

PROCUREMENT

The Public Procurement Process & Deadline Guide

A stage-by-stage map of how a European public tender actually runs — every procedure type, every statutory deadline, and the standstill and remedy windows most first-time bidders don't know exist.

- ✓ Print-optimized
- ✓ Expert-curated
- ✓ Actionable tips

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Public procurement looks like a black box from the outside: a notice appears, a deadline passes, a winner is announced. Inside, it's a tightly regulated sequence governed by EU Directive 2014/24/EU and national rules (in Norway, the Anskaffelsesforskriften / FOA). Understanding that sequence — and the legally fixed minimum deadlines at each step — turns the black box into a calendar you can plan against. It tells you how much time you really have to respond, when you can ask questions, and crucially, what to do in the days after a decision if you believe the process was flawed.

This guide walks the full lifecycle, names each procedure type, and gives you the minimum timelines that contracting authorities must respect.

The Procurement Lifecycle at a Glance

Planning → PIN (optional) → Contract Notice → Clarification Q&A
→ Submission → Evaluation → Award Decision → Standstill
→ Contract Signature → (Remedies if challenged)

Every public tender moves through these stages. The difference between procedure types is mainly in *how* the middle stages work — whether there's a pre-qualification round, negotiation, or dialogue.

Stage 1 — Planning & Prior Information Notice (PIN)

Before a tender is formally advertised, the buyer plans the procurement and may publish a **Prior Information Notice (PIN)** — an early signal, often months ahead, of an upcoming contract. PINs are gold for suppliers: they give you time to prepare, build relationships, and respond to **market consultations** (where buyers ask suppliers what's feasible before writing the spec).

Your move: Watch for PINs and market consultations in your sector. Engaging here — legitimately and transparently — is the single most underused advantage in public bidding. A PIN can also shorten the buyer's later submission deadline, so its presence tells you to be ready early.

Stage 2 — The Contract Notice

The formal start. The contract is advertised on the relevant portal — **Doffin** for Norwegian contracts, **TED (Tenders Electronic Daily)** for above-threshold EU contracts, and national portals elsewhere. The notice and accompanying tender documents define everything: scope, selection criteria, award criteria and weightings, deadlines, and the procedure type.

Your move: Read the notice and *all* documents in full on day one. Decide bid/no-bid fast (see Tenderen's Bid/No-Bid Scorecard). The clock is now running.

Stage 3 — Clarification Questions (Q&A)

During the open period, bidders may submit written questions. The buyer must answer **all bidders simultaneously and anonymously** — answers become binding parts of the tender. If a requirement is ambiguous, unfair, or appears written for a competitor, this is your channel to challenge it.

Deadline note: Buyers typically set a Q&A cut-off several days before submission and must allow reasonable time to respond. If a clarification materially changes the tender, the buyer should extend the submission deadline.

Stage 4 — Submission & Statutory Minimum Deadlines

This is where the law gets specific. The EU directive sets **minimum** time limits between publishing the notice and the submission deadline. Buyers can give more time, never less:

Procedure	Minimum time to submit	With PIN published	With e-submission
Open	35 days	15 days	30 days
Restricted — request to participate	30 days	—	—
Restricted — final tender	30 days	10 days	25 days
Competitive procedure with negotiation — request	30 days	—	—
Competitive procedure with negotiation — initial tender	30 days	10 days	25 days

(Days are calendar days. Below-threshold national procedures, e.g. under Norway's FOA, often allow shorter, buyer-set deadlines.)

Your move: Back-plan from the deadline. Reserve the final 2+ hours for upload, account for the buyer's time zone (e.g. 12:00 CET), and confirm the offer-validity period your bid must hold (commonly 90 days).

Stage 5 — The Procedure Types (Know Which One You're In)

- **Open procedure** — Anyone may submit a full tender. No pre-qualification round. Most common; fastest route.
- **Restricted procedure** — Two stages: first you submit a request to participate (ESPD + qualifications), then shortlisted bidders are invited to tender. Used when the buyer expects many suppliers.
- **Competitive procedure with negotiation** — Shortlisted bidders submit initial tenders, then negotiate before final offers. For complex needs.
- **Competitive dialogue** — Buyer dialogues with bidders to develop the solution, then bidders tender. For complex projects where the buyer can't fully specify the solution upfront.
- **Innovation partnership** — For procuring R&D and a not-yet-existing solution.
- **Framework agreement** — Establishes terms with one or more suppliers for future call-offs (mini-competitions or direct awards) over up to 4 years (utilities: up to 8). High value — pursue these.

- **Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS)** — A fully electronic, always-open list suppliers can join at any time, with contracts called off from members.

Stage 6 — Evaluation

The buyer scores submissions in two parts: **selection** (are you qualified — exclusion grounds, capacity, references) and **award** (how good is your offer against the published criteria). Award is almost always on **MEAT — Most Economically Advantageous Tender** — balancing quality and price by the stated weighting, not lowest price alone.

Your move: Nothing to do but wait — but use the time to prepare clarification answers, as buyers may ask bidders to clarify (not change) their offers.

Stage 7 — Award Decision & the Standstill Period

When the buyer decides, it issues an **award decision notice** to all bidders, stating the winner and — critically — **the reasons and the relative scores**. The contract is **not yet signed**.

A mandatory **standstill period** (the "Alcatel" / suspension period) then begins — a minimum of **10 calendar days** (electronic notice) or **15 days** (other means) before the contract can be signed. This pause exists specifically to give losing bidders time to review the decision and challenge it.

Your move: Read the award notice immediately. You are entitled to a debrief explaining why you lost and how you scored against the winner. Request it.

Stage 8 — Remedies: Your Rights If the Process Was Flawed

If you believe the procurement breached the rules, you have time-limited remedies — and the standstill exists so you can use them *before* the contract is signed:

- **Debrief request** — Ask for detailed feedback on your scores and the winner's relative advantages.
- **Complaint to the contracting authority** — Raise concerns directly within the standstill window.
- **Complaint body** — In Norway, **KOFA** (Klagenemnda for offentlige anskaffelser) hears procurement complaints; other countries have equivalent review bodies.
- **Court / interim measures** — A challenge filed during standstill can suspend signature pending review.
- **Ineffectiveness** — In serious cases (e.g. illegal direct award), a signed contract can be declared ineffective.

Deadlines are short — often days, not weeks. If something looks wrong, act inside the standstill.

Stage 9 — Contract Signature & Mobilisation

After standstill (and any resolved challenge), the buyer signs with the winner. Mobilisation begins — your transition plan from the response now goes live. For frameworks, this stage repeats at every call-off / mini-competition.

The Deadlines That Catch People Out

1. **Submission is to the minute, in the buyer's time zone** — portals lock instantly. Late = rejected, no exceptions.
2. **Q&A cut-off** is usually well before submission — bank your questions early.

3. **Standstill is your window to challenge** — 10–15 days, and it closes fast.
4. **Remedy deadlines** are measured in days. Don't sit on a grievance.
5. **Offer validity** — your bid must stay valid (commonly 90 days) through evaluation and standstill.

How Tenderen Keeps You Ahead of Every Deadline

This entire lifecycle is what Tenderen tracks so you never miss a step:

- **Tender alerts** catch contract notices and PINs from Doffin and TED the moment they publish — including early market-consultation signals.
- **Deadline tracking & pipeline management** map each tender to its stage, with Q&A cut-offs, submission deadlines, and standstill dates surfaced in one Kanban view.
- **AI document analysis** extracts the procedure type, evaluation weighting, and every key date from the tender documents automatically.
- **Market insights** show historical buyers, winners, and timelines so you know what to expect before you commit.

Map your next tender's full timeline — and never miss a deadline — free at tenderen.com.

Tenderen — AI-Powered Public Procurement. Find, analyse, and win public tenders across Norway, the EU, and beyond.

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