

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: May 20, 2026

To: Marcelia Nicholson-Bovell, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Isaac Rowlett, Director – Strategic Planning, Office of Strategy, Budget, and Performance

Subject: Plan for a Public Dashboard of Milwaukee County Contracts

File Type: Informational Report

REQUEST

This informational report is to provide an update on [Milwaukee County - File #: 26-297](#) requesting a plan to implement a public dashboard of contracts subject to County board approval.

POLICY

Wisconsin State Statutes:	N/A
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	N/A
Specific Adopted Budget:	N/A
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	N/A
Specific Adopted Capital Project:	N/A

BACKGROUND

Purpose of Report

This report is a response to the request for a plan to implement a public-facing dashboard of all contracts subject to Board approval ([File #: 26-297](#)). This report provides the general approach, potential required resources, and an estimated timeline toward implementation of both an interim and long-term solution.

Improving transparency and accountability in contracting is a priority across Milwaukee County leadership. A public, searchable list of awarded County contracts subject to Board approval is an achievable goal. While efforts towards it are already underway, significant foundational work is required to achieve it and this report outlines what it would take.

Background: Current state of Milwaukee County contracting data

Milwaukee County's contracting data is managed across departments and systems, by design. Subject matter experts within each department manage contracts directly, and different systems support different functions: competitive bidding, contract management, certified business compliance tracking, business certification, contract payments, and more. No single system does all of these things well, and specialized tools allow the staff closest to each contract to manage it effectively.

The trade-off is that contract information lives in separate systems that do not automatically communicate with one another, use different fields, and apply different standards. *This is not unique to Milwaukee County*, but it does mean that contract data cannot yet be reliably compared or aggregated across the organization.

This project is an opportunity to bridge the gap and break down the unhelpful silos in our contracting data.

Background: Why a Dashboard Requires Foundational Work First

Publishing accurate contract data requires consistent definitions and governance structures alongside the technology solution or tool (i.e., the dashboard itself). The following example illustrates why:

	Current State	With Shared Standards
Example: "End date" field	Some systems store the original contract end date; amendments tracked separately. In other cases, the current end date is manually updated by staff at each renewal.	A single, agreed-upon definition of "end date" is consistently applied and updated across all systems.
What this means for a dashboard	<i>Sorting by end date produces inconsistent results; it may not actually tell you when a contract is expiring.</i>	<i>Sorting by end date accurately reflects which contracts are expiring, regardless of source system.</i>

This is one example of many. Similar inconsistencies exist across vendor names, contract amounts, and other key fields. Resolving them systematically requires deliberate, Countywide coordination along with technical changes to make this possible.

Looking Ahead: Steps Toward a Long-Term Dashboard

Defining Uses

The dashboard will work best if it is set up to help answer specific questions. Those identified so far include:

- Which contracts are coming up for renewal?
- What contracts does a vendor hold across departments?
- Where are County dollars going, and how much?

These questions will continue to be refined in coordination with departments and County leadership, as they directly determine what data fields are required and how the

dashboard would be designed. The existing foundation for cross-departmental collaboration will be critical, and the ongoing alignment work will directly shape the steps that follow. The subsequent work toward a dashboard falls into two parallel tracks, followed by the ongoing maintenance as the final phase, once the dashboard is launched.

Data Readiness

The quality of the final product (the dashboard) will be heavily dependent on the data readiness work, which will include steps like:

1. **Determine which system(s) will store contract data.** Work is already underway to assess current systems and identify the best paths forward.
2. **Establish Countywide data definitions and standards.** We can learn from other recent data governance work that has been done in order to define what counts for each field along with how each is entered and maintained. (See “end date” example table above.)
3. **Enter or extract contract data according to those standards.** This applies to current active contracts; including historical data would extend the timeline significantly.
4. **Review and clean the data.** Resolve inconsistencies and remove sensitive information (e.g., social security numbers tied to a business).
5. **Establish access, maintenance, and publishing rules.** Define internal permissions, how and when contract information will be updated, what is public, etc.

Dashboard Development

Once data standards are in place, technical development can proceed with work such as building the database structure, automating data connections between source systems for current and ongoing updates, and developing the public-facing interface using existing County tools. Quality review and user testing will occur before any public launch.

Ongoing Maintenance

After launching, the dashboard will require ongoing staff effort to maintain data quality and respond to system or policy changes. The governance structures established in the data readiness phase will define ongoing roles and responsibilities.

Interim Option: Manually Compiled Contract Report

While the long-term work proceeds, staff can manually compile a Countywide list of significant contracts, prioritized by dollar amount, to provide meaningful visibility in the near term. This report could include similar fields to the dashboard, such as contract purpose, vendor name, contract amount, and end date, and could be updated on a semi-annual basis as most contracts terms are typically at least one year.

Estimated Timeline and Resource Considerations

- 2026: Compile information and develop the interim contract report
- 2026–2027: Develop and adopt Countywide contract data standards

- 2027: Align and modernize source systems
- 2028: Build, test and launch an integrated public dashboard

The 2028 target reflects the time required to complete data governance work and any system changes before a reliable dashboard can be built. Shortcuts in earlier phases would compromise the accuracy of what is ultimately published.

No specific budget requests are being made at this time. The Board will be kept informed of any resource needs or decisions that require action as this work progresses. Current anticipated needs include staff time for data governance coordination and entry, potential investment in more integrated source systems (being assessed through ongoing workgroups), and staff time to maintain the dashboard after launch.

Next steps:

No action is required at this time. Staff will proceed with interim reporting and Countywide data standards development. Updates will be provided as data standards are established and system decisions are made.

Related File No's:	Milwaukee County - File #: 26-297
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the objectives in the [strategic plan](#):

- *1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses.* A public dashboard of all contracts and consistent contract records would enable us to better track performance on this goal.
- *2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered.* Countywide data standards and shared transparency tools reduce siloed contracting data management practices and promote cross-department coordination.
- *2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions.* Reliable, standardized contract data enables the County to identify disparities, monitor progress, and apply a racial equity lens to contracting decisions.
- *3B: Enhance the County's fiscal health and sustainability.* Improved visibility into spending and contract performance supports stronger financial oversight, better forecasting, and more sustainable long-term budgeting.

FISCAL EFFECT

No fiscal impact at this time.

TERMS

N/A

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ATTACHMENTS:

PowerPoint Presentation

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Director of Legislative Services, Office of the County Clerk