CITY OF SAN MARCOS TAKES ON LARGER PROCUREMENT LOAD WITH PLANETBIDS

HOW PLANETBIDS HELPED

Procurement Efficiency
With an influx of new projects, automation of RFP process was key.

Vendor Communication
Centralized RFPs and addenda tracking ensures all vendors receive all documentation.

Evaluation Transparency
Clear scoring metrics on large projects eliminate errors, while side-by-side comparison ensures the correct bid wins.

OVERVIEW

The City of San Marcos, a parks and recreation paradise located in San Diego County, is a rapidly growing city of nearly 95,000.

While the City has been conducting procurement processes with PlanetBids digital procurement solution since 2018, project requests and funding have skyrocketed in the past year, thanks to the passing of a major tax initiative in late 2024.

Measure Q imposed a one-cent sales tax on most purchases, providing approximately $20 Million annually for general government use for 10 years – all to be used locally.

The measure provides funding for services such as fixing public infrastructure, updating and maintaining local parks, trails, and playgrounds, and providing additional fire, paramedic, and 911 emergency response services for the city.

A new fire station, fire engines, and brush rig were among the emergency response improvements, while infrastructure additions included two dump trucks, street paving, and a lighting project along Mission Road. Parks and recreation was slated to receive playground replacements, new sports lighting, and master plans for new parks.

As expected, this new influx of funds and the corresponding projects put new pressure on the City's procurement team.

THE CHALLENGE

After releasing 12 RFPs in Fiscal Year 2023 (which runs from July 1 to June 30) and 15 in 2024, the City released 18 RFPs and IFBs in 2025. As of February 2026, they had already exceeded the previous year with 21 RFPs executed.

Per the City's bylaws, anything above $150,000 must go out for formal bid unless a cooperative contract can be used.

"The new measure is generating a good amount of revenue, which opens up so much more opportunity for the city, which means an increase in consulting services, public works, and construction projects," Merce LeClair, Contract Grant and Procurement Manager for the City of San Marcos said.

Because of these new opportunities, the City also ramped up its use of PlanetBids for solicitation creation and release, vendor communication and management, and project evaluation.

Prior to using PlanetBids, the City relied on manual processes, paper bidding documents, and in-person bid submissions.

Vendors had to print out their bid documents, drop them off at the City's office by the deadline, and have them timestamped and logged before they were opened live in front of the public in bid opening meetings. Evaluations, usually run internally, were slow and confusing, with different groups of evaluators depending on the type of project.

There was little visibility, as well, into whether vendors were getting all the required information.

"We would release the bid and have vendors downloading or pulling the information, but we couldn't see who was looking at it, we couldn't see the questions they had or know if they got the answers," LeClair said. "And then if we released a change or an addendum to the bid, we didn't know if they'd seen it or not. We'd add an addendum and they'd have to certify that they received it, but we'd get those one or two that say, 'Oh, I never got it,' and they never certified that they received it. And then at that point we really had to just disqualify them, which is unfortunate."

THE SOLUTION

With PlanetBids, solicitations are created from existing templates, making the process quick and easy when the City's procurement team is under a tight timeline or dealing with multiple projects at once.

RFPs are released via the City's online bidding portal, which allows vendors to register and prequalify before seeing all open bids and project documents in one place. The City can even see how many vendors are registered that do a certain type of work, based on keywords and codes, and notify them directly of new opportunities.

The City has anywhere from 50 to hundreds of vendors, depending on the type of work required.
At bid submission time, vendors simply compile all documents and submit them electronically via a secure, encrypted locked-box submission process, confirming that they've read all Q&A and received all applicable addenda before submitting.

This process ensures the City is safe from bid protests and reduces the number of no-bids or disqualifications, while saving vendors the hassle of submitting stacks of paper in person.

"Just to have all the bid information in one place and to have vendors submit bids electronically versus paper has had a really significant impact on the timeframe for us," LeClair said. "Our turnaround time for all these RFPs has really shortened."

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>
> Merce Leclair, Contract Grant and Procurement Manager

THE RESULTS

That turnaround time is key for the number of projects the City is releasing, as is the speed and transparency of the evaluation process. Getting so many different city project managers on the same page to evaluate at the same time is difficult, but PlanetBids allows them all to evaluate at once without having to gather them in a central location.

PlanetBids gives them the scoring metrics set forth by the City and allows them to score independently and compare all projects to determine the winner, with audit trails to demonstrate accuracy and fairness. "The biggest thing is the transparency and compliance," LeClair said. "We're able to show exactly when and what time anything was put out there, what was received, who the evaluation committee are, when they actually did the evaluation – everything. For compliance and auditing purposes, it's helped tremendously. If we have a public records request, we know we can go right into PlanetBids and it's all right there."

SOLICITATIONS

Streamlining RFP creation and release

- **Challenge:** The City's new tax measure created additional funding and an influx of new projects, leading to an increase in the number of solicitations and RFPs the procurement team needed to release.
- **Solution:** PlanetBids helped the City release RFPs quickly, with pre-approved templates and an easy-to-use vendor portal.

VENDORS

Simplifying communication and bid submissions

- **Challenge:** Addenda were often missed, Q&As went unseen, and bids had to be submitted in person and in paper by deadline.
- **Solution:** PlanetBids allows for digital bid submission, and vendors must certify that they have seen and acknowledged all key addenda and Q&As.

EVALUATIONS

Ensuring accurate and transparent scoring

- **Challenge:** Evaluators vary by project type and are often scattered in different locations, making it difficult to convene them for in-person evaluations.
- **Solution:** PlanetBids centralizes all scoring, allowing evaluators to perform their duties from anywhere and ensuring transparency with clear auditing.

THE RESULTS: TRANSFORMED PROCUREMENT OPERATIONS

PlanetBids allowed for faster, more efficient RFP creation and release, helping the City award 21 projects in 2025, with more coming in 2026, while making the process more user-friendly for vendors and reducing risk for the City.

EFFICIENT BID CREATION

Pre-approved templates, clear line item codes, and centralized documentation help the City release more solicitations and manage them more easily.

IMPROVED VENDOR EXPERIENCE

An online vendor portal provides vendors with all important documents and ensures acknowledgement, while encrypted electronic submission saves them from in-person, paper-heavy bidding.

MORE TRANSPARENT EVALUATION

Centralized, collaborative scoring streamlines and simplifies evaluation across different project types and provides insight into decision making to eliminate bid protests.

ABOUT PLANETBIDS?

PlanetBids' end-to-end procurement platform helps procurement professionals in the public, private, education, and non-profit sectors streamline their purchasing operations and improve vendor and supplier relationships for better budget and resource management.

Built and supported by procurement experts, for procurement professionals, PlanetBids is created to be feature-rich and powerful, while also easy to use, supporting sustainability and community empowerment.

ABOUT THE CITY OF SAN MARCOS

The City of San Marcos, California, is a suburb in North San Diego County and home to 94,000 residents. Known for its scenic hills, more than 70 miles of trails, and a college town feel thanks to Cal State San Marcos and Palomar College, the city offers a suburban lifestyle with high-end housing, diverse dining, and coastal beaches. With more than 300 acres of park land, 44 parks, seven facilities, and two aquatic complexes, "San Parkos" is the perfect place to recreate, gather, and enjoy the city.

Contact us to schedule a free demo to see how the PB system can help you. **Talk to Sales** →

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