



DIVISION OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller
Pinellas County, FL



AUDIT OF CAPITAL CONTRACTING AND GENERAL SOLICITATION PROCESS

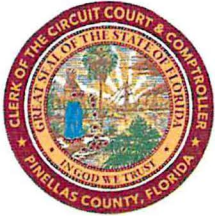


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REPORT NO. 2025-06
MAY 13, 2025



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May 13, 2025

Blaine Williams, Assistant County Administrator
Joseph Lauro, Director, Administrative Services Department

We have conducted an audit of the Capital Contracting and General Solicitation Process based on a management request. Opportunities for Improvement (OFIs) and Recommendations (Recs.) are presented in this report; see Table 1 for a summary classified by priority level.

During our audit we found Pinellas County's Capital Contracting and General Solicitation Process had sufficient internal controls and risk management activities established regarding internal policies and procedures, adherence to governing directives, and selection of the appropriate solicitation types. However, we identified some opportunities to enhance the governance for solicitation processing efficiency after performing interviews and reviewing processes with several key departments involved in the Capital Contracting and General Solicitation Process. We developed OFIs and Recs. to address these items.

We appreciate the cooperation shown by the staff of County Administration, the Purchasing Division, the Construction and Property Management Department, the Public Works Department, and the Utilities Department during the course of this review.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Dondero

Melissa Dondero
Inspector General/Chief Audit Executive

Approved:

Ken Burke

Ken Burke, CPA*
Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
Ex Officio County Auditor
*Regulated by the State of Florida




| Priority | OFIs | Recs. |
|---|----------|-----------|
|  HIGH | 0 | 0 |
|  MEDIUM | 6 | 11 |
|  LOW | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 6 | 11 |

Table 1 - Number of OFIs and Recs.

cc: The Honorable Chair and Members of the Board of County Commissioners
Barry Burton, County Administrator
Jill Silverboard, Deputy County Administrator and Chief of Staff

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Administrative Services | Administrative Services Department |
| BCC | Board of County Commissioners |
| BI | Business Intelligence |
| BTS | Business Technology Services |
| CCNA | Consultants' Competitive Negotiation Act |
| CIP | Capital Improvement Program |
| CM | Construction Manager |
| CMAR | Construction Manager At Risk |
| Construction and Property Management | Construction and Property Management Department |
| County | Pinellas County |
| DB | Design-Build |
| DBB | Design-Bid-Build |
| DP | Design Professional |
| ERP | Enterprise Resource Planning |
| GMP | Guaranteed Maximum Price |
| IBM | International Business Machines |
| ITB | Invitation To Bid |
| JOC | Job Order Contract |
| OFI | Opportunity for Improvement |
| PCU | Pinellas County Utilities |
| PM | Project Manager |
| Public Works | Public Works Department |
| Purchasing | Purchasing Division |
| Recs. | Recommendations |
| RFP | Request For Proposal |
| RFQ | Request For Qualifications |

REPORT SUMMARY

Overall Conclusion

Our audit was conducted in accordance with the *Global Internal Audit Standards* of The Institute of Internal Auditors and the *Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General* of the Association of Inspectors General. Accordingly, it included such tests of records and other auditing procedures as we considered necessary in the circumstances.

Based on our independent and objective assessment, the risk management and internal control environment of the responsible departments were effective for the scope of this audit. Risk management and internal controls were operating effectively and consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited. However, governance weaknesses existed in the responsible departments which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited. We identified areas of strength where controls were strong and aligned with the department's goals. However, we also identified areas of improvement to enhance efficiency and improve effectiveness.

Opportunities for Improvement (OFIs) are prioritized based on the likelihood of the risk occurring and the impact the risk may have on the department's governance, risk management, and/or control processes as follows:

- Priority 1 (High) = Significant risk or impact on operating effectiveness and efficiency; audit findings indicate ineffective or lack of controls
- Priority 2 (Medium) = Moderate risk or impact on operating effectiveness and efficiency; audit findings indicate control weaknesses that may negatively impact the achievement of business objectives, reputation, and/or compliance
- Priority 3 (Low) = Minor risk or impact on operating effectiveness and efficiency; audit findings indicate opportunities to enhance the control environment



Figure 1 - Priorities

Our audit was neither designed nor intended to be a detailed study of every relevant system, procedure, or transaction. Accordingly, the OFIs presented in this report may not be all-inclusive of areas where improvement may be needed.

Audit Objectives and Outcomes

The purpose of our audit was to:

1. Determine if best practices were being used to select the appropriate solicitation types for capital projects
2. Determine if internal controls over the capital procurement vendor selection and approval processes were effective and operating efficiently
3. Determine compliance of the capital procurement process with governing directives

As a result of the audit, we determined:

1. There was not a one-size-fits-all approach to solicitation types for all projects based on discussions with County departments and independent solicitation research. The choice of solicitation method depended on factors such as project complexity, industry standards, and the desired level of engagement with vendors. County team members responsible for solicitation functions indicated they used their solicitation knowledge and experience to make professional judgment decisions when selecting a solicitation type unless the project funding dictated otherwise. We noted that, while there were discussions and meetings that occurred when deliberating solicitation selection, the process was not typically documented. However, we identified no statutory requirements for documentation of solicitation selection methodologies.
2. The capital contracting and general solicitation processes had room for efficiency improvements. Two key components of the solicitation and contracting activities are the Legistar review process and the OpenGov process. Regarding the Legistar review process, we found opportunities to improve the efficiency of solicitation review. First, we identified application data input concerns that could be due to several factors, such as a lack of understanding of what fields needed to be populated, employee turnover, or insufficient training. Next, the Legistar software's report design did not include key information management could use to monitor the Legistar review process, and the software also had limited controls to prevent data fields from being left unpopulated. In addition, management neither had established timeline targets for Legistar solicitation review, nor did it have a methodology for performance evaluation. Our review of the OpenGov process also revealed multiple areas that had opportunities for efficiency improvement. First, management indicated it was not using the data analytics tool in the OpenGov software. Additionally, we found the existing OpenGov solicitation templates included various types of solicitations grouped in single template formats instead of being assigned individual templates, which distorted OpenGov solicitation data. We also found the OpenGov process had no established timeline targets or methodology for performance evaluation.

3. The departments involved in the capital contracting and general solicitation process adhered to both the governing directives from the internal policies of Pinellas County (County), as well as the applicable Florida Statutes.

Scope and Methodology

We performed a risk assessment of the County's Capital Contracting and General Solicitation Process. As a result of our risk assessment, the audit covered the development of solicitations at the department level, the review and advertisement process that occurred within the Purchasing Division (Purchasing) using the OpenGov software, and the approval process that occurred within the Legistar software. The audit encompassed a review for adherence to established governing directives, internal control adequacy, and potential process improvements to gain efficiencies.

The audit period was October 1, 2021, through February 28, 2025. However, we did not limit the review of transactions and processes by the audit period and scope.

To meet the objectives, we performed the following:

1. Met with management in the departments involved in the capital contracting and general solicitation process to understand roles in the process, including but not limited to:
 - a. Solicitation type selection
 - b. Vendor selection and approval
 - c. Compliance with governing directives
2. Completed flow charts documenting the capital contracting and general solicitation process for each applicable department and reviewed for processing efficiency
3. Reviewed the solicitation process in OpenGov to determine the efficiency of the solicitation development process
4. Reviewed the solicitation review process in Legistar to determine the efficiency of approvals
5. Documented and reviewed the policies and procedures used by the departments in the capital contracting and general solicitation process
6. Identified, documented, and reviewed applicable statutory directives
7. Reviewed supporting procurement documentation to ensure compliance with governing directives
8. Researched best practices for solicitation type selection and baselines for approval timeframes

BACKGROUND

Audit Origination

County Administration requested a review of the capital contracting process with an emphasis on the methodology for solicitation selection. A significant portion of public funding is used to complete Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects each year. Under this premise, we began by obtaining a list of County capital contracts, prioritized departments with the highest value capital contracts, and had discussions with those departments to understand the associated solicitation process.

Capital Contracts

The County CIP is a comprehensive six-year plan of proposed capital projects intended to identify and balance the capital needs of the community within the fiscal capabilities and limitations of the County. It is primarily a planning document that is updated annually and subject to change as the needs of the community are defined.

The CIP is divided into two categories: enterprise projects and governmental projects. Enterprise projects support the St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport, Pinellas County Utilities, and Solid Waste. These areas are managed like businesses in which the revenues generated fully support their operations. Enterprise projects are funded by grants, airport fees, and user fee charges for water, sewer, and solid waste. All other capital projects, such as roads, drainage, public safety, buildings, and park projects, are included in the governmental project section of the CIP. Funding for the governmental projects includes the “Penny for Pinellas” (a 1% local option sales surtax), grants and reimbursements, local option fuel taxes, and the tourist development tax.

Purchasing maintains an awarded contract list, which is available on the County’s website. During the preliminary phase of the audit, we downloaded a copy of the contract list and obtained the assistance of Purchasing management to identify all capital contracts in the list. Table 2 contains the departmental distribution of capital contracts, as identified by Purchasing management, by quantity and dollar amount.

| Department | Number Of Contracts | Total Contracted Value |
|--|---------------------|------------------------|
| Administrative Services | 48 | \$138,465,703 |
| Business Technology Services / Office Of Technology & Innovation | 1 | 625,000 |
| Economic Development | 1 | 928,991 |
| Human Services | 1 | 1,881,347 |
| Parks & Conservation Resources | 2 | 10,505,431 |
| Public Works | 113 | 450,748,814 |
| Solid Waste | 8 | 50,403,564 |
| St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport | 10 | 24,361,490 |
| Utilities | 36 | 137,052,439 |
| Total | 220 | \$814,972,779 |

Table 2 - County Capital Contracts by Department

Nine total departments had capital contracts. Based on reviewing the data in Table 2, we determined the departments with the highest number of capital contracts were the Construction and Property Management Department (Construction and Property Management), Pinellas County Utilities (PCU), and the Public Works Department (Public Works). Construction and Property Management was formerly under the Administrative Services Department (Administrative Services) and included within that department in Table 2.

Audit Evolution

Rather than meeting with all nine County departments that had capital contracts, we limited our review to the top three departments in terms of capital contract quantity. Moreover, we met with management in Construction and Property Management, PCU, and Public Works to discuss their roles and responsibilities in the capital contract solicitation process, including the methodology for solicitation selection. In addition, we created flow charts for each solicitation type used by the three departments to identify key steps and differences.

During our discussions with department management, we came to understand the capital contracting process mirrored the typical County contracting process. With that understanding, we decided to expand our audit scope to the general solicitation process for all County contracts. Consequently, we met with management in Purchasing and County Administration to discuss the solicitation process from initiation through approval, including the critical applications used. Following is some brief background information we gathered during our interviews with the corresponding departments and independent research.

Departmental Information



Departments seeking procurement services drive the solicitation process. The central part of solicitation administration lies with Purchasing, and all departments

seeking procurement services collaborate with Purchasing. Purchasing's primary tool for solicitation development and advertisement is the OpenGov software. OpenGov allows the various departments to access it and upload documentation for review. It also allows Purchasing to publish the advertisements online and respond to vendor comments through the online procurement portal.



Purchasing plays a crucial role in managing procurement activities and mitigating risks associated with County operations. The division is responsible for the procurement of goods, services, and construction projects, ensuring compliance with policies and regulations to achieve the best value for taxpayers. Additionally, it identifies, evaluates, and mitigates risks to protect the County's assets, employees, and the public, which includes managing insurance programs, safety programs, and claims processing. The division also maintains relationships with vendors and contractors, ensuring fair and competitive procurement processes. It provides training and support to County departments on procurement processes and risk management practices.

Key programs and projects managed by the department include the Small Business Enterprise Program, which promotes the participation of small businesses in County procurement processes; the Purchasing Policy and Procedure Manual, which provides guidelines for vendors to participate in the County's procurement market; and various insurance and safety programs aimed at protecting County assets and team members. Overall, Purchasing ensures efficient and effective procurement processes while maintaining a safe and risk-aware environment for the County.

County Administration's role in the solicitation and contracting process is the ownership of the Legistar application, which facilitates final review and approval after OpenGov processing. Legistar, a Granicus software solution, provides users the ability to review solicitations in a sequential order until they are ready for final approval by the Board of County Commissioners (BCC).



Construction and Property Management handles all vertical construction for the County. Construction and Property Management is a newly created department that originated from the Building Design and Construction group that was under Administrative Services previously. It handles building new facilities or renovating existing facilities. It also ensures the constructed buildings follow design specifications and building codes to ensure they are constructed or renovated safely.

Public Works is responsible for managing essential infrastructure and environmental resources to ensure a safe, sustainable, and vibrant community. The department oversees the maintenance and improvement of roadways, sidewalks, bridges, stormwater systems, and traffic signals. Overall, Public Works plays a crucial role in maintaining the quality of life

for residents and visitors in the County by ensuring the efficient operation and maintenance of essential services and infrastructure.

PCU provides reliable and safe water, wastewater, and reclaimed water services to County residents and businesses. The department ensures the delivery of clean and safe drinking water to homes and businesses, conducting regular testing to meet or exceed federal and state standards for water quality. It also manages the collection and treatment of wastewater to protect public health and the environment. Additionally, the department provides reclaimed water for irrigation and other non-potable uses, promoting water conservation. PCU plays a vital role in maintaining the infrastructure and resources necessary for the well-being of the community.

Common County Solicitation Types

Management from Construction and Property Management, Public Works, and PCU informed us of the common solicitation types the County uses. With feedback from the departments and our independent research, we developed multiple flow charts to document and analyze the solicitation process by department. As noted in our audit outcomes, we determined there was not a one-size-fits-all approach to solicitation types for all projects, as the choice of solicitation method depended on several different factors that required professional judgment and adherence to state statutes such as the Consultants' Competitive Negotiation Act (CCNA) that governs how public entities hire professionals like engineers, architects, surveyors, and mappers. The CCNA mandates a qualifications-based selection process, meaning that public agencies must prioritize the competency, qualifications, and experience of firms or individuals over cost when awarding contracts. Following is an overview of the County's most predominant solicitation types.

The Design-bid-build (DBB) method is a traditional and widely used approach in construction where the owner contracts with the designer/architect separately from the construction contractor. The design and construction occur sequentially, with the design phase needing to be completed before the construction bidding process begins. This method has several advantages, including clear roles and responsibilities, competitive bidding that can lead to lower construction costs, opportunities for thorough design review, familiarity and acceptance within the construction industry, and greater responsibility on the owner, allowing for a greater say in project execution. However, the DBB method also has its disadvantages, such as being time-consuming due to its sequential nature, the potential for conflicts between the designer and contractor, risk of cost overruns if design changes occur after bidding, and less flexibility during the construction phase, as changes can be challenging and costly.

See Figure 2 for the DBB flow chart we created based on discussions and feedback from Public Works. Note we highlighted one consulted department's process flow for each solicitation type for illustrative purposes rather than providing all departmental flow charts.

Design-Bid-Build Process for Public Works

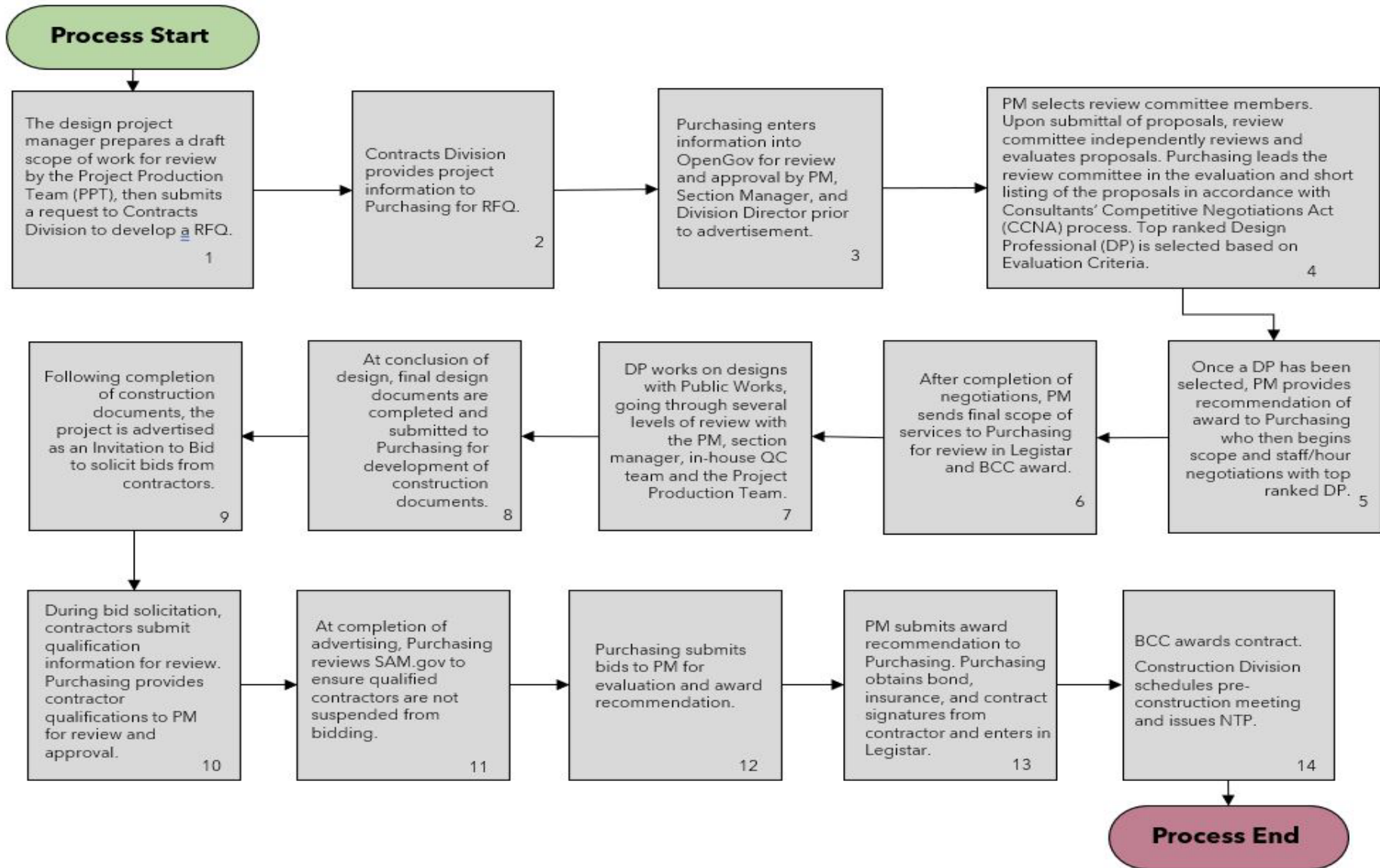


Figure 2 - DBB Process at Public Works

Another solicitation type the County uses is the Design-build (DB) method. It is a project delivery system in the construction industry where the design and construction services are contracted with a single entity known as the design-builder or design-build contractor. This method relies on a single point of responsibility contract and is used to minimize risks for the project owner and reduce the delivery schedule by overlapping the design and construction phases. The DB method has several advantages, including a single point of responsibility that simplifies project management for the owner, time efficiency due to overlapping phases and eliminated bidding periods, cost savings from the contractor's involvement in the design phase, and improved communication with one team working together. However, there are also disadvantages to consider, such as less owner control over the design process, more complex contracts requiring legal expertise, reduced checks and balances with one entity handling both design and construction, and potential for higher costs if the project scope is not clearly defined.

Figure 3 represents the DB process at Public Works.

Design-Build Process for Public Works

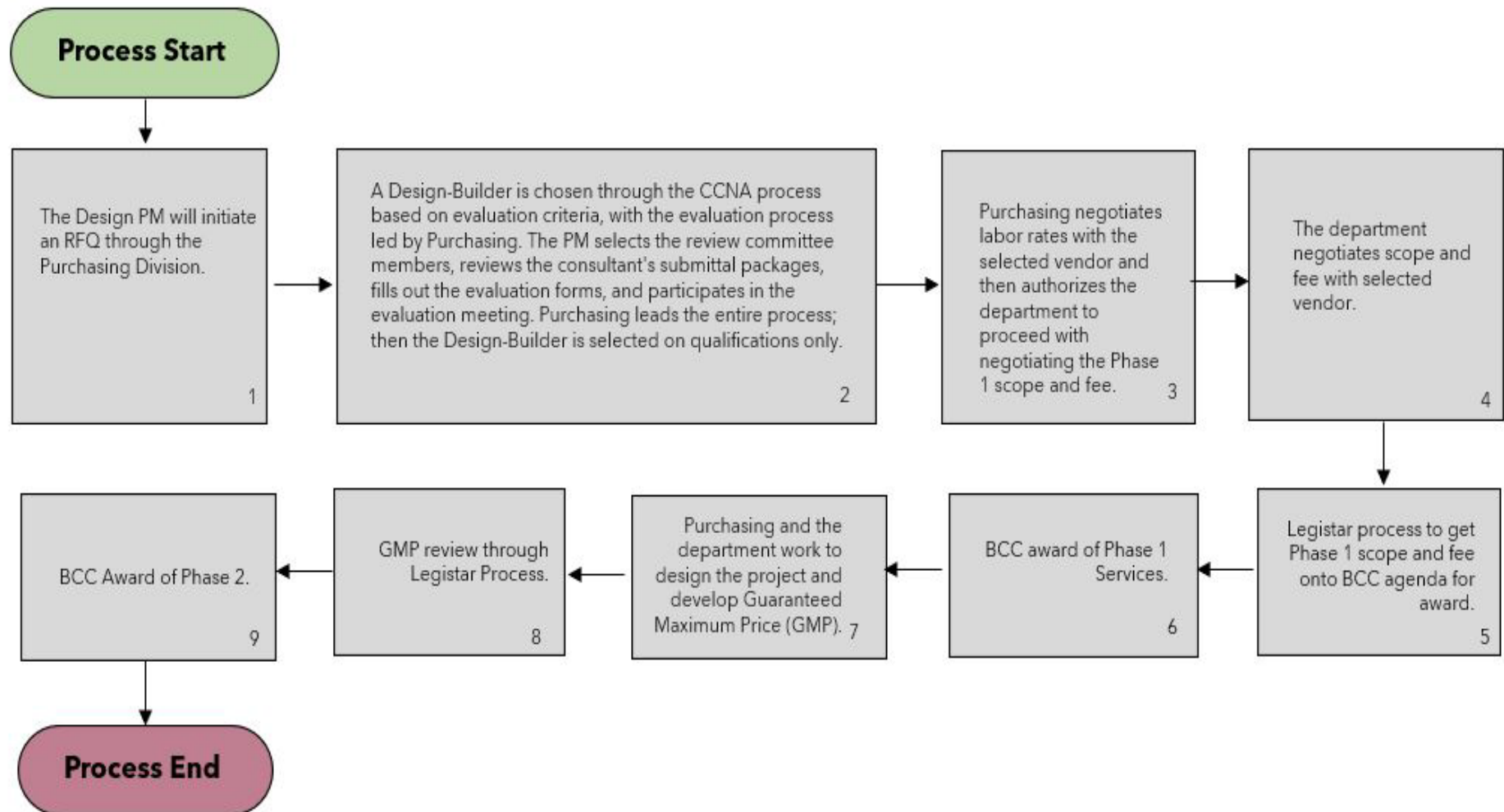


Figure 3 - DB Process at Public Works

An alternate solicitation type is the Construction Manager at Risk (CMAR) method. It is a construction delivery system where the construction manager commits to delivering the project within a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP). The construction manager provides input during the design phases and becomes the general contractor during construction. This method is suitable for larger and more complex projects where the benefits of early involvement, cost certainty, and increased collaboration outweigh potential downsides. For smaller projects, hiring a CMAR may add unnecessary complexity. Advantages of the CMAR methodology includes early involvement from the design phase leading to more efficient and realistic planning, cost certainty with the GMP commitment, encouragement of collaboration between the owner and construction manager, higher-quality project outcomes due to early involvement, and more accurate cost estimates as the construction manager consults subcontractors throughout the design process. However, there are disadvantages to consider, including the process can be time-consuming as it involves the owner throughout, there is a risk of cutting corners to stay within the GMP, finding a skilled and experienced construction manager can be challenging, and hiring a CMAR may add complexity to smaller projects.

Figure 4 represents the CMAR process at Construction and Property Management.

Construction Manager At Risk for Construction & Property Management

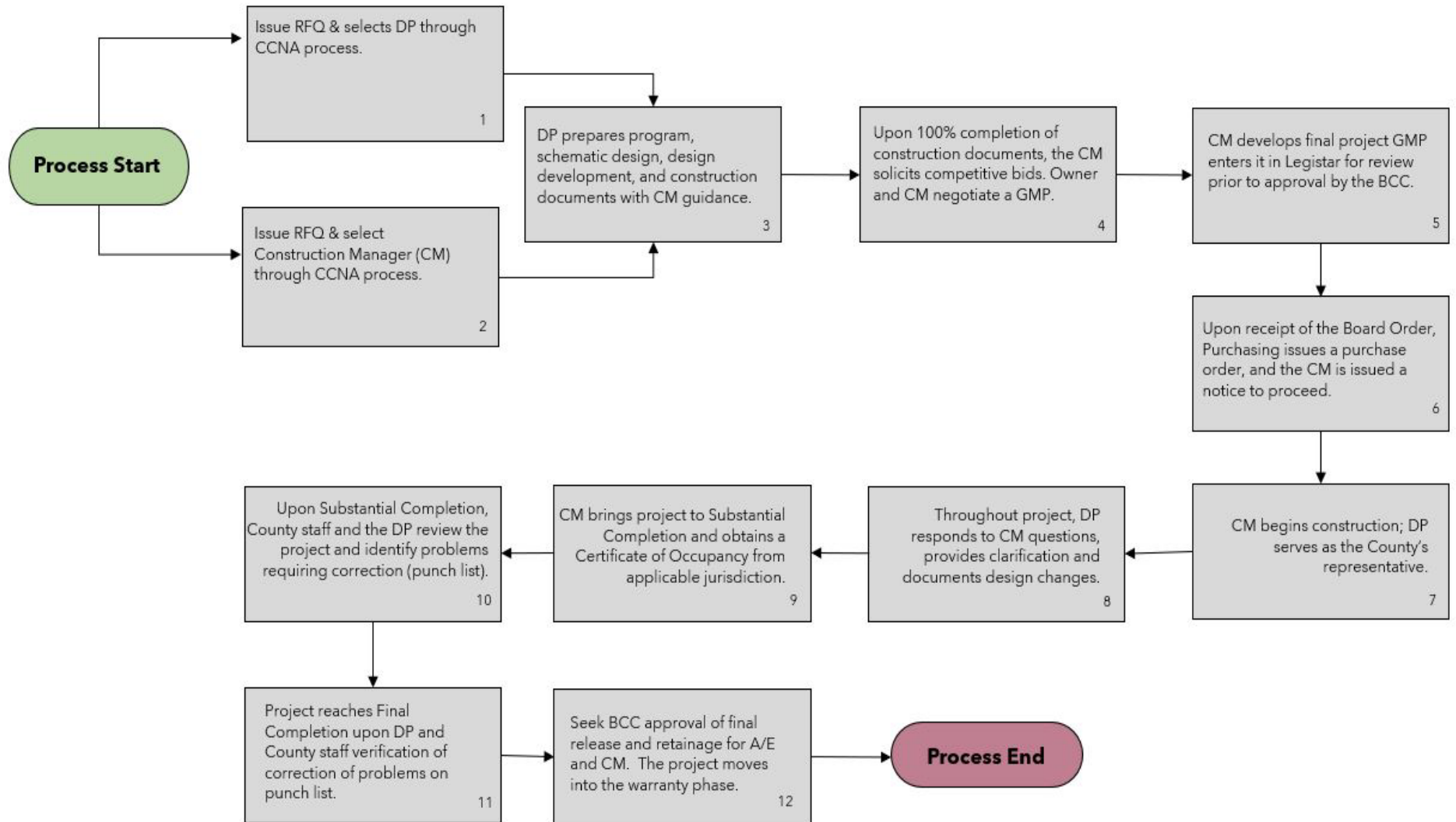


Figure 4 - CMAR Process at Construction and Property Management

Lastly, a Job Order Contract (JOC) is another common solicitation type used. It is a highly efficient and flexible construction procurement method commonly used in the public sector. A JOC allows organizations to complete multiple projects under a single, competitively awarded contract, making it ideal for routine, straightforward projects like renovations, repairs, maintenance, and minor new construction. The method relies on a Unit Price Book that lists pre-defined tasks and unit prices, which contractors use to bid on projects. This approach saves time and money, reduces administrative burdens, and improves project delivery quality and speed.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. The Legistar Application Contained Fields With Inconsistent Data Input.

MEDIUM

During our audit fieldwork, we discovered inconsistencies in data entry within the Legistar application, particularly in the last approval date and final action date fields. These critical fields help identify the solicitation timeline, which is crucial information to validate the efficiency of the Legistar review process. Our review revealed multiple instances where these fields were left unpopulated, complicating our efforts to establish a comprehensive timeline for all solicitation data in Legistar. This resulted in a less complete picture for management.

Business Technology Services (BTS) informed us this issue arose because staff did not input the data into the Legistar system. Discussions with BTS revealed several potential contributing factors, including a lack of understanding of which fields needed to be populated, employee turnover, and insufficient training. Additionally, the Legistar system lacked a mechanism to require all date fields to be populated. See additional information in OFI #2.

International Business Machines (IBM) published an article emphasizing three key points of data consistency. The first point focused on improved decision-making as follows:

"Maintaining data consistency can help ensure that data remains uniform across all systems, preventing discrepancies that could lead to inaccurate conclusions. Similarly, data integrity can help ensure that data remains accurate, reliable, and error-free as it is entered, stored, and retrieved. This allows organizations to improve data quality and make better data-driven decisions."

The second point addressed operational efficiency, explaining the following:

"Inefficient data management can lead to significant time and resource consumption, negatively impacting the operational efficiency of an organization. Data consistency and data integrity help streamline data management processes by ensuring data is accurate, reliable, and up to date. This, in turn, enables organizations to make well-informed decisions, reduce the time spent on data validation and error correction, and optimize their overall data management strategies."

Lastly, IBM highlighted how data consistency enhances data security as follows:

"Data consistency and data integrity also play a crucial role in preserving data security. Ensuring data consistency helps prevent unauthorized access and data manipulation, while data integrity checks help detect and rectify any unauthorized changes to the data. By prioritizing data consistency and data integrity, organizations can minimize the risk of data breaches and protect sensitive information from unauthorized access or tampering."

Missing timeline data results in inadequate records, hindering management's ability to conduct thorough reviews and identify any potential timeliness issues.

We determined this OFI's priority was medium, as the finding occurred; however, its occurrence was not pervasive, and the finding was operational efficiency and effectiveness related.

We Recommend County Administration Management:

Provide additional training to ensure staff consistently populates all data fields. Management should also consider revising existing cases of missing fields.

Management Response and Action Plan:

Management Concurs. Additional training is needed to ensure staff consistently populates all data fields. Business Technology Services will be responsible to ensure training takes place as and when necessary.

- ✓ **Individual(s) Responsible for Implementation:** Bryan Zumwalt, Chief Technology Officer, Business Technology Services
- ✓ **Planned Implementation Completion Date:** September 30, 2025

2. The Legistar Software Had Limited Reporting Details And Limited Controls For Data Fields.

MEDIUM

The Legistar software had limited reporting functionality and capabilities. During our review, we found the reporting functionality was inadequate, as the generated report provided limited critical information. Key details such as the number of reviewers and aging information were missing. We also noted the report was not user-friendly. The report generated by Legistar could only be exported in a poorly formatted Excel version or a PDF, making it challenging to extract key raw data for data analytics.

Additionally, the software lacked required field controls to ensure the last approval date and the final action date were populated, which we determined by reviewing these fields to assess solicitation review timelines for Legistar. See also OFI #1.

Multiple departments expressed concerns about the Legistar solicitation review timelines during the audit. Our review indicated both the reporting functionality and data entry controls needed improvement to ensure an accurate Legistar efficiency review.

The Legistar limitations arose because the software's report design did not include key information that management could use to monitor the Legistar review process. Furthermore, the software had limited controls to prevent data fields from being left unpopulated.

According to an article published by Marshall University Institutional Research and Planning:

"In today's data-driven world, organizations increasingly rely on data to make informed decisions. However, the utility of this data is directly proportional to its quality. Data quality is not just a buzzword; it's a critical aspect that can make or break business strategies, and research outcomes, and even influence policy changes....

Understanding and improving data quality is essential for any organization that relies on data for decision-making, analytics, and operational efficiency. Poor data quality can lead to inaccurate analyses, inefficient processes, and, ultimately, the wrong conclusions, which can have a material impact on business or research outcomes."

The Legistar report should have the capability to show additional details such as the count of reviewers and aging data. We were able to request this data from Granicus, indicating the information was captured in the system's database. This data is imperative to develop performance metrics that management can follow and track. See also OFI #3.

Having limited information in the generated Legistar report prevents management from reviewing and analyzing data within the Legistar process readily. The inability to analyze data impedes management's ability to monitor trends in the process effectively, which could delay projects and cost the County money through delays and resulting price increases.

We determined this OFI's priority was medium, as the finding occurred; however, its occurrence was not pervasive, and the finding was operational efficiency and effectiveness related.

We Recommend County Administration Management:

- A. Work with Granicus to modify the report Legistar generates, including updating the Excel version of the report to be more user-friendly, enabling management to efficiently review the raw data and format it, as needed, for reviews.

- B. Work with Granicus to improve the reporting functionality in Legistar to include an aging report column and a reviewer count column so that management can readily identify potential problems.
- C. Work with Granicus to develop controls to prevent solicitation date fields from being left unpopulated.

Management Response and Action Plan:

- A. **Management Partially Concurs.** Legistar is a commercial off-the-shelf product, and the County is currently utilizing the latest version available. Business Technology Services will continue to monitor for future versions and enhancements and update accordingly.
 - ✓ **Individual(s) Responsible for Implementation:** Bryan Zumwalt, Chief Technology Officer, Business Technology Services
 - ✓ **Planned Implementation Completion Date:** September 30, 2026
- B. **Management Partially Concurs.** Refer to management's response in Recommendation A.
 - ✓ **Individual(s) Responsible for Implementation:** Bryan Zumwalt, Chief Technology Officer, Business Technology Services
 - ✓ **Planned Implementation Completion Date:** September 30, 2026
- C. **Management Partially Concurs.** Refer to management's response in Recommendation A.
 - ✓ **Individual(s) Responsible for Implementation:** Bryan Zumwalt, Chief Technology Officer, Business Technology Services
 - ✓ **Planned Implementation Completion Date:** September 30, 2026

3. The Legistar Review Process Needs Established Timeline Targets And A Methodology For Evaluating Performance.

MEDIUM

During our review of the Legistar review process, we identified potential efficiency improvements. During our preliminary audit work, we met with multiple departments involved in the County solicitation process. During these meetings, the departments informed us they had concerns about Legistar processing timelines. Therefore, we reviewed the information within the Legistar software and the report it generates to determine timelines for solicitation reviews and the number of reviewers involved in the process. We reviewed solicitation timeline data from calendar years 2018 through 2023. Due to the data

completeness limitations identified in OFI #1 and reporting deficiencies noted in OFI #2, we worked with Granicus, the software manufacturer, to obtain additional date fields to use in our timeliness calculation. In addition, some solicitations still did not have any date information to use and were excluded from our review.

Of the solicitations we were able to analyze for the period of 2018 to 2023, we determined it took an average of 66 days for all departments to complete solicitations in Legistar. In addition, we noted an average of 29 approvers for each department during the same period. Table 3 represents, by department, how long on average a solicitation took in the Legistar process and how many reviewers there were, as well as the total number of solicitations. In addition, the bold figures in Table 3 represent values above the average number of days to approve and number of approvers, as applicable. Note we determined the Medical Examiner average number of days was a statistical anomaly, as the two associated solicitations included one solicitation with an abnormally long review period.

| Department | Average Number Of Days | Average of Number Of Approvers | Number Of Solicitations |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Administrative Services | 78 | 27 | 105 |
| Airport | 68 | 29 | 90 |
| Animal Services | 70 | 28 | 4 |
| Board of County Commissioners | 33 | 25 | 5 |
| Building Services | 57 | 28 | 4 |
| Business Technology Services | 61 | 30 | 97 |
| Clerk of the Circuit Court | 101 | 27 | 3 |
| Construction Services | 41 | 28 | 6 |
| Convention and Visitors Bureau | 45 | 24 | 27 |
| County Administrator | 41 | 21 | 6 |
| County Attorney | 15 | 15 | 1 |
| County Commission | 14 | 17 | 1 |
| Development Review Services | 7 | 13 | 33 |
| Economic Development | 45 | 25 | 18 |
| Economic Development Authority | 161 | 48 | 2 |
| Emergency Management | 57 | 23 | 33 |
| Emergency Medical Services Authority | 59 | 30 | 6 |
| Facilities and Real Property | 74 | 29 | 25 |
| Fleet Management | 70 | 28 | 9 |
| Forward Pinellas | 11 | 23 | 1 |
| Housing and Community Development | 51 | 28 | 8 |
| Human Resources | 99 | 34 | 38 |

| Department | Average Number Of Days | Average of Number Of Approvers | Number Of Solicitations |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Human Services | 45 | 29 | 183 |
| Management and Budget | 77 | 28 | 17 |
| Medical Examiner | 380 | 24 | 2 |
| Office of Technology and Innovation | 67 | 29 | 12 |
| Parks and Conservation Resources | 45 | 24 | 47 |
| Planning | 41 | 29 | 79 |
| Public Works | 64 | 29 | 542 |
| Purchasing | 45 | 24 | 18 |
| Purchasing and Risk Management | 46 | 22 | 8 |
| Real Estate Management | 56 | 26 | 66 |
| Risk Management | 38 | 23 | 2 |
| Safety and Emergency Services | 78 | 32 | 59 |
| Solid Waste | 99 | 30 | 39 |
| Tax Collector's Office | 42 | 21 | 3 |
| Utilities | 96 | 35 | 274 |
| Averages | 66 | 29 | |
| Total | | | 1,873 |

Table 3 - Legistar Average Solicitation Days and Approvers (2018-2023)

We made an attempt to baseline solicitation timeline data against other Florida counties; however, we were unable to obtain responsive Legistar timeline data to use for this analysis. Using the timeline data from our analysis, management should evaluate whether the length of time and number of approvers involved in the Legistar solicitation process is acceptable. In addition, discussions with management revealed it did not have established targets for Legistar solicitation review timelines.

According to the U.S. Office of Management and Budget Federal Data Strategy Data Governance Playbook:

"Agencies should develop performance metrics, assign responsibility, audit practices, collect implementation and outcome data, document and learn from results, and make needed changes."

Without complete date information tied to OFI #1 and the reporting ability missing from OFI #2, management has a limited ability to track timelines effectively and efficiently. Implementation of the associated recommendations would facilitate an efficient and effective review process. Management must also develop performance metrics so it can make informed decisions to improve the Legistar review process. The absence of

monitoring the Legistar timelines risks solicitations taking longer to complete and projects to be delayed, which can cost the County money and resources.

We determined this OFI's priority was medium, as the finding occurred; however, its occurrence was not pervasive, and the finding was operational efficiency and effectiveness related.

We Recommend County Administration Management:

- A. Establish target timelines for all solicitation types in the Legistar process.
- B. Use the Legistar timeline data to track and monitor to ensure timelines are being met. Management should establish a review period on regular intervals, such as quarterly or semi-annually. As noted in OFIs #1 and 2, improvements are needed to the Legistar reporting function and data completeness, which would assist in a more efficient and effective review process.

Management Response and Action Plan:

- A. **Management Partially Concurs.** While staff agrees it made sense to establish timelines for solicitation types in the Legistar process pertaining to contract review, staff no longer utilizes Legistar for contract review or for solicitation. Legistar is an inefficient tool for contract review and for the past 12-14 months the OpenGov software has been utilized as the contract review/solicitation tracking tool and timelines are developed and tracked in OpenGov. What once took 3 to 4 weeks to process contract review in Legistar now only takes 2 to 3 days in OpenGov. Legistar is currently utilized post-solicitation to award contracts.

Staff currently utilizes OpenGov to track and monitor to ensure timelines are being met with reporting of such provided semi-annually.

✓ **Individual(s) Responsible for Implementation:** Merry Celeste, Director, Purchasing Division

✓ **Planned Implementation Completion Date:** September 30, 2025

- B. **Management Partially Concurs.** Refer to management's response in Recommendation A.

✓ **Individual(s) Responsible for Implementation:** Merry Celeste, Director, Purchasing Division

✓ **Planned Implementation Completion Date:** September 30, 2025

IG Response:

We acknowledge the effort management made to improve solicitation review and approval efficiency. The process change to use OpenGov for solicitation review occurred during audit fieldwork, and management informed us of the change subsequent to our Legistar data review. A consistent concern among audit contacts from multiple departments at the inception of the audit was timeliness related to the entire solicitation process and especially the Legistar review process. The impetus of these recommendations was to highlight the importance of establishing timelines and evaluating efficiency in the solicitation review and approval process.

Management expressed the desire to explore use of the future Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) application's procurement functionality to manage the solicitation process moving forward. Whether management uses OpenGov, the future ERP application, or an alternate application, we continue to stress the importance of establishing and measuring performance metrics to ensure maximization of efficiency and timeliness in the entire solicitation process. See also OFI #6.

4. Management Did Not Use The Data Analytics Tool In The OpenGov Software.

MEDIUM

During audit fieldwork, Purchasing management indicated it was not using the data analytics tool in the OpenGov software. We met with management to discuss the data analytics functions present within OpenGov and determined how they were used. During the discussions, management informed us it did not use those functions. By not using the OpenGov data analytics features, management cannot effectively and efficiently track solicitation timelines.

After additional discussions with Purchasing management during our fieldwork exit meeting, management informed us there were concerns about staff turnover and training to ensure accurate data was entered into the OpenGov software. Specifically, management stated there were inconsistencies regarding when dates should be entered. These concerns could be alleviated through additional training to ensure high quality OpenGov data.

Management also mentioned the County was in the process of procuring a new ERP system and stated it would like to explore the feasibility of having OpenGov functionality integrated into the new system. We encourage management to proceed with the use of the existing OpenGov data analytics tool so it can leverage this work in developing reporting requirements for the new ERP system if such an integration is deemed feasible.

Management was still relatively new to using OpenGov, which led to having no experience with the data analytics features. The data analytics tools in OpenGov can enhance efficiency. These tools enable active tracking and monitoring of processes, as well as establishing baselines for continuous improvement over time.

The benefits of data analytics are well documented and cited by Forbes. A Forbes article entitled, "Leading With Data: BI [Business Intelligence] And Analytics For Business Success" stated the following:

"BI tools can help identify areas where costs can be cut without compromising on quality or performance.... Long-term planning can be supported by historical data analysis, providing a solid foundation for future business strategies."

By not using the data analytics tool, management cannot determine whether solicitations are being processed through OpenGov in a timely manner. It also limits management's ability to identify any data trends or potential issues, inhibiting management's ability to adapt and improve those processes. This could delay projects from being started and could cost the County money through delays and resulting price increases.

We determined this OFI's priority was medium, as the finding occurred; however, its occurrence was not pervasive, and the finding was operational efficiency and effectiveness related.

We Recommend Purchasing Management:

- A. Start actively using the data analytics tool within OpenGov to help track and manage solicitations. Management should also perform reviews of the data in sync with the review of Legistar data so the entire timeline can be visualized.
- B. Provide additional training to staff to ensure staff are well versed in the use of the OpenGov software.

Management Response and Action Plan:

- A. **Management Concurs.** Staff is currently utilizing the data exports from OpenGov to perform analytics and produce reporting using Power BI. The one resource the Purchasing Division has to perform this activation and training is currently dedicated to the new ERP project and is actively involved in the evaluation of firms and subsequent negotiation of a contract. As time permits staff will dedicate time to fully activate the OpenGov analytic tool and train accordingly.

Additional reporting training will be provided to staff on the limited analytic ability in OpenGov and the other software tools available (OBIEE, SplashBI, Power BI, etc.).

- ✓ **Individual(s) Responsible for Implementation:** Merry Celeste, Director, Purchasing Division
- ✓ **Planned Implementation Completion Date:** February 28, 2026

- B. **Management Concurs.** Refer to management's response in Recommendation A.

- ✓ **Individual(s) Responsible for Implementation:** Merry Celeste, Director, Purchasing Division
- ✓ **Planned Implementation Completion Date:** February 28, 2026

5. The Limited Number Of OpenGov Solicitation Templates Hindered Management's Ability To Analyze Solicitation Data.

MEDIUM

We found the existing OpenGov solicitation templates included various types of solicitations grouped in single template formats instead of being assigned individual templates, which distorted OpenGov solicitation data. During our review, Purchasing informed us management had designed the current templates to enable staff to use prompts within the templates when initiating projects in the OpenGov modules, thereby choosing a suitable solicitation type based on their selection of the prompts. This could make it more efficient for staff to initiate solicitations, but it is not helpful for analyzing metrics because they become skewed due to lack of specificity.

Table 4 contains a rollup of the current OpenGov templates where each bold row is the template, and the underlying rows are the solicitation types that fall under each template.

| Construction Template |
|---|
| Invitation to Bid - Construction |
| Request (All items begin as -REQ; the analyst updates the suffix when the project is generated) |
| Construction - V1 Template |
| Invitation to Bid |
| Invitation to Bid - Construction |
| Request (All items begin as -REQ; the analyst updates the suffix when the project is generated) |
| Invitation to Bid - Construction Template |
| Invitation to Bid - Construction |
| Invitation to Bid - Cooperative |
| Invitation to Bid - Goods Template |
| Invitation to Bid |
| Invitation to Bid - Services Template |
| Invitation to Bid |
| Non-Compete |
| Request for Proposal - Formal/Informal |
| Invitation to Quote Template |
| Invitation to Quote |
| Request (All items begin as -REQ; the analyst updates the suffix when the project is generated) |
| Notification Template |
| Informal Request for Proposals |

| |
|---|
| Non-Compete |
| Request for Proposal - Formal/Informal |
| Notification Template |
| Sole Source |
| OLD - Invitation to Quote - Template |
| Invitation to Bid |
| Invitation to Quote |
| Request (All items begin as -REQ; the analyst updates the suffix when the project is generated) |
| Request For Proposal - CCNA - Non-Continuing Template |
| Request for Proposal - CCNA Non - Continuing |
| Request For Proposal - Revenue Template |
| Request for Proposal - Formal/Informal |
| Solicitation Template |
| Informal Quote |
| Invitation to Bid |
| Invitation to Bid - Construction |
| Invitation to Quote |
| Letter of Interest |
| Non-Compete |
| Piggyback |
| Request For Information |
| Request for Proposal - CCNA Continuing |
| Request for Proposal - CCNA Non - Continuing |
| Request for Proposal - CMAR |
| Request for Proposal - Design Build |
| Request for Proposal - Formal/Informal |
| Information |
| Request for Proposal - CCNA |
| Solicitation - All Template |
| Invitation to Bid |
| Request for Proposal - Formal/Informal |
| Solicitation - All - V1 Template |
| Invitation to Bid |
| Letter of Interest |
| Non-Compete |
| Request (All items begin as -REQ; the analyst updates the suffix when the project is generated) |
| Request for Proposal - Formal/Informal |
| TESTING - Request for Proposal - CCNA Template |
| Request (All items begin as -REQ; the analyst updates the suffix when the project is generated) |
| Request for Proposal - Formal/Informal |

Table 4 - OpenGov Templates and Associated Solicitation Types

The grouping of templates occurred because management designed the templates to enable staff to use prompts within these templates when initiating projects in the modules to make initiating a solicitation more efficient.

The Federal Data Strategy Data Governance Playbook, Practice 20 - Leverage Data Standards, provided the following regarding the need for data standards to improve data quality:

"Adopt or adapt, create if needed, and implement data standards within relevant communities of interest to maximize data quality and facilitate use, access, sharing, and interoperability."

Creating a data standard to employ OpenGov templates for each solicitation type would be in alignment with this guidance to enhance data quality.

IT Convergence, a Gartner-recognized and Oracle-awarded global strategic partner, stated the following regarding the importance of data quality:

"Data and analytics leaders must collaborate with business stakeholders to build a data quality operating model that enables you to allocate the appropriate resources and improve the skills, technology, and processes required to implement your data quality program."

The design of certain templates caused solicitation types to be grouped under a single template, which distorted the OpenGov solicitation data. As a result of the skewed data, management lacked precise information, hindering efficient solicitation tracking and trend monitoring. When there is a lack of efficiency, the County could be at risk of having projects delayed or potentially losing money through delays and resulting price increases.

We determined this OFI's priority was medium, as the finding occurred; however, its occurrence was not pervasive, and the finding was operational efficiency and effectiveness related.

We Recommend Purchasing Management:

Separate the existing solicitation templates into distinct ones, allowing management to use the data analytics tool to monitor each solicitation type with greater accuracy.

Management Response and Action Plan:

Management Partially Concurs. The Purchasing Division can analyze solicitation data. The problem that is under review is management's ability to analyze solicitation data using the tools available in OpenGov. Purchasing is currently using five solicitation templates. These five solicitation templates have satisfactorily met the current needs of the division. The

implementation of this recommendation includes establishing an additional 13 solicitation templates, as well as reconfiguring three of the five active ones. All content from the templates to be implemented is already contained within the five active templates. Currently, the contents are accessed using logic statements by the analyst when they develop the solicitation. This efficiency would be lost through the implementation of additional templates. Additional reporting training will be provided to staff on the limited analytic ability in OpenGov and the other software tools available (OBIEE, Splash BI, Power BI, etc.).

- ✓ **Individual(s) Responsible for Implementation:** Merry Celeste, Director, Purchasing Division
- ✓ **Planned Implementation Completion Date:** September 30, 2025

IG Response:

We acknowledge management's reason for maintaining consolidated solicitation templates. Our experience during the audit was this configuration made it difficult to analyze the data at a granular level sufficient to allow for more efficient data analysis to be performed. The focus of this recommendation was on improving the data quality to make data analytics more efficient and effective. If management is able to perform data analytics using an alternative tool that can parse the solicitation template data sufficiently, that would be an acceptable alternative to our recommendation.

Moreover, management expressed the desire to explore use of the future ERP application's procurement functionality to manage the solicitation process. Whether management uses that application or an alternate application, we continue to stress the importance of evaluating reporting requirements to ensure the available data is segregated in a manner suitable for the performance of data analysis.

6. The OpenGov Solicitation Process Needs Established Timeline Targets And Should Incorporate The Use Of The OpenGov Data Analytics Tool For Evaluating Performance.

MEDIUM

During our review of the OpenGov solicitation process, we identified potential efficiency improvements. While performing our review of the OpenGov software, we obtained the raw data from exported Excel files obtained in the Intake, Projects, and Contracts modules in the OpenGov software. The Intake Module is the first step of the OpenGov process. Both the responsible department and Purchasing enter information and start the solicitation process in this module. The Projects module is the next step in the process where solicitations are advertised and finalized before going to Legistar for final approval. Lastly, the Contracts module is used to hold all finalized contract documents.

We exported data from all three modules into an Excel workbook we used to help visualize solicitation timelines. In addition, OpenGov has a built-in data analytics tool that can display timeline information, and we were able to get snapshots to help with determining timelines for solicitations.

On average, we found it took a combined 131 days for all project solicitation types to move through the Intake and Projects modules in OpenGov. This is the combination of the average number of days in the Intake module (36) and the average number of days in the Projects module (95) for the years 2022-2023, which includes the first solicitation data available in OpenGov. Note some solicitation types reported no data in the Intake or Projects modules, as tracking of those projects either commenced in the Projects module phase or the project did not make it past the Intake module phase. Table 5 represents, by department, how long on average a solicitation took in the Intake and Projects modules in the OpenGov process. The bold figures represent values above the average for each module.

| Department | Intake Average Days | Projects Average Days |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Administration Office Of Courts | 2 | No Data |
| Administrative Services | 35 | 100 |
| Administrative Services - Facilities and Real Property | 3 | 187 |
| Airport | 33 | No Data |
| Animal Services | 6 | No Data |
| Building & Development Review Services | 18 | 92 |
| Business Technology Services / Office Of Technology & Innovation | 55 | 97 |
| Clerk Of The Circuit Court | 119 | 198 |
| Communications | 5 | No Data |
| Convention & Visitors Bureau | 13 | 91 |
| County Administration | 31 | 89 |
| County Attorney | 43 | No Data |
| Economic Development | 26 | 71 |
| Emergency Management | 22 | 52 |
| Housing & Community Development | 26 | 131 |
| Human Resources | 25 | 117 |
| Human Services | 43 | 152 |
| Office Of Asset Management | 5 | No Data |
| Office Of Management & Budget | 18 | No Data |
| Parks & Conservation Resources | 20 | 82 |
| Pinellas Planning Council | 37 | 121 |
| Public Works | 53 | 79 |
| Safety & Emergency Services | 38 | 59 |
| Solid Waste | 30 | 83 |

| Department | Intake Average Days | Projects Average Days |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|
| St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport | 36 | 115 |
| State Attorney | 4 | No Data |
| Tax Collector | 11 | 98 |
| Utilities | 39 | 107 |
| Medical Examiner | No Data | 18 |
| Safety & Emergency Services - Ambulance Billing & Financial Services | No Data | 200 |
| Building & Development Review Services - Code Enforcement Division | No Data | 106 |
| Blanket Purchase Order - County Wide | No Data | 184 |
| Averages | 36 | 95 |

Table 5 - OpenGov Average Solicitation Days by Module (2022-2023)

During our review of the Legistar process, we found it took an average of 66 days to complete the Legistar review process, for a total of 197 days from a solicitation's creation in the Intake module to its final approval in Legistar, resulting in an average of approximately 6.5 months.

Based on discussions with Purchasing management, although there were no fixed target timelines for solicitations, management's goal was three or four months total for Invitation to Bid (ITB) solicitations and six months for Requests for Proposal (RFPs). Based on our review of all ITB solicitation data in OpenGov for the 2022-2023 period, we found it took an average of 116 days (nearly 4 months) from solicitation creation to the date marked award pending. See Table 6. For RFPs, we found an average of 143 days (nearly 5 months). See Table 7. This is in addition to the 66-day average days to complete the Legistar process. We were unable to segregate only RFP and ITB data in the Legistar data. Therefore, the 66-day average represents all solicitation types.

| Year | Invitation to Bid | Invitation to Bid - Construction | Invitation to Bid - Cooperative | Average Number Of Days |
|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| 2022 | 158 | No Data | No Data | 158 |
| 2023 | 109 | 73 | 136 | 94 |
| Average | 136 | 73 | 136 | 116 |

Table 6 - OpenGov Average Solicitation Days for ITBs (2022-2023)

| Year | Request for Proposal - CCNA | Request for Proposal - CCNA Continuing | Request for Proposal - CCNA Non - Continuing | Request for Proposal - Formal/Informal | Average Number Of Days |
|----------------|-----------------------------|--|--|--|------------------------|
| 2022 | No Data | 196 | 256 | 205 | 208 |
| 2023 | 37 | 108 | 98 | 118 | 113 |
| Average | 37 | 130 | 151 | 147 | 143 |

Table 7 - OpenGov Average Solicitation Days for RFPs (2022-2023)

We contacted multiple local government procurement offices that used OpenGov to manage solicitations in an attempt to obtain statistical data and timeliness targets for solicitation completion. One county was responsive and, although unable to provide specific data, did provide target completion times. For ITBs, they targeted 90 days, and for RFPs they targeted 130 days.

We also networked with other audit agencies throughout the state to obtain this information. Of note, the City of St. Petersburg solicitations took, on average, 60 to 75 days to process through the OpenGov Projects module for all solicitation types. As highlighted in Table 5, County solicitations, on average, took 95 days to process through the Projects module.

This occurred partly due to the unfamiliarity that came with new software, and a learning curve was expected. In addition, there were various departments involved in the OpenGov process. However, there was also no monitoring of the OpenGov built-in data analytics function. If solicitations were closely tracked, management would be aware of how long they were taking and could set goals to improve those timelines.

Management cannot make informed decisions to improve the process without the timeline information from the data analytics tools. See OFI #4. Management needs to establish timelines for solicitation types and utilize the data analytics tool to track and monitor timeline performance.

Best practices noted in an article by GEP, a worldwide procurement and supply chain consulting firm, stressed the need for creating an effective procurement schedule to reinforce this. The article stated that management should have the following:

"Estimated duration for each task, typically expressed in days, weeks, or months. These should be realistic and based on historical data or expert judgment."

The absence of monitoring the OpenGov timelines risks solicitations taking longer to complete and projects to be delayed, which can cost the County money and resources.

We determined this OFI's priority was medium, as the finding occurred; however, its occurrence was not pervasive, and the finding was operational efficiency and effectiveness related.

We Recommend Purchasing Management:

- A. Establish target timelines for all solicitation types in the OpenGov process for both the Intake and Projects modules.

- B. Use the OpenGov timeline data in the OpenGov analytics tool to track and monitor timelines and ensure they are being met. Management should establish a review period at regular intervals, such as quarterly or semi-annually.

Management Response and Action Plan:

- A. **Management Concurs.** Currently, staff can extract timelines for solicitation types from OpenGov and are utilizing the timelines to address potential protractions in the solicitation process. This information is reviewed and used to identify obstacles and low levels of performance. Staff currently reviews the solicitation data semi-annually. Staff will proceed with the implementation of the OpenGov analytics tool and utilize the tool for evaluating performance.

✓ **Individual(s) Responsible for Implementation:** Merry Celeste, Director,
Purchasing Division

✓ **Planned Implementation Completion Date:** February 28, 2026

- B. **Management Concurs.** Refer to management's response in Recommendation A.

✓ **Individual(s) Responsible for Implementation:** Merry Celeste, Director,
Purchasing Division

✓ **Planned Implementation Completion Date:** February 28, 2026



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