

Procurement audit

Federal Statistical Office

Key facts

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) conducted a procurement audit at the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) with a focus on needs and benefits analysis and the direct award of contracts. The underlying procurement organisation was also assessed. In 2018, the FSO had 126 contracts outside the Confederation, with a cost ceiling of CHF 43.8 million and an order volume of CHF 9.9 million. A large part of this was generated by the procurement of statistics, expert reports and surveys.

At the time of the audit, the FSO was planning improvements in procurement. Important points have already been implemented. However, the SFAO recommends further changes (a clear composition of the evaluation teams, the requirement of declarations of impartiality, consolidated procurement planning, ensuring a seamless process, and staff training).

Some deficiencies in procurement documentation

The SFAO audited a sample of 32 contracts from 15 suppliers. The volume of the audited contracts amounted to around CHF 10.5 million (including VAT)¹. The focus was on the direct award of contracts. The majority of the contracts examined met the conditions for the direct award of contracts under procurement law. The FSO did not utilise the potential for bundling with four suppliers (15 contracts). In the case of two of the four (ten contracts), the FSO has already identified and remedied the problem. Needs analyses were not available for more than a third of the procurements examined.

In one of the four tender procedures², the composition of the evaluation team was of concern. One of its members was employed by the supplier who was awarded the contract. Although this person's assessment was not included in the evaluation, the impartiality of the decision is questionable given this situation.

In addition, the declarations of impartiality were missing from all the audited procurements. The SFAO recommends that the FSO pay attention in future to the composition of the evaluation teams and demand declarations of impartiality for all those involved in the preparation of tender documents and the evaluation.

Potential for optimisation in budgeting and procurement planning coordination

In a further sample³, the SFAO found that the legal bases were in place and/or the needs analyses considered were plausible. According to the directive on procurement in the Fed-

¹ Sample 2: risk-based sample of 32 contracts: 14 contracts with contract start from 2011 to 2018 and 18 contracts with contract start from 2015 to 2018; 28 direct awards and four tender procedures.

² This case concerns the Swiss Health Observatory (Obsan). The Obsan is organisationally affiliated to the FSO, but has its own legal personality.

³ Sample 1: Procurements from 2018 with a volume of more than CHF 1 million. In addition, five other transactions with a contract volume of less than CHF 1 million were selected based on their risk exposure. The total volume of the audited contracts was around CHF 50.7 million (incl. VAT).

eral Department of Home Affairs, specifications or a description of services must be produced for every procurement which exceeds CHF 5,000 (including VAT) and thus also requires a needs analysis.

Requirements planning and the planning of pending transactions is carried out in parallel with the FSO's budget planning. The SFAO recommends that the FSO check whether the PCR (planning controlling reporting) tool can be used for both, in order to ensure consolidated planning.

The FSO ensures the quality of the statistics they produce by tailoring them to the respective user's needs. The SFAO rates the alignment between output and user needs positively. A quantitative review of use is not done systematically. It should also be remembered that certain statistical information is only required by individual key users. A review based solely on call-up figures can therefore only provide a relevant indication of the benefits of statistics.

Media disruptions in the procurement process

Shortly after the SFAO's audit, the FSO revised its procurement processes and produced a corresponding manual. It is structured and describes the process step-by-step and in a consistent manner. However, the roles of the players (according to PDCI⁴) in the respective process steps are not fully assigned. This should be supplemented so that the tasks of the respective roles are clearly defined.

The FSO uses the GEVER electronic business management system, which provides the prerequisites for continuous and automated business processes. This continuity is not yet used in the procurement processes. It currently serves only as an electronic data storage system. Documents (e.g. needs analyses) that require signatures are printed out, signed and then scanned in again. This is despite the fact that legally valid signatures can be provided electronically. The SFAO recommends that the FSO handle its procurements entirely via GEVER in future, close media disruptions in processes as far as possible and increase process efficiency.

FSO employees not offered regular internal procurement training

In the FSO, the project managers (PM) carry out the procurements. The PMs and the department and section heads play important roles in this process. Despite this, they do not receive regular training. The SFAO recommends that the FSO run periodic procurement training courses with the aim of improving understanding of procedures, templates and renewals at these levels.

The SFAO can understand the need for a new employee to be recruited to the procurement service, as is currently planned.

Original text in German

⁴ Who is responsible for performance? (P = performance), Who decides? (D = decision), Who has to be consulted? (C = consultation), Who is to be informed? (I = information)