

OFFICE OF THE PROCUREMENT OMBUD

FOLLOW-UP REPORT TO THE 2021-2022
PROCUREMENT PRACTICE REVIEW OF
INNOVATION, SCIENCE, AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CANADA

DECEMBER 2025



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Office of the
Procurement Ombud

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Introduction

In accordance with paragraph 22.1(3)(a) of the *Department of Public Works and Government Services Act*, the Procurement Ombud has the authority to review the procurement practices of departments to assess their fairness, openness and transparency and to make any appropriate recommendations to the relevant department for the improvement of those practices. Such reviews, which are performed by the Office of the Procurement Ombud (OPO), are referred to as Procurement Practice Reviews (PPRs).

In 2021-2022, OPO conducted a PPR entitled "Procurement Practice Review of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED)," which included 5 recommendations to address identified issues. A final report was issued in December 2022 and published on OPO's website.

As a standard practice, OPO follows up on recommendations resulting from PPRs. This is done in order to determine whether federal departments have implemented their management action plans in response to the Procurement Ombud's recommendations. This follow-up report includes a summary of results from the initial PPR and OPO's assessment regarding progress made by ISED in response to the Procurement Ombud's 5 recommendations. This report also includes an organizational report card that facilitates comparisons across federal departments over time.

Results from initial Procurement Practice Review

The objective of the initial PPR of ISED was to determine whether the Department's procurement practices pertaining to evaluation criteria and selection plans, solicitation, and evaluation of bids and contract award, supported the principles of fairness, openness and transparency.

For the PPR, OPO analyzed ISED's procurement practices under 3 Lines of Enquiry (LOE). Below are descriptions of the LOEs, a brief summary of observations for each LOE, and the Procurement Ombud's 5 recommendations included in the initial PPR report.

LOE 1: Evaluation criteria and selection plans were established in accordance with applicable laws, regulations and policies.

For LOE 1, OPO's initial review found that both mandatory and rated criteria were not overly restrictive and were aligned with requirements. Also, rating scales reflected their relative importance. However, there were a number of files that did not define mandatory criteria in a clear, precise and measurable manner.

The Procurement Ombud made 1 recommendation to address the issues identified under LOE 1:

Recommendation 1: ISED should establish a mechanism to ensure mandatory criteria and scoring schemes for point rated criteria are clearly communicated in solicitation documents.

LOE 2: Solicitation documents and organizational practices during the bid solicitation period were consistent with applicable laws, regulations and policies.

For LOE 2, OPO's initial review found that the majority of solicitation documents provided a clear description of requirements and solicitation documents from all applicable files included clear instructions for posing questions and submitting bids. However, certain solicitations included instructions to bidders for responding to mandatory and point rated criteria that conflicted with what was stated in the actual criteria.

Additionally, solicitations were open to an appropriate number of suppliers and for an appropriate period of time, communications with suppliers appeared to be appropriate and supported the preparation of responsive bids. Regret letters to unsuccessful bidders were generally adequate, but award notices were not posted for a significant number of solicitations to Buyandsell.gc.ca. and documentation of communication was incomplete in many files.

The Procurement Ombud made 3 recommendations to address the issues identified under LOE 2:

Recommendation 2: ISED should review its RFP templates to ensure clear and internally consistent instructions are communicated to bidders.

Recommendation 3: ISED should establish a mechanism to ensure that all relevant communications with suppliers are properly documented and retained on the procurement file.

Recommendation 4: ISED should establish a process to ensure that applicable award notices are published within required timeframes following contract award.

LOE 3: Evaluation of bids and contract award were conducted in accordance with the solicitation.

For LOE 3, OPO's initial review found that in nearly half of the applicable files, the bid evaluation procedures deviated from the procedures described in the solicitation document resulting in several instances where bidders were wrongly deemed non-compliant or the contract was awarded to the wrong bidder.

The Procurement Ombud made 1 recommendation to address the issues identified under LOE 3:

Recommendation 5: ISED should update its procurement guidance and training, and implement an oversight process and review mechanisms to ensure that evaluations are carried out in accordance with the planned approach specified in the solicitation, and that contracts are not awarded to non-compliant bidders.

Methodology and management action plan assessment summary

When launching this Follow-up Review, OPO asked ISED to self-assess their progress in implementing the 5 recommendations stemming from the initial review, using a progress scale provided by OPO. This scale ranged from “No progress” (level 1) to “Full Implementation” (level 5), as outlined in Appendix 1. Furthermore, ISED was asked to provide OPO documentation to support their self-assessment. OPO reviewed ISED’s self-assessment and supporting documentation for its overall reasonableness and credibility.

ISED self-assessed the implementation of their action plans at level 3 “Preparations for implementation” for recommendation 1, level 4 “Substantial Implementation” for recommendations 2 and 5, and level 3 “Preparation for Implementation” for recommendations 3 and 4.

Substantiating documentation provided by ISED demonstrated that processes and structures were substantially implemented for Recommendations 2 and 5, while Recommendations 1, 3, and 4 still require further work to fully implement the intended action plans and address the recommendations. Details of OPO’s assessment are provided in Appendix 3. OPO has been made aware of several recent initiatives launched in mid 2025 to further address the recommendations. However, these initiatives were not included in the final scoring because they occurred outside the report’s review period and therefore could not be included.

The Follow-up Review showed that ISED has implemented a series of new tools, programs and processes that support fairness, openness, and transparency in the procurement process with the purpose of meeting the intent of each of the 5 recommendations of the initial review. Some of these include:





- An enhanced Quality Assurance (QA) function
- A peer review mechanism to strengthen oversight
- Updated procurement forms and templates
- Training sessions
- A standardized folder structure and a request tracker

While the above noted tools, programs and processes are a positive start, there remains much to do for ISED to fulfil the recommended action plans from the PPR to support departmental procurement practices which are fair, open, and transparent. Specifically ISED should continue to monitor the implementation of the QA program, formalize the internal training and onboarding processes, track the completion of mandatory training, enhance the tools that support compliance with documentation requirements, and establish an organizational results tracking process.

Continued development and oversight in these areas will strengthen ISED's quality control framework by ensuring that criteria and instructions are clearly communicated, documentation standards are consistently met and evaluations are conducted as planned without errors.


Report card

OPO's Follow-up Reviews include a report card with a rating that depicts the department's performance taking into consideration the results from the initial review and the actions taken by the department in response to the recommendations under each LOE. The assessment ratings are as follows:

	Satisfactory Plus (four star)
	Satisfactory (three star)
	Partially Satisfactory (two star)
	Unsatisfactory (one star)

Note that a "Satisfactory Plus" assessment rating is only possible when the initial review resulted in no recommendations being issued under a particular LOE. As ISED's initial review contained recommendations under all 3 LOEs, a "Satisfactory Plus" rating was not possible in this Follow-up Review, and the highest possible score ISED could obtain for each LOE was "Satisfactory." Assessment definitions and criteria are outlined in Appendix 2.

This review concluded that ISED's self-assessment is reasonable and credible. After reviewing progress made toward implementing the action plans for each recommendation, OPO concluded that a rating of "Partially Satisfactory" was determined for LOE 1 and 2, and a rating of "Satisfactory" was determined for LOE 3.

Report card		
Line of Inquiry (LOE)	Rating	Assessment
1. Evaluation criteria and selection plans were established in accordance with applicable laws, regulations and policies.	Partially Satisfactory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendation 1 applied to this LOE. ISED has applied a combination of new and existing tools, programs, and processes, including a Quality Assurance (QA) program, a peer review mechanism, updated Request for Proposal (RFP) templates, internal

		<p>procurement training sessions, and training modules to address this recommendation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further address this LOE by finalizing the templates that are still in draft form; formalizing internal procurement trainings and tracking training attendance.
<p>2. Solicitation documents and organizational practices during the bid solicitation period were consistent with applicable laws, regulations and policies.</p>	<p>Partially Satisfactory</p> <p>☆☆</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations 2, 3 and 4 applied to this LOE. • To address the recommendations, ISED has reviewed its procurement forms, updated its RFP templates, introduced a standard folder structure, a request tracker, adopted a new QA program along with a peer review mechanism, and internal procurement trainings. • The QA checklist, as part of the QA program, specifically confirms whether supplier communications are documented on file, and whether an award notice was published following contract award. • Further address this LOE by finalizing the templates that are still in draft form; formalizing internal procurement training, feedback, and onboarding processes; and developing a folder structure with standard subfolders to minimize inconsistencies in documentation requirements.

<p>3. Evaluation of bids and contract award were conducted in accordance with the solicitation.</p>	<p>Satisfactory</p> <p>☆☆☆</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendation 5 applied to this LOE. • To address this recommendation, ISED updated RFP templates, introduced a conflict of interest attestation form and non-disclosure agreements forms, adopted a new QA program and peer review mechanism, identified an additional mandatory training course, and revamped the organization's procurement governance approach. • The continued tracking of mandatory training completion rate, along with the ongoing implementation of the QA program, will help address this LOE. • Positive observations include the weekly briefings to senior officials on medium- and high-risk contracts, as well as the procurement team's efforts to align their strategic approach with other internal stakeholders.
<p>OPO Concludes that the overall report card rating is:</p> <p>Partially Satisfactory</p> <p>☆☆</p>		

Conclusion

While ISED has implemented some new measures that support fairness, openness, and transparency in the procurement process, these efforts did not fully meet expectations. During the review's examination phase, the evidence showed actions intended to address all 5 recommendations stemming from the initial review. OPO also acknowledges additional initiatives recently undertaken to further advance these recommendations, however, they fall outside the review's timeline and were not included in the final results.

The Follow-up Review concluded that ISED's assessment, supported by documentation, demonstrated some progress made in relation to the recommendations in the initial PPR. As such, OPO accepts ISED's self-assessment and concludes that the progress reflects a combination of Level 3 ("Preparation

for Implementation”) and Level 4 (“Substantial Implementation”), resulting in an overall report card rating of “Partially Satisfactory.”

OPO found that while measures have been developed and implemented in most parts of the organization, further work remains to be done in continuing the development and implementation of the QA program, formalizing internal training, feedback and onboarding process, as well as establishing a detailed folder structure to minimize inconsistencies related to information management and ensure compliance with documentation requirements.

In addition, there is a general lack of formal reporting on results and limited tracking of internal training content. Much of the training sessions and reported improvements were high level in nature and described verbally, without accompanying written reports or documented decisions.

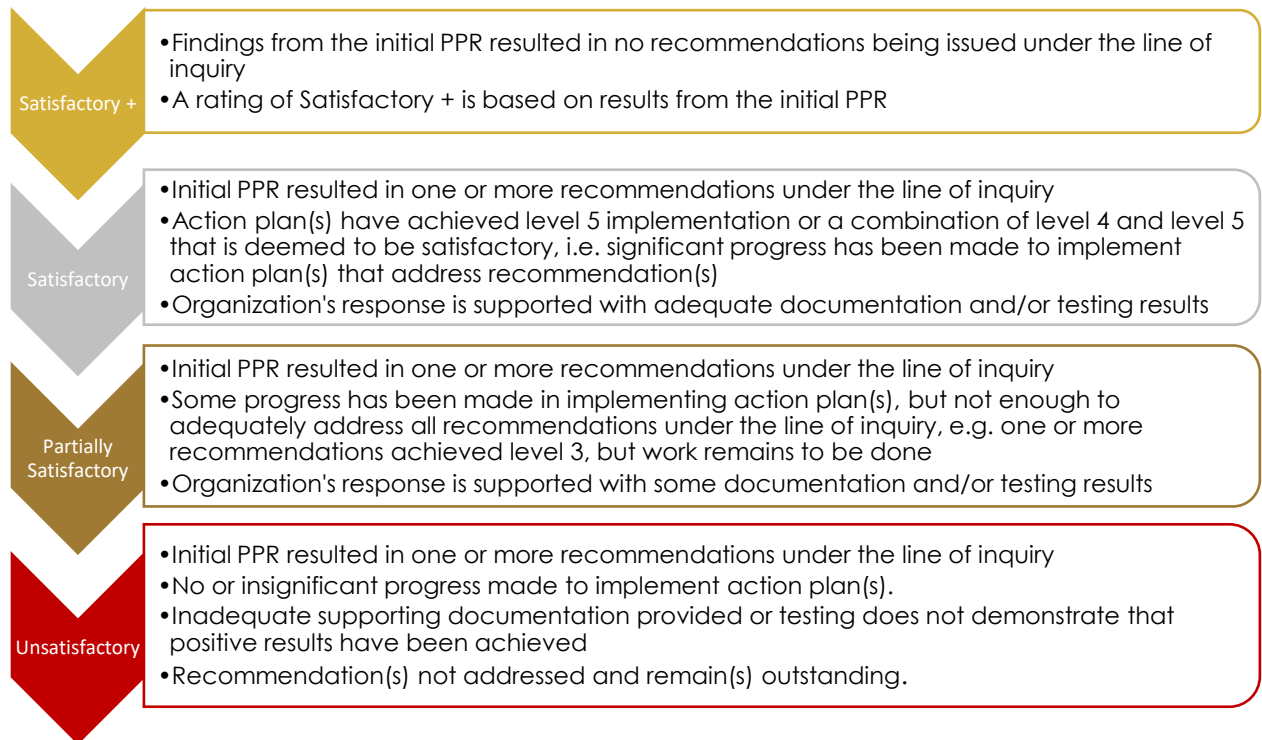
Full implementation of these steps will equip ISED with the necessary training and guidance, enhancing ISED’s ability to effectively plan future procurement activities. Maintaining comprehensive records will further strengthen ISED’s preparedness for any audit activities or external challenges.

Finally, the Procurement Ombud commends ISED for its commitment to supporting fairness, openness, and transparency in the procurement process but strongly encourages ISED to complete full implementation of all recommendations by the end of March 31, 2026. ISED’s timely responses to OPO’s requests and follow-up questions pertaining to this review were appreciated.

Appendix 1: Assessment of implementation level

Assessment of implementation level	
Level 1	No progress or insignificant progress. Actions such as establishing a new committee, conducting meetings, and generating informal plans have not advanced, or insignificant progress has been made.
Level 2	Planning stage. Formal plans for organizational changes have been created and approved.
Level 3	Preparations for implementation. Preparations for implementing a recommendation are in progress – e.g. hiring or training staff, developing necessary resources, etc.
Level 4	Substantial implementation. Structures and processes are in place and integrated within at least some parts of the organization, and some achieved results have been identified.
Level 5	Full implementation. Structures and processes are fully implemented and operating as intended and results have been identified.
Obsolete	Recommendation is no longer applicable due to new policies, procedures, etc.

Appendix 2: Overall performance assessment scale



Appendix 3: Assessment of recommendations

Recommendation 1: ISED should establish a mechanism to ensure mandatory criteria and scoring schemes for point rated criteria are clearly communicated in solicitation documents.

ISED Action Plan:

The OPO found that ISED's evaluation criteria and selection plans were established in accordance with applicable laws, regulations and policies and that mandatory and point-rated criteria are generally not overly restrictive and were aligned with requirements of the solicitation.

The OPO also found that ISED did not clearly define mandatory criteria, fully document scoring grids for point rated criteria or clearly communicate the selection methodology in a minority of files reviewed. As such, ISED accepts the OPO's recommendation that these items be addressed with greater consistency across all procurement files.

As noted in the OPO's report (page 3), in 29 of 30 applicable files, mandatory criteria were aligned with the requirements as described in the solicitation, and in 22 of 24 applicable files, the point rated criteria were clearly communicated in the solicitation documents (page 6). These point to ISED having existing strong controls and practices. However, to increase overall consistency, ISED will update its procedures and guidance documents to procurement staff, and also pilot a peer review process across all levels for the next 6 months to ensure clarity and consistency. At the end of the pilot period, all new entry level hires will have their work peer reviewed for a period of prescribed duration. The application of these standardized criteria and scoring will be monitored and reported on via ISED's already established quality assurance review function to allow for ongoing improvement.

OPO Assessment

To address this recommendation, ISED updated its RFP templates to include guidance on bid submission, evaluation criteria, and selection methodology to support clear communication with suppliers. RFP examples showed that the new templates were in use.

ISED adopted a peer review process in 2024 that focused on the items in the requirements checklist, which intended to ensure that all necessary documents are included in the procurement file. However, based on the content of the requirement checklist, it does not include elements related to mandatory or rated criteria, which are essential components of recommendation 1.

In May 2025, ISED adopted a suite of QA standard checklists as part of the new mandatory QA process. Some of these checklists include the “QA Pre-Issuance or Post Contract Review Checklist” which covers contract award, post contract award, Amendment requirements and RFP processes. The RFP process tab under this checklist notes the requirement where QA reviewers verify whether “evaluation criteria are appropriate for type of procurement – mandatory criteria and scoring schemes for point rated criteria not unnecessarily restrictive and are clearly communicated in solicitation documents and supported by SOW” before posting the RFP. Also, the QA reviewers should verify that “the evaluation and selection methods are in accordance with bid solicitation.”

ISED provided several examples of QA review comments that were shared via email or Word documents rather than through the use of QA checklists. It is noted that some QA templates are still in draft form and that ISED is working on implementing finalized versions during summer 2025. Comprehensive QA materials that are formally communicated to procurement officials will increase the likelihood that all procurement steps, including those related to mandatory criteria and scoring schemes are sufficiently considered and addressed.

ISED also delivered a series of non- mandatory “Friday Proc Talks” training sessions to procurement officers. A session on evaluation criteria took place on October 4, 2024, for 36 procurement officers, but attendance was not recorded. According to ISED, the session covered the topic of communication of evaluation and best practices. Since the supporting documents provided did not specifically illustrate what was discussed during the sessions, OPO is unable to comment on how effectively the training addressed recommendation 1.

In addition to the “Friday Proc Talk”, a training module was provided that explains the logic behind technical evaluation criteria as well as the components of the criteria, but it did not emphasize the importance of clearly communicating the criteria. ISED stated that both training modules are still being developed and that new training videos will be created.

Overall, the updated RFP templates and the many new templates being developed under the new QA program are the key contributors to address this recommendation. They demonstrate that preparations are underway to equip procurement officers to better understand that mandatory criteria and scoring schemes for point rated criteria must be clearly communicated in solicitation documents. The continued implementation of the updated RFP templates, as well as the finalizing of QA checklists and templates will further support fully addressing the recommendation.

OPO acknowledges that ISED has implemented a system to keep track of the completion of mandatory trainings. It is recommended that ISED also move quickly to finish formalizing the internal training process and maintain accurate records of the training, attendance, and results achieved. This will demonstrate

ISED's commitment to fairness, openness and transparency in their procurement practices, particularly concerning the communication of clear mandatory criteria requirements and scoring schemes for point-rated criteria.

ISED developed a QA program that provides oversight of each phase in ISED's procurement activities, from pre-solicitation through file closeout. Each phase has a separate checklist for the QA reviewer to complete, and an additional tab offers explanations for each element. OPO considered this structured approach to a QA program as a good practice.

Implementation level: 3

Recommendation 2: ISED should review its RFP templates to ensure clear and internally consistent instructions are communicated to bidders.

ISED Action Plan:

ISED thanks the OPO and agrees with the recommendation. As noted by the OPO, in 37 out of the 39 files reviewed, ISED was fully compliant and consistent in providing clear and internally consistent instructions to bidders. Further, as the OPO notes, 31 of 33 files had bid solicitation periods that were of an appropriate length to the OPO, that overall solicitations were open to an appropriate number of suppliers and for an appropriate period of time (page 10). In response to the OPO's observation that "communications with suppliers appeared to be appropriate and supported the preparation of responsive bids, however documentation of communication was incomplete in many files" (page 11), ISED would note that as a result of the pandemic, and the abrupt transition from paper to electronic filing it caused, there may have been inadvertent inconsistencies in the completeness of files as they may have had both electronic and paper records, introducing a new challenge in maintaining one complete file and leading to the observations noted by the OPO.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, ISED performs quality assurance review on this procurement activity to ensure overall effectiveness and compliance. In this context, ISED agrees with the OPO and is committed to reviewing its RFP templates and administrative practices to ensure standard, clear and consistent messaging and tools. Further, as noted above, ISED will undertake a pilot peer review scheme as well as support ongoing reviews from its internal quality assurance group.

OPO Assessment:

According to the "management response and action plan" document provided, a full review of all ISED procurement forms and templates were conducted in March 2023. RFP templates were updated as part of this broader initiative. As mentioned previously, RFPs now include standard language guidance on bid submission, evaluation criteria, and selection methodology to

support clear communication with suppliers. Examples were provided to demonstrate that the new templates are in use.

The new QA program which incorporates several standard checklists requires the QA reviewer to validate, before posting RFPs, whether the most recent template and appropriate clauses are applied or a standard template for cases where a PSPC tool is not available.

The peer review mechanism, as previously mentioned, does not validate items that relate to the content of an RFP. Instead, the peer review is based on the items on the requirement checklist, aiming to ensure all necessary documents are included on the file. Therefore, OPO is unable to comment on whether the peer review mechanism assisted ISED in fulfilling Recommendation 2.

ISED noted that several non-mandatory "Friday Proc Talk" training sessions addressed RFP drafting and supplier communication including the session on "Competitive vs non competitive" and "roles and responsibilities". Since the supporting documents provided did not illustrate of what was specifically discussed during the sessions, OPO is unable to comment on how effective the training addressed recommendation 2.

Overall, the review of all ISED procurement forms and templates, along with the updated RFP templates and the new QA program using checklists, demonstrates that ISED has substantially implemented the action plans to address Recommendation 2.

Regarding the non-mandatory internal training sessions provided to procurement officers, it is recommended that ISED continue to formalize the internal training process and maintain accurate records of the training, attendance, and results achieved.

Implementation level: 4

Recommendation 3: ISED should establish a mechanism to ensure that all relevant communications with suppliers are properly documented and retained on the procurement file.

ISED Action Plan:

ISED notes this observation and potential to improve best practices, and highlights that the OPO found in 19 of 21 solicitations, the files contained the necessary documentation. ISED notes this observation and that the period of the OPO's focus fell during the COVID crisis. As a result of the pandemic, and the abrupt transition from paper to electronic filing it caused, there may have been inadvertent inconsistencies in the completeness of files as they may have had both electronic and paper records, making it difficult to maintain one complete file and leading to the observations noted by the OPO.

Since this transition to fully electronic files in March 2020, ISED has implemented improved electronic document management practices and standards leveraging the departmental corporate Information Management tool. ISED's established Quality Assurance function also conducts post monitoring of procurement files and communicates findings and areas of improvements to ensure continuous optimization of processes, tools and guidelines.

ISED will continue to emphasize the importance of document management as part of its training and guidance to its procurement community.

OPO Assessment:

ISED indicated that a request tracker and a new folder structure has been created to support the transition to managing the volume of procurement requests and to enhance information management. Upon assessment, the request tracker captures basic information about a procurement but has limited functionality regarding oversight of communication with suppliers or documentation requirements for a procurement file. Therefore, OPO could not comment on how the request tracker addressed Recommendation 3.

According to the supporting document provided, the new folder structure is mandatory for all procurement activities and contains four separate folders. These include "contract award", "initial contract request", "competitive process" and "non- competitive process". The folder structure remains high-level with no pre-populated folders for documenting supplier communication, which could lead to inconsistencies in practices. It is recommended that ISED further develop the structure to minimize these inconsistencies and ensure proper documentation of supplier communications.

The new QA program asks that the QA reviewers validate that Q&A process was appropriately applied and documented on file and whether the file overall is well documented, before contract award. In the example provided, it demonstrated that the QA reviewer had verified both elements.

Training has mostly been delivered informally through daily engagements between procurement officers and the QA team. ISED reported that improvements in file quality have been observed, and training modules are currently being developed. However, no written evidence was provided to substantiate these interactions and noted improvements.

Overall, the actions taken demonstrate that ISED has made progress toward addressing Recommendation 3. However, work remains to establish a standardized folder structure for documenting supplier communications and to continue developing and formalizing internal training to equip procurement officers with best practices and knowledge to meet documentation

requirements. Finally, ISED should implement a standardized approach to tracking all training activities and progress to support future planning.

Implementation level: 3

Recommendation 4: ISED should establish a process to ensure that applicable award notices are published within required timeframes following contract award.

ISED Action Plan:

ISED fully supports this observation and recommendation. While the OPO report notes that ISED consistently ensures that award notices are published within the required timeframes, there are areas for improvement in the files selected.

ISED also notes that the period of the OPO's focus fell well within the COVID-19 period where files may have been exceptionally incomplete due to the rapid and unprecedented need to transition to working from home, and the consequent shift from paper based to electronic files which may have led to this observation. However, ISED is committed to adopting best practices and in future employee onboarding and training will further emphasize the importance of timely posting.

In parallel, ISED is currently updating processes and tools for its procurement officers, which will provide instructions on procedures and service standards (timelines) for the posting of award notices and the issuance of regret letters, ISED will also ensure continuity of procurement files should a transition between procurement offices be required.

Ongoing monitoring will occur via ISED'S established quality assurance function to ensure continuous improvement, including quarterly reports to senior management.

OPO Assessment:

To address recommendation 4, the QA checklist requires the reviewer to confirm whether a contract award notice has been posted and regret letters have been sent to all unsuccessful bidders prior to awarding a contract. However, regret letters must be sent to all unsuccessful bidders after the contract is awarded. OPO recommends that ISED review the accuracy of each item on the checklist to ensure alignment with applicable rules and policies.

Post-award, the checklist verifies whether regret letters were sent to unsuccessful bidders in conjunction with the contract award and whether the Award Notice was posted on Canada Buys. In addition, ISED provided an example of a completed QA checklist to demonstrate that this item had been validated.

ISED also claimed the use of GCDocs and request tracker to help reduce the delay in publishing contract awards. As mentioned previously under recommendation 3, the request tracker and the folder structure does not provide the sufficient level of oversight in terms of documentation or functionalities related to the timely publication of contract award notices. It is suggested that ISED continue to develop the folder structure to minimize these inconsistencies and ensure proper documentation and the timely publication of award notices.

ISED noted that the importance of publishing award notices on time has been reinforced through QA feedback loops, peer reviews, QA reviews, and onboarding verbal guidance. It is recommended that ISED formalize the training process by implementing a standardized approach to tracking all training activities and progress to support future planning.

Overall, the QA program, supported by standard checklists to verify the publication of award notices and overall documentation of the procurement file demonstrates that ISED has made progress toward addressing Recommendation 4. However, evidence related to training and documentation tools, such as the request tracker and folder structure indicates that further work is required to ensure these measures effectively meet their intended purpose.

Implementation level: 3

Recommendation 5: ISED should update its procurement guidance and training, and implement an oversight process and review mechanisms to ensure that evaluations are carried out in accordance with the planned approach specified in the solicitation, and that contracts are not awarded to non-compliant bidders.

ISED Action Plan:

ISED fully agrees with the need for consistency in training and application of procedures. The overall findings of the OPO report appear to support the conclusion that ISED executes the fundamentals of procurement with a good assurance.

Nonetheless, there is an opportunity to strengthen practices and controls especially in the evaluation process, and so guidance and training for procurement specialists, as well as piloting a peer review process to further strengthen the evaluation process, will be revisited as appropriate.

ISED is also developing a curriculum for Procurement Functional Specialist and updated training as part of its newly launched community development program for purchasing and supply group (PG)s.

Other findings in the report relate to inconsistencies in the evaluation process specifically related to Information technology contracts, where ISED's current model is heavily reliant on non procurement subject-matter experts. These findings present ISED with an opportunity to more fundamentally restructure the manner in which Information Technology (IT) contracts are overseen.

As a result, ISED will immediately supplement its existing oversight and review mechanisms by increasing the involvement of senior management. ISED will also undertake a review of the current operating structure and strengthening its governance model to ensure clear accountability, roles and responsibilities and improve overall compliance and IT procurement strategy.

Further, ISED will ensure on-going monitoring via its established quality assurance function with increased rigour on IT related contracts and reporting to senior management.

OPO Assessment:

To address recommendation 5, ISED has:

- 1) identified an additional mandatory curriculum TRN 323 " Project Management in a Government Context", offered by the Canada School of Public Service to enhance project management knowledge for ISED's procurement officers. Course topics include reviewing relevant policies and directives, and identifying the roles and responsibilities of project actors. According to the course description, it supports project management within a federal government context, with less emphasis on procurement. The current completion rate of the course is only 19%, therefore it's suggested that ISED continue to track the completion rate of this new course, along with other mandatory procurement courses required for ISED's PGs. Furthermore, all mandatory training should be included in PG Personal Learning Plans.
- 2) Utilised the new QA checklist to validate whether the following steps were reviewed prior to contract award:
 - "Evaluation and selection methods are in accordance with bid solicitation.
 - Evaluations and Consensus Report on file and any deviations addressed.
 - Evaluation summary with evaluators attestations on file"

These points contribute to ISED's efforts to enhance understanding of roles and responsibilities pertaining to the contract award process. Increased capacity increases the likelihood that evaluations are conducted in accordance with the planned approach and that contracts are not awarded to non-compliant bidders.

The checklist stipulated that individual evaluations and consensus report should be reviewed and if necessary, discussed with the client. Any discussions resulting in a change are to be documented to clarify why a change has been made. In the example provided, it demonstrated that the QA reviewer have met with the Contracting Authority to confirm they participated in all of the consensus meetings to ensure evaluations were completed appropriately.

Together, the QA program and the mandatory training demonstrate that ISED have substantially implemented its action plan towards addressing recommendation 5. And ISED should continue to implement the QA program, as well to track the completion rate of the additional mandatory training course. In addition, while ISED already maintains a mechanism to track the completion of mandatory training courses, it should consider implementing a standardized approach to also track internal training activities and related progress to support future planning.

Further to the above measures that directly addresses Recommendation 5, ISED has also implemented other noteworthy practices that also promote oversight, consistency and completeness of procurement files, although they do not directly address recommendation 5. ISED has:

- Adopted a peer review process to help ensure all procurement files are complete, consistent and compliant with requirements. As mentioned previously, the peer review is performed based on the content of the requirement checklist, which, while lacking in some areas such as promoting clarity around mandatory criteria and scoring schemes for point rated criteria, still intends to ensure that all necessary documents are included on file. OPO could not therefore comment on how the peer review process addresses the evaluation process. Nevertheless, the continued use of the requirement checklist and the “client procurement package document” are considered good practices to help ensure that procurement packages sent to ISED’s contracts & Material Management (CMM) are consistent and complete.
- Developed a conflict of interest form alongside of a non-disclosure agreement to enhance transparency during the evaluation process.
- Revamped reporting frequencies to provide the Deputy Minister with weekly briefing emails on all professional services requirements valued over \$40,000 and other services-related procurements deemed to be high-value or medium-to-high risk.
- Engaged with internal stakeholders to provide updates on the procurement function, internal controls as well as changes to the procurement framework to support the alignment with organizational priorities.

Implementation level: 4