

When it comes to Canada's procurement, WE Charity is the exception, not the rule

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We just need to properly use it – and follow the rules."

Awarding a sole-sourced contract to the WE Charity to administer \$900 million in program funding casts unfortunate doubt on Canada's procurement process. Now that the contract has been terminated, it is time to reinforce our usually robust procurement system.

What made the contract to WE Charity so out of step is that other COVID-19 related procurements have been delivered with lightning-fast turnaround times – and with open competition. During the past three months of the pandemic, the federal government has demonstrated it can procure quickly and efficiently within the existing rules and regulations.

While emergency exemptions may technically have allowed this contract to be sole-sourced, it was unnecessary and selective. This is especially so when contrasted against recent successes that show how efficiently the public service can move and how quickly suppliers have been able to react while operating within the existing rules.

When Innovation, Science and Economic Development [was looking for analysis of key strategic industrial sectors](#) to address the economic impact of the pandemic, a request for proposals was issued with a closing date only six days later. Twenty companies submitted bids and within a few days, the winner was announced.

Likewise, when Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada posted an urgent request for proposals for **informatic services on May 28th**, with a closing date of June 8, 41 companies registered as interested suppliers, and two contracts of over \$2.9 million each were ultimately awarded.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given cause for exception within the procurement system where timeliness has a direct impact on public health and well-being, such as the procurement of protective equipment. However, interested suppliers have proven their ability to meet shortened solicitation timelines when necessary. Canadians must appreciate the immense pressure of getting things done quickly and efficiently in an emergency situation, and there is no question that Canada's public servants have been moving mountains.

Our rules-based system is undermined when solicitations are closed from potential for competition without good reason. The prime minister claimed that only one supplier was capable of running a \$900-million volunteer program, even as other organizations rightfully asserted their ability to run the program. This was problematic.

The government's move on Friday to terminate the contract with the WE Charity is a move in the right direction.

Treasury Board contract regulations state that "before any contract is entered into, the contracting authority shall solicit bids therefor in the manner prescribed by section 7." While it is reasonable and prudent to add exceptions to this policy objective during an emergency, the government has demonstrated a number of times that it can run open procurement competitions and obtain best value for the taxpayer.

Canada has an efficient, rules-based procurement system. We just need to properly use it – and follow the rules.

