Cloud computing enables the on-demand self-service procurement of standardized IT services over the internet. However, to efficiently use electronic markets and platforms for exchanging cloud services, a common understanding of the service to be exchanged is required between the organizations providing and the organizations in need of the service. Currently, only a few rather specific criteria catalogues are available to address this need, only focusing on certain types or specific aspects of cloud services. It remains unclear upon which general characteristics organizations require information when procuring cloud services. To identify this broad set of information, we conducted 16 interviews with small-to-large organizations. Combining the responses with literature-based findings, we identified a set of 39 items that form the essential set of characteristics required by an organization when procuring cloud services. This set provides a starting point for the development of a domain-specific vocabulary, service descriptions, and supports the decision-making process of procuring organizations.