



T R I P L E H E L I X

**Leveraging AI for Procurement**

by Justin Nakao

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# BRIEFING NOTE

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## **Executive Summary**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents new opportunities for complex procurement and proposals in Canada. For the federal government, AI could be used for Request For Proposals (RFPs) and proposal evaluations. AI can assist in drafting requirements, processing proposals, and scoring submissions. For industry, AI is reshaping competitive marketing, market research, drafting proposals, and finding solutions to RFPs from the government. The key takeaway is that AI, when properly implemented with guardrails and training, will greatly speed up the procurement cycle.

### **How far has AI come?**

AI is a decision-assist, not a decision-maker tool, yet. It is increasingly capable in decision-making, such as in health care diagnostics and social media algorithms. AI is replacing art and human models in advertisements, while conversational AI is increasingly capable and has now passed the Turing test, meaning it is indistinguishable from a real human. Governments across the world are deploying AI with use cases in Albania for reducing corruption, in Australia to detect price fixing, and by the US General Services Administration to assist in making strategies. Language translation for large documents is also increasingly common.

### **AI in Industry Capture and Proposal Development**

For best practice, AI should be used as an assistant for non-sensitive/confidential tasks. Companies using AI should use in-house models or firewalled enterprise models to ensure material is not leaked to the public domain.

For industry, AI can increase bidding efficiency. The development of proposals can be sped up through AI assistance in various stages of proposal writing. AI can assist in the early pre-procurement market research stage. Companies can also use AI to analyze government statements and speeches to identify patterns and inconsistencies that may impact their proposals. During the analysis of an RFP, AI could identify inconsistencies in the RFP and then produce questions that can be asked by the company for clarification. When drafting proposals to meet criteria, publicly available policies could be fed into AI to align your proposals with the RFP. As reference policies and documents are long, AI can ensure compliance and enable companies to meet RFPs faster. In the actual writing of proposals, AI can assist through several functions. AI can help create response templates and checklists for certifications and information. AI can analyze proposal scoring criteria and matrices to assist companies in crafting their proposals. The key is to feed AI the relevant policies and documents to enable policy navigation and proposal-criteria alignment. Critically, what you can realistically offer as AI will offer proposals your company cannot provide, or products that are not realistic. If you are using AI, your review process should be all human, as a human must remain in the loop.

## AI in Government Procurement

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Government departments are experimenting with and operationalizing AI to cut down bureaucratic delays in procurement. Like Industry, AI at the enterprise scale needs to be isolated within the enterprise, with a firewall, to prevent proprietary and sensitive data from reaching the public domain. The government is sharing best practices between departments with mechanisms to share AI experience. AI can also assist in the selection of companies before the RFP goes out. This is because AI can be used to find companies that have solutions, and that might have missed the RFP.

AI is enabling the public service workforce to filter through policies and regulations, avoiding financial thresholds that increase program length. Additionally, procurement often involves multiple departments, each with its own policy objectives and regulations. AI can assist in identifying which policy is more important, cutting through policy bloat. Therefore, when putting out an RFP, AI can create coherence from a variety of policies, requirements and mandates across departments. Deploying AI to analyze old contracts to improve future contracts as workforce knowledge atrophies, especially as programs can last decades. This use of AI to assist in plugging skill gaps across the workforce, as various expertise is applied when drafting an RFP. Even if AI is not applied to solve cross-departmental processes, AI used in internal processes will speed up procurement. Think first, AI second. Define what you want, as AI will make an RFP that isn't realistic. Experts are the ones who establish requirements, but menial tasks can be delegated to AI.

AI is not the solution to a public service culture that slows procurement. AI cannot determine which departmental metric will lead to the best outcome, such as value for money, capability or industrial offsets, etc. Canada asks a lot of the industry in terms of specifications and requirements, and the scoring criteria are bloated. While the technical authority is typically the end user, it drafts the requirements. The evaluation criteria are developed by a committee, which increases the number of stakeholders who contribute more criteria. This is a problem that AI cannot solve, only culture change. Additionally, data models need to be consistent across departments using AI; data gaps create issues requiring costly customization to fix.

## AI Risk for both Government and Industry

AI still cannot replace humans, but it can speed up the process as an assistant. Using public AI models risks exposure of sensitive proprietary information. AI models shared across borders raise security and export concerns for companies. AI may make an RFP more complex as it moves away from the end user, as it cannot capture the nuance of requirements. AI in RFPs and proposals risks generating nonsense. AI needs to be used with guardrails and extensive review. AI does not understand exactly what you want. You need very clear inputs to avoid bad outcomes. AI will produce errors and hallucinate, requiring experts to verify material.

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