



HOWARD COUNTY, MARYLAND EXPANDS EPROCUREMENT CAPABILITIES WITH PLANETBIDS TO INCREASE EFFICIENCY AND VENDOR PARTICIPATION

HOW PLANETBIDS HELPED



Vendor Relationships

An intuitive, accessible portal led to better transparency, increased bid participation, and greater competition.



Improved Evaluations

Evaluators remotely enter ratings, and PlanetBids automatically calculates scores and ranks proposals.



Faster RFP Release

Bid templates and specification libraries speed up the bid creation process for more than 800 annual projects.



Greater Transparency

Digital data tracking, certification management, and evaluations ensure impartiality and efficient use of public funds.

OVERVIEW

Howard County, Maryland, nestled between Baltimore and Washington, blends rich history with a vibrant, modern community. With more than 110,000 households, the County thrives as a hub for government agencies, higher education institutions, and global industries including defense, healthcare, and technology.

The County's Office of Procurement & Contract Administration, which is responsible for maintaining approximately 800 annual contracts for goods, services, and capital improvements, began a shift toward modernization and automation in 2016. The vendor community helped drive the change by requesting online bidding capabilities like those offered by surrounding jurisdictions.

Dean Hof, Procurement Manager of the County's 15-person team procurement team, led the search for a user-friendly, vendor-accessible platform that required no participation fees. In the end, PlanetBids end-to-end procurement solution fit the bill.



THE CHALLENGE

The first step in going digital was getting current vendors to register in the new system. Automated email instructions accelerated vendor onboarding and helped ease the transition in an easy-to-navigate new bidding portal.

Howard County Senior Contract Analyst Jennifer Rittenhouse emphasized the importance of guiding people through change.

“We took the time to work with people on the transition, creating easy-to-follow one-page instructions to take away the intimidation factor of this operational change.”

But the COVID-19 forced the procurement team to work remotely before the transition could be completed, and remaining manual processes presented new hurdles.

Paper submittals and in-person meetings were still part of the lifecycle, and two staff members had to physically report to the office for bid openings or documentation collection. Makeshift outdoor meetings became the norm to follow social distancing protocols.

This challenge made it clear that further automation was necessary, not only to adapt to public health demands but also to prepare the department for long-term operational resilience.

THE RESULTS

To address this, Howard County turned to PlanetBids to digitalize evaluation processes, a game-changer for internal workflows. Instead of coordinating in-person evaluator meetings, team members could independently score proposals online, anytime, from anywhere, with standardized criteria and automatic ranking.

“This was new to staff who were accustomed to meeting in person to discuss the proposal and their scores,” Hof said. “It saved personnel time, as we no longer had to coordinate these in-person meetings to accommodate everyone’s schedules. Individuals could work on their evaluations at any time, allowing the process to move much faster.”

Meanwhile, on the supplier side, vendor participation skyrocketed. Ease of use and streamlined registration contributed to stronger supplier engagement—leading to greater competition, higher-quality bids, and improved transparency. Where the County used to receive three or four submittals per bid, now they were receiving 10 to 12.



THE RESULTS (CONT'D)

"When we first began, occasionally a vendor would call and say, 'That was too easy... I must have done something wrong,'" said Rittenhouse. "Our team has been very pleased with the ability to increase vendor participation, which results in greater competition and transparency within our bid processes."

While the County's employees returned to the office full time in July 2021, the procurement team made a conscious decision to keep the efficiency gains and avoid reverting to paper-heavy processes.



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– Dean Hof, Howard County Procurement Manager

BID MANAGEMENT

Simplifying the RFP Process from Creation to Evaluation

- **Challenge:** Manual RFP creation, in-person submittals, and paper-based documentation created logistical challenges, especially during remote work periods.
- **Solution:** PlanetBids helped the County create clear templates and automated workflows that eliminated scheduling conflicts and improved accuracy while making bid submissions easier.

VENDOR MANAGEMENT

Streamlining Registration and Boosting Participation

- **Challenge:** The County needed an efficient way to onboard vendors, validate certifications, and communicate quickly during the transition to digital bidding.
- **Solution:** PlanetBids' vendor portal automated the registration and onboarding process, reducing the workload on staff while offering vendors a simple, intuitive user experience. Procurement staff could easily access vendor data, verify qualifications, and send real-time updates or clarifications while accepting digital submissions.



PROJECT EVALUATION

Enabling Secure and Accurate Online Scoring

- **Challenge:** In-person evaluation sessions delayed projects, left room for errors, and introduced challenges when teams were remote.
- **Solution:** PlanetBids' evaluation features support both weighted and rubric-based scoring, enabling accurate, impartial assessments without the need to coordinate schedules. The County also had the flexibility to add up to four rounds of evaluation per project, and Evaluators could securely review and score bids without the burden of manual calculation or in-person coordination.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Adopting PlanetBids has allowed Howard County to modernize its procurement process, save time, increase competition, and create a more agile and resilient operation.

Improved Internal Efficiency

Digital evaluations and remote scoring reduced administrative overhead and eliminated the need for scheduling evaluator meetings.

Enhanced Vendor Experience

User-friendly portals and simple bid submission workflows led to increased participation and reduced confusion.

Greater Transparency and Competition

More bids, better competition, and digital records improved accountability and procurement outcomes.

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.

ABOUT HOWARD COUNTY, MARYLAND

Howard County is one of Maryland's most sought-after communities, offering economic opportunity, historical charm, and proximity to the nation's capital. With thriving commercial sectors and a commitment to innovation, the County continues to lead by example in sustainable, efficient governance.