PROCUREMENT EXCELLENCE NETWORK
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How to Run a Market Landscape Scan to Get More Solicitation Responses

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Overview

Getting only one bid on an infrastructure project solicitation, or none at all, is often treated as a fact of life. It doesn't have to be. Before you release your next solicitation, spend a few hours looking at who is competing for similar work nearby. This is a market landscape scan, and it can help you find businesses you are missing, understand what may be keeping them away, and design a procurement that attracts stronger competition.

The basic idea is simple: **Find similar procurements, see which businesses showed interest or bid, build a stronger picture of the market, and use what you learn before your solicitation goes out.**

This guide is best suited for governments with access to an eProcurement platform, though it also includes options for those without one. Our focus is on public works and infrastructure projects, but you can use these approaches for almost any procurement.

When is a Market Landscape Scan Worth Doing?

A market landscape scan is especially useful when:

- You expect few bids or responses.
- Similar procurements have attracted limited competition.
- You are procuring something new, specialized, or particularly important.
- Your current business or outreach list is old or incomplete.
- You want to reach businesses that have not worked with your government before.
- The project is high-cost, high-profile, or difficult to deliver.

Start early (ideally several weeks to a few months before the solicitation is released) so that you still have time to change the scope, schedule, requirements, or outreach strategy based on what you learn.

1 For simplicity, this document generally uses the term 'business' to refer broadly to consultants, contractors, engineering firms, vendors, and other entities responding to a solicitation.

What can a market landscape scan help you decide?

- Whether to bundle or unbundle contracts depending on if the project is too large or small for the businesses in your market
- If you should change the schedule for qualified businesses that are already committed elsewhere or need more lead time
- If you need to clarify scope so businesses better understand your goals and how to meet your needs
- Whether to expand advertising or hold an industry meeting to raise awareness of the solicitation and invite partnership
- If bonding, insurance, or experience requirements are out of proportion to the work and keeping qualified businesses from competing
- Whether it would be useful to consider a different procurement or project delivery approach if your original plan does not fit the market

Why Competition Matters

More competition can mean better pricing. Yet infrastructure solicitations often receive few, and sometimes, no bids.[2] For some large or highly specialized projects there may truly be only a small number of qualified businesses. But if you're procuring more routine work, practical barriers are usually what's keeping competition low. A business may not have the staff or equipment available for a specific time frame, the project may be too large for its capacity, bonding or licensing requirements may be burdensome, or long distances to project sites can make a project unappealing. In other cases, qualified businesses may never hear about the opportunity because outreach lists are outdated and incomplete, missing businesses that have recently entered the region or expanded their services.

A market landscape scan helps you learn about these issues before the solicitation goes out, while there is still time to address them.

Example: More Businesses in the Pipeline. Literally.

Before issuing a solicitation for a water infrastructure project, the Village of Peck, Michigan, realized its business database was outdated and incomplete. After conducting a market landscape scan and using the resulting business list to conduct targeted outreach, the village:

- Identified 61 qualified businesses within 100 miles
- Received survey responses from 15 businesses about communication preferences, willingness to travel, and preferred project size
- Attracted four bids, including three from businesses new to the village
- Received a low bid approximately $300,000 below available grant funding
- Avoided an anticipated $20 monthly increase in household water rates by going with the low bid without reducing project scope

The lesson: Better information about the market helped Peck make stronger procurement decisions, increase competition, and save residents money.

2 Limited competition driving costs is demonstrated through the literature in industrial organization. For an overview, see Section 3 of the Hortaçsu and Perrigne (2021) Handbook of Industrial Organization chapter. Additionally, Liscow et al., "State Capacity and Infrastructure Costs" (2025), found that within State Department of Transportation road construction projects, each additional bidder is associated with 8.3% lower costs per mile.

Four Steps to Scan Your Market Landscape

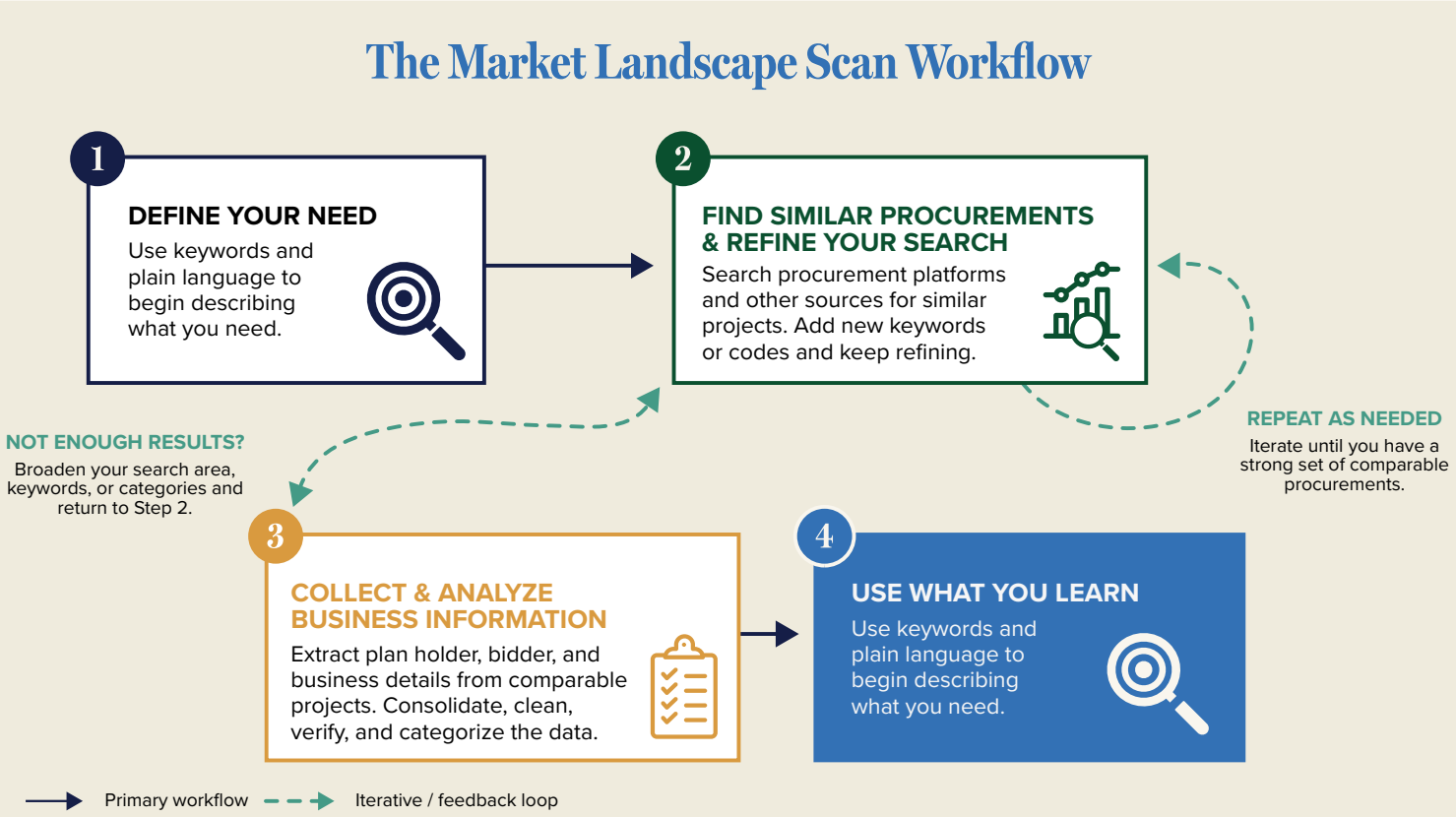


Figure 1. An overview of the market landscape scan. The scan is an iterative process. Use, learn, and repeat to build the strongest possible market understanding and business list.

Step 1: Define Your Need

Start with a simple description of your goal, boiled down to a few key words: e.g. “water main replacement,” “fleet maintenance software,” or “pavement reconstruction.” For their project, the Village of Peck used “water and sewer.”

Your first search should be broad enough to teach you something.

Write down these basic, plain-language search terms. You can refine or expand as you learn, so they don’t have to be perfect.



Step 2: Find Similar Procurements & Refine Your Search

Using your search terms, look for recently awarded or completed projects similar to yours. How you do this will depend on the tools available to your government.

If you have access to an eProcurement platform, start there, especially if it is a platform commonly used by neighboring or peer governments. Search for recently closed or awarded procurements using the plain-language terms you developed in step one.

Look for projects that are similar in:

- Type of work
- Size
- Complexity
- Funding source
- Geography

If you do not have access to an eProcurement platform, start by looking for comparable projects or relevant businesses through publicly available sources such as:

- Neighboring or peer government procurement, public works, or purchasing pages
- State procurement, business-registration, or local business-license databases
- Public bid tabulations, award notices, meeting packets, or contract records
- The Small Business Administration's Dynamic Small Business Search

If you're using business registries or directories, keep in mind that they will be useful for identifying businesses that may be qualified to perform the work, but generally will not tell you whether those businesses are actively pursuing similar government projects. You may need to put additional effort into outreach to combine several sources that can help fill that gap.

Search for comparable projects

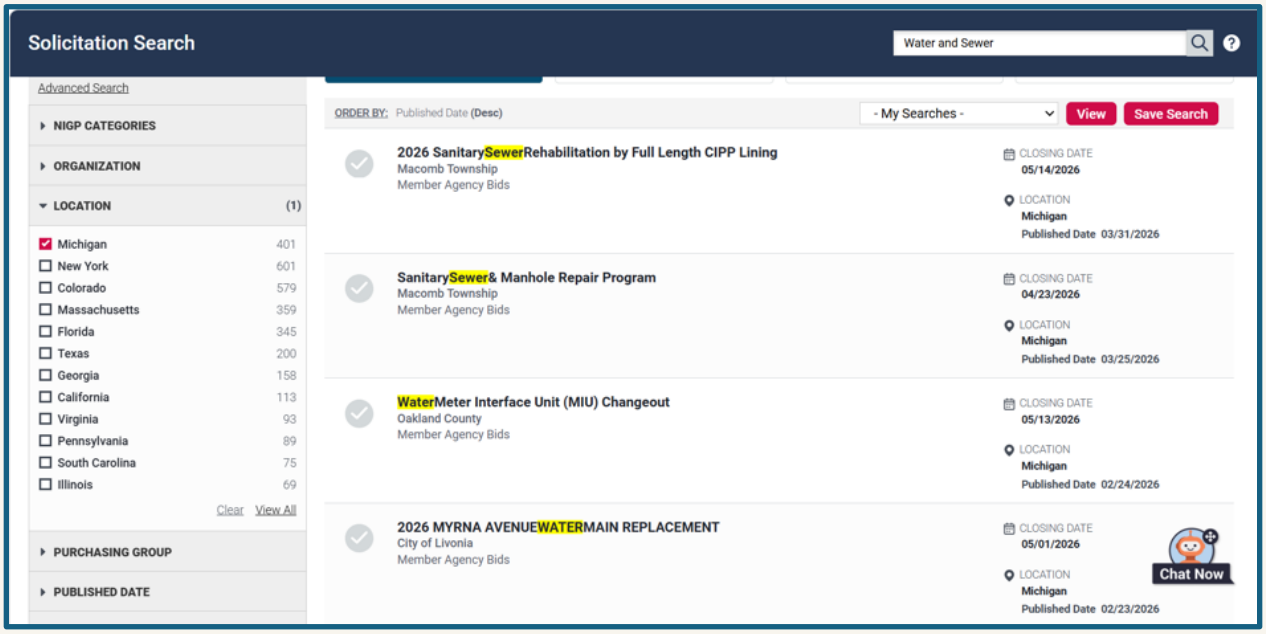


Figure 2. The Village of Peck used an eProcurement platform to search for nearby projects using the keywords "water and sewer" with the location filter for "Michigan."

For each similar project you find, note the procurement classification codes used. These codes are standardized ways of describing the type of work being procured and are often used by procurement systems to organize business notifications and searches.[3]

Review the project descriptions and category codes used.

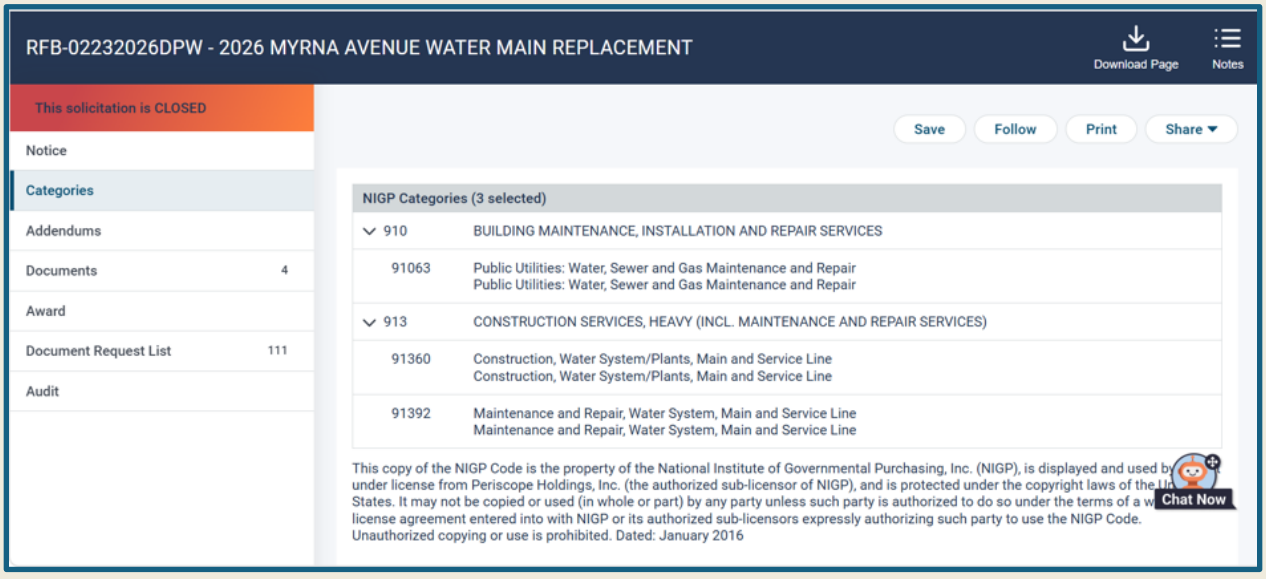


Figure 3. Peck selected the Myrna Avenue Water Main Replacement project, then selected the "categories" to see how that project had defined the services required. They took note of NIGP codes 91063, 91360, and 91392 for water and sewer mains and service lines.

3 Codes might include those from the Institute for Public Procurement (NIGP), the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), the United Nations Standard Products and Services Code (UNSPSC), or agency-specific commodity categories. While there is significant overlap among all three, NIGP and UNSPSC codes are commonly used to classify commodities and services for purchasing and notifications, while NAICS codes classify businesses and industries and are often used in business directories and registration systems.

Why this matters: Comparable procurements reveal how similar work has been procured, which businesses competed, and what approaches appear to attract the strongest competition.

Use those codes to expand your search. A few tips:

- Search for “closed” or “awarded” solicitations rather than “open” ones, because these are most likely to have a business list attached.
- Keep adding relevant commodity codes to your list and drop the ones that return unrelated results.
- If you’re not finding many comparable projects, broaden the categories and keywords you’re using or expand your search area. Just keep in mind that geography may matter a great deal for construction projects, but less so for professional services. Expanding your search area across state lines may also require searching additional eProcurement platforms or using different commodity codes and terminology.

Aim to review at least 3–5 comparable procurements and keep going if new projects are still turning up new businesses. Once the same names begin recurring and additional projects add few new businesses, you likely have a reasonable picture of the market.

Each comparable project makes the next search better.

Refine your search categories and code list.

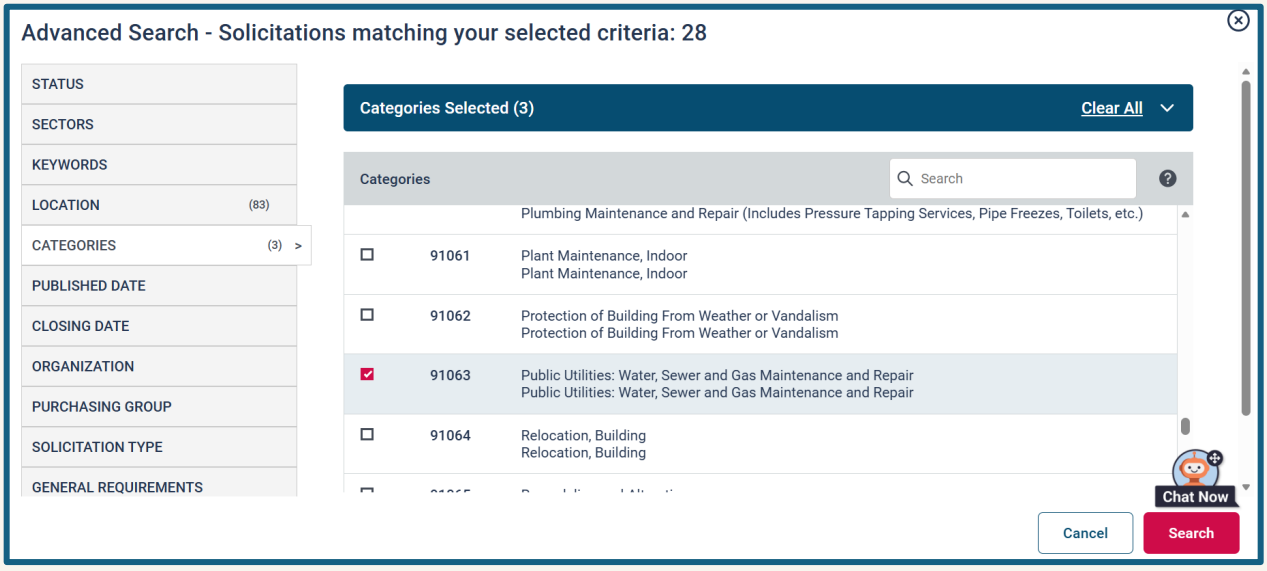


Figure 4. Peck added the NIGP codes to their search using the categories filter.

Repeat the process to identify additional projects.

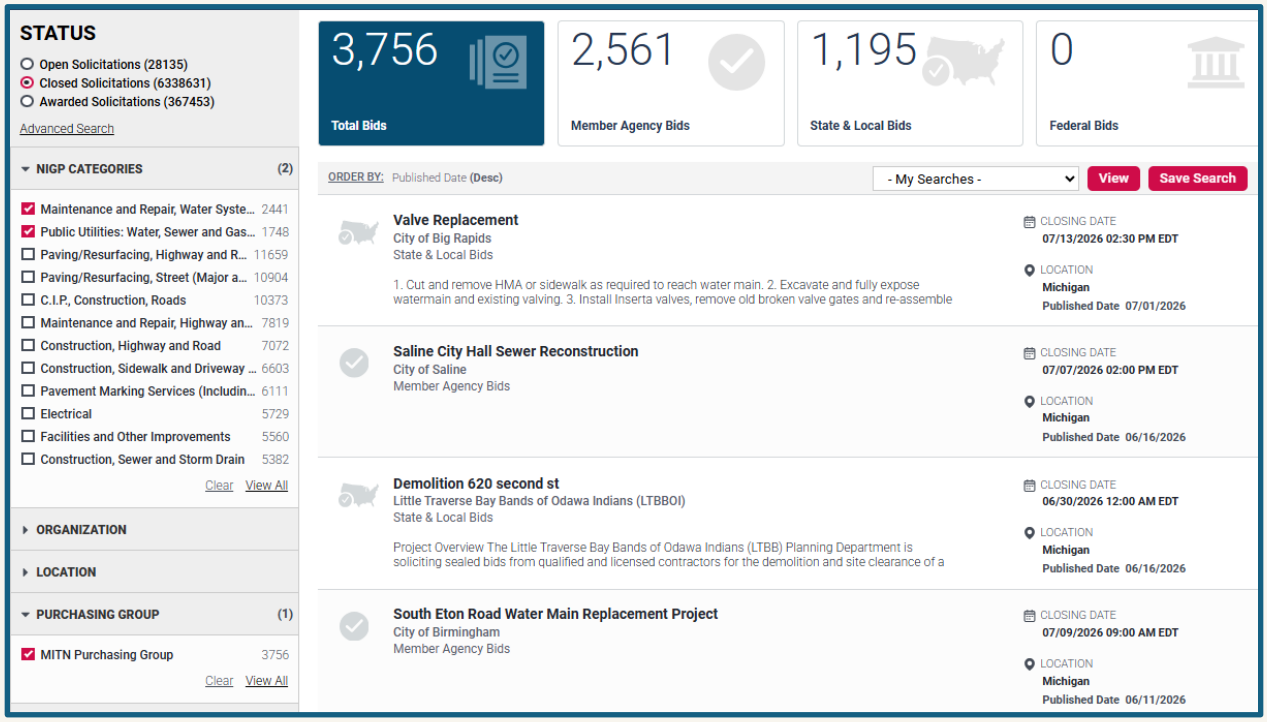


Figure 5. Repeating the process identified additional projects which matched Peck's needs.

Can't my eProcurement platform do this already?

Partly. Procurement platforms are good at posting opportunities and notifying businesses already registered in the system. Some also offer supplier-discovery or market-intelligence tools. But looking beyond a single tool and pairing this with your own local knowledge can give you a fuller picture.

Step 3: Collect & Analyze Business Information

The goal of this step is to turn your research into a usable outreach list of prospective businesses.

Once you identify three to five relevant projects, look for the businesses that demonstrated interest by downloading the solicitation, bidding on the solicitation, or winning the contract. This data might have a name like the "plan holder," "document request," or "bidder" list.



Figure 6. This Redford Township project includes a document request list of 59 businesses.

Download or copy the business information you can find, including the business name, contact name, and contact information.[4] Contact information for a specific estimator, business development manager, or project manager can be particularly helpful for larger companies to quickly get to the right person.

Why this matters: The goal is not simply to build a contact list but to understand the size, characteristics, and capacity of the market so you can make informed procurement decisions.

The right contact can matter as much as the right company.

Expect this initial business data to be messy. Because you're pulling lists from multiple projects, you will probably have duplicates, inconsistent company names, incomplete contact information, and businesses with varying relevance to your project. You'll want to clean the data enough to answer the questions that matter:

- Who is active in the market
- Where businesses are located
- Which businesses appear repeatedly
- Which businesses won awards
- Who to contact

4 Many eProcurement platforms have a "print" button for these lists, but it doesn't always print the full picture – sometimes it cuts out key contact information. When that happens, you're stuck looking up each business one by one, often landing on a generic company email rather than the individuals most likely to bid. See Appendix A for a potential workaround.

Optional: Ways to use AI to clean and enrich a large list
If your government permits it, AI tools can speed up some of the administrative and analytic work (See Appendix B for sample AI prompts). For example, AI can:

- Remove duplicates and standardize formatting
- Update contact information
- Sort businesses by distance from your community
- Group businesses by location or specialty
- Identify businesses that appear repeatedly across comparable projects
- Search for examples of similar projects the business has worked on
- Identify indicators of relevant experience, such as federal funding, utility work, transportation projects, or other specialized project types

DISTANCE FROM PECK	SERVICES (WATER/SEWER FOCUS)	NOTABLE PROJECTS (MUNICIPAL)
70 miles	General contractor for municipal infrastructure; experienced in water main and sewer installations.	Performed local utility projects in SE Michigan (e.g. municipal water/sewer replacements; *sources not publicly detailed*).
95 miles	Asphalt paving contractor offering road and utility trench resurfacing; can support water main projects with restoration paving.	Completed numerous municipal road repaving contracts in Wayne County (including utility cut restorations).
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Table 1. Peck used AI to amplify its business list, adding columns for the business' distance from Peck, a list of services offered, and relevant projects completed, all supported by verifiable links.

Always follow your government's data and acceptable-use policies, use an approved tool where available, and verify important information. Use AI as an accelerator, not a source of truth. AI tools may miss smaller businesses or produce inaccurate details, so do not rely on it alone to assess qualifications, licensing, bonding, or capacity.

Step 4: Use What You Learn

Now that you know more about the prospective businesses in the market, the next step is to reach out. This could be in the form of a short survey, request for information, industry meeting, one-on-one market research conversations (if permitted by your local procurement rules), or other pre-solicitation engagement.

Ask questions that will help you make decisions. For example:

- Would your business consider pursuing this project?
- How far are you generally willing to travel for work of this type?
- Is the proposed contract size attractive?
- Does the proposed timeline work?
- Are any bonding, insurance, licensing, or experience requirements likely to discourage participation?
- Is there anything about the project scope or packaging that would make it difficult to pursue?
- How do you typically learn about government opportunities? How do you want to learn?
- How much advance notice would help you plan to compete?

Every procurement should leave your database stronger than before.

Next, and most important, act based upon what you learn. For instance, if several qualified businesses tell you the contract is too large, consider unbundling it. If they need more notice, publish the opportunity earlier. If no one in the market can meet an experience requirement you assumed was standard, reconsider whether that requirement is necessary.

Example: The Village of Peck had several theories about why recent solicitations had attracted few bidders, but little evidence to confirm them. Using the database developed through its market landscape scan, the village surveyed businesses within 100 miles to better understand how they learned about bidding opportunities, how they preferred to receive notifications, and how far they were willing to travel for work. The findings helped Peck refine its upcoming solicitation and, by engaging businesses before the bid was released, signaled that new opportunities were on the horizon.

A Note on Fair Competition and Pre-Solicitation Contact

Reaching out to businesses before a solicitation is released should be done in a way that preserves fair and open competition. Before conducting pre-solicitation outreach, check your government's procurement code, state law, and any grant-funding requirements for rules on contacting prospective respondents before a solicitation is issued. Some agencies restrict certain pre-solicitation communications or require that they be documented.

Reach out to every business on your list the same way, keep a record of who you contacted and when, and don't share draft terms or pricing with only a few bidders. Consistent, documented outreach reduces legal and procurement-integrity risk and also strengthens your record if a respondent later questions how the solicitation was advertised.

Finally, a few recommendations looking forward:

- Save your search terms, code lists, and outreach records alongside the businesses you identified and the outreach you conducted. If your project involves federal or state grant funding, a well-documented market landscape scan can help satisfy grant-compliance requirements of good faith outreach to small, local, and diverse firms.
- Think beyond the current procurement. Save the database in a centralized location where others can access it and keep it up to date as businesses enter the market, expand their services, or change contact information.
- Track whether the scan improved your outcomes. Compare the number of bids or responses received, the number of new-to-you businesses that participated, and the pricing spread on this solicitation against your recent history. Reviewing these metrics after a few procurements will tell you whether your scanning approach needs adjustment, such as expanding your geographic radius or adding a business survey.

What Success Looks Like

At the end of a successful market landscape scan, you should be able to answer three questions:

☐ Who could realistically compete for this work?

☐ How can we reach them?

☐ How can we make the project more feasible, attractive, or visible to prospective businesses?

More than an exercise in building a list of businesses, a market landscape scan is an investment in better procurement. By developing a stronger understanding of today's market, governments can make more informed decisions, expand competition, and build lasting relationships with businesses that can help deliver successful projects.

Appendices

Appendix A: Maintaining business emails in downloaded lists.

Some eProcurement document holder lists will print a version of the list that excludes key contact information (e.g. email addresses). You can work around this by opening the accordion or drop-down menu for all businesses you would like to add (you may determine by names or locations that some are irrelevant to your scan) and then print the list from your browser instead of the software print button (see below).

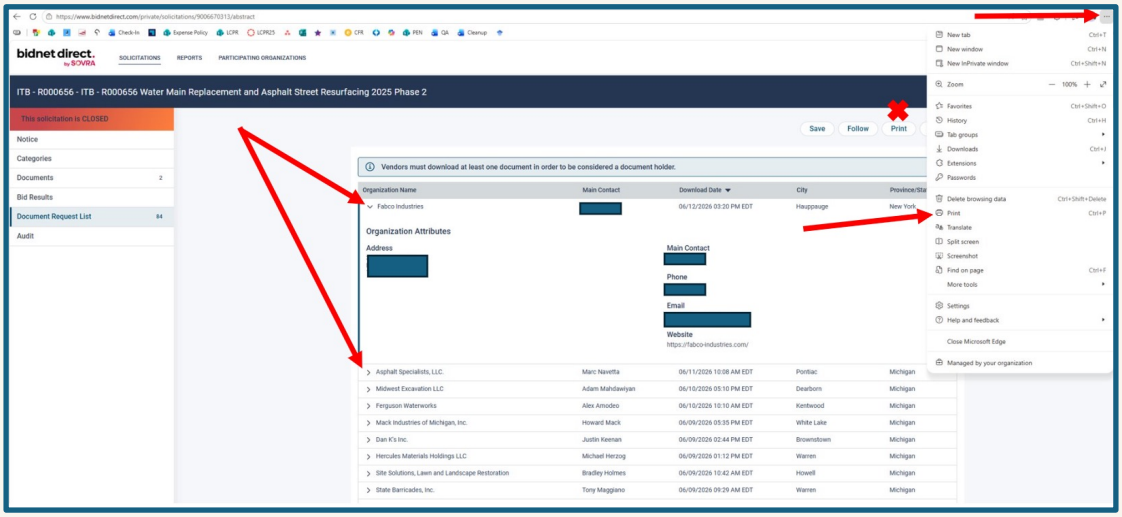


Figure 7. Expand the drop-down menu for the businesses you want from the list. This enables you to use the browser's print option to print the business' contact information.

Then, save the list as a pdf (instead of printing it).

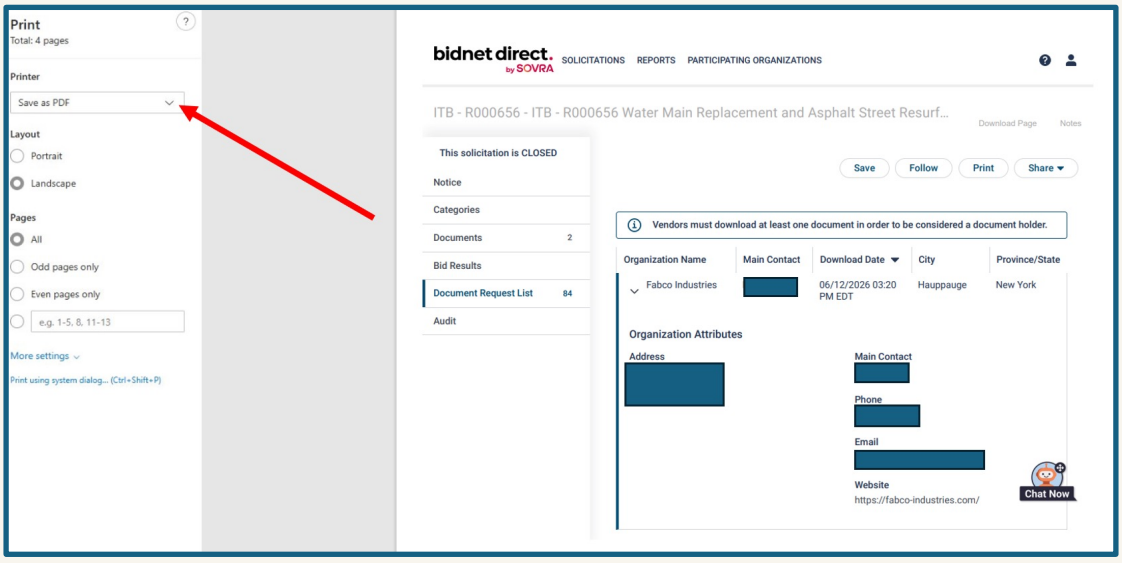


Figure 8. Save the list as a pdf instead of printing.

Repeat this process and save the pdf lists for as many projects as you desire. Finally, use AI to upload and combine the lists and source additional information for each business (see the prompt in step 5 above).

Appendix B: AI prompts to clean business lists
[Note: Yellow highlighted text indicates fields for you to customize for your project.]

Research the businesses listed on these files. I have uploaded documents showing businesses potentially available to complete *[Describe the comparable projects you used (e.g. water main projects)]*. The goal is to identify businesses that might be able to provide similar services to *[Enter your city here]*. Look up the businesses with addresses within *[Specify #]* miles from [Specify the location of your project]. Provide a summary of the type of work they do including any recent similar municipal projects (specifically *[Describe your project]*). Your output should be an Excel file with columns for "Company Name," "City, State," "Distance from *[City Name]*," "Main Contact," "Email," "Phone," "Website," "Description of Services," "Recent Municipal Projects", "Source (Where you found the information on this company)".

If the output is less than you would expect:

- *"Act like a self critic. Walk me through why a company doing X services might not have made this list."*
- *"Connect this list of local resources; point me to any Chambers of Commerce Resources in XXXXX zipcode(s) that can supplement or add to this list."*

If you have disparity study goals as a City:

- *"Include NAICS codes for these businesses."*
- *"Cross reference this list with the M/D/WBE State Certification list at this LINK"*