

CASE STUDY

Ohio Department of Transportation Rolls Out e-Bidding to LPAs

BACKGROUND

Due to issues with late bids, errors, and paper processing, The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) adopted online bidding to overcome these inefficiencies. In order to meet federal reporting requirements when bidding with locals and create a centralized bidding database, ODOT set out to spread e-bidding across the state of Ohio.

After experiencing the benefits of going paperless with the Bid Express® service, the DOT partnered with Infotech®, the creators of Bid Express, to educate and inform Local Public Agencies (LPAs) about the service.

ODOT's goals in this state-wide effort were to:

- + Standardize bid forms for centralized bidding with ODOT
- + Reduce errors & omissions from paper-based bidding
- + Meet contractor demand for convenient, electronic services
- + Host safe and expedited remote bid openings

“Anytime you go with online bidding, the number of issues you have with the bidding process is going to be reduced. The human error component has largely been taken out of the equation.”

TINA COLLINS
IT CONSULTANT, ODOT

e-Bidding was already beneficial. The pandemic made it essential.

The construction folks at the Ohio Department of Transportation have been bidding online, so they're well aware of the associated benefits.

Dan Stacy, Letting Manager for ODOT, summed these up succinctly:

"There were so many fatal errors in the old days. With the electronic system, the signature issues are gone. Mathematical errors are gone. Items that they forgot to bid are gone. We pretty much go to the Award Committee and they can just say 'award' without having to traverse all kinds of bidding issues."

Tina Collins, the DOT's IT Consultant, was even more brief: **"It just makes sense."**

In January of 2020, ODOT was already in the process of communicating these benefits to the many LPAs they work with annually. Just a couple months later, the COVID-19 pandemic required they double their efforts as remote bidding quickly became the norm for organizations in transition nationwide. In this new world of new rules, it can be hard to separate the core benefits of e-bidding from its essential nature in our socially distanced environment. That said, Collins and Stacy are both well aware of what it could mean for an agency's process.



"We have a vested interest in getting the locals up and running because we know how much a difference it makes for your processes," said Collins.

ODOT's goals align with key benefits of e-bidding

Online bidding through Bid Express allows organizations to set up, advertise, and accept bids electronically, eliminating the need for paper, travel, and postage fees. Stacy and Collins note that the positive impacts of online bidding align perfectly with ODOT's goals of standardization, error and late bid reduction, expediting bid openings, and meeting contractor demands.

Standardizing Bid Forms

Using Bid Express makes it easier to bid projects with ODOT. Bid forms and items in the Bid Express service are standardized to meet Ohio's requirements, making it easy to send data from Bid Express to ODOT.

"From our department's perspective, it gives us data we don't currently have. There are a lot of things we can build on by having that information digitally."

TINA COLLINS, IT CONSULTANT

Reducing Errors & Omissions

Electronic bidding forms in Bid Express make automatic calculations to reduce the chance of math errors and mistakes. Bid forms are interactive, so the service will let contractors know if their bid is missing a key section or value. This functionality is especially helpful when agencies need to send addenda out to their bidders.

“You can roll out addenda on a moment’s notice this way. Keeping up with that was a huge pain, making sure the contractor’s received it. That might be one of the biggest positive impacts, because it’s self-monitoring, there’s nothing manual we have to do to keep up with addenda.”

DAN STACY, LETTING MANAGER

Federal Compliance & Templating Bids

ODOT has worked with the Bid Express team to create a number of standardized bidding templates for common project types that also meet federal reporting requirements for locals. Making the switch to Bid Express gives organizations the chance to streamline their bidding process and cut out unnecessary forms.

“We put a lot of effort into coming up with templates for the locals to use. They have standard templates that they can use right out of the gate, so they don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Their requirements are built into these templates.”

TINA COLLINS, IT CONSULTANT

Meeting Contractor Demand

Ohio contractors are calling for electronic bidding with increasing urgency. Bidding through Bid Express allows them to submit bids from their office and easily incorporate last-minute price changes without needing to accommodate for postage or couriers.

“The contractors have reached out through OCA many times to get [bidding] put online. From a contractor perspective, if they can be in their office, get calls on quotes, and incorporate a last-minute price change on their bid instead of having to do that early to mail in their bid, that’s a win for everyone.”

Transparency for Bidders

When your agency reaches the award stage, Bid Express’ timed digital lockbox publishes the apparent low bid to every bidder on the project. This complete transparency helps build trust and credibility with the contractor community, while also helping to avoid disputes.

“Online bidding puts transparency into the process because everyone sees the same thing at essentially the same time.”

Advice to LPAs adopting online bidding

ODOT has worked with many LPAs during Ohio's rollout of online bidding.

From those experiences, they've landed on a few key components to successful adoption:



Take your time and use templates. Don't try and replicate your entire bidding

process from day one. Start with key state and federal templates to ensure your agency doesn't risk non-compliance or bid rejections, then go from there.

"If you use the created template, something that could've taken a week or two to get everything built doesn't take more than a few hours because most of it is already done." – Tina Collins, IT Consultant



Take the opportunity to streamline. Your 45-page bid packets may be outdated and unnecessary. Switching to online bidding is a great opportunity to reassess your bidding process and see what can be

simplified or removed.

"With all the paper and requirements, you can slash Xs through them and move some to award. You have to take a serious look at what you're doing and why you're doing it, even independent of online bidding." – Tina Collins, IT Consultant



Talk to your peers. There is a wide network of bidders with Bid Express experience in Ohio.

LPAs can benefit from discussing best practices with their industry peers.

"Whatever issue you have, someone else has navigated it." – Dan Stacy, Letting Manager

LPA and Contractor Testimonials

LPAs and contractors are using Bid Express to streamline their bidding process. Here's what they have to say:

LPAs

"Process-wise, it's cleaner. I'm able to generate the documents and seamlessly convert them to PDF. We're not printing paper and hauling it back and forth to the courthouse. I can prep the project ahead of time and advertise it when I have the authority to advertise it, and everybody's instantly got everything they need. Addenda are really easy. Obtaining a plan holder's list was problematic and a lot of work, and it's really taken that out. We're seeing a 40%-70% increase in the number of bidders, depending on the scope of the project."

ADAM FRICKE, DEPUTY ENGINEER, CLINTON COUNTY

"I talked to the board and said listen, [Bid Express] pretty much does everything, they receive the bid, they post the results when the bid opening is due, so we don't have to worry about someone not getting their package over here on time. So we subscribed to it and it worked out great."

ROSANN KEISER, SECRETARY, PUT-IN-BAY TOWNSHIP

"We have been using electronic bidding in New Franklin and Norton with much success. This has streamlined our bidding and award process. The automatic generation of the bid tab has been a great time saver. An incredibly valuable part of the online bidding in the past year was the elimination of in person bid openings."

JOSH SLAGA, P.E., PROJECT MANAGER

"The service was fantastic, and is now our permanent procedure to bid on infrastructure work. I would say the fact that clerical errors are avoided and ease of use by my engineers are the two most valuable attributes of your system. The review of the bids also has been a pleasant surprise – before Bid Express the review took days, now the review takes minutes. This is a great service that should become every agency's standard bid process."

ERNIE STATON, SERVICE DIRECTOR, CITY OF FAIRLAWN

"I personally love Bid Express. It has made opening bids very easy, and saves us a lot of time in taking the paper bids, and putting them into Excel format so that we can prepare the bid tab and do the comparison of bids. It simplifies everything for us and allows us to get through the bids quicker and more efficiently. We have used the software for all of our ODOT projects, and have used it for our local projects as well and we are looking at having other departments that bid out work to use the software as well. We are very happy with the software and will continue to use it as much as we are able to."

THOMAS LEE HARRIS, P.E., CITY ENGINEER, CITY OF FAIRBORN

CONTRACTORS

"Online bidding has been extremely popular with OCA members since ODOT went to it in 2006. It is much more efficient from both the contractor's and owner's perspective. The software ensures that bid omissions are addressed before submission and arithmetic errors are a thing of the past. It pays for itself by having just one contractor's low bid accepted instead of rejected on a technicality. In addition, by not having to submit a bid in person, more bids will be turned in on any given project, leading to more competition and lower prices."

CHRIS ENGLE, OCA

"From the contractor's perspective, we love the online bidding process for many reasons!

1. It helps to minimize the chance of errors with the bid packet, be it including the right documentation and/or mathematical issues.
2. Online bidding allows numbers that come in at the last minute to be included in the bid process, thus ensuring the lowest best price to the project owner.
3. Safety is also a key benefit as we do not have to send someone out to deliver the bid packet.

As a member, we receive notices of upcoming projects. This can potentially save money to the contractor by eliminating plan exchange services."

DIANA MADDOX, J & J SCHLAEGEL, INC

"Online bidding has increased the efficiency of bidding for contractors. It standardizes the procurement process which assists in the minimization of the risk of errors. It also minimizes the amount of paperwork required with bids which saves costs for paperwork, postage, and photocopying."

MICHAEL D. KILLILEA II, P.E., CPESC, THE RIGHTER CO., INC.



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Ready to start bidding online in Ohio?
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to get started.