



Customer Success Story

Digital procurement drives collective success in Barnstable County

Bonfire & Barnstable County

Barnstable County, the regional government for Cape Cod, Massachusetts, is made up of 15 towns with a combined population of over 212,000. United by more than their physical location, the towns have a shared history and vision, as well as a cooperative approach to delivering services that benefit each community and the entire region.

Those collaborative efforts are managed by the one person procurement team at Barnstable County, which is responsible for all the bidding, contracting, and purchasing for the internal department and county-wide cooperative bids.

With RFPs for a variety of commodities and services, from road materials to school supplies to economic development consulting, the County's manual, paper-based processes and small team struggled to keep up with the constant demand for critical projects.

By digitizing procurement with Bonfire, Barnstable instantly expanded their procurement capacity. They're already helping the towns deliver more cost-effective, on-budget solutions and realize a vision of greater collaboration through eProcurement.

KEY CHALLENGES

- One-person team managing all internal purchasing and county-wide cooperative bids
- Labor-intensive manual processes creating inefficiencies and administrative overhead
- No central place to coordinate stakeholders, vendors and evaluators across 15 towns
- Limited strategic capacity due to a lack of data analysis and insights

KEY RESULTS

- Ability to manage more projects every year without increasing headcount
- Increased vendor submissions driving competition and cost savings
- Greater capacity to collaborate and use resources more efficiently
- Access to data insights enabling strategic decision-making



Challenge

Paper-based processes impede strategic sourcing and collaboration

Since the towns in Barnstable County don't have dedicated procurement departments, working together allows them to leverage their resources and networks to meet collective needs and enhance purchasing power. That task is single-handedly managed by Chief Procurement Officer Jennifer Frates in what she calls the "one-woman show" for procurement at Barnstable County.

Inefficient, labor-intensive workflows

Coordinating cooperative bids for 15 towns is already complex enough, but paper-based processes made collaboration and communication even more challenging for Barnstable.

On top of that, since Jennifer doesn't have a procurement team, she said, "I was stuck doing a lot of that work myself: putting together spreadsheets, putting together all the bid tabulations – everything that Bonfire automates, I had to do manually. That was always challenging; for example, when vendors would submit pricing in handwriting that wasn't legible."

"Last year alone, I had one project for roadway construction where the bid opening itself—having to read all of the unit pricing—took over three hours. By the end of it, I had no voice left," she said. After that, Jennifer would have to manually enter all the information into a spreadsheet and distribute it to evaluators over email.

No process for collecting or analyzing data

Not only was Jennifer spending too much time on clerical tasks, she also had no way to identify where and how improvements could be made to things like procurement processes, vendor relationships or purchasing. "Before Bonfire, I wasn't able to look at my reports and make data-driven decisions," she said.

Without a mechanism for collecting data, analyzing it, and acting on the insights, procurement was stuck doing things the same way it always did. That meant working with the same small pool of vendors, paying more for commodities and services, wasting excessive time on the procurement process, and, ultimately, limiting Barnstable's ability to deliver value for citizens.

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Solution

eProcurement centralizes processes and enables data-driven decisions

The moment she took her post in August 2019, Jennifer knew the procurement process had to change if the County was to maximize its collaborative efforts and deliver more cost-effective services now and into the future.

“When I started with Barnstable, I saw everybody was still doing hardcopy bids and in-person bidding,” Jennifer said. Having used Bonfire in her previous role at a different organization, she knew right away that Barnstable needed to make the switch from paper-based to eProcurement as soon as possible.

Barnstable needed an eProcurement solution that could deliver on the following needs, and Bonfire fit the bill:

Centralized information.

With so many internal departments, evaluators, and vendors collaborating, Barnstable needed a solution that would bring information and processes into a single platform that everyone could access at any time. Bonfire makes collaboration frictionless, allowing all involved stakeholders to see where others are in the process and easily view their feedback.

Silvio Genao, Superintendent of Public Works and Natural Resources for the Town of Eastham in Barnstable said, “With Bonfire, I’m able to log in and see a great timeline from where the process started.

I can submit my comments. I can download the bid results when they’re done. And it’s all there, not only now, but six months from now if I need it.”

Automated processes.

Rather than starting from scratch with every project, Barnstable needed to be able to quickly post and evaluate bids and reduce the time to get projects off the ground. “Instead of three-hour bid openings and sometimes days of putting together spreadsheets, it’s done within a minute,” Jennifer said. “So, the bid closes at 11:00, for example, and at 11:01, I have all the information I need right in front of me.”

An extension of the team.

At a time when adding headcount just wasn’t feasible, digitizing procurement workflows was the only way to up the efficiency and deliver more value with less budget. Jennifer needed an eProcurement solution that would act as a virtual extension of her one-person team. Bonfire reduces administrative effort so she can focus on high-level strategic planning and decisions..

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“I really feel like I have a team. Any time I have a question, I am almost guaranteed to hear from someone at Bonfire within 5 to 10 minutes. Especially in my type of work, I need an answer and I usually need it yesterday, so it’s helpful that Bonfire is as responsive as they are.”

Results

Bonfire saves time and costs, helping Barnstable deliver better value for 15 communities

Switching to Bonfire has saved Barnstable County time, administrative effort, and money that they can now divert to critical projects that make all towns in the county better.

Meeting community needs faster

During the pandemic, Barnstable used Bonfire to quickly and easily complete time-sensitive projects, including procuring COVID testing structures and site equipment, and commissioning a study to understand the business impact of the pandemic on the local economy, which is largely dependent on summertime tourism.

By delivering goods and services faster, Bonfire is helping procurement meet community needs more efficiently. And it's supporting other departments in the County and towns, as well. For Silvio, eProcurement has given Public Works and Natural Resources extra time "to plan so much spring work, like roadside mowing, pothole patching, catch basin cleaning, and things of that nature, that now we're doing literally a month ahead of time."

Data-driven, strategic planning and sourcing

Spending less time on administrative tasks frees up capacity for procurement to do more strategic planning and decision-making—backed by data-driven insights—that's delivering better value for the community.

Not only do digitized processes allow Barnstable to complete projects faster, they also translate to more competitive bids, higher quality submissions, and direct cost savings. "I'm able to focus more on getting a bid out to a variety of different vendors rather than scrambling to just do the minimum to get a project completed," Jennifer said.

Happier stakeholders, evaluators and vendors

There are a lot of moving pieces when it comes to procuring goods and services through cooperative contracts. Barnstable procurement serves as the connector, and Bonfire provides a process that's more efficient and results-oriented for everyone involved.

Stakeholders and evaluators have everything they need in one convenient place with automated reminders and notifications so they never miss a step in the process. Vendors no longer have to worry about submitting incomplete bids or missing deadlines, and they can quickly see the results of a competition.

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“My vendors were very excited when we switched to Bonfire. They didn’t have to worry about deadlines as much, with making sure that their packages were in the mail. And vendors could quickly see the results. It’s right there within minutes.”

Building a future of better collaboration

In her position at Barnstable, as well as her role as the President of the Cape Cod Association of Procurement Officials (CAPPO), Jennifer sees the importance of collaboration in getting the most value for taxpayer dollars. “A lot of budgets are getting slashed and people are trying to find new opportunities to save. This is where it becomes much more important for public procurement officials to collaborate a lot more.”

For Barnstable County towns that rely on collaborative contracts to be strategic and save costs, Bonfire has drastically improved their ability to work together quickly and easily from anywhere.

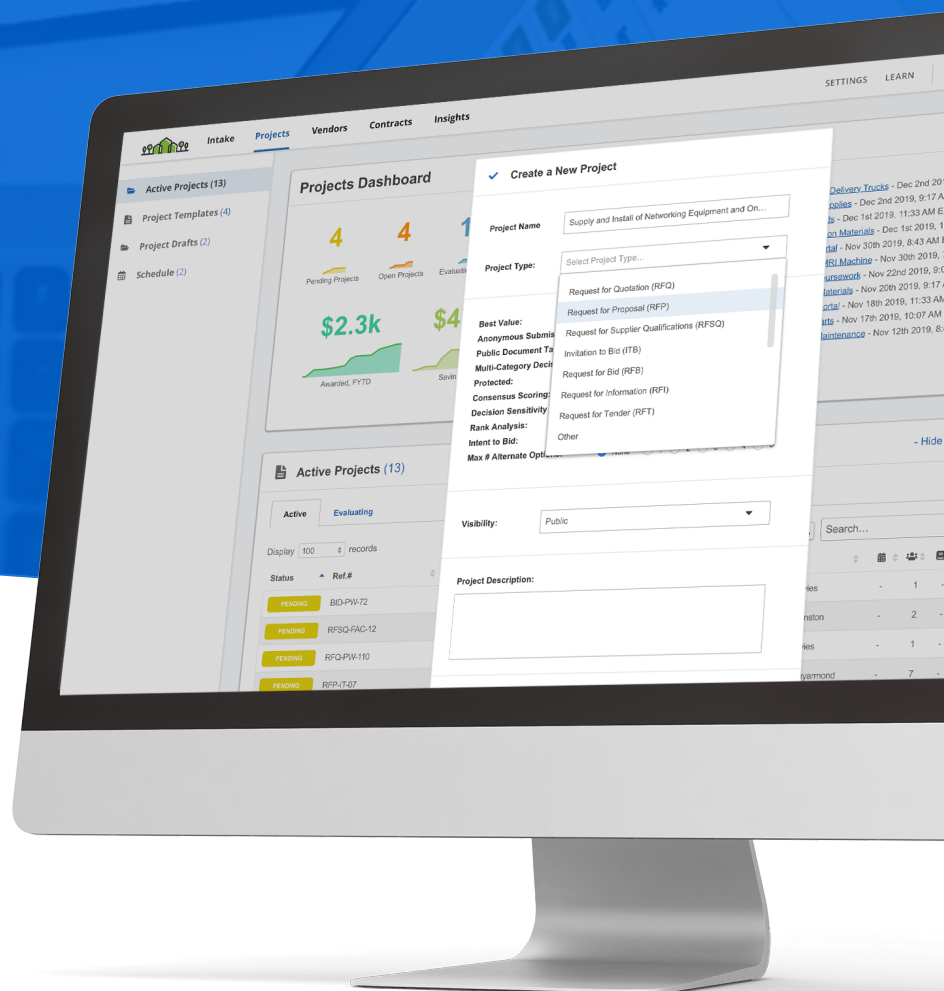
In the near future, Jennifer said, “I would like to see the towns join Bonfire and that way we can collaborate a lot more. It would be a good opportunity to see what the other towns are doing. We can put our resources together and be able to get some great opportunities and cost savings.”



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