, case studies and testimonials to back up your claims.
- Link your benefits to measurable outcomes – for example, reduced carbon emissions, improved public engagement or financial savings over time.

Compliance with Procurement Rules

Local authorities must follow strict procurement processes and rules, so it's important to:

- Show you understand and are ready to comply with public procurement standards.
- Highlight any previous experience working with public sector clients, even if this was as a subcontractor.
- Be transparent about pricing and contract terms.



Focus on Social Value and Local Impact

Since the introduction of the Social Value Act, public sector bodies are legally required to consider how the services they procure improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas. SMEs can gain a competitive edge by demonstrating:

- How your solution supports local economic development (e.g., using local supply chains or hiring local staff).
- Positive environmental impact.
- Support for community projects or initiatives.

Key tip for SMEs

Keep your pitch clear, focused and tailored to the specific authority or public sector body. Show how you can solve their challenges, meet their priorities and deliver real value – all backed up by solid evidence.

The best advice we have found when speaking with local authorities is to “Read the tender documentation, highlight it in different colours, make sure your submission and pitch hit every single aspect of the tender documents, and where possible, aim for some other areas that the Council are focussed on that we aren't expecting, it'll really make you stand out!”

Where to look for public sector procurement opportunities

There are multiple platforms and portals where public sector opportunities are advertised. For SMEs, understanding where to look and how to register can open up a steady pipeline of tenders and contract opportunities. These are some suggestions to help guide you:

Contracts Finder (England)

The UK Government's Contracts Finder is a central hub for public sector procurement notices in England. Contracts above £10,000 are listed.

Sell2Wales (Wales)

This is the official procurement portal for Wales, covering local government, health and education contracts.

Public Contracts Scotland (Scotland)

The Scottish Government's portal lists all public sector procurement opportunities in Scotland.

eTendersNI (Northern Ireland)

For SMEs targeting Northern Ireland's public sector, this is the main procurement platform.

Crown Commercial Service (CCS)

CCS manages framework agreements for the UK public sector, including technology, professional services and construction.



Local Authority Procurement Portals

Many local authorities have their own procurement portals or work with regional purchasing consortia. Visit the local authority website to find their tender or procurement portal.

7. Specialist Portals for Certain Sectors

- **Delta eSourcing** – Used by many public sector bodies across the UK.
- **ProContract (Proactis)** – Widely used by local authorities.

8. Innovation-specific opportunities

- **Innovate UK Funding Finder** – While not a procurement portal, this is essential for SMEs developing innovative solutions for public sector challenges.
- Speak to your Local Authority, Regional Authority or Growth Hub to find out about funding and opportunities within your area! Many often send out an email with new opportunities, which makes it easier for you to keep an eye on potential tenders or support.



Top Tips for Finding Opportunities

- Register on all relevant portals to receive email alerts.
- Use good keywords and filters to identify relevant tenders.
- Join local authority supplier lists – some councils maintain preferred supplier registers for lower-value contracts.
- Build relationships with local procurement teams – they can offer guidance and notify you of upcoming projects.

Innovate UK Business Connect Net Zero Supplier Portal

The Net Zero Place Innovation Network is currently developing a Net Zero Supplier Portal.

The portal will allow SMEs to sign up to the portal and to showcase their business to the public sector. Public sector organisations will be able to access the directory and search for suppliers in their region or UK wide, and also search by sector to drill down directly to the support they need.

Organisation can then request an introduction to you and Innovate UK Business Connect will undertake a warm introduction, giving you the best start when engaging with a potential new contract. We will also be on hand, along with our partners, to support you through accessing procurement systems and getting your pitch ready!

This is expected to launch in spring 2025 so please keep an eye on the Innovate UK Business Connect website.



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