

THE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT FILE CHECKLIST

What a complete digital procurement record looks like, and how to know if yours measures up

You already know what belongs in a procurement file. But is your current system or process actually capturing and organizing the records you need automatically? Or is your team doing the work manually, inconsistently, or not at all?

As you work through each phase of this checklist, ask yourself, “Is this record being created and filed as part of the workflow, or is it something someone has to remember to do or save?”

The gap between those answers is the gap between a complete project file that’s ready when needed and one that requires days of legwork and reconstruction to produce.

PHASE 1: PRE-SOLICITATION

RECORD	WHY IT MATTERS	COMMON GAP
Needs assessment or purchase requisition	Establishes the business justification for the procurement	Not created or not retained once solicitation begins
Budget authorization	Confirms funding was approved before the solicitation was issued	Verbal approval only; no written record
Scope development notes	Documents who developed the specifications and how	Missing when scope is challenged as restrictive or tailored
Market research documentation	Supports the estimated value and method selection	Skipped for routine procurements; absent when challenged
Sole-source or exception justification	Required if competitive process is waived	Created after award rather than before

Retention reference: Pre-solicitation records should be retained with the solicitation file for the full retention period applicable to the procurement type as required by your local, state, or federal regulations.

PHASE 2: SOLICITATION

RECORD	WHY IT MATTERS	COMMON GAP
Solicitation as posted (all versions)	Establishes what vendors were given	Only final version retained; earlier versions discarded
Posting confirmation	Documents when and where the solicitation was published	No record of posting date or publication locations
All addenda, numbered and dated	Ensures the official record reflects all changes	Informal clarifications issued outside the addenda process
Q&A log (questions and official responses)	Demonstrates equal access to information	Vendor questions answered individually by email
Addenda distribution log	Proves all registered vendors received all addenda	Distribution assumed but not documented
Pre-bid meeting attendance and notes	Documents commitments or clarifications made verbally	Meeting held but no written record created

Retention reference: Solicitation records are usually subject to a minimum three-year retention period, with longer periods for federally funded procurements (often seven years) and construction contracts (Varies by state, often 10 years or more).

PHASE 3: EVALUATION

RECORD	WHY IT MATTERS	COMMON GAP
Evaluator roster and assignment confirmation	Documents who evaluated and when they were assigned	Evaluators selected informally with no written record
Signed conflict of interest disclosures (all evaluators)	Required before evaluators access submissions	Completed after scoring rather than before
Individual scoring sheets (all evaluators, all criteria)	The primary record of evaluation decisions	Summaries retained; original sheets discarded
Evaluation criteria and weights as applied	Confirms criteria matched what was published	Criteria adjusted during evaluation without documentation
Deliberation notes (if evaluators met)	Explains how scoring decisions were reached	Meeting held but not documented
Clarification requests and responses	Shows equal treatment of vendors during evaluation	Clarification requested from one vendor only
Final scoring summary with award rationale	Ties scores to recommendation	Scores compiled but rationale not written

Retention reference: Evaluation records should be retained for the full solicitation retention period and must not be destroyed if a protest has been filed or is reasonably anticipated.

PHASE 4: AWARD

RECORD	WHY IT MATTERS	COMMON GAP
Award recommendation memo	Documents the basis for the recommended award	Recommendation made verbally; no written record
Board or approving authority action	Required for awards above delegated authority	Approval assumed based on meeting minutes; no direct reference
Notice of intent to award (if issued)	Triggers protest period; establishes timeline	Issued but not retained in project file
Unsuccessful vendor notifications	Required by most jurisdictions; triggers debrief rights	Sent verbally or by phone; no written record
Debrief records (if requested)	Documents what was communicated to unsuccessful vendors	Debrief conducted but not documented
Protest and response records (if applicable)	Complete record of any challenge and resolution	Partial records; correspondence not consolidated

Retention reference: Award documentation should be retained for the full solicitation period. Protest records should be retained for a minimum of seven years, regardless of outcome.

PHASE 5: CONTRACT FILE

RECORD	WHY IT MATTERS	COMMON GAP
Fully executed contract with all exhibits	The governing document for the relationship	Unsigned copy retained; executed original not filed
Insurance certificates with expiration tracking	Required to confirm ongoing coverage	Certificates collected at award but not monitored for renewal
Business certification documentation	Required for programs tracking certified participation	Collected at submission but not filed with contract
All amendments and change orders	Modifies the contract; requires same approval process	Informally agreed; not reduced to writing
Performance documentation (inspections, delivery confirmation, etc.)	Supports payment and closeout decisions	Created but not attached to contract file
Contract closeout documentation	Confirms all obligations fulfilled	Contract expires without formal closeout record

Retention reference: Contract files are typically subject to longer retention periods than solicitation records. Construction contracts often require retention for the life of the asset plus the applicable statute of limitations. Federally funded contracts are subject to federal retention requirements, generally seven years from final payment.

QUICK REFERENCE

Most Common Audit Findings and the Records That Prevent Them

Audit Finding

- Unable to confirm all vendors received addenda
- Evaluation criteria not consistently applied
- No documented justification for sole-source award
- Vendor communications not on the record
- Contract modification not properly approved
- Insurance lapsed during contract period
- Records unavailable for audit period

Preventing Record

- Addenda distribution log with timestamps
- Scoring sheets with written rationale
- Pre-solicitation exception documentation
- Q&A log; all communications through official channel
- Amendment with approving authority signature
- Active certificate tracking with renewal alerts
- Retention schedule applied at file creation

READINESS ASSESSMENT

Use these questions to assess your agency's current documentation posture:

For a solicitation from 18 months ago, can you locate the complete project file without asking multiple people?

Are all vendor communications for active solicitations running through a single, documented channel?

Do your evaluation records include individual scoring sheets from every evaluator, not just compiled summaries?

Are addenda distribution logs automatically generated, or does someone have to create them manually?

Is your contract file updated continuously, or assembled at closeout?

Do you have a written retention schedule that maps to your state's requirements?

PlanetBids centralizes the complete procurement record from solicitation to award, automatically logging every action, communication, and document. Agencies using PlanetBids have the project file ready at every stage, and there has never been a valid bid protest won against PlanetBids.

Want to see why? [Book a meeting](#) or watch a quick demo to learn more.