

CASE STUDY

The City of Grand Rapids Goes Paperless with e-Bidding

CHALLENGE

Paper bidding often led to late submissions, time-intensive bid processing, and wasted plan packets for the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

SOLUTION

Adopting an online bidding system designed to allow web-based submissions, enable automatic bid report creation, and provide unlimited space for plans and specs.

RESULTS

VENDOR & AGENCY COST SAVINGS | MINIMIZING LATE BIDS & ERRORS | FASTER BID PROCESSING

“It’s been a really wonderful system. It saves a ton of time and money for us and our contractors.”

EMA LUDGE
ENGINEERING OFFICE ADMINISTRATIVE SPECIALIST

By pairing the Bid Express® service with an electronic contract submission, the City of Grand Rapids has gone entirely paperless for their bidding process. Bid Express streamlines their bidding process while also saving time and money for the City and its vendors.

What issues led the City of Grand Rapids to seek an e-bidding solution?



Ema Ludge, Engineering Office Administrative Specialist, shared the biggest challenges her department faced when they started looking for a digital bidding platform.

Late Bids

Late bids due to traffic or delayed mail are a common problem for agencies that accept paper bids. For the City of Grand Rapids, this issue was exacerbated by their downtown location. Vendors that couldn't find parking could have a tough time meeting the 11 am submission deadline.

“Finding a place to park near us isn't always easy. We've had contractors booking it up the stairs and they would get in just after 11 am. That was obviously a big issue.”

Manual Data Entry

Bids entered on paper would then need to be manually entered into Grand Rapids' bid tabs. This process could take 5 hours thanks to the need to double-check figures or make out illegible handwriting.

“Typically all of our bids were written out in pen by the contractor, and then they had to be manually entered into our bid tabs, so it was a lot of double checking. We have bids with 180 line items, it could take 4-5 hours to run that bid tab.”

Wasted Paper Plan Sets

Contractors in Grand Rapids are required to pick up plan sheets to submit a bid for that project. That meant the bidding team would need to print out at least 10 sets of plan books to have ready for vendors that make the trip downtown to pick up plans. If fewer than 10 vendors came to pick up plans, it meant a large chunk of paper and ink was wasted.

“People would need to come to our office to buy plans. We would typically have 10 sets of planbooks ready to go at any given time. I can't tell you how much it hurt at the end of a project if they didn't get bought to toss them all in the recycling bin.”

Communicating Addendums

Sending addendums via email came with a degree of uncertainty as to whether the vendor actually received the notice. This communication challenge can lead to incomplete and discarded bids.

“We would have to email out addendums and there was always that bit of nervousness wondering if they got it or not.”

How does Bid Express address these issues?

Online Submissions & Addenda

“Folks find our bids easier because they don’t have to come into the office.”

Online submissions completely eliminate the need for vendors to travel to the downtown office. Addendum notices are automatically emailed and the solicitation is updated for bidders to have the most up-to-date information, so contractors can’t submit a bid without acknowledging them. Error checking and easy online submittal solve Grand Rapids’ issues with travel and communicating to bidders.

Instant Ranked Bid Tabs

“Since we’ve adopted Bid Express, the longest a bid tab has ever taken me is maybe two or three hours, compared to four or five before, and it’s never an issue of putting in the numbers. Inputting numbers is the quickest part of what I do now.”

Exportable bid tabs in Bid Express remove the need to manually enter data. The ability to download a spreadsheet with bid information and upload into the bid tab has saved hours for Ludge and her team.

Open Access to Online Plans

“Being able to provide those documents for free has been awesome. Our contractors have reported that they appreciate not having to spend so much money to come pick up plans.”

The plan sheets process is now entirely digital. Vendors can access plans online, and no more paper ends up in the recycling bin. While vendors need to pay to submit through Bid Express, the submission cost is usually less than the \$100+ cost of plans they were required to purchase.

Hosting Remote Bid Openings

Many organizations found themselves turning to e-bidding as the pandemic pushed the need for safe and remote bid openings. For Grand Rapids, they simply moved their process from a conference room to a Zoom room thanks to Bid Express.

“We’ve been incredibly lucky to already have been on Bid Express [when the pandemic hit]. I can’t imagine trying to make the transition from paper while working at home.”



Simplifying Discount Programs

Through their Office of Equity and Engagement, the City of Grand Rapids runs a discount program for contractors who meet stipulations like using a minority-led business. Those discount points can be cumbersome to calculate, and Grand Rapids would often have bid values flip when contractors were calculating discounts by hand. Bid Express simplifies the process for more accurate results.

“It was a very common problem we had with paper bids where folks would run their discounts incorrectly. In Bid Express, you just go in and check a box for your point value. We have much greater accuracy using Bid Express.”



Working with Infotech Support

While Ludge and her team don't often deal with support, their experiences have been positive.

“We have had amazing experiences in the past when we're in a pinch and need to solve something before a bid opening. We don't need to reach out a ton, but when we do it's always a great experience.”



Bid Better with Bid Express

Amplify the quality and quantity of your bid submissions with the e-Bidding platform that streamlines the letting process for agencies and vendors everywhere.

- + Minimize discarded low bids with error checks and omission alerts
- + Reduce paper waste from printed bid packets and plans
- + Get instant online bid tabs with ranked and exportable results



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