

REACTIVE TO READY:

Improving Procurement in Life Sciences

How procurement teams can shift from ad-hoc requests
to confident, compliant sourcing decisions

Introduction

The email usually arrives on a Monday morning, bringing yet another urgent RFP, a dozen stakeholders, and no time to spare. You pull together what you can, gathering input from R&D, legal, and commercial teams, each requiring additional information. By Friday, the proposal's submitted, but it's clear there was never enough time to scope the work or align on what success should look like.

This pace is familiar to most procurement teams in life sciences. Many roles are rotational or leanly staffed, balancing compliance, costs, and dozens of vendor relationships. It's easy to get caught in reactive cycles that leave little space for strategy or long-term planning.

According to McKinsey, procurement accounts for more than 20 percent of the total financial impact in a transformation program.¹ This is a reminder of how much potential there is to influence outcomes when the process runs efficiently.

This guide provides practical advice on overcoming the constant rush, including effective use of RFIs, simplified contracting, and improved tracking of supplier performance.

Over time, we've seen that the teams who plan early and build stronger partnerships shape better outcomes for the business, not just faster transactions. And it starts with rethinking how those relationships are built and managed from the beginning.

Start with Proactive Relationships

Strong procurement starts with relationships.

The most effective teams don't wait for stakeholders to come to them with an urgent request. They stay connected to what's happening across R&D, clinical, and commercial functions. That means checking in regularly to understand what's working, what's changing, and what's coming next.

Because when teams know what's on the horizon, they can anticipate needs and identify potential providers early, before the RFP clock starts ticking. That shift alone saves weeks of time and helps prevent rushed decisions that lead to mismatched vendors or compliance issues later.

It also helps procurement earn credibility. The more teams understand how clinical operations run trials, or how commercial teams measure launch success, the better positioned they are to support those goals.

A [Conexus](#) customer's procurement team began participating in discovery meetings with

R&D, aiming to stay informed about upcoming initiatives. Within a few months, they identified an overlap between two vendors operating in similar areas and consolidated their work under a single partner. The change saved time, reduced redundant spend, and built trust between procurement and the business.

It's the same type of visibility achieved when CRM, Vault, and other systems work together through a strong [Veeva governance framework](#), ensuring every investment delivers its full value.

According to Gartner, 88% of procurement leaders say supplier collaboration has become a top priority in the past two years — a clear sign that teams are shifting from reactive sourcing toward proactive partnerships.²

By now, it's clear that early visibility is what transforms ad hoc buying into long-term partnership building. The next step is knowing how to capture that insight and turn it into something actionable.

Use RFIs to Build Awareness

The scramble typically begins well before the request for proposal (RFP) is issued.

It starts when no one runs a request for information (RFI).

Without early outreach, teams often discover vendors too late, missing valuable context that could have altered the outcome.

Imagine a procurement team finds an amazing service provider, just days before an RFP deadline. Other providers had been working on their proposals for weeks, and although the team liked what they saw from the newly discovered provider, there wasn't enough time to prepare a proper response. It was a missed opportunity on both sides, and it could have been avoided with an RFI.



Gather the Right Information Early

Running an RFI helps teams collect baseline information, verify compliance standards, and understand which providers can scale with their business. That way, once the RFP launches, you'll already know the qualified players and can move faster with confidence.

Build Partnerships Before You Need Them

RFIs also help strengthen supplier relationships early. They give providers a chance to share their capabilities without the pressure of a live bid, allowing teams to start conversations that often lead to better long-term partnerships.

Reduce Surprises and Strengthen Decisions

The more teams use RFIs to stay informed about the market, the fewer surprises they face when urgent requests arise. In the long run, this practice turns vendor selection into a planned, informed process instead of a last-minute reaction.

When procurement takes time to understand the market before a need arises, the business moves faster, providers perform better, and partnerships start on the right foot.

Simplify Contracting with CDA & MSA



Identifying the right provider is only half the challenge—contracting can still slow everything down. Weeks can be lost to back-and-forth reviews, legal edits, and document approvals before any real work begins. A simple way to avoid that slowdown is to set the groundwork early with a CDA (confidentiality agreement) and, when possible, an MSA (master service agreement).



Start with a CDA to Enable Open Conversations

A CDA allows open conversation from the start. It removes barriers that prevent both sides from sharing relevant details or discussing scope. We often encourage teams to establish a CDA with promising providers, even before a specific project is identified. That single step speeds up collaboration later when an opportunity arises.



Use MSAs to Streamline Future Work

An MSA takes that foundation further. It outlines how both parties will work together in general terms, without tying it to a particular project. Once an MSA is signed, new statements of work can move through quickly, reducing delays and paperwork.

We've seen companies benefit from having these agreements in place early. One team had already completed both steps before a new need came up, and within a week, they were able to start work instead of waiting through months of approvals.

Those early agreements created flexibility, giving them more room to act quickly when business priorities shifted. They don't have to be complicated. They serve as tools for speed and readiness, helping you remove friction before it starts.



Watch for Signs It Is Time to Transition

Even strong partnerships can lose alignment over time. The warning signs rarely appear all at once. They build gradually into a few minor issues that, if ignored, grow into larger problems.






These situations tend to play out in different ways. In one instance, a partner's slow response to minor requests ultimately resulted in significant reporting delays. By the time the issue surfaced, frustration had already spread across teams. Regular performance reviews and clear KPIs could have caught the trend sooner.

When these red flags appear, start with a direct conversation. Many issues can be resolved through transparency and a reset of expectations. But if the same problems continue, or if the provider's capabilities no longer match business needs, it may be time to plan a transition.

Handled thoughtfully, change doesn't have to be disruptive. With a clear plan that defines timelines, ownership, and risk mitigation, procurement teams can shift providers smoothly while maintaining continuity for trials, patients, and operations.

Procurement and operational teams that Conexus supports often describe this as one of the most significant advantages of having structured governance in place. It creates the confidence to adapt when business needs evolve, as they inevitably do.

Common Red Flags

-  Ongoing "paper cuts" —minor but repeated issues like late reports, missing documentation, or minor invoice errors that add up, causing friction.
-  Missed deadlines, data errors, or recurring compliance findings.
-  Limited transparency or delayed disclosure of problems.
-  Vendors struggling to keep pace with innovation or scalability needs.
-  Reduced engagement or high turnover on the provider's team.

Keep Improving Supplier Partnerships

Partnerships work best when they're fostered as ongoing collaborations, not one-time contracts. Regular touchpoints keep both sides accountable and aligned with evolving business priorities.

Schedule quarterly or biannual business reviews with providers. Share metrics openly so partners can course-correct early.

Refresh provider networks every few years through light RFIs to capture innovation and benchmark pricing. These small habits help maintain visibility and ensure that relationships continue to deliver value as needs change.

Continuous improvement is what keeps the supplier dynamic, strong, and relevant. It's about staying connected, evaluating progress, and encouraging innovation across every partnership.

What Future-Focused Procurement Teams Prioritize

The most effective procurement teams build routines that help them stay ahead of change.

- ✓ Use RFIs as a proactive radar to scan the market and avoid reactive sourcing.
- ✓ Set metrics early and revisit them often to guide decisions on continuation or transition.
- ✓ Keep procurement stakeholder-driven and focused on outcomes that support both science and business goals.

At Conexus, we've seen time and time again that those who stay proactive, transparent, and aligned with their stakeholders are the ones who achieve lasting success.

Companies that modernize sourcing and procurement processes are 42% more successful in achieving their broader transformation goals, proof that strong practices pay off well beyond cost savings.³

How Conexus Helps:

Conexus helps life sciences organizations strengthen procurement practices that support smarter sourcing and lasting supplier relationships. We work with you to:

- **Establish proactive RFI** and contracting frameworks that save time and reduce risk
- **Align procurement with business and operational goals** for better visibility and outcomes
- **Build consistent metrics and governance** to evaluate providers objectively
- **Streamline transitions to new partners** without disrupting studies or operations
- **Maintain an informed view of the market** to adapt as needs evolve

Is your procurement process built to support long-term success?

If you are interested in improving services being delivered to your stakeholders or establishing a long-term partnership with a life sciences solutions service provider, contact us at cnxsi.com

About **Conexus Solutions, Inc.**

We combine deep industry knowledge with specialized talent to support progress for pharma and life sciences companies. Our team brings practical experience across commercial, R&D, quality, and technology services, helping organizations strengthen capabilities, navigate change, and deliver results efficiently. By aligning strategy with the right tools, we help clients reduce risk, respond to evolving market demands, and build long-term value.

Schedule a consultation at cnxsi.com.

Sources

1. McKinsey & Company. Aim Higher and Move Faster for Successful Procurement-Led Transformation. 2021.
2. Gartner. Supplier Relationship Management. 2024.
3. Gartner. Sourcing and Procurement. 2024.



The **team** behind your **team**.



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