A MACDONALD-LAURIER INSTITUTE PUBLICATION

How Canada's fragmented, opaque procurement systems limit competition and drive up spending

INVISIBLE INTERNAL TRADE BARRIERS

RYAN MANUCHA

JOE NOSS

May 2026

TRUE NORTH IN CANADIAN PUBLIC POLICY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHAIR
Gerry Protti
President, Collaborative Canadian Energy Solutions, Calgary

VICE-CHAIR
Jacquelyn Thayer Scott
COO, Airesun Global Ltd; President Emerita, Cape Breton University, Sydney

MANAGING DIRECTOR
Brian Lee Crowley, Ottawa

SECRETARY
Elizabeth Burke-Gaffney
Commercial Negotiator, Oil & Gas, Calgary

TREASURER
Martin MacKinnon
Lecturer (part-time), Cape Breton University, Sydney

DIRECTORS
Richard Boudreault, CEO, AWN Nanotech, Montreal

Wayne Critchley
Senior Associate, Global Public Affairs, Ottawa

Lisa Gable
Author, CEO, and former US Ambassador, Washington, DC

Bryan Gould
Founder and Executive Chair, Aspenleaf Energy Limited, Calgary

François Guimont
Retired, Federal Public Service, Ottawa

Colleen Mahoney
Independent Researcher, Calgary

Simon Nyilassy
Founder, Marigold & Associates Limited, Toronto

Hon. Christian Paradis
Co-founder and Senior Advisor, Global Development Solutions, Montréal

Mark Rodger
Senior Partner, Borden Ladner Gervais LLP, Co-Chair, Energy Markets, Toronto

David Schneider
Senior Investment Advisor, Aligned Capital Partners, Victoria

Aaron Smith
Partner, Ernst & Young LLP, Nepean

Cheryl Ziola
Owner, Cheryl Ziola Communications, Management & Advocacy, Vancouver

ADVISORY COUNCIL

John Beck
President and CEO, Aecon Enterprises Inc, Toronto

Aurel Braun,
Professor of International Relations and Political Science, University of Toronto, Toronto

Erin Chutter
Executive Chair, Global Energy Metals Corporation, Vancouver

Navjeet (Bob) Dhillon
President and CEO, Mainstreet Equity Corp, Calgary

Jim Dinning
Former Treasurer of Alberta, Calgary

Richard Fadden
Former National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, Ottawa

Brian Flemming
International lawyer, writer, and policy advisor, Halifax

Wayne Gudbranson
CEO, Branham Group Inc., Ottawa

Calvin Helin
Aboriginal author and entrepreneur, Vancouver

David Mulroney
Former Canadian Ambassador to China, Toronto

Peter John Nicholson
Inaugural President, Council of Canadian Academies, Annapolis Royal

Barry Sookman
Senior Partner, McCarthy Tétrault, Toronto

Sam Sullivan
CEO, Global Civic Policy Society, Vancouver

Rob Wildeboer
Executive Chairman, Martinrea International Inc, Vaughan

Bryon Wilfert
Former Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministers of Finance and the Environment, Toronto

RESEARCH ADVISORY BOARD

Brian Ferguson
Professor, Health Care Economics, University of Guelph

Jack Granatstein
Historian and former head of the Canadian War Museum

Patrick James
Dornsife Dean's Professor, University of Southern California

Rainer Knopff
Professor Emeritus of Politics, University of Calgary

Larry Martin
Principal, Dr. Larry Martin and Associates and Partner, Agri-Food Management Excellence, Inc

Alexander Moens
Professor and Chair of Political Science, Simon Fraser University, Greater Vancouver

Christopher Sands
Senior Research Professor, Johns Hopkins University

Elliot Tepper
Senior Fellow, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University

Contents

Executive Summary / Sommaire 4

Introduction 8

Public Procurement and the Push for Internal Free Trade 12

Transparency is Key to Public Procurement Discipline 14

Results and Discussion 18

Policy Recommendations to Streamline Canada's Procurement System and Strengthen Its Economy 23

Conclusion 25

About the authors 27

References 28

Endnotes 33

Appendix A: Methodology 34

Cover design: Renée Depocas (photo: iStock)

Copyright © 2026 Macdonald-Laurier Institute. May be reproduced freely for non-profit and educational purposes.

The authors of this document have worked independently and are solely responsible for the views presented here. The opinions do not necessarily represent the views of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, its directors, or supporters.

Executive summary | *sommaire*

Canada's declining productivity and weak competitiveness are increasingly tied to structural barriers that limit competition in domestic markets.

One of the most consequential – and overlooked – of these barriers lies in public procurement. Accounting for 13.4 per cent of GDP, or roughly $350 billion annually – government purchasing should exert strong downward pressure on costs and expand opportunities for firms. Instead, transparency failures and fragmented systems are inflating public spending and restricting access to government contracts.

The evidence is clear: when procurement processes are opaque or difficult to manage, fewer firms participate and prices rise. In Canada, these effects are amplified by inconsistent disclosure practices and the absence of a coherent national approach. Fourteen separate procurement systems – each with its own platform, standards, and rules – impose unnecessary burdens, discourage new entrants, and entrench incumbents. The result is weaker competition, higher public expenditures, and reduced innovation.

These inefficiencies have taken on greater urgency amid efforts to strengthen Canada's economic resilience. In 2025, an outpouring of interprovincial collaboration emerged in Canada in response to US President Donald Trump's overhaul of the global trading system. While governments moved to reduce visible trade barriers, less attention has been paid to embedded constraints within procurement systems. Reform must extend to these less visible barriers.

Current procurement practices often function as de facto internal trade barriers. Protectionism in procurement can anoint industrial winners and losers without regard to merit, with outsized consequences for the economy's competitiveness.

Transparency and disclosure are central to addressing this problem. When governments fail to publish clear, accessible procurement information, fewer firms bid and prices rise – imposing a direct fiscal burden on taxpayers.

To assess the adherence of Canada's federal, provincial, and territorial governments to their procurement transparency obligations under the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement*,

we developed a scoring framework for four key areas: ease of use, data quality, coverage, and accessibility.

The results reveal stark variation, ranging from world-class open data practices to systems that barely meet the threshold of meaningful disclosure. Nova Scotia, Quebec, British Columbia, and the federal government are highly compliant. New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Yukon are in weak compliance. The remaining provinces and territories fall in between.

A few serious problems must be addressed:

- Several provinces store public procurement data on privately owned platforms, effectively outsourcing transparency to entities that control access without democratic accountability. Any credible transparency framework must require data portability and open access.
- Pre-qualified vendor lists, used to streamline routine purchasing, often operate with minimal disclosure. Contracts awarded through these channels are frequently invisible, reinforcing closed networks and weakening competitive pressure.
- Fragmentation remains a core problem. Firms must navigate 14 portals with different formats, rules, and systems, incurring significant administrative and legal overhead that adds no productive value.

We offer specific remedial recommendations for each government and propose three system-level reforms:

- Establish a common procurement data standard.
- Create a Canadian "procurement passport" that enables firms that establish financial standing, regulatory compliance, and technical qualifications in one province to port those credentials into procurement processes in other jurisdictions.
- Provide a genuine single point of access.

The European Union provides a useful benchmark. Through its Tenders Electronic Daily portal and the European Single Procurement Document, it has built a far more transparent and interoperable system. Canada remains fragmented, rewarding incumbency and obscuring opportunity.

Canadians are currently incurring billions of dollars in avoidable costs. The reforms proposed here are achievable, require no amendments to the CFTA, and are grounded in proven models. They would reduce spending, expand market access for firms of all sizes, strengthen accountability, and support more effective, data-driven procurement.

Without action, these costs will continue to compound. Canada will entrench a fragmented, opaque system that weakens competition, limits opportunity, and drives higher spending at a time when Canadians can least afford it. MLI

Les barrières structurelles *qui entravent la concurrence sur le marché intérieur nuisent de plus en plus à la productivité et la compétitivité du Canada.*

Un des défis majeurs – fréquemment sous-estimé – réside dans l'approvisionnement public. Comptant pour 13,4 % du PIB, soit environ 350 milliards de dollars par an, les achats gouvernementaux devraient fortement réduire les coûts et élargir les débouchés pour les entreprises. Or, le manque de transparence et la fragmentation des systèmes gonflent les dépenses publiques tout en limitant l'accès aux contrats.

Les preuves sont claires : l'opacité et l'ingouvernabilité des processus de passation des marchés nuisent à la participation des entreprises et augmentent les prix. Ces effets sont amplifiés par des pratiques de divulgation incohérentes et l'absence d'une approche nationale unifiée. Quatorze systèmes distincts – avec leurs propres plateformes, normes et règles – imposent des contraintes inutiles, découragent les nouveaux entrants et favorisent les opérateurs établis. Il en résulte une concurrence affaiblie, des dépenses publiques plus élevées et moins d'innovation.

Ces inefficacités exigent une action immédiate, alors que l'on s'efforce de solidifier la résilience économique du Canada. En 2025, une vague de coopération interprovinciale a pris forme en réponse à la révision complète du système commercial international par le président américain Donald Trump. Les gouvernements ont réagi en abaissant les barrières commerciales visibles, mais ont négligé les contraintes inhérentes aux systèmes d'approvisionnement. La réforme doit englober ces barrières cachées.

Les pratiques d'approvisionnement actuelles font souvent office de barrières commerciales internes. Ce type de protectionnisme peut favoriser certains secteurs industriels sans considération du mérite, ce qui a des conséquences disproportionnées sur la compétitivité.

Surmonter ces obstacles requiert transparence et divulgation stricte. Lorsque les gouvernements ne fournissent pas d'informations claires et accessibles sur les marchés publics, moins d'entreprises présentent des soumissions et les coûts grimpent, d'où une imposition directe pour les contribuables.

Dans ce contexte, pour évaluer la conformité des divers paliers de gouvernement à leurs obligations de transparence aux termes de l'Accord de libre-échange canadien (ALEC), nous avons conçu un système de notation fondé sur quatre piliers : la convivialité, la qualité des données, le champ d'application et l'accessibilité.

Les résultats révèlent des écarts considérables, allant de pratiques exemplaires en matière de données ouvertes à des systèmes de divulgation à peine adéquats. La Nouvelle-Écosse, le Québec, la Colombie-Britannique et le gouvernement fédéral sont tout à fait conformes. Le Nouveau-Brunswick, le Manitoba et le Yukon le sont moins. Le reste des provinces et territoires se situent entre les deux.

Quelques problèmes graves doivent être résolus :

- *Plusieurs provinces entreposent les données sur des plateformes privées, externalisant de fait la transparence à des entités qui contrôlent l'accès sans*

reddition de comptes. Tout système transparent crédible doit permettre la portabilité des données et un accès ouvert.

- *Les listes de fournisseurs préqualifiés, souvent soustraits à des exigences de divulgation minimales, sont utilisées pour simplifier les achats courants. Les contrats attribués via ces canaux sont fréquemment invisibles, ce qui renforce le cloisonnement des réseaux et nuit à la concurrence.*
- *La fragmentation persiste. Les entreprises doivent composer avec 14 portails comportant des formats, des règles et des systèmes différents, ce qui entraîne d'importants frais administratifs et légaux sans valeur ajoutée.*

Nous offrons des recommandations précises pour chaque gouvernement et proposons trois réformes à l'échelle du système :

- *L'établissement d'une norme commune pour les données dans le domaine de l'approvisionnement.*
- *La création d'un « passeport » canadien qui permet aux entreprises à solvabilité financière, conformité réglementaire et qualifications techniques reconnues dans une province de transférer leurs accréditations ailleurs au pays.*
- *La présence d'un véritable point d'accès unique.*

L'Union européenne offre un modèle utile. Grâce à son portail TED (Supplément au Journal officiel de l'UE) et au DUME (Document unique de marché européen), elle a mis en place un système bien plus transparent et interopérable. Le Canada reste fragmenté : il privilégie les opérateurs établis et obscurcit les possibilités.

Les Canadiennes et Canadiens supportent des coûts évitables de plusieurs milliards de dollars. Les réformes proposées sont réalisables sans modifier l'ALEC et reposent sur des modèles éprouvés. Elles réduiraient les dépenses, élargiraient l'accès au marché pour les entreprises de toutes tailles, renforceraient l'imputabilité et favoriseraient des passations de marchés plus efficaces et rentables.

Sans intervention, les coûts continueront de grimper. En effet, le pays ne pourra qu'enraciner un système fragmenté et opaque qui affaiblit la concurrence, limite les possibilités offertes et relève les coûts à un moment où la population est le moins en mesure de les supporter. **MLI**

Introduction

In 2025, an outpouring of interprovincial collaboration emerged in Canada in response to US President Donald Trump's overhaul of the global trading system. By breaking down Canada's internal trade barriers, the federal and provincial governments sought to address some of the trade repercussions that followed the president's actions. Premiers inked bilateral and multilateral memoranda of understanding (MOUs) pledging to strengthen domestic economic relations. Several provinces and the federal government introduced new legislation to improve economic integration by way of statute. And Canada's governments signed the *Canadian Mutual Recognition Agreement on the Sale of Goods*, which allows most goods legally sold in one Canadian jurisdiction to be sold in another without additional requirements or re-certification. These are just three examples of the significant strides that Canada made in its efforts to unlock domestic prosperity.

However, not only is the job far from complete, but the reforms must be broadened to include a significant and under-discussed source of trade barriers: public procurement practices. When 14 governments each operate their own separate procurement portals, each with its own unique interface, data format, and disclosure practices, the result is not just administrative inconvenience; it is a measurable drag on competition and a direct cost to taxpayers. This paper is the first to assess the compliance of Canada's governments with their procurement transparency obligations under the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement* (CFTA). Its aim is to broaden what Canadians consider to be domestic trade barriers, assess current CFTA compliance, and offer some actionable proposals that could bring Canada closer to globally recognized best practices.

From 2025's rhetoric to 2026's implementation

Tabling legislation or signing hortatory pledges and MOUs is only a fraction of the battle to free internal trade in Canada. Recent attempts to reform interprovincial labour mobility, a key internal trade irritant, are instructive about the outsized importance of effective implementation.

Labour mobility had risen to the top of the internal trade reform agenda before 2025. In September 2006 – 20 years ago – internal trade ministers committed to implementing mutual recognition for labour credentials and certifications by April 1, 2009 (Knox 2010). A wave of labour mobility legislation passed by a number of Canada's governments followed this multilateral political agreement. The legislation was intended to enshrine the underlying mechanism of mutual recognition in statute. But the laws passed were simply inadequate for the job. Ideas were not appropriately translated into measures and regulations, and efforts failed at the implementation stage. Almost as if the reform efforts of 2006–2010 had never happened, 2025 saw a swell of calls for improved labour mobility via mutual recognition along with the tabling of companion labour mobility legislation (Manucha 2025). The sentiment and efforts were a complete déjà vu. It is also clear that inadequate implementation over the past 20 years has hindered progress on labour mobility, a key internal trade irritant. We can extend the lesson about the fundamental importance of implementation to another key source of internal trade barriers, and the subject of this paper: public procurement practices.

Public procurement practices as a source of internal trade barriers

Public procurement is deeply linked to internal trade. Provincial politicians who unfairly prefer local vendors may win electoral favour among a select group of pleased stakeholders. However, public procurement spending in Canada amounted to 13.4 per cent of national GDP in 2021 (approximately $350 billion) (OECD 2023). As a result, protectionism in procurement has outsized impacts on the economy's competitiveness, and ultimately, its strength and prosperity. Protectionism can anoint industrial winners and losers without regard to merit. And it can roil trading partners into introducing protectionist procurement practices of their own. With the ongoing ramp-up in federal, provincial, and territorial government spending on defence and Major Projects Office initiatives, competitive procurement practices are more relevant than ever.

Weak transparency practices affect more than just those firms that lose out on government tenders. They also generate harm that cascades through the whole system. Firms quickly become unwilling to invest time and effort in playing an unmeritocratic game. Over time, there are fewer bidders on government opportunities, which directly increases the prices governments pay for goods and services. Poor transparency forces firms of all sizes to invest in monitoring infrastructure that creates no economic value. And those practices entrench incumbents whose continued success may owe more to informational advantage than to the competitiveness of their offerings. Thus, the transparency weaknesses identified in this paper are not merely a *Canadian Free Trade Agreement* (CFTA) compliance issue. More consequentially, they are a structural drag on the productivity of Canadian public spending.

> *Protectionism in procurement has outsized impacts on the economy's competitiveness, and ultimately, its strength and prosperity.*

The job of internal trade reform is incomplete not only because commitments from 2025 must now be put into effect, but because Canada's first ministers and the Committee on Internal Trade (a body composed of Canada's internal trade ministers) must now address parts of the reforms, such as public procurement, that have been left behind.

When Canadians think of internal trade barriers, they often think about trucking and transportation, pipelines, and alcohol. The connection between those objects and internal trade is fairly intuitive, and thus, politicians will often talk about such items to claim they are making progress on improving trade. But often, internal trade barriers linger that can yield a sizable economic impact and are more difficult to address. It is also less clear how to communicate progress on these issues. Examples include the alignment of electrical codes, occupational health and safety standards, and corporate securities regulation. Another example, and one that this paper focuses on, is public procurement.

Scholars and public policy experts well know the link between public procurement and liberalized trade. In the world of international trade, negotiations to open up public procurement to global competition started in the late 1960s (Trionfetti 2000). These efforts led to the WTO's General Procurement Agreement (GPA), which Canada signed during the Uruguay Round of negotiations in 1994. By 2015, the GPA covered US$1.7 trillion worldwide annually in government purchases of goods, services, and construction work (Steiner 2015).

Canada has long understood the connection between government procurement policy and free trade. In a 1987 speech in Montreal on the virtues of Canada–US free trade, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney made the connection explicit when he discussed ongoing negotiations with the Americans: "it is clear that non-tariff barriers increasingly distort trade. Our negotiators have therefore been instructed to negotiate a broad and comprehensive agreement addressing these issues, *including changes to government procurement practices*" (Mulroney 1987, emphasis added). Mulroney's remarks can be taken as evidence of a general understanding in the 1980s that public procurement practices can generate non-tariff trade barriers in the form of the obstruction of the free flow of goods, services, and capital.

There is another more optimistic side to procurement, however: it is also a powerful demand-side tool that can leverage government spending power to help regional economic development objectives. Mulroney's own government introduced the Industrial Regional Benefits program in the 1980s, which used defence procurement to generate regional development benefits and greater economic activity in Canada (Auger 2020). Procurement policy can simultaneously be both a hindrance to liberalized domestic exchange and also a boost to regional prospects, implying that governments face inherent policy trade-offs when seeking to impose discipline.

The European Union provides a helpful benchmark for Canada. Through its Tenders Electronic Daily portal and the European Single Procurement Document, the EU has built a far more transparent and interoperable procurement infrastructure than has Canada. We discuss the EU example in detail below, but it is worth noting here that what Canada's CFTA aspires to in principle, the EU has operationalized in practice. And as we discuss, empirical studies demonstrate that the EU model generates benefits for competition as well as cost savings.

Public procurement and the push for internal free trade

In a push to tackle the internal trade barriers plaguing the economic union, Canada's governments agreed in 1994 to a domesticated free trade agreement called the *Agreement on Internal Trade* (AIT). (In 2017, Canada replaced the AIT with the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement,* which remains in effect). The AIT was a political agreement analogous to international documents such as NAFTA and similarly constrained the ability of member governments to unfairly prefer local suppliers in government purchasing. It was not an easy path to include such measures in the AIT. During negotiations, debates about disciplining the public procurement process were particularly fraught (Doern and MacDonald 1999, 11). The Atlantic provinces in particular wanted ample room to benefit local industries from their public purses (Doern and MacDonald 1999, 74). Historians of the AIT negotiations that took place in the early 1990s reveal that Canada's governments struggled to agree on how far to impose discipline on the procurement process (Doern and MacDonald 1999, 91).

Canada's Western provinces have been more ambitious in experimenting with ways of imposing discipline on public procurement in the interest of internal free trade; some of those ways pre-date even the AIT. In 1989, for example, the western Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba signed onto a Memorandum of Agreement, pledging the signatories to principles of geographic neutrality in public procurement (Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan 1989). Those same Western Canadian provinces would reiterate their ambitions for internal free trade reform with the *New West Partnership Trade Agreement* (NWPTA), a comprehensive regional free trade agreement that went even farther than the AIT in imposing discipline on public procurement. In an in-depth analysis from 2015 comparing the AIT with the NWPTA, Professor Christopher Kukucha noted that the latter had lower bidding thresholds than the former across the full spectrum of procurement categories (Kukucha 2015). For instance, the NWPTA set the bidding threshold for construction contracts for Crown corporations at $100,000 versus $5,000,000 under the AIT. The benefit of lower bidding thresholds is that they expand competitive access to public procurement opportunities.

> *Full and transparent disclosure allows bidders … to evaluate whether governments are running fair and open procurement programs.*

Procurement discipline in the Canadian Free Trade Agreement

When the CFTA replaced the AIT in 2017, it retained discipline in public procurement as a core component of its approach to internal trade liberalization. Full and transparent disclosure allows bidders and other external stakeholders to evaluate whether governments are running fair and open procurement programs. Chapter 5 of the CFTA offers the main guidance on this front. It seeks to ensure fair and open access to government procurement opportunities for all Canadian suppliers by instilling a regime of transparency. Article 516 is central to the CFTA's transparency-giving framework, and it has two main components. The first is a requirement that governments communicate with losing bidders and explain why they did not win. The second (and the chief focus of this study because it shoulders an outsized share of the Chapter 5 obligation) is a requirement that member governments publicly disclose procurement outcomes.

More specifically, Article 516(2) requires that within 72 days of awarding a contract covered by the terms of the CFTA, a CFTA member government must publish a notice containing

- a description of the goods or services procured;
- the name and address of the procuring entity;
- the value of the successful tender;
- the date of the award; and
- justification for limited tendering (if applicable).

Transparency is key to public procurement discipline

The connection between procurement transparency and economic growth is not theoretical. When governments publish clear and complete information in a timely fashion about what they are buying, who they are buying it from, and on what terms, they create the conditions for genuine competition. First, businesses can easily identify opportunities and prepare responsive bids. Second, businesses are able to monitor whether governments are making their decisions based on merit. If businesses deem the game to be unfair or rigged, they will choose not to participate in the future, thereby diminishing the pool of prospective contestants. Without transparent disclosure, procurement becomes a closed game, and closed games produce poor outcomes for taxpayers and lock competitive firms out of the market.

The economic consequences of such transparency failures are quantifiable. Research consistently shows a direct relationship between the number of bidders and procurement costs (OECD 2011). Analysis of more than 3.5 million European government contracts found that single-bid tenders, often the result of opacity in the tendering process rather than market structure, cost governments over 7 per cent more on average than contracts that attracted two or more bids (Bauhr, Czibik, de Fine Licht, Fazekas 2017). Given the scale of Canadian public procurement ($350 billion annually), even modest improvements in competitive participation translate to billions of dollars in savings for taxpayers (Competition Bureau of Canada 2025; OECD 2023). Ukraine's experience is instructive: prior to the war, it had implemented centralized, open, data-driven procurement through the ProZorro platform. As a result, the number of unique suppliers increased by 45 per cent and average procurement costs fell by 15 per cent (Amin 2017). These figures represent funds that the government can use to buy other public services, and market access opened to firms that were previously excluded, not by merit but by information asymmetry.

This study reviews the extent to which each of the CFTA parties (all 13 provinces and territories, as well as the federal government) are adhering to their Article 516(2) procurement transparency obligations. Importantly, it examines whether CFTA parties are adhering to both the *letter* and the *spirit*

of their obligations. To illustrate: imagine that a potential supplier arriving at Province A's procurement portal finds that there is a 5-minute wait each time they click "Next" or make a selection from a drop-down menu, and the webpage takes 5 minutes to load. Technically, Province A provided visibility in line with its obligations, but in reality, the government flouted the intent of its 516(2) obligations.

The international benchmark

The European Union offers a clear contrast to Canada's internal market. Tenders Electronic Daily (TED) serves as a single, searchable portal for procurement notices across all 27 member states,[1] publishing not just award notices but planning notices, tender documents, and contract amendments across the full lifecycle of a procurement. The eForms standard, mandatory since October 2023, ensures that all data is published in a common, machine-readable format (European Commission Undated a).

Perhaps most instructive is the European Single Procurement Document (ESPD) established under Directive 2014/24/EU, which functions as a sort of "procurement passport" (European Commission Undated b). Rather than assembling fresh qualification documents for every contract in every jurisdiction, a firm can file a single self-declaration of financial standing, regulatory compliance, and technical capability, which is accepted across the entire EU. The financial benefits of such a system have been quantified. Denmark estimated annual savings to firms of €12 million (European Commission Undated c). And Croatia achieved an 83 per cent cost reduction in bid preparation (European Commission Undated c). There is also a significant structural benefit arising from the ESPD arrangement. The ESPD removes a friction that disproportionately burdens small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) trying to compete outside their home jurisdiction.

Canada has nothing comparable. Article 516(2) mandates basic award disclosure, but it says nothing about standardized formats, lifecycle tracking, or interoperable qualification systems. The gap between what the CFTA requires and what modern procurement governance demands is where much of Canada's procurement-sourced trade barrier problem lives.

Measuring compliance with the CFTA benchmark

To assess how well Canadian governments meet their CFTA transparency obligations, we developed a scoring framework across four key dimensions, as set out below. Appendix A lays out the full methodology more comprehensively.

- **Ease of Use** measures portal design, search functionality, and navigation. This matters because SME business operators scanning for opportunities do not have dedicated bid teams. If the portal is slow, confusing, or requires multiple clicks to find basic information, a firm is less likely to compete. The difference between a well-designed portal and a poor one is often what causes a firm to bid or to give up.
- **Data Quality** captures the completeness and detail of disclosed fields, from basic CFTA requirements through to RFP documents and bid submission data. Richer data lets firms assess whether a contract is worth pursuing before investing in a bid, enables researchers to study procurement efficiency, and allows oversight bodies to identify patterns that warrant scrutiny. Minimal data satisfies the letter of the law but tells stakeholders almost nothing useful.
- **Coverage** measures the scope of contracts disclosed and historical depth. Gaps in coverage mean entire categories of government spending are invisible. A firm cannot compete for contracts it does not know exist, and a policymaker cannot evaluate procurement performance if the data only captures a fraction of actual spending. This is also the dimension most tied to compliance with the trade agreement, as all provinces are required to disclose contracts since the CFTA came into force.
- **Accessibility** evaluates export options, application programming interface (API) availability, and machine-readability. APIs are what allow businesses to access the data using software or AI agents. This allows the public not only to access this data more easily but also to build tools using it.[2] This is the dimension that determines whether transparency is real or performative. Data that can only be viewed one record at a time on a website is technically public but practically useless for any systematic analysis. Bulk downloads and APIs are what allow researchers, journalists, and businesses to work with the data at scale.

We scored each of these areas on a four-point scale, for a maximum of 16 points. We designed the criteria to be as binary as possible to ensure that other scholars could reproduce our results.[3] We scored all 14 governments and classified them into three tiers: Strong (13+), Moderate (7–12), and Weak (0–6).

Undergirding our assessment throughout is the distinction between the *letter* and the *spirit* of compliance. A jurisdiction might technically publish some procurement data, but if that data is locked behind a clunky interface, missing key fields, or impossible to download in a usable format, the practical effect for a business is not meaningfully different from no disclosure at all.

TABLE 1: Federal-provincial-territorial procurement transparency scorecard

Jurisdiction	Ease of use	Data quality	Coverage	Access	Total	Tier
Nova Scotia	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	**16/16**	**Strong**
Quebec	3/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	**15/16**	**Strong**
British Columbia	3/4	3/4	4/4	4/4	**14/16**	**Strong**
Government of Canada	3/4	3/4	4/4	4/4	**14/16**	**Strong**
Alberta	4/4	4/4	3/4	0/4	**11/16**	**Moderate**
Saskatchewan	2/4	3/4	4/4	0/4	**9/16**	**Moderate**
Newfoundland and Labrador	2/4	2/4	4/4	1/4	**9/16**	**Moderate**
Ontario	2/4	2/4	3/4	0/4	**7/16**	**Moderate**
Prince Edward Island	2/4	2/4	3/4	0/4	**7/16**	**Moderate**
Northwest Territories	1/4	2/4	3/4	1/4	**7/16**	**Moderate**
Nunavut	1/4	1/4	4/4	1/4	**7/16**	**Moderate**
New Brunswick	1/4	2/4	2/4	1/4	**6/16**	Weak
Manitoba	2/4	2/4	1/4	0/4	**5/16**	Weak
Yukon	1/4	1/4	3/4	0/4	**5/16**	Weak

Results and discussion

The results reveal enormous variation in CFTA transparency obligations, ranging from world-class open data practices to systems that barely function as disclosure mechanisms. The Table 1 scorecard captures the detail. What follows highlights the key patterns and the most consequential gaps.

The national landscape

- ***Strong (13+)***

Nova Scotia (16/16) is the only jurisdiction to earn a perfect score (Nova Scotia Undated). Its open data portal provides API access, multiple export formats (which improves accessibility by allowing for multiple systems to easily use the data) and lists over 31,700 contracts, including submitted bid information. A researcher can download the entire dataset in minutes; a journalist can audit sole-source awards without filing an access-to-information request. **Quebec** (15/16) is the only Canadian jurisdiction publishing in Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) format (Quebec Undated a), with bulk JSON exports, the easiest format for software applications to use, through Données Québec (Quebec Undated b) that make structured, cross-jurisdictional comparisons possible. Its only failing is a slightly less-polished interface than that of other provinces like Nova Scotia and Alberta.

On the coverage and accessibility components, **British Columbia** (14/16) (British Columbia Undated) and the **Government of Canada** (14/16) are both strong. BC Bid pairs with a comprehensive open data program; CanadaBuys (Canada 2026a) provides the ability to download records back to 2012 in multiple formats, including JSON. Both lose a point on ease of use (a 25–50 per cent slower interface) and data quality (no data on the businesses who submitted a proposal or the original request for proposal (RFP) documents). Accessing RFP documents through CanadaBuys often requires a separate login to another application (SAP Ariba), adding a layer of complexity that discourages broad market scanning.

- ***Moderate (7–12)***

Alberta (11/16) illustrates a pattern that occurs among several provinces: it has excellent data, but that data is trapped behind poor accessibility. The

portal is the most user-friendly in the country (4/4) with the richest data fields (4/4), including RFP documents, sole-source justifications, and plan-taker information (Alberta 2026). But there is no bulk export or API (0/4 on accessibility). **Saskatchewan** (9/16) follows the same pattern: it includes every award back to 2009 and rich data fields, but users cannot extract that information (Saskatchewan Undated). Saskatchewan's portal is also markedly slower and more challenging to navigate than Alberta's, resulting in a 2/4 for ease of use. For example, it takes 2.4 seconds on average on Alberta Purchasing to receive results after applying a filter, and around 4.9 seconds on SaskTenders.

Newfoundland and Labrador (9/16) has complete data back to 2018 but publishes it only in HTML tables that researchers must copy manually if they wish to use it (Newfoundland and Labrador Undated). The province also uses Merx for some categories, which introduces the issues with the privately owned portal that are discussed in more detail below. **Ontario** (7/16) has close to 100 per cent coverage for competitive tenders (Ontario Undated a; Ontario Undated b), but a significant volume of procurement flows through standing arrangements where individual awards are not consistently disclosed, data cannot be exported in bulk, and it has no API.

Prince Edward Island (7/16) (Prince Edward Island 2022), **Northwest Territories** (7/16) (Northwest Territories Undated), and **Nunavut** (7/16) (Nunavut Undated) share a common profile: they adequately meet their disclosure requirements but have weak portals and no meaningful data extraction method. NWT adopted OCDS but the portal is so difficult to navigate that there is no clear structural advantage. Nunavut has a commendably low $5,000 disclosure threshold but minimal data fields and a dated interface. For territories that depend on outside suppliers, these barriers are a direct hindrance to competition.

• *Weak (5–6)*

New Brunswick (6/16) explicitly refers to CFTA thresholds, which shows that the province is aware of its obligations, but the NBON portal is confusing and the coverage has gaps (New Brunswick 2026). **Manitoba** (5/16) and **Yukon** (5/16) both rely on private portals for procurement disclosure (Manitoba Undated; Yukon Undated). Manitoba's Merx claims 16,000-plus awards but pagination limits mean only about 1,000 are accessible. Yukon's Bids and

Tenders system requires registration and payment just to see the available opportunities. In both cases, procurement is effectively opaque to anyone outside the system, and there are real barriers to entry.

The privately owned portal problem

Several provinces store public procurement data on privately owned platforms, particularly Merx and Bids and Tenders.[4] This creates a fundamental tension: contract awards funded by taxpayers and subject to public disclosure requirements are controlled by a private company that sets the terms of access to the opportunities.

Manitoba exemplifies this problem. The Merx portal claims access to over 16,000 awarded solicitations, but pagination limits mean only about 1,000 records are actually accessible; the other 15,000-plus are hidden behind an artificial limit. Yukon faces a similar dynamic with Bids and Tenders, where registration and payment are required to access procurement opportunities. Newfoundland and Labrador's partial use of Merx creates inconsistent access depending on which system handles a given contract.

The concern is not that the private sector is participating in procurement technology, as governments routinely contract with private vendors to build digital infrastructure. The issue is what happens when public disclosure obligations depend on a platform whose commercial incentives may diverge from public access goals. In November 2025, Valsoft Corporation acquired Bids and Tenders, the platform on which Yukon and other jurisdictions rely for procurement disclosure (Valsoft 2025). Following the acquisition, subscription pricing for complete access to Ontario municipal procurement data quadrupled, from about $449 annually to $2,000. This cost is prohibitive to many SMEs, discouraging their participation in what should be an open market.

This is a familiar pattern in public sector technology: a company purchases a platform with sticky government customers and limited competitive alternatives, then uses that lock-in to extract value. Once a government's data and workflows are embedded in a proprietary system, the cost for switching to a different system becomes prohibitive. Any framework for procurement transparency should therefore require data portability and open access as baseline contractual terms, ensuring that the public's right to procurement information cannot be subordinated to a vendor's pricing strategy.

Standing offers, supply arrangements, and the disclosure gap

Every jurisdiction maintains some form of pre-qualified vendor list. They can be called lists of standing offers, supply arrangements, or in the case of Ontario, Vendor of Record (VOR) agreements. These are a sensible procurement mechanism. OECD Guidelines for public procurement even contemplate such tools (OECD 2025). They allow governments to pre-qualify suppliers and streamline purchasing for routine goods and services. When a department needs something, it issues a "call-up" to the pre-qualified vendors under the standing arrangement. The problem is not the mechanism. Rather, it is one of visibility.

Contracts awarded under these arrangements are frequently not disclosed (even though the CFTA considers each call-up that meets the threshold to be a procurement that is covered by the CFTA).[5] This is the most opaque aspect of Canadian government procurement. In simple terms, it is a space where established vendors with existing relationships have access to contracts with minimal competition, while firms outside the network have no way of knowing that the opportunities even exist. This is where procurement is most susceptible to gaming, and where the lack of transparency most directly harms SMEs trying to compete outside their home jurisdiction. It is this type of contract mechanism that the firm GC Strategies used to win a series of contracts in the recent ArriveCan scandal (Morrison 2025). It is also the first recommendation any business receives when trying to break into government contracting: figure out what standing offers you should get in on, or subcontract to the people already in on them.

The economic cost of this opacity extends beyond excluded firms. When procurement channels become closed systems accessible primarily to incumbents and their subcontractors, the competitive pressure that drives down prices and improves quality erodes. In turn, the lack of transparency results in governments paying more for products and services, not because the incumbent's offering is superior, but because the absence of informed competition removes the pricing discipline that open markets provide. This is a direct cost to taxpayers, compounding with each undisclosed call-up. As a counter-example, an implementation of the Open Contracting Data Standard in Mexico resulted in up to 25 per cent more bids per opportunity due to the increased visibility it provided (Brown and Coleman 2021).

Ontario illustrates both the problem and the path forward. Supply Ontario discloses a list of all active VOR arrangements and their renewal dates, which is more transparent than is the case for many provinces (Ontario 2026). But the individual contracts awarded under those arrangements remain largely invisible. This is not unique to Ontario, and it is not a failure of intent. Standing offer data is scattered across departments, each maintaining its own records in systems that predate CFTA transparency commitments. The solution is to build systems that capture these awards as they happen and ensure that the same disclosure standards applied to competitive procurements extend to contracts issued under standing arrangements.

Fragmentation and the CanadaBuys missed opportunity

This assessment has identified a broader structural problem: fragmentation. Canadian businesses seeking government contracts face 14 separate portals, each with their own unique interface, data formats, search capabilities, and disclosure practices. Large firms can absorb the costs of this fragmentation, though it is not justified. These costs may include hiring dedicated procurement monitoring staff, buying subscriptions to private aggregators, and funding legal teams to navigate the 14 different disclosure regimes. These are not productive investments that generate economic value. Rather, they are a pure deadweight loss and consume firm resources solely because governments have failed to standardize their procurement disclosures. A Nova Scotia engineering firm and an Ontario IT consultancy must both allocate a real operating budget to a problem that would not exist under a functioning transparency regime. Every dollar spent monitoring fragmented portals is a dollar not spent on innovation, hiring, or competitive pricing.

The federal government's launch of CanadaBuys in September 2022 was intended to address exactly this problem (Canada 2026b). Replacing buyandsell.gc.ca with CanadaBuys was a genuine institutional effort to meet the CETA and CFTA deadline. It involved migrating off a system that users liked, coordinating across many departments and agencies, and delivering a working platform with CSV/JSON downloads, OCDS commitment, and historical data back to 2012. At the federal level, it delivers real value.

What it did not achieve was the pan-Canadian consolidation originally envisioned. Provincial data was not integrated, no common standard was mandated, and provinces continued operating incompatible portals. While

provincial data is now shared on CanadaBuys, it is incomplete and lacks standardization, so most government contractors still monitor all portals. This is not unique to Canada: around the world federal governments in developed countries face the most challenging procurement technology environments precisely because they invested early, accumulated tech debt, and must now coordinate across subnational governments with widely varying processes and systems. CanadaBuys met the letter of the CFTA requirements, but the full vision remains a work in progress. Without binding commitments to a shared standard, each jurisdiction has developed its own approach in its own time, producing the variation documented above.

Policy recommendations to streamline Canada's procurement system and strengthen its economy

Three reforms would materially improve the state of procurement transparency in Canada. Critically, none require amending the CFTA itself.

1. Adopt a common procurement data standard

The OCDS provides a ready-made framework for structuring procurement data across the full lifecycle of procurement, from initial requirements to contract award and management (Open Contracting Partnership 2026). A pan-Canadian agreement to publish in OCDS-compliant formats, with mandatory fields including the UN's standardized classification system, would make cross-jurisdictional data interoperable overnight – and globally aligned as well. This is not a heavy technical lift, as the standard is well documented, open source, and in use by over 50 governments. The government of Canada launched a pilot in pursuit of this in 2022 and should restart those efforts.

Implementation of a common procurement data standard need not wait for unanimous provincial agreement. The federal government can adopt OCDS as its mandatory procurement data standard unilaterally, building on its existing pilot, and invite provinces to adopt the same standard progressively. There is precedent: the federal Canadian Collaborative Procurement Initiative

(CCPI) already allows municipalities and other public sector bodies to use federal contracts to buy commodity goods and services. Through the CCPI, the federal government sets the standard and negotiates contracts, and captures savings through bulk purchasing. Participating entities that opt in enjoy efficiency gains as they don't need to run their own tenders. The renewed political emphasis on breaking down interprovincial trade barriers makes broader buy-in achievable.

2. Create a Canadian procurement passport

The EU's European Single Procurement Document (ESPD) demonstrates that a shared credential system across jurisdictions is both feasible and enormously beneficial. A Canadian equivalent would allow a firm that has established its financial standing, regulatory compliance, and technical qualifications in one province to carry those credentials into procurement processes in any other. Today, a Nova Scotia engineering firm bidding on an Alberta contract navigates an entirely separate qualification process, duplicating effort that serves no competitive or accountability purpose. Mutual recognition of these firm-level qualifications, a "Canadian procurement passport," completely aligns with recent successes (i.e., the pilot program for a mutual recognition agreement for trucking regulations) and helps address the repeated calls of Canada's first ministers to expand the use of mutual recognition as a way of bringing down internal trade barriers (Canada 2025).

Unlike the data standard or single portal, a procurement passport would require a formal multilateral instrument through either an amendment to Chapter 5 of the CFTA or a stand-alone mutual recognition agreement. At minimum, the federal government could test mutual credential recognition within its own procurement processes and with willing provincial partners, establishing a working model before seeking broader adoption.

3. Build a genuine single point of access

CanadaBuys has the institutional mandate to serve a single-point function. But a single point of access means more than linking to 13 provincial and territorial portals. It must aggregate standardized data into one searchable, machine-readable interface where a business in any province can find every open opportunity in the country. This is what Tenders Electronic Daily (TED) does for the EU and what Estonia's register does nationally.

The federal government can lead this initiative under its existing spending authority, as it did when it created CanadaBuys. Building the platform does not require provincial consent at the outset, and the federal government can aggregate its own data and invite provincial participation voluntarily, much as the Collaborative Procurement Initiative operates today. Over time, formal data-sharing commitments could be negotiated through the CFTA's Committee on Internal Trade. The key is to begin with a working system rather than wait for comprehensive political agreement.

Conclusion

Public procurement has been largely left behind in the current wave of interprovincial trade barrier reform. This paper has shown that the gap between the CFTA's transparency obligations and actual practice is wide, varied, and consequential. Only four of 14 governments meet a high standard of compliance with their CFTA requirements. The remaining 10 operate systems that are effectively opaque to businesses, researchers, and the public.

The costs of this opacity are measurable. When procurement systems are fragmented and disclosure is incomplete, fewer firms bid for contracts, and fewer bidders means higher prices – in this case higher prices for governments and thus, ultimately, for taxpayers. Analysis of over 3.5 million European government contracts found that single-bid tenders cost governments over seven per cent more than competitive ones (Bauhr, Czibik, de Fine Licht, and Fazekas 2017). At the scale of Canadian public procurement (roughly $350 billion annually), a seven per cent premium on even a fraction of single-bid contracts represents billions of dollars in avoidable spending. The firms that do participate must invest in monitoring infrastructure, private aggregator subscriptions, and duplicated qualification processes across 14 separate regimes. These are deadweight and unproductive costs imposed by government failure, not by market forces.

Fragmented, non-standardized procurement data also forecloses an opportunity that Canada has barely begun to explore: cross-jurisdictional purchasing intelligence. When procurement data is published in common

formats, governments can identify where multiple departments or jurisdictions are buying the same goods and services and can begin aggregating demand to capture economies of scale. This presents a material opportunity for savings.

The three reforms proposed in this paper are achievable with existing tools and proven models. They would reduce costs for taxpayers, expand market access for businesses of all sizes, strengthen accountability, and enable the kind of data-driven purchasing intelligence that modern procurement demands. The path forward is clear and what remains is the will to take it. MLI

About the authors

Ryan Manucha is a leading expert on interprovincial trade in Canada. Frequently called upon to advise governments and agencies, his work and words have appeared in prominent Canadian peer-reviewed legal journals and in publications such as *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*, *The Hill Times*, *The Hub* and *The New York Times*. A regular media commentator, he has been featured on CBC News, BBC World Service, CTV News, BNN Bloomberg, TVO's *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, and CBC Radio.

His book *Booze, Cigarettes and Constitutional Dust-Ups: Canada's Quest for Interprovincial Free Trade* won the Donner Prize for best in Canadian public policy writing and was a finalist for the Balsillie Prize for Public Policy. His solutions-focused research is routinely published by Canada's leading think tanks. Manucha holds a JD from Harvard Law School and a bachelor's degree in economics from Yale University.

Joe Noss is the founder and CEO of Publicus, Canada's fastest growing GovTech company focused on using AI to transform our country's procurement system. Publicus' AI agents have supported Procurement Canada (PSPC) and businesses like Visa and Dexterra. Prior to founding Publicus, Noss worked at Deloitte as a government consultant and policy advisor, helping public sector entities implement new technologies.

He has a BA from Claremont McKenna College (CMC) in government and an MSc from Western University's Ivey Business School in Data Analytics.

References

Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. 1989. *Memorandum of Agreement of the Reduction of Interprovincial Trade Barriers in Western Canada: Government Procurement*. Government of Alberta, Government of British Columbia, Government of Manitoba, and Government of Saskatchewan. Available at https://www.cfta-alec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Western-Procurement-Initiative.pdf.

Alberta. 2026. "Alberta Purchasing Connection." Government of Alberta. Available at https://purchasing.alberta.ca/.

Amin, Lucas. 2017. *Making the Case for Open Contracting in Healthcare Procurement.* Transparency International UK. Available at https://ti-health.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Making_The_Case_for_Open_Contracting_TI_PHP_Web.pdf.

Auger, Martin. 2020. *The Evolution of Defence Procurement in Canada: A Hundred-Year History*. Background Paper 2020-54-E. Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament. Available at https://lop.parl.ca/staticfiles/PublicWebsite/Home/ResearchPublications/BackgroundPapers/PDF/2020-54-e.pdf.

Bauhr, Monika, Ágnes Czibik, Jenny de Fine Licht, Mihály Fazekas. 2017. "Lights on the Shadows of Public Procurement: Transparency in Government Contracting as an Antidote to Corruption?" *Governance* 33, 3: 495–523. Available at https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12432.

British Columbia. Undated. "BC Bid Portal." Government of British Columbia. Available at https://bcbid.gov.bc.ca/.

Brown, Sophie, and Romina Coleman. 2021. "Public Works Watchers: Making Nuevo Léon's Infrastructure Projects More Transparent and More Competitive." Open Contracting Partnership, September 7. Available at https://www.open-contracting.org/2021/09/07/nuevo-leon-public-works-watchers/.

Canada. 2025. "First Ministers' Statement on Building a Strong Canadian Economy and Advancing Major Projects." Office of the Prime Minister of Canada, June 2. Available at https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2025/06/02/first-ministers-statement-building-strong-canadian-economy-and-advancing-major-projects.

Canada. 2026a. "CanadaBuys." Government of Canada. Available at https://canadabuys.canada.ca/en.

Canada. 2026b. "Tender Opportunities: CanadaBuys." Government of Canada. Available at https://canadabuys.canada.ca/en/tender-opportunities?status%5B0%5D=1920&status%5B1%5D=87.

Competition Bureau of Canada. 2025. "Competitive Bidding Processes in the Public Sector: Procuring Good Value for Taxpayer Money." Government of Canada. Available at https://competition-bureau.canada.ca/en/how-we-foster-competition/promotion-and-advocacy/competitive-bidding-processes-public-sector-procuring-good-value-taxpayer-money.

Doern, G. Bruce, and Mark R. MacDonald. 1999. *Free Trade Federalism: Negotiating the Canadian Agreement on Internal Trade*. University of Toronto Press.

European Commission. Undated a. eForms (Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1780). European Union. Available at ec.europa.eu/eforms.

European Commission. Undated b. "European Single Procurement Document and eCertis." European Union. Available at https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/public-procurement/digital-procurement/european-single-procurement-document-and-ecertis_en .

European Commission. Undated c. *Report on the ESPD, COM(2017) 242.* European Union. Available at eur-lex.europa.eu/52017DC0242.

European Union. Undated. EU Tenders: Tenders Electronic Daily [TED]. European Union. Available at ted.europa.eu.

Knox, Robert H. 2010. *Who Can Work Where: Reducing Barriers to Labour Mobility in Canada*. Backgrounder number 131. CD Howe Institute. Available at https://cdhowe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/backgrounder_131.pdf.

Kukucha, Christopher J., 2015. "Internal Trade Agreements in Canada: Progress, Complexity and Challenges." *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 48, 1: 195–218. Available through https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/canadian-journal-of-political-science-revue-canadienne-de-science-politique/article/abs/internal-trade-agreements-in-canada-progress-complexity-and-challenges/78A4D4FCF785E709333529521F69F7E1.

Manitoba. Undated. "Bidding Opportunities: Province of Manitoba." (Via Merx). Government of Manitoba. Available through https://www.merx.com/mbgov.

Manucha, Ryan. 2025. "A Call for Coherence: Variation in Recent Legislative Approaches to Remedy Internal Trade Barriers." Institute for Research on Public Policy, October 22. Available at https://centre.irpp.org/research-studies/remedy-internal-trade-barriers/.

Morrison, Catherine. 2025. "Company That Worked on ArriveCan app Barred From Government Contracts For 7 Years." CBC News, June 6. Available at https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/arrivecan-gc-strategies-banned-contracts-1.7555239

Mulroney, Brian. 1987. "Address to Chambre de Commerce de la Rive-Sud, Longueuil, Quebec, December 3, 1987." Great Canadian Speeches 1, 3 (May). Available at https://greatcanadianspeeches.ca/2025/03/12/brian-mulroneys-vision-for-canada-u-s-free-trade/#:~:text=We%20recognize%20that%20a%20good,Related.

New Brunswick. 2026. "eProcurement in NB: NBON." Government of New Brunswick. Available at https://nbon-rpanb.gnb.ca/.

Newfoundland and Labrador. Undated. "Public Procurement Agency: Open Calls." Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Available at https://www.gov.nl.ca/ppa/tenders/.

Northwest Territories. Undated. "Contracts: OpenNWT." Government of Northwest Territories. Available at https://contracts.opennwt.ca/.

Nova Scotia. Undated. "Awarded Public Tenders." Nova Scotia Open Data Portal. Government of Nova Scotia. Available through https://data.novascotia.ca.

Nunavut. Undated. "Request for Tenders/Proposals." Government of Nunavut. Available at https://www.nunavuttenders.ca/.

Ontario. 2026. "Supply Ontario." Government of Ontario. Available at https://www.supplyontario.ca/.

Ontario. Undated a. "Ontario Tenders Portal." (Via Jaggaer). Government of Ontario. Available at https://ontariotenders.app.jaggaer.com/esop/nac-host/public/web/login.html.

Ontario. Undated b. "Enterprise-wide Vendor of Record (VOR) Arrangements and Volume Licensing Agreements (VLAs)." Available at https://www.supplyontario.ca/vendors-of-record-arrangements .

Open Contracting Partnership. 2026. "The Open Contracting Data Standard." Open Contracting Partnership. Available at https://www.open-contracting.org/data-standard/.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]. 2011. *Competition and Procurement: Key Findings*. Competition Committee, OECD Publishing. Available at https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2011/11/competition-and-procurement-key-findings_48813c6d/c6e6d5ae-en.pdf.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]. 2023. *Government at a Glance 2023: Canada*. OECD Publishing. Available at https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/government-at-a-glance-2023_c4200b14-en/canada_b1e33546-en.html.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]. 2025. *OECD Guidelines for Fighting Bid Rigging in Public Procurement (2025 Update)*. OECD. Available at https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/09/oecd-guidelines-for-fighting-bid-rigging-in-public-procurement-2025-update_127880ea/cbe05a56-en.pdf.

PR Newswire. 2026. "First Ministers' Joint Statement." PR Newswire, January 29. Available at https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/first-ministers-joint-statement-885652501.html.

Prince Edward Island. 2022. "Search for Tenders and Procurement Opportunities." Government of Prince Edward Island. Available at https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/feature/search-for-tenders-and-procurement-opportunities.

Quebec. Undated a. "Système électronique d'appels d'offres." [SEAO]. Government of Quebec. Available at http://seao.gouv.qc.ca/.

Quebec. Undated b. "Données Québec." Government of Quebec. Available at donneesquebec.ca.

Saskatchewan. Undated. "SaskTenders." Government of Saskatchewan. Available at https://www.sasktenders.ca/.

Steiner, Marc. 2015. "The WTO Government Procurement Agreement: Assessing the Scope for Green Procurement." *BIORES* 9,10 (December): 21–25. Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372964127_The_WTO_Government_Procurement_Agreement_Assessing_the_scope_for_green_procurement.

Trionfetti, Federico. 2000. "Discriminatory Public Procurement and International Trade." *World Economy* 23, 1: 57–76.

Valsoft. 2025. "Valsoft Corporation Strengthens its Public Sector and Procurement Portfolio with the Acquisition of bids&tenders." Press Release. Valsoft, November 12. Available at https://www.valsoftcorp.com/news/valsoft-corporation-strengthens-its-public-sector-and-procurement-portfolio-with-the-acquisition-of-bidstenders/ .

Yukon. Undated. "Welcome to the Government of Yukon Bid Opportunities Website." Government of Yukon. Available at https://yukon.bidsandtenders.ca/Module/Tenders/en.

Endnotes

1 Tenders Electronic Daily lists 800,000 procurement notices annually collectively worth over €815B (European Union Undated).

2 In the US, an entire ecosystem of tools has been created over the course of a decade as a result of the federal procurement portal, Sam.gov, being API accessible. The same is true for Europe/UK. Some examples include Govspend https://govspend.com/ and Tussell https://www.tussell.com/.

3 See the methodology appendix for full scoring criteria.

4 Merx is an electronic tendering service; see merx.com.

5 Ontario Vendor of Record (VOR) arrangements are pre-qualified supplier lists managed through Supply Ontario. Individual call-up awards under VOR agreements are not consistently published on the Ontario Tenders Portal. See https://www.supplyontario.ca/vendors-of-record-arrangements/.

Appendix A: Methodology

Overview

Four dimensions; 16 points maximum. Criteria are binary or near-binary to maximize objectivity and reproducibility.

Dimension 1: Ease of use (4 points)

POINTS	CRITERIA
4	Fast and intuitive navigation
3	Functional with minor friction
2	Slow or difficult to navigate
1	Very slow or confusing interface

Note: This is the only subjective dimension. We also considered the speed of the portal and the clarity of the interface.

Dimension 2: Data Quality (4 points)

Measures the quality and richness of published data.

Parameter 1: CFTA Field Completeness (2 points)

Guiding query: For the contracts that are published, are the six required fields consistently and meaningfully populated?

POINTS	CRITERIA
2	All six fields present and meaningfully populated
1	Fields present but some are incomplete or ambiguous (e.g., title duplicated as description)
0	Significant gaps or unable to verify due to portal quality

Parameter 2: Beyond CFTA Requirements (2 points)

FIELD	POINTS	JUSTIFICATION
RFP documents available	+1	Provides substantive context beyond title and description. This is essential for understanding what is actually being procured. Furthermore, it enables vendors to assess their fit, researchers to analyze existing procurement patterns, and governments to benchmark practices.
Plan-takers or amendment tracking	+1	Plan-takers, which refers to any business that expressed interested in bidding on an opportunity, reveal the competitive landscape: how many businesses are bidding for a contract and who those businesses are. Amendment tracking refers to when a government entity discloses the series of amendments it may make to a publicly available tender. The number of amendments is a recognized fraud indicator under the Open Contracting Data Standard. Sequential amendments can signal bid-rigging or specification manipulation. Both are established transparency markers internationally.

Dimension 3: Coverage (4 points)

Assesses the scope and completeness of disclosure. More specifically: what proportion of contracts that should be published actually are.

Since 2018 (3 points)

POINTS	CRITERIA	DEFINITION
3	**Complete**	All contract types above the published dollar threshold are disclosed: competitive, sole-source, and standing offers
2	**Substantial**	Most contracts above the published dollar threshold are disclosed but some categories are excluded (e.g., sole-source contracts are omitted, or specific departments do not report)
1	**Partial**	Significant contract categories or departments excluded from disclosure

Pre-2018 Historical Data (1 point)

POINTS	CRITERIA
1	Historical data available prior to CFTA implementation
0	No pre-2018 data accessible

Dimension 4: Accessibility (4 points)

POINTS	CRITERIA
4	API access available
3	Single bulk download (CSV/JSON/XML) available
2	Multiple downloads required to obtain complete dataset
1	Manual copy-paste from HTML tables
0	No programmatic extraction possible

GOOD POLICY
is worth fighting for.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT **MLI**

MLI has been active in the field of indigenous public policy, building a fine tradition of working with indigenous organizations, promoting indigenous thinkers and encouraging innovative, indigenous-led solutions to the challenges of 21st century Canada.

– The Honourable **Jody Wilson-Raybould**

I commend Brian Crowley and the team at **MLI** for your laudable work as one of the leading policy think tanks in our nation's capital. The Institute has distinguished itself as a thoughtful, empirically based and non-partisan contributor to our national public discourse.

– The Right Honourable **Stephen Harper**

May I congratulate **MLI** for a decade of exemplary leadership on national and international issues. Through high-quality research and analysis, **MLI** has made a significant contribution to Canadian public discourse and policy development. With the global resurgence of authoritarianism and illiberal populism, such work is as timely as it is important. I wish you continued success in the years to come.

– The Honourable **Irwin Cotler**

MACDONALD-LAURIER INSTITUTE

TRUE NORTH
IN CANADIAN PUBLIC POLICY

323 Chapel Street, Suite 300,
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7Z2
613-482-8327
info@macdonaldlaurier.ca

macdonaldlaurier.ca