

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
CITY OF BALTIMORE



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

Investigative
Report Synopsis

OIG Case # 24-0043-I

Issued: July 2, 2025



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
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100 N. Holliday Street
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July 2, 2025

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

The mission of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is to promote accountability, efficiency, and integrity in City government, as well as to investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste, and abuse.

In February 2024, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) received a complaint regarding the professional services contract for the Baltimore City Website Redesign Project. Specifically, the complaint alleged that the Baltimore City Office of Information Technology (BCIT) requested quotes from six companies. Only two companies responded with proposals. Vendor 1 (Vendor 1) was awarded a one-year contract for \$1,078,847.40, while Vendor 2's (Vendor 2) proposed project costs was \$306,250.00. The lowest bidder was not selected. Two contract amendments were later approved, adding \$887,843.95 and \$250,000 to Vendor 1's contract.

Background

The Baltimore City Office of Information Technology (BCIT) manages and provides support for multiple technology services to City agencies.

The City's website utilizes Drupal 7 (D7), a content management system that simplifies web content management with a template-like platform that allows agencies to easily add content to their website. In February 2019, Drupal announced the end-of-life¹ for D7 would be November 2021. The end-of-life date was extended multiple times; specifically, in February 2022, the end-of-life was anticipated for November 2023. This prompted a website redesign, upgrade, and implementation of a new City government website using Drupal's latest version, Drupal 9 (D9).

OIG Investigation

Lack of Professional Services Contract Policies

BCIT and other City agencies utilize "professional services" contracts. According to the Board of Estimates Regulations on Procurement, Protests, Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise, and Debarment/Suspension, professional services are "services that are predominantly mental or intellectual, rather than physical or manual, and require the application of the special knowledge, technical skill, and the experience that comes from instruction, training, and the exercise of mental facilities." The City has an approved list of recognized professional services known as the De Facto Professional Services List (the De Facto List). According to the De Facto List, "an information technology consultant providing strategic direction, insight, and/or recommendations related to the City's IT assets and infrastructure" is designated as a professional service. Once approved as a professional service, the agency may solicit vendors directly without competitive public bid solicitations or procurement by the BOP. Flowchart 1

¹ End-of-life is the date on which software or hardware is no longer updated or maintained by the manufacturer.

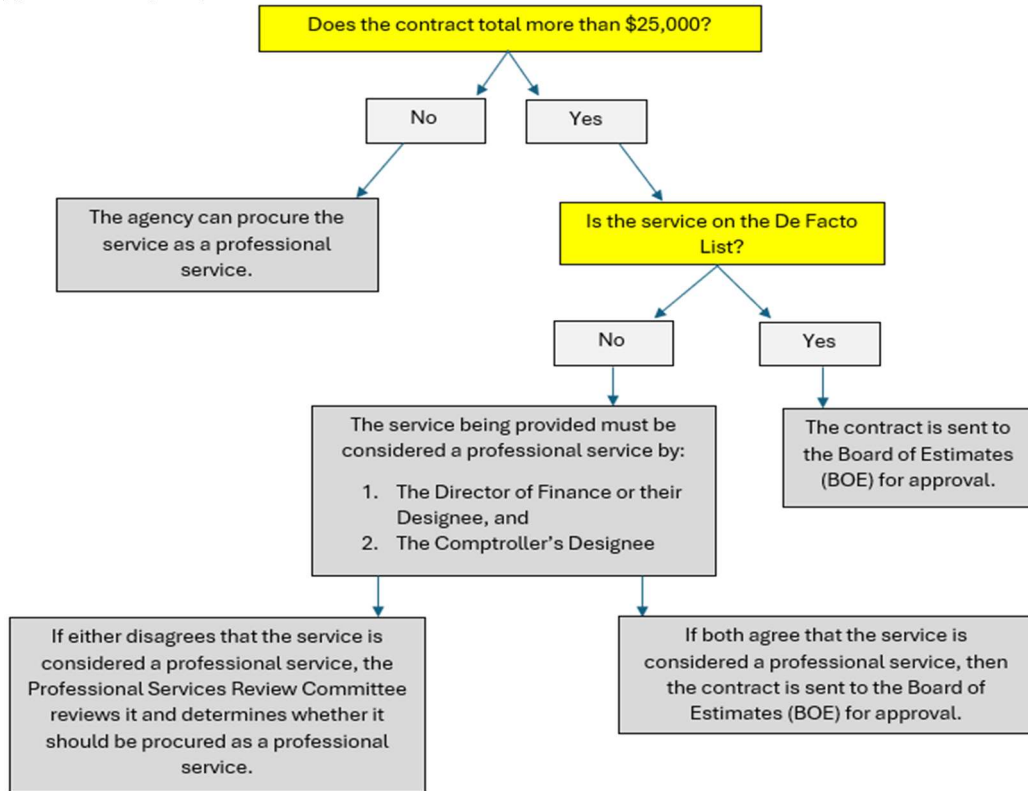
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displays the approval flow of a professional services contract.

Flowchart 1: Approval Flow of Professional Services Contracts



A Chief Solicitor with the Law Department’s Contracts Division (Chief Solicitor) stated that professional services do not have the same governing rules as procurement solicitations, which require competition. If the service is deemed a professional service, the agency can select the vendor.

The OIG also interviewed BOP’s Chief Procurement Officer (Chief Procurement Officer), who reported that BOP manages the procurement for agencies utilizing traditional procurement methods, such as requests for proposals (RFPs).² The Chief Procurement Officer confirmed that BOP’s procurement process is detailed because of set criteria, scoring matrix, and trained BOP contract specialists. BOP does not process or manage the procurement of professional services contracts. The Chief Procurement Officer also confirmed that agencies seeking professional services contracts are responsible for the procurement of the services.

BCIT’s Procurement

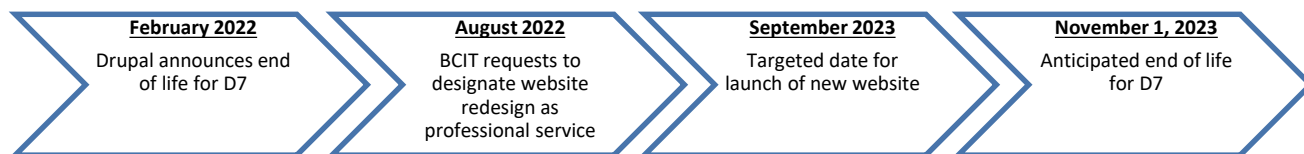
The Former BCIT Chief Information Officer (Former BCIT CIO) stated that the professional service agreement process is much faster than competitive bids. BCIT contracted a certified Project Manager (BCIT PM) to manage the website redesign project. On August 29, 2022, BCIT requested that the website redesign services be approved as a professional service. The request estimated that the project would cost \$800,000 with a contract term of 12 months. The Director of Finance and the Comptroller’s

² A request for proposal (RFP) is a project announcement posted publicly requesting bids for contractors to complete a specific project.

Designee approved the request. The Board of Estimates (BOE) approved the contract amount to Vendor 1 (Vendor 1) and its subcontractor (Subcontractor) on January 11, 2023.

On September 9, 2022, the BCIT project manager emailed a request for quotes (RFQ) with BCIT's scope of work to six vendors. The scope of work sought a digital website design agency or consulting firm to guide the redesign and implementation of a mobile-first, browser-independent website, and creating training for those that maintain the website and content administrators. The scope of work targeted a project completion date of September 1, 2023. The scope of work targeted a new website. The timeline of events is reflected in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Timeline of Initial Key Events



Only two vendors responded with proposals: Vendor 1 and Vendor 2 (Vendor 2). The four vendors that did not submit proposals reported various reasons to the OIG for why they did not submit proposals, including:

- The scope of work was not detailed enough to articulate if the project was to design or design and build a new website;
- One vendor withdrew from the solicitation because the BCIT project manager told them there would be a separate RFQ for the website build;
- One year was not enough time to complete the project;
- The RFQ was perceived as an informal notification of a future project because it was not listed in the City's Workday portal, the City's human capital and financial management software.

Scoring Panel for Vendor Proposals

The OIG reviewed both Vendor's proposals. Vendor 1's initial proposal totaled \$1,332,958 for a 61-week timeline. On October 26, 2022, the BCIT PM requested Vendor 1 to submit a revised proposal that shortened the timeline from 61 weeks to 39 weeks. The revised proposal lowered the proposal amount from \$1,332,958 to \$1,078,847.40. The OIG's comparison found the change in cost correlated to the change in proposed hours for designated positions. Vendor 2's proposal included two options. Option 1 totaled \$306,250, and Option 2 totaled \$320,250. The OIG's comparison found the difference in cost correlated to Vendor 2's partnership with a subcontractor.

A website redesign panel was formed to score the vendor proposals and demonstrations of past projects. Panelists included various agency content editors and a City employees with subject matter expert. Two panel members recused themselves from voting because they worked with Vendor 2 on a previous City project. One panelist told the OIG that one of the recused panelists shared opinions on Vendor 2's work product on a previous City project.³ In total, the panel consisted of three voting and two non-voting members.

³ The panelists who had previous experience with Vendor 2 recused themselves from scoring when they were told that Vendor 2 was one of the vendor candidates.

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The OIG requested the panelists' scoresheets from BCIT. All panelists scored Vendor 1 higher than Vendor 2. Table 1 shows the score totals.

Table 1: Panel Scores for Vendor 1 and Vendor 2

	Vendor 1	Vendor 2
Panelist 1	31	28
Panelist 2	30	28
Panelist 3	28	27
Total	89	83

The panelists reported impressions from the vendor presentations and proposals. One panelist acknowledged the higher cost of Vendor 1 but stated that Vendor 1 is known for its digital transformation. Another panelist said that Vendor 1's quality of work was superior. That panelist was also concerned about Vendor 2's additional fee of \$3,500 per week that the project extends beyond the nine-month period. The panelist wrote that this additional fee would offset the \$1 million difference. The Former BCIT CIO also acknowledged Vendor 2's low bid but said that there was no way the project could have only cost \$300,000.

One of the panelists told the OIG that the vendors' scoring was done twice because the two vendors received similar scores in the first round. The panelist explained they were not led in any direction but the panelists were not happy with Vendor 2's presentation and put some more thought into the proposals they received.

The Board of Estimates approved the one-year contract with Vendor 1 on January 11, 2023, for \$1,078,847.40. A few days later, Vendor 1 sent the City its Performance Work Statement (PWS). The PWS listed the Site Launch deliverable as occurring in August 2023.

OIG's Comparison of Vendor Proposals

Both Vendors' proposals appear to be centered on the website's design rather than the build. Both proposals mention a handoff to or working with a Drupal upgrade vendor; a handoff to a Drupal upgrade vendor is mentioned in BCIT's scope of work. The OIG received a document of answers in response to the vendors' frequently asked questions; one answer stated that the vendor would be responsible for the design and that the development and Drupal upgrade would be a separate project. In response to another question, it stated that BCIT does not yet have a contract for a Drupal upgrade vendor.

Contract Amendments

After Vendor 1 and the Subcontractor began working on the project, both expressed concern to BCIT about the expected difficulty of handing the project to a Drupal upgrade vendor. Vendor 1 and the Subcontractor recommended they complete the upgrade and content migration. The first amendment to the contract was approved in May 2023; it totaled \$887,843.95, which increased the contract total from \$1,078,847.40 to \$1,966,691.35. The amendment extended the contract's term by three months, which extended the contract's end date from January 11, 2024, to April 10th, 2024. The amendment modified the scope of work, which included an additional 7,050 hours of labor.

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A \$250,000 contract amendment was approved in January 2024. This second contract amendment increased the contract total to \$2,216,691.35, extending the contract term end date from April 10, 2024, to June 30, 2024. The second amendment noted unforeseen complexities of the City's current web environment and unanticipated requirements created more work for the project, causing the go-live date to be delayed. The contract was amended for the provision of go-live support and additional closeout tasks for the project.

The City's Concerns with Vendor 1 and the Subcontractor

During the project, BCIT personnel expressed various concerns about Vendor 1 and the Subcontractor, including: inadequate preparation; a lack of cohesive organization; unnecessary coding; and high turnover within Vendor 1 and the Subcontractor.

BCIT employees told the OIG that the website could have launched, but the delays experienced pushed the completion date multiple times. In July 2023, a BCIT executive employee (BCIT Executive) advised another BCIT employee that the project's success was an enhanced user experience and not hitting a budget or hitting a schedule. This was corroborated by BCIT personnel, who explained that the website could have already launched, but that appearance was prioritized by BCIT management. The redesigned website was expected by the Former BCIT CIO to "go live" in January 2025. As of April 2025, the BCIT Interim Chief Information Officer told the OIG that website is under final review by the City Administrator's Office and will be launched before the end of the fiscal year. As of the date of this synopsis, the website has not launched.

Vendor 1 and the Subcontractor's Concerns with the City

The CEO of Vendor 1 (Vendor 1 CEO) told the OIG that to avoid any conflict-of-interest issues, they only received a few updates regarding the project. The Vendor 1 CEO told the OIG that they recalled City leadership taking an all-at-once approach to content migration instead of taking an incremental approach. Taking an incremental approach would allow Vendor 1 to learn with each agency's website and provide some deliverables before the end of the contract.

The Subcontractor's President (Subcontractor's President) told the OIG that the initial project scope of work did not provide enough time for the project. Further, the Subcontractor's President reported that it was unclear who from the City was leading the project. The Subcontractor's President also reported that the City had over a decade's worth of outdated content that had not been reviewed or filtered before the project.

Investigative Findings

The OIG confirmed the allegation that BCIT only contacted six vendors, and only two responded with proposals. However, the investigation revealed that professional services contracts are not managed by BOP and do not require a public solicitation for bids. The investigation uncovered that there is a lack of policies and procedures for the solicitation of professional services contracts. The OIG strongly recommends that the City develop policies to create consistency in the procurement of professional service contracts and ensure the City is receiving competitive pricing when applicable.

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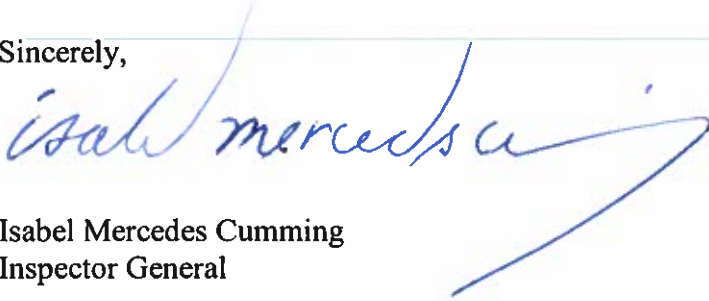
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The OIG substantiated the allegation that the City did not select the lowest bidder, Vendor 2. However, panelists raised concerns about Vendor 2's past work with the City, the added charge from Vendor 2 if the project extended beyond its end date, and a lack of detail surrounding Vendor 2's anticipated project timeline.

BCIT and Vendor 1 reported numerous issues that potentially delayed the project's completion. The project was awarded to Vendor 1 for \$1,078,847.40, however, Vendor 1 received contract amendments that brought the total contract value to \$2,216,691.35 for the website redesign project. The redesigned website was originally projected to be completed in August 2023, but, as of the date of this report, the redesigned website has not been completed.

Sincerely,



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

CC: Hon. Brandon M. Scott, Mayor of Baltimore City
Hon. Zeke Cohen, Baltimore City Council President
Hon. Bill Henry, Baltimore City Comptroller
Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council
Hon. Ebony Thompson, Baltimore City Solicitor

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