Supplier Post & Qualification and Vendor Management in Canada's MASH Sector

What Procurement Officers Should Know Before Choosing a System

If you work in procurement at a municipality, school board, hospital, or post-secondary institution, supplier Qualification is probably not a new concept. Most organizations in Canada's MASH (Municipalities, Academic: Colleges and Universities, School Boards, Health care: Hospitals & Long-term care) sector have some version of a qualification process. What varies considerably is how that process is managed, how current the information is, and whether the system can keep up with the volume of suppliers your organization works with.

This paper covers what supplier qualification actually involves in the Canadian public sector context, what ongoing vendor management requires, and where manual approaches tend to break down.

What Supplier Qualification Actually Involves

Qualification is the step that happens before a supplier is eligible to work with your organization. At a minimum, it means verifying that the supplier meets your baseline requirements: current insurance, Workers Compensation standing, any required certifications, and sometimes financial or reference checks.

In the context of Ontario's BPS Procurement Directive, Qualification is explicitly contemplated as part of a compliant procurement process. Infrastructure Ontario, most major municipalities, and many school board and hospital procurement programs run formal Qualification processes for contractors in specific trades or service categories.

The output of a good Qualification process is an approved vendor list. The challenge is that the list reflects what was true when each supplier was added. Without ongoing verification, the list becomes less accurate with every passing month.

Where Manual Processes Break Down

The most common approach to supplier qualification in small and mid-size public sector organizations is still spreadsheet-based tracking. A procurement coordinator maintains a list of suppliers with expiry dates for insurance certificates, Workers Compensation Certificate of Clearance, and other documents. When a date approaches, they follow up.

This approach has real limits. It depends entirely on the spreadsheet being kept current, which depends on someone having time to update it. Staff turnover is a particular vulnerability. When a procurement coordinator leaves, the institutional knowledge about which suppliers need attention and when often leaves with them.

Volume is the second limit. An organization working with 30 to 40 contractors can manage manually. At 100 or more, the follow-up volume becomes unmanageable without a dedicated system.

The third limit is verification. Collecting a document and confirming it meets your requirements are two different steps. A manual process often collapses these into one, which means a certificate that is on file but technically insufficient may not be caught until something goes wrong.

What a Vendor Management System Should Do

A vendor management system for the MASH sector should do more than store documents. The core functions are collection, verification, tracking, and reporting.

Collection means getting documents from suppliers directly, without requiring your team to request them repeatedly. Suppliers should be able to submit documents through a portal, and the system should confirm receipt and flag anything missing.

Verification means reviewing documents against your requirements, not just confirming they exist. A certificate of insurance needs to be checked for coverage amounts, named parties, and validity dates. A Workers Compensation certificate of clearance needs to match the supplier's registered name.

Tracking means maintaining real-time visibility into which suppliers are current and which have items expiring or already lapsed. This visibility should require no manual effort to produce.

Reporting means being able to demonstrate compliance to leadership, your board, or an external auditor. A system that only works in real time but cannot produce historical records has limited value for governance.

The Buy Local Dimension

Canada's Buy Local procurement landscape has shifted in recent years. Ontario's Buy Ontario Act and the federal Buy Canadian policy introduced in late 2025 have created new compliance requirements for public sector organizations.

For many MASH sector organizations, Buy Local compliance requires knowing not just where your suppliers are located but whether their products and services meet the domestic content requirements set out by legislation. That is a supplier qualification question as much as a procurement policy question.

A vendor management system that tracks supplier location and domestic content at the supplier level simplifies the Buy Local compliance process considerably, particularly for organizations subject to regular audits or reporting requirements.

Questions Worth Asking Before You Choose a System

When evaluating a vendor management or supplier Qualification system, the most useful questions are practical ones.

How does the system handle document collection from suppliers? Does your team do the chasing, or is that handled for you?

How are documents verified? Is a human reviewing them, or is verification fully automated?

What happens when a document lapses? Does someone on your team get notified, or is the notification sent directly to the supplier?

Can the system produce compliance reports on demand? For how far back?

Is there a managed service option, where a third party handles the operational work? If your team is already stretched, adding a new system that requires significant ongoing maintenance may not improve your situation.

The answers to these questions tell you more about how a system will perform in your environment than any feature list will.