



CAPABILITY STATEMENT

**SME ENGAGEMENT
Actions. Not words.**



INTRODUCTION

For over 20 years, Talent Lab has helped our clients maximise the value of their interactions with their clients, people, brand and other companies.

Our services are delivered under four main headings: Communications, Networking, Strategy and Tendering. As Talent Lab, we have worked for many different companies, from PLCs to SMEs, from organising conferences and other business events, to writing speeches, presentations and reports, designing websites and exhibitions, and writing successful tender and framework submissions.

In 2002, Talent Lab helped to create Shoreditch Business Network, which we developed into Urbano Network, an independent business network based in London but with members across the UK. Since 2011, Urbano has organised 1,000 events, attended by 20,000 representatives from 7,000 companies across all sectors contributing to the quality of our database with 55,000 subscribers.

Our knowledge and experience of running Talent lab and Urbano Network, alongside a passion to help clients win work in the public sector, means we have the tools and experience to help SMEs develop opportunities as direct suppliers to national and local government, organisations in education, health, and infrastructure, and as part of supply chains of large companies and projects.

The New Procurement Act offers a unique opportunity to move the dial on opportunities in the public sector for small companies.

Talent Lab invites you to consider how we can help you turn those promises into actions.



**PEOPLE.
COMMUNICATIONS.
OPPORTUNITIES.**

NEW PROCUREMENT ACT

SMEs make up over 99% of the UK's 5.6 million businesses, employ around 60% of those in the private sector workforce and generate half of its turnover.

However, the 2024 SME Procurement Tracker by Tussell reports "direct spending with SMEs of.. public sector procurement spending was only 20% in 2023, the same as 2022". The spending dial with SMEs is still firmly stuck. But how can we shift it – and why?

Bidding and winning opportunities in the public sector is a challenge for small businesses. The average SME contract win is £32k from direct tendering, while a SME can turn over up to £25M.

There's a disconnect between SMEs and the public sector. Private sector success doesn't always translate to winning public sector work, where the rules and language around procurement can seem obtuse, unfair and not worthy of the investment needed to submit tenders only to lose.

Enhancing awareness of tenders won't drive real change. Yet, the government knows that UK PLC is missing out on the qualities that SMEs can bring as suppliers to national and local government, the NHS, defence, education, infrastructure and construction, especially as employers, innovators, and socially conscious businesses committed to reducing their environmental impact.

As directors of Talent Lab and Urbano, we understand SMEs and can create or improve programmes to help smaller companies to win work. But we can help deliver on targets such as sustainability, ED&I, innovation, local employment, anti-slavery, compliance, and regulation.

Our experience over the past 10 years divides into three main areas: Engage, Inform and Support.

“SMEs are the backbone of our economy...it is vital contracting authorities support businesses to achieve sustainable growth and open up public procurement opportunities to more SMEs...creating a thriving, competitive marketplace”.

**National Procurement Policy Statement
May 2024**

**ACTIONS.
NOT WORDS.**

**ACTIONS.
NOT WORDS.**

“SMEs are effectively shut out of the public procurement system. Only one in five SMEs has bid for a public sector contract in the last three years. In the construction industry, only two in five SMEs have bid for a public sector contracts. Submitting a tendering application is a resource-heavy process. If a SME keeps getting knocked back, the stats show that it will eventually stop trying.”
Federation of Small Businesses report on Procurement & Social Value

HOW WE CAN HELP

As Talent Lab, we understand how to reduce and remove the barriers to improve both the number of tenders won by SMEs and the financial value of those wins.

Many small companies within the UK are cynical about tendering, seeing public sector work as high risk with low reward, especially if they failed to win previously. Sometimes, they fear losing valuable IP or assets. Often, they feel the system is biased against them. Having an initial conversation with someone who combines knowledge and empathy can unlock resistance and lead to success for them and the organisation seeking their services. Here's how we do it:

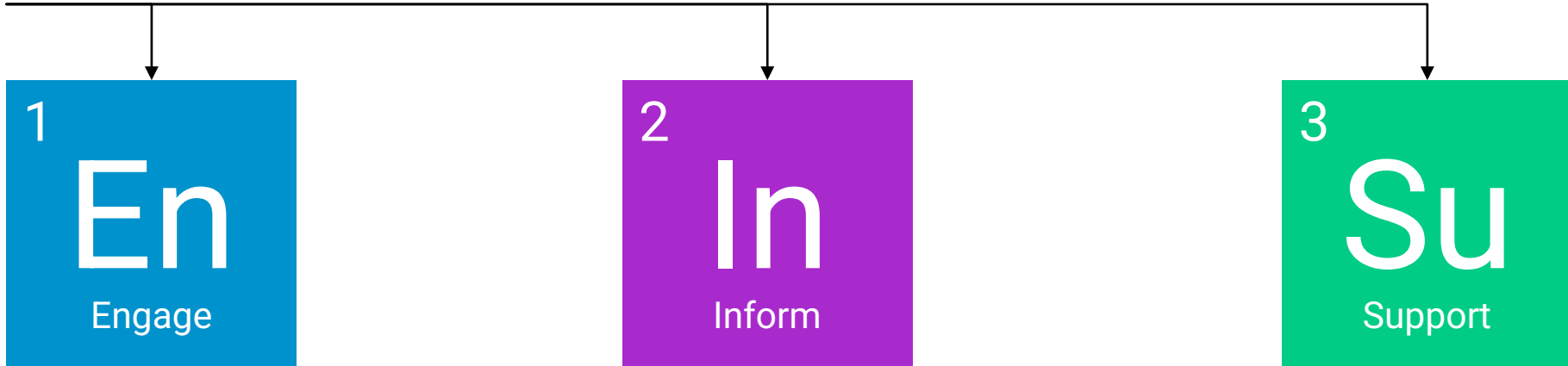
1. **Engage** – By creating quality events and marketing them as catalysts to opportunities, including our own database of 55,000 SMEs, we can drive up the number and quality of attendees, focusing on what SMEs will want to see, hear and experience.
2. **Inform** – We can help SMEs find suitable tenders and construct winning bids. From writing guides on procurement to hosting webinars and podcasts, we can maximise successes and the stories behind them.
3. **Support** – From one-to-one training to group workshops, we can support companies on their procurement journeys. But we can also create and run programme to include training in areas such as ED&I, cyber security, growth and enterprise, sustainability and carbon reduction.

SMEs, especially in sectors such as hospitality and construction, have suffered post Covid as costs have increased and revenues have decreased in real terms. By bringing companies together, we can create dynamic business communities that improve the economies around them as they learn from themselves and other SMEs and develop opportunities together.





OUR KEY SERVICES



- Marketing & awareness – including through Urbano’s database of 55,000 subscribers
- Social media, including LinkedIn & Instagram
- Event production and management, including industry speaker events
- Facilitated networking events, maximising connections and opportunities
- Respected SME voice and champions

- Identifying opportunities for SMEs, whether direct tendering, or as part of supply chains
- Writing guides to tendering for small companies
- Webinars on key elements of tendering and other programme elements
- Video and podcast production to highlight local companies and their success stories
- Helping Tier 1 suppliers and organisations source and filter new companies for their supply chains

- Workshops for companies new to tendering to demystify the process
- Training for companies & individuals to enhance their bid writing skills
- Chairing and facilitating peer-to-peer networking groups to share each other’s knowledge and experience
- Bringing SMEs together to benefit and share learning/lessons, such as:
 - Post Covid Economic Recovery
 - Strategy (Business, Brand & Marketing)
 - Pathways to Net Zero Carbon
 - Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
 - AI, Technology & Cyber Security
 - Compliance & Risk



55,000
SME
Database



1,000+
Events



150 +
Speaker
Events/Panels



"A cut above your average breakfast discussion, Mark was a punchy, warm and well-briefed host and his guests offered a lively and stimulating conversation."
Christian May, Editor CityAM (Sep 2024)



55,000
SME
Database



1,000+
Events



150 +
Speaker
Events/Panels



Top Table Networking Lunch
for SME founders and directors



Build Community Networking
Lunch on Zero Carbon



Business Networking Breakfast



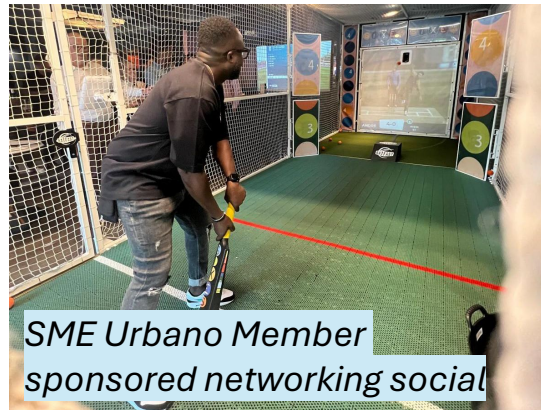
Top Table Networking Lunch
for SMEs in creative sectors



Summer Networking
at The Bowls Club LDN



International Women's Day
Networking Lunch



SME Urbano Member
sponsored networking social



Checking in with our
community host member –
Sagal Group

“Urbano is an excellent way to meet great people and potential clients. We won a project on a scheme through meeting an architect at one of the brilliant Urbano Build events.”
Jess James, Director, JAW Sustainability



55,000
SME
Database



1,000+
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150 +
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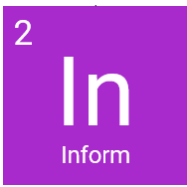
Event Themes

- Accessibility and Inclusive Design
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- BIM/ISO19650
- Carbon Reduction Planning
- Cyber Security
- Digital Currencies / Blockchain
- Enterprise and Entrepreneurship
- Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)
- Impact Investment
- Innovation
- Internet of Things (IoT) / Machine-to-Machine (M2M)
- Menopause in the Workplace
- Modern Methods of Construction (MMC)
- Procurement Act and SMEs
- Retro-fit and Repurpose
- Social Value
- Sustainability
- Virtual Reality (VR)
- Wellbeing

Speakers

- AECOM
- Arup
- Atkins
- B Corp
- Bank of England
- Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment at UCL
- BBC
- Building Research Establishment (BRE)
- Business in the Community (BITC)
- Cabinet Office
- Cass Business School
- Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR)
- Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)
- Corporation of London
- Crossrail
- Cushman & Wakefield
- Grosvenor
- Human Nature
- International WELL Building Institute (IWBI)
- MACE
- New York City Housing Association
- O2
- Oxford University
- RIBA
- Sofie Pelsmakers (Tampere University)
- The Institution of Engineering & Technology (IET)
- UK BIM Alliance (now nima)
- University College London (UCL)
- WSP

“Having presented on sustainable construction, I was particularly delighted at the depth of the Q&A with such a multi-disciplinary and informed audience from across the built environment sector. Urbano clearly has a great reach into the industry, and to see so many women attending was indicative of the high quality of the event and the relevance of the topic to women in industry.”
Prof Jacqui Glass, Dean of the Bartlett at UCL and Urbano Speaker



Weekly
Tenders List



Guides &
Information



Podcasts, Videos
& Webinars

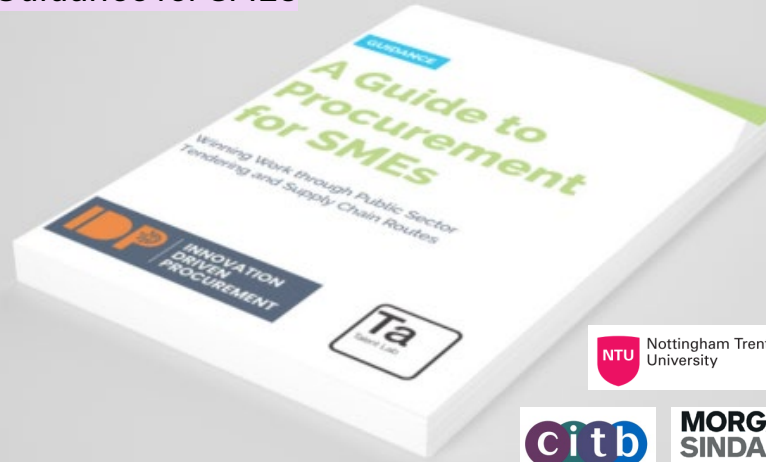
urbano

Tenders Tuesday

Weekly Tenders List

- Through Urbano we help companies monitor and discover new business opportunities in the public sector. Using a list of keywords relevant to our members' services to search across different platforms, we produce a weekly list of tenders to send to their mailboxes every Tuesday morning.
- The list provides a succinct "single source" of live opportunity notices and keep it affordable as part of company member benefits. It also acts as a catalyst for engagement and collaboration.

Guidance for SMEs



- Talent Lab was commissioned by The Innovation Driven Procurement (IDP) to write a **Guide To Procurement for SMEs**. The IDP was a collaboration between Nottingham Trent University (NTU), Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and Morgan Sindall set up to develop supply chain capacity within construction, focusing on SME innovations.
- The guide provided a simplified explanation of the public procurement process and information on how to plan the tender response to improve the chance of success, reinforcing the importance of value for money and social value outcomes with real case studies.

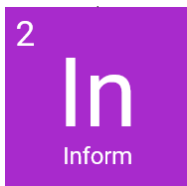


EXPERT PANEL: TENDERING

Lessons learned on how
to write better tenders



- Talent Lab acts a video and podcast producers, scripting, editing and distributing various recordings of Urbano's events.
- We promote through social media channels and use clips to maximise engagement with key topics.
- Tendering, especially explaining how the new Procurement Act will benefit SMEs, have featured in many editions.
- We have covered a variety of topics, including branding, sustainability, new technology, including AI, and the changing workplace.



Weekly
Tenders List



Guides &
Information



Podcasts, Videos
& Webinars

Procurement Events and Webinars: Company Attendees

- AHR
- Ali Saad
- Barton Willmore
- BDB Pitmans LLP
- Be First
- Bids Partner
- Borrás Construction Ltd
- Cerescom
- Changing Lives
- Clarke Willmott LLP
- Clearview Consultancy
- Click Travel
- Click Travel Ltd
- Cooper Parry
- Costain Group
- Crispy Dog
- CT Consulting and Business Support Ltd
- DB I
- Dr Logic
- Drew + Rose
- Eskimo Products Ltd
- Foundation Media
- Greater London Authority
- GreenBuild Consult
- Hawkins\Brown
- Hemlow Limited
- HKA
- Honeycomb Group Ltd
- HR Dept - Central & City of London
- Installation & Refurbishment Solutions Ltd
- JAW Sustainability
- JMW Solicitors LLP
- Leeds Beckett University
- Mackay + Partners
- Magnetic London Creative Services
- Marbank
- Morph Structures
- Motley.co.uk
- Nordan UK Ltd
- Over the Line Consultants
- Peabody
- Resident
- RIAI
- RIFT R&D Tax Credits
- Roof Ltd
- Ryan-Jayberg Ltd.
- Scott Brownrigg Limited
- SOCOTEC Building Control
- Spencer West LLP
- Staycity Aparthotels
- Stevens & Bolton LLP
- Stewart Title Ltd
- Stories
- Support Service Leaders
- Sussex Innovation
- Symmetrys Ltd.
- The RPA Group
- TIPi Group
- TRC Companies Limited
- Trowers & Hamblins LLP
- True North Digital
- Valhalla Private Capital
- Virtual College
- Walcom Integration Limited
- Weston Williamson + Partners
- Xerini Limited
- Young Scott & Company



- Open workshops for SMEs to learn more about the procurement process and where to find tenders through to tips on writing their response.
- Online training workshops and bitesize seminars for companies with little or no experience tendering to those who are more advanced and looking for refresher training or help with win strategies.



- Urbano ran a speaker panel event, facilitated by Mark Herring (Director, Talent Lab), with Rebecca Rees (Towers & Hamblins, expert in procurement law), Caroline Brock (Director & Tendering Specialist, Talent Lab) and Matthew Grenier (Social Value, HACT).
- The event focused on how SMEs will be affected by the changes in regulations. By bringing together those on the commissioning side with those who tender and experienced bid people, a lot of insight and knowledge was shared.



- Urbano hosts regular speaker and experience events encouraging SMEs to embrace digital and new technology to support their own development and growth.
- BIM, Blockchain, Crypto, IoT, M2M, VR, AI, Digital, Data, Eco, Scopes, Electrification, Cybersecurity - just some of the technologies we have introduced at events to help SMEs assess the benefits as users or as early adopters in their sectors to gain a competitive advantage.



Training



Enterprise & Growth



Innovation & New Technology

Tender Training: Company Attendees

- Adamapp Ltd
- Alexandra Lunn Designs
- ATRA Living
- CLM Group
- Crispy Dog
- Curtins Consulting Ltd
- Drew + Rose
- DS Security
- ecce.
- Ed Yuen Architecture & Interiors
- Edge Design Studio
- EDP Environmental
- Empiric Partners LLP
- Forresters
- Foundation Media
- Gnatta
- GreenBuild Consult
- Group B Wholesale Ltd
- i2 Solutions
- Ice
- Ignite Business Communications
- ITO Lab Ltd
- Katten Law
- Kina Events Limited
- LAPD Consultants Ltd
- Lnet Digital Ltd
- Lucidica
- Mackay + Partners
- Mango Logistics Group
- Matter Architecture
- Modulex
- Motley.co.uk
- Movement Strategies
- Planning Potential
- Portman Tech Solutions
- Purple Bytes Limited
- Re:
- Red Loft LLP
- Resident
- Roof Ltd
- Sleeping Giant Media
- Sowga
- Spec Digital Ltd
- Spencer West LLP
- stefanini
- Studio Nova
- TIPi Group
- Truant London
- WKH Developments Ltd

“We engaged Caroline from Talent Lab for a strategically important tender that we were tracking for over eight years – and won! From the development of win themes to staff interviews, her focus on ensuring we added value to every question was critical to our success. Caroline has been instrumental in this win for us which will be transformational for our business growth.”

Business Development Lead, Professional Services Company (SME)

CLIENTS INCLUDE

AECOM

ARUP

Bolt



First 

Jacobs

 **national
highways**



 **Nottingham Trent
University**

Plowman Craven

WSP

SPINVIEW

Caroline is a joy to work with. She 'gets' working at the coal face of big bids in a way few do, expertly able to collaborate with multiple technical owners in time constrained and high-stake environments. She stays calm and flexible throughout, helping our experts provide the content and messaging needed to yield high scoring responses with the wow factor. Can't recommend her highly enough!

Zac Dixon, Associate Bid Director Major Pursuits Team, Europe - AECOM

PUBLIC SECTOR FRAMEWORK EXPERIENCE



PROFILE – STRATEGY & ENGAGEMENT LEAD



- Co-Founder of Talent Lab and Connector-In-Chief of Urbano Network, bringing experience working in and around the creative sectors since 1990 after training as a theatre director at Middlesex University.
- Previous roles and accomplishments include running an art gallery in Spitalfields Market, working for ITV in their compliance and subtitling division, and Creative Director at Equus Communications Agency.
- Projects include writing, producing, directing and leading a £1M+ change management programme for First Group PLC and a range of other projects including exhibitions, conferences and workshops for clients including Alcatel, Stagecoach, The Maritime Museum, the World Health Organisation, Royal Mail, Lloyds Bank, and Shoreditch Trust.
- Led a project for London Remade, a business support programme helping develop business and brand strategies for start-ups and SMEs in the waste reduction sector. This resulted in one client featuring on Grand Designs (C4) leading to a re-brand and market leader position in recycled glass work surfaces.
- Along with other company representatives based in and around Shoreditch, helped set up the nascent Shoreditch Business Network in 2002 that evolved into Business Junction before creating Urbano Network with an emphasis on SME procurement, sustainability and promoting good business practice.
- **To date, Talent Lab has organised over 1,000 events, 95% hosted by Mark** instigating conversations and connections between thousands of companies across all sectors, including chairing discussions on different topics with 150+ speakers.
- Delivers bespoke strategic networking training workshops and masterclasses.



PANEL CHAIR:
The New Procurement Act & Opportunities for SMEs - Turning Words Into Action

PROFILE - TENDERING SERVICES LEAD



- Over 20 years' experience working across a range of industries including environmental, engineering, creative, technology and transportation sectors.
- Previously Head of Work Winning at AECOM – a global engineering and planning consultancy – writing, reviewing and overseeing the delivery of hundreds of PQQs, RFIs, tenders and interview presentations. Involved managing a team of five Bid Managers, two Bid Co-ordinators and a graphic designer. Part of AECOM's strategic pursuits team who developed the EMEA Work Winning Toolkit and delivered training to bid teams/technical authors.
- Leverages agency-side marketing and communications experience working on projects for the World Health Organisation, Royal Mail, First Group PLC, and The Maritime Museum to help break down the barriers of complex procurement exercises, enabling companies to get 'tender ready'.
- Leads strategic bid services and provides tender authoring to a range of companies – from large corporates to SMEs and micro-organisations ranging from £9bn to £650k.
- Extensive experience working closely with Technical Subject Matter Experts and creatives to develop appropriate visuals and infographics to support and enhance narratives.
- Regularly delivers open and bespoke tendering training workshops.
- Hosts and facilitates Urbano Network's Women in Business Community Top Tables and other events.

TALENT LAB PARTNERS & SUPPLY CHAIN

It is rare for Talent Lab's co-Directors to work alone. We have established partnerships with independent consultants and specialist agencies – from funding and employment law to digital and sustainability – and they really know their stuff.

We create value from day one with the best fit experienced delivery team, promoting an inclusive and collaborative culture that works honestly and openly.

We are flexible to scale up quickly to meet key milestones or add value for specific themes or technical requirements.



**ACTIONS.
NOT WORDS.**

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 **Talent
Lab**

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