



City of Casey Believes Good Procurement Relies on More Than Just Talk, Talk, Talk

As with most things in life, communication is key. But within council procurement activities, talk is not enough. Risk must be mitigated by ensuring all 'talk' is transparent, consistent and retrievable. The tendering process invariably leads to questions from suppliers, and communication glitches can quickly escalate to a council coming under scrutiny – causing expense, delay and distraction.

Luckily, e-Procurement solutions help to mitigate this risk while freeing procurement professionals to concentrate on high-value roles such as crafting the right communications, casting a wider net for prospective suppliers or searching for innovative supply solutions.

The City of Casey is one organisation reaping these benefits through its use of the TenderLink e-Procurement portal.

The City of Casey is one of Victoria's fastest-growing municipalities. It has an area of 395 square kilometres and a population of 281,000 (as of June 2014), which is expected to increase to more than 450,000 by 2036.

Thor Hansen, Manager Contracts and Purchasing for the City of Casey, said the council undertakes 60 to 70 tenders a year, and the municipality's rapid growth has led to larger tenders, more regularly.

"Because we're growing at such a quick rate there is a constant demand for new buildings, new pavilions for sporting grounds, and new family and children's centres - among other projects," he said.

For the City of Casey, the tendering process has been made easier through its use of TenderLink. A system Mr Hansen was very familiar with, having worked for the company.

"The TenderLink system is very reliable, simple to use, and very intuitive - they provide excellent guidelines for procurement staff and for suppliers who want to download and upload tender documents," he said. "The system itself provides us with everything we need and their support is second to none."

According to Dean Armstrong, TenderLink's Victoria-based Business Development Manager, the growing complexity of projects and chance of error are common themes to many councils.

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City of Casey*

are for things to go wrong. And when it comes to spending public funds, absolute transparency is demanded. Thankfully, e-Procurement solutions deliver on two fronts - by reducing the chance of error in the first place, while also creating a valuable audit trail for those inevitable times when issues do occur".

Transparency and faultless two-way communication during tenders

According to Mr Hansen, the biggest benefit for the City of Casey is the strength of the relationship between procurement staff and the TenderLink support team. This relationship ensures swift and simple resolutions to any probity issues that may arise during the tendering process.

"TenderLink provide a very quick and immediate response to any issues and they provide excellent guidelines for us and for people who want to download and upload tenders," he said. "Let's say a supplier rings me to say they were logged into the system at 2:45PM and didn't have a big file upload, but they were locked out before the upload was completed. I can ring TenderLink and they can tell me, 'No, they actually logged in at 3:10PM, but the electronic tender box closed at 3PM'. So when it comes to transparency and audit it's perfect."

And the TenderLink system leaves nothing to chance when it comes to ensuring transparency, according to Mr Hansen.

"We're pretty clear to all tenderers that they ask all questions through the tender forum functionality," he said. "We'll provide a response and everyone who registered an interest in the tender will be copied into the discussion, as long as there are no confidentiality issues relating to the person asking the question. The portal's communications tools are fantastic and it's a great way of keeping everything in one place."

As well as guaranteeing transparency, these processes reduce calls to the council, while also guaranteeing a council response. In addition, Mr Hansen said the ease of supplier communication means that no stone is left unturned when it comes to advising prospective submitters of administrative issues such as timeframes and what needs to be done on their part.

"One of the real benefits that TenderLink provides is that two days prior to the tender close, the system automatically issues an email to all prospective tenderers advising that the tender is closing and reminding them to submit a bid response," he said. "The email provides guidelines as to how long it should take for people to upload their tender response documents to the electronic tender box, based on the size of their response and their internet capacity. It leaves nothing to chance, and from an audit perspective, it's all very clear."

The time saved has allowed Mr Hansen and his team to concentrate on other higher-value procurement tasks, such as being able to participate in evaluation panels, and to lend their expertise to other departments in the council which might be grappling with any number of procurement issues.

"The manual process - the printing of all documents, the calls we'd receive - added four to six weeks to any tender," he said. "Moving to an e-Procurement solution has saved us that time. It's fantastic."

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