

**GENERAL AGREEMENT  
ON TARIFFS AND TRADE**

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**Interim Committee on Government Procurement**

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QUESTIONNAIRE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
IN GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT

Response by Canada

The attached communication contains the replies from the delegation of Canada to the questionnaire on Information Technology in Government Procurement contained in document GPA/IC/W/4/Rev.1, dated 16 September 1994.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT

### Replies received from Canada

1. Could delegations give a brief description of any steps taken or planned to introduce information technology (electronic commerce) into public procurement? If so, does this cover contracts which are covered under the Agreement presently in force, or under the newly-signed Agreement? At all levels of government? In the event that delegations are not considering introducing information technology into public procurement, could they explain the reasons?

The Canadian Government has introduced the Open Bidding Service (OBS), an internationally accessible electronic database, which lists procurement opportunities for government goods and service contracts valued at more than \$25,000 and construction and maintenance opportunities valued at more than \$60,000. This includes opportunities subject to the GATT Procurement Code, which are specifically identified as a GATT requirement.

2. What function(s) would information technology serve in such systems and who will be the users?

The OBS has been in operation since 1992 and there are over 23,000 registered users of the service. On-line subscribers can order documents directly while linked to the database. Suppliers that do not use the on-line feature of the OBS, for example users of the GBO publication or subscribers to the OBS bid matching service, can call the Bid Request Line (phone or fax) to order bid documents. The OBS offers several options for the delivery of bid documents (fax, mail or courier). In the near future, subscribers will be able to download bid documents to their modem. OBS services are offered in both French and English.

Within the OBS matching service, suppliers provide to OBS a description of the goods and services they sell. Using this information, OBS scans its database and automatically faxes to subscribers those opportunities that might be of interest. Suppliers can then order the bid documents from the Bid Request Line. The OBS also lists a number of international procurement opportunities from other countries which are open to Canadian suppliers. The OBS system also contains news, information and advice on doing business with the government, export information from Foreign Affairs and International Trade and on Public Works and Government Services Canada's Standard Acquisition Clauses and Conditions manual.

3. Could delegations describe the technical aspects of the systems in use or planned? In particular as regards infrastructure/hardware-software and its options/standards?

The system is accessible by any microcomputer and modem. Communications software provided by the OBS for IBMs or compatible. The basic technical requirement for OBS communications can be met with a 286 computer and modem. Telecommunications software is included with the OBS on-line subscription. The service is available seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Easy-to-use menus and key word search capability available in both French and English.

4. Could delegations describe any limitations affecting access to information available in a system? How wide is potential access to interested suppliers? What are the access possibilities for suppliers of other signatory countries? What possible obstacles to access might arise for suppliers in other signatory countries?

Access to the database is open to both domestic and international suppliers. Using the on-line service, firms have immediate access to opportunity notices the morning they are published. Bid documents can be ordered and be on their way within four hours. Subscribers have a choice of delivery method: fax, courier or mail. To subscribe to the OBS, call: (613) 737 3374.

5. Has any thought been given to the question of interaction between electronic tendering and the obligations concerning publication and time-limits imposed by the Agreement?

Electronic tendering reduces the time requirement for suppliers to respond to a bid. Time-limits should be re-examined once a system has been established and agreed to by Code members.

6. For those delegations who use a database which lists government procurement opportunities:

(i) What is the name of this database?

The Open Bidding System.

(ii) How long has the database been operational and how many suppliers use the database?

The database has been in operation since June 1992 and currently has more than 23,000 subscribers.

(iii) Is a fee charged to suppliers using this system? If so, how much, and what is included in the fee?

OBS subscribers costs are as follows:

-	On-line subscription	\$130/year
	or	
-	Bid Request Line	\$37/year
	or	
-	Bid Matching including the Bid Request Line	\$395/year
	or	
-	Bid Matching including the On-line subscription	\$488/year
	or	
-	Bid Matching including the Bid Request Line for Construction, Architecture and Engineering	\$195/year

An additional pre-payment deposit account of \$100 which is drawn down to cover the cost on On-line time (\$0.42/minute or \$25/hour) and bid documents ordered (average \$6.20/document).

- (iv) Can suppliers obtain tender documentation electronically? If so, how?

In the near future, subscribers will be able to download bid documents to their modem.

- (v) How is information on the database organized?

Suppliers can browse through the listings or do a quick search using key words to find opportunities that are of interest.

- (vi) Does the database offer any other features?

The OBS offers a bid matching service. On-line suppliers can also find out which other companies have ordered bid documents. The OBS also lists a number of international procurement opportunities from other countries which are open to Canadian suppliers. The OBS system contains news, information and advice on doing business with the government, export information from Foreign Affairs and International Trade and on Public Works and Government Services Canada's Standard Acquisition Clauses and Conditions manual.

- (vii) What is the approximate number of procurement opportunities listed on the database annually?

In total there are 15,000 to 20,000 bid opportunities listed annually.

- (viii) Is the system managed by the government or a private company?

The government contracts this service to a private firm, Information Systems Management (ISM) Publishing.