

10 Things Start-ups Want City Staff to Think About

1. **When a start-up calls.** We want to tell you about a new, passionate and even disruptive way of doing things that could be better, faster or cheaper. Please be kind enough to really consider our pitch and suspend disbelief just for a second.
2. **You're not the right person?** Did we get our research wrong? Chances are that you can provide valuable feedback, help us find the right person and take a moment educate us a little bit about how things work in your city. Thanks!
3. **Solution is not perfect?** Start-ups rely on quick trial-and-error to build something that really works. Your honest feedback is invaluable on all aspects of the offering, it will help us get it right faster, and avoid wasting scarce resources. And, don't be surprised if we get back to you in 3 months with something that works!
4. **About our bosses.** Investors and banks are afraid of start-ups that do business with government. Compared to other business, procurement takes too long, it is hard to make unsolicited sales, and discretionary spend - whilst faster - pushes us to under-price our services. We have to work very hard to convince them that this is an important market - how can you help us earn their trust?
5. **Buy if you like what you see.** Early on, start-ups need to prove that they have made something that customers want. The most valuable way for you to show this is to buy something. Sounds risky? Start-ups are more flexible to de-risk their business models. So maybe together we can work something out?
6. **On time. Start-ups live in a different 'time-zone'.** Our survival depends on how predictable and responsive our relationship is going to be at all steps along the way: listening to our idea, contracting us, paying on time and providing a reference.
7. **On fairness.** Of course I want you to favor me! I heard that sole source is great. But that would not be the healthy path toward a start-up friendly city. Instead, help us understand the fair process you have in place to consider new ideas and support what works.
8. **On procurement:** How can we tell that your RFP is fair and open to new ideas? Bidding is very expensive and all our mentors and investors tell us that we should assume that you know the desired winner upfront. We love RFPs that specify your desired outcomes and provide pathways to prove our new solutions.
9. **On contracts:** Don't get us wrong, we're ecstatic to sign! But, too often, start-ups have to accept standard Terms & Conditions that do not fit a small business, even less an innovative solution. These terms risk becoming a huge liability to the start-ups your city tries to support. We would be happy to help you write the simple T&Cs for the 21st century city that values diversity and innovation.
10. **Not sure what you're supposed to do?** If you don't know whether you should talk to a start-up at all, how much time you can spend giving feedback or whether your colleagues will hate you for referring us to them? We wrote this post so that you can share it with colleagues, raise the issue at a department meeting and ask for guidance!