



Subject: *Online procurement Application - Third Party Users*
To: Corporate and Residential Services Committee
Date Prepared: November 14, 2025
Related Motions: N/A
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Approved by: Adam Clarkson, Director of Corporate Services

Summary

Staff have developed an Online procurement Application for use by the Procurement Officer to distribute competition documents during public, open competitions and to facilitate the receipt, electronically, of responses to these competitions. The simplicity of the solution has drawn continuous interest from other public sector entities and Staff have considered ways in which to make this Application available to other public sector entities.

Valley Waste Resource Management (“Valley Waste”) is comprised of 6 municipal units formed to deliver solid waste management. Valley Waste has expressed interest in our Application in August of this year; Staff provided an overview of how the Application works and a version of the Application for them to test to see if Application was something that might work for them. After testing, Valley Waste has indicated they would like to use our Application to manage their public competitions.

This report outlines Staff’s intention to provide the Online Procurement Application to Valley Waste. The Application will be provided “as-is” with minimal customization and support will be provided on a “when available” basis with no service-level commitment.

Financial Impact Statement

Staff expect there will be little-to-no financial impact; any cash outlays associated with providing the Application will be recovered from Valley Waste. Depending on the way the Application is deployed for Valley Waste, it might require the rental of server space which is very inexpensive in this instance.

Staff anticipate there will be some initial support activities to ensure Valley Waste have the information they need to begin using the Application effectively. This will not take much time as most of the configuration is already done and replacing data (like logos) takes little time. The Procurement Officer has already developed training tools for internal use, so there will be no additional time required for this.

Based on Staff’s own use of the Application, issues are rare; support requests are expected to be limited and easily accommodated by Staff, under the agreed understanding that East Hants’ issues take precedence. Any issue affecting Valley Waste’s use of the Application would likely be something that would impact East Hants eventually.

Recommendation

Proceed to provide a version of the Online Procurement Application to Valley Waste to use in their Procurement process and to provide nominal support during their use of the Application, subject to Staff availability and East Hants’ priorities.

Recommended Motion

Move that the Corporate and Residential Services Committee recommends that Council directs staff to negotiate an agreement with Valley Waste to provide the Online Procurement Application service based on an “as is” cost recovery model for the Municipality and provided that the agreement enables the Municipality to exit the agreement for any reason with a reasonable notice period.

Background

In 2014, the Procurement Officer identified the need for a tool to distribute documents to potential bidders during public, open competitions. The process at the time was largely manual; bidders would request documents and Staff would email these documents to bidders. The electronic distribution used by the province at the time was bulky and hard to use.

Information Services Staff developed a simple to use Online Procurement Application to allow for the distribution of competition documents. This allowed potential bidders to download competition documents and to receive automatic notification in the event of an addendum. Submissions from bidders were still submitted in paper format through the front desk.

Consultants and other suppliers were increasingly looking for ways to reduce the cost of bidding. Bidders were increasingly looking to find opportunities in other jurisdictions, be they in Halifax or another province. East Hants was getting a number of requests to submit responses by email rather than sending documents via courier, where there was risk, the submissions would arrive late or be lost. Staff resisted these requests because email has some technical barriers which could impact receipt of bids. Given the high stakes and the potential for lost profits, email was not considered the best solution.

In 2016/17, the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) was ratified. This Agreement applies to Municipal entities and it places obligations on public sector entities to advertise high-value competitions for specific durations, subject to certain time period reductions if the entity has certain electronic options in place. An entity can reduce the time a competition is in the market if they can distribute documents electronically and further reduce this time period if they can accept bids electronically as well. As the initial time in market was 40 days, obtaining these reductions was becoming essential to compete projects efficiently.

In 2020, the Covid-19 changed the way Municipalities do business. Public openings and paper bids were no longer practical because many offices were closed or staff were working from home. Email still had constraints and risks which made it less than ideal for accepting submissions, especially when many submissions are, when submitted electronically, very large. East Hants did start accepting emailed submissions as an interim step, but it required heightened due diligence so bidders were not inadvertently treated unfairly, creating a situation where East Hants might be sued for failing to meet their Contract A obligations. Staff took this opportunity to change the Online Procurement Application so it could also accept submissions, permanently transitioning to electronic submissions.

Since 2020, the Online procurement Application has been an essential part of close to 200 competitions, reducing the administrative burden of those competitions to almost nil.

This Application embodies both our Core Values and Organizational Values; it provides a simple way for us to communicate our needs to our vendor base and provides a fair, open, and transparent channel for vendors to respond to our needs. Sharing this Application with other public sector entities demonstrates Integrity, Excellence, Innovation, Fiscal Responsibility, and will help the entities we may share it with to be Responsive, Transparent, and Accountable.

We currently facilitate competitions for fire departments using this same Application.

Discussion

The Online Procurement Application is a cost-effective and simple to use Application which can distribute documents, update competitions, and receive submissions for open competitions, reducing administrative burden and procurement risk to very low levels. When Staff did a “make or buy” assessment comparing third-party applications to developing (or improving) our Application in-house, the over-riding benefit to the Application we built was simplicity, both in terms of Staff use but also in terms of supplier use.

Supplier acceptance of our Application has been very good. Most suppliers tell us they like the simplicity and we rarely have anyone ask for any help in using the Application. On the few occasions where suppliers have reached out, the issues were related to something East Hants had forgotten to do or was an issue with the suppliers’ browser being out of date.

Our Application is designed to be used in conjunction with the provincial Tenders site. We “advertise” on the NS Tenders site and provide a URL which points to the Application. The supplier accesses our Application, registers to the applicable competition(s), and is provided a link to a dashboard where they can download documents, view addenda, and upload responses.

Most third-party applications which do a similar thing are much more complicated for the entity to use. From the supplier perspective, they must have a subscription to the application the entity is using. [Bids&Tenders](#), for example, offers a free account to see open competitions, but you need to have an Unlimited Subscription (\$38.49/month) or a pay-per-bid plan (\$138.64 per bid) in order to place a bid. While these costs are relatively low when considering many entities may use Bids&Tenders, this platform is just one of several which municipalities may use.

Staff have used some of the third-party applications to obtain documents as if they were a bidder; while not horribly complicated, the process is often not intuitive or requires multiple steps (including log-in) just to see the competition documents. From the owner side, overviews of these systems indicate there are a number of parameters to configure. While this gives the owner a lot of flexibility in how they go to market, it means setting up a competition could take a lot of time.

Many public sector entities in Nova Scotia do not have a dedicated procurement team; some entities do not even have a dedicated procurement officer. There is a huge benefit to have a simple to use Application which can meet your needs and not act as a barrier to your potential supplier base by forcing them to have a subscription to one or more bidding platforms.

Staff have believed that if the Municipality were in a position to share this Application with other entities, it could be beneficial to the whole Municipal sector. While extensive distribution is not something Staff are advocating for in this report, providing this Application to Valley Waste will be a test of the effectiveness for other entities and may be the catalyst to work with additional entities who could use such a solution. Staff would put in place any controls necessary to protect East Hants’ interests, including an agreement with Valley Waste to set out service expectations and to mitigate risk.

It is important to note that Staff are not suggesting that East Hants sell or market this Application, rather that we would, to the extent we are able, would share this Application on a cost-recovery basis. If there were an opportunity to create a municipal committee to help in this endeavour, Staff would certainly pursue it.

The Procurement Application is a tool that can help strengthen the Municipal sector and provide value to other Municipal units. If the experience with Valley Waste proves successful, this could be the catalyst to partner with other Municipal organizations who may not have the resources to support the more complicated

commercial tools, improving the overall Service Excellence of the sector and feeding into Nova Scotia's overall economic prosperity.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

While this initiative truly represents many of East Hants' Core and Organizational Values, it speaks most closely to the values of Fairness, learning, Excellence, Innovation, and Fiscal Responsibility. By supporting our sector and providing simple access to the sector by suppliers, we create a fair, open, and transparent procurement environment.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

N/A

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Minimal Staff support. Costs will be recovered for any expenses. Staff are currently waiting on a cost for any potential impacts to insurance.

Alternatives

The alternatives are:

- 1 Do nothing. We can continue to use the Application without sharing it.
- 2 Share the Online Procurement Application with Valley Waste. Valley Waste experience using the Application may also inform Staff of improvements or potential issues which they may not have identified on their own.

Attachments

N/A