

How accurate, up-to-date data can help municipalities fight maladministration

It is no secret that few of South Africa's municipalities consistently receive clean audits and that many struggle to fulfill their mandate to deliver services to their communities. However, implementing appropriate checks and accurately verifying municipal suppliers and employees can help regulate processes and streamline operations to deliver much-needed critical services, says Sameer Kumandan, Managing Director of [SearchWorks](#), an innovative data platform that allows users to conduct live, accurate searches on individuals and companies and in-depth KYC checks online.

Before a municipality can begin to perform its duties, delivering services to its residents, it must function optimally and procure goods and services in accordance with National Treasury regulations, the Preferential Procurement Framework Act and the Public Finance Management Act. These acts regulate supply chain management practices and are in place to ensure that tenders are awarded correctly and fairly.

"Verifying the credentials of buyers, suppliers and vendors to the municipality is a crucial first step in combatting malfeasance of all kinds – from deceptive suppliers to tender fraud. Detailed company registration information can assist in establishing if an entity has a track record in the sector in which they claim to operate and if they have a history of supplying similar services," explains Kumandan.

Uncovering potential conflicts of interest during the procurement process is another step municipalities can take to prevent onboarding dubious suppliers. SearchWorks can confirm whether an individual is in the employment of the state which would exclude them from tendering. This includes identifying employees of the municipality, direct relatives or associates being registered as a director with a company that is looking to do business with the municipality.

He adds that using company and individual checks, evidence of bad debts, criminal records, and other findings against a business and its directors can side-step awarding tenders to companies who aren't operating legally or with integrity.

Verifying municipal employees

Fraud and corruption from within municipalities' own ranks can be curbed with thorough background checks. "Fortunately, carrying out these necessary checks has become easier,

as it's no longer necessary to check every fact or qualification manually. Instead, it's possible to run a reliable background check on any individual in just a few clicks to verify a potential employee's ID and employment history using the SearchWorks platform," says Kumandan.

Securing municipal revenues

In addition to the need to strengthen human resources with verified, qualified employees and a database of similarly verified service providers, municipalities need to ensure better collection of rates, taxes and money owed for electricity, water and refuse collection. If a city cannot secure its revenue stream, it can have dire consequences for budgets and its overall financial position.

"SearchWorks can assist municipalities in confirming all information relating to property ownership to assist them with revenue collection and clearing payment backlogs. These options include trace searches, transfer reports, letters of demand sent to defaulting debtors, and an interactive map to perform a visual search to determine a street address or coordinates and corresponding erf number," notes Kumandan.

Transparency and trust

Local development and better municipal service delivery are vital if South Africa wants to improve its economic position. To achieve this, it is necessary to strengthen municipal finances and governance practices.

"Complete and accurate information enables better, more transparent decision making, which in turn can create greater trust between municipalities and the public. Preventing and mitigating risk irregularities, fraud and corruption can free municipalities to serve communities that need improved service delivery from their elected officials," says Kumandan.

Ends.