The Sunlight Foundation has created this set of guidelines to help shape how governments release data on their procurement process. More transparency in procurement can reduce corruption, make procurement more efficient and effective, and allow for more accountability.

A few general notes: Although some provisions may carry more importance or heft than others, these Guidelines are not ranked in order of priority, but organized to help define the ideal data disclosure scenario for government contracting. We have drafted them to be applicable to any level of government, including local, national, or international.

The Procurement Process

1. All laws and policies relating to procurement should be publicly available. Additionally, governments should produce a primer on their procurement laws and regulations written in straightforward language that is accessible to the public.

2. Solicitations or tenders for contracts, as well as any accompanying documents that justify or explain exemptions from regular procedures and requirements, should be made available to the public and should remain publicly available even after the solicitation period has ended.

3. Data on direct purchasing, purchases using procurement cards, or other acquisitions that do not require a solicitation, should also be published.

4. Bid documents for each contract, as well as contact information (name, address, telephone number, id number) for all bidders, should be publicly disclosed.

5. Communications between potential bidders and procurement officers during the bidding process of specific solicitations should be conducted in a public forum.

6. Awards for solicitations should be publicly disclosed as soon as they are awarded, including any accompanying justifications or criteria for the selection method.

7. The full text of any awarded contract as well as any modifications should be proactively posted online for public consumption. Summary information about each contract, such as awardee, amount, date, etc., should be available as structured data.

8. Information regarding procurement disputes should be available for all steps in the dispute resolution process, including the parties to the dispute, the complaint, and the resolution.
Participants in the Procurement Process

9. Databases containing current and historical performance information for contractors, including suspensions or debarments, should be publicly available. Additionally, information on companies that have been pre-approved for certain designations, exemptions, or purchasing should also be public.

10. Status information on contracts should be publicly available throughout and beyond the lifetime of a contract. This might include projected completion date, actual completion date, information on funding extensions outside the scope of the original agreement, or contractor performance information.

11. If a significant portion of a contract is subcontracted, all data available for the primary contractor must also be available for the subcontractor, including the amount and description of the subcontract.

12. There should be a unique identifier for contracts that is consistently used end-to-end in the contracting process, including solicitation, award and expenditure reporting. The end result should allow for tracing an expenditure to its original solicitation. This identifier should be used in all related data, to promote interoperability between datasets.

13. Entities receiving contract awards or bidding on a contract should be identified by a unique, non-proprietary, publicly available, legal entity identifier. This identifier should allow for parent-child relationships between entities to be identified. If possible, entity identifiers should be consistent with existing or standardized schemas.

How to Release this Information

14. Where practicable, governments should seek to adopt existing standards for the release of procurement data to encourage interoperability of data across jurisdictions.

15. All data outlined above should be available as structured data in a machine-readable format, in addition to any existing prose structure. It should also be available online and in bulk.

16. All data outlined above should be accessible free of charge and not require registration, either online or in-person.

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1 a non-proprietary application is “one which is not subject to intellectual property controls in any country, and for which documents defining the format’s structure are freely available. HTML and XML are examples of open formats.”
17. All data should be published in a timely manner, and ongoing throughout the fiscal year. End-of-year information dumps are not useful for actionable, public accountability purposes. Delayed disclosure for purposes of confidentiality should be kept to a minimum.