Green Purchasing Around the World

Common challenges, common solutions

PLUS:

Getting Money to Classroom Teachers

5 Energy Misconceptions

How to Build a Category Analysis

Leveraging the Buzzword Paradigm

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IN DEPTH

16 Green Purchasing
GREEN PURCHASING AROUND THE GLOBE
Purchasers worldwide have adopted remarkably similar approaches to integrate green considerations into standardized purchasing practices, have encountered remarkably similar challenges, and are beginning to build common solutions collaboratively to make green purchasing even easier.
BY SCOT CASE

24 Purchasing Cards
MANAGING THE FLOW OF DOLLARS INTO THE CLASSROOM
Seeking to simplify the purchasing process, the Mississippi Department of Education worked with the State Department of Finance and Administration to implement a statewide purchasing card (p-card) system enrolling 35,000 classroom teachers.
BY LARRY ANDERSON
The Night Snow Drove Old Dixie Down

By Bill Wolpin

Snow doesn’t visit Atlanta often, but one thing is clear when it does: nobody’s prepared. Cluelessness reigned supreme in today’s capital of the New South. And there’s plenty of blame to go around, for example, city hall and the governor’s office, which did not salt streets and highways. And let’s not forget its residents who thought they could ride roughshod over the roads.

We were no smarter than the rest, especially three of us who finally realized that we’d stayed too long at the office. We scavenged a few benches to rest on for the night, and walked down the road to that Southern Oasis, the Waffle House. We thought we were just going to get something to eat, but instead found ourselves in the middle of the chaos outside.

We had been watching outside through our windows for the past 12 hours as cars lined up, nearly motionless. But it was worse now that the ice had settled on the roads and steep inclines, leaving people stuck in cars whose wheels could only spin. Other cars had been abandoned for lack of gas or in sheer frustration, causing more problems.

We jumped into the fray, pushing cars into parking lots and helping others gain enough traction to move forward. With her car moved to the side, one woman was in tears as she told us that she has been in traffic for eight hours. With that, she left the car and started walking the rest of the way home.

Later, we walked into the only hotel in the area. A bleary-eyed clerk at the front desk told us more than 300 people without rooms were there — huddled in corners, sitting on the floors and of course drinking at the bar. You could hear them on their phones telling their loved ones of abandoned cars and wondering how they would get home.

A few steps out of the hotel, we landed in the Waffle House. The waitresses lucky enough to shoulder this shift darted from table to table taking orders, pouring coffee and dispensing as much good will as they could muster. It was chaos there, too, but it was tempered by a strange sense of normalcy. We were eating dinner.

Funny how waffles, eggs and grits made us feel full, or at least ready to stop eating, so we skated across the still-crowded streets toward the office, where we were met by another employee who had invited two snowstorm refugees — a mother and her young son — to spend the night in our boardroom.

It’s 2 in the morning and outside, the road has cleared except for the occasional tow truck rumbling down the street. Inside, the six of us are lying on our makeshift beds thinking about how we will remember the night when all hell broke loose because of a couple inches of snow. Finally, I fell asleep, still wondering if the woman who wandered off into the night in tears ever made it home.

BILL WOLPIN is editorial director of Government Procurement and several other Penton Media publications.
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Emory University in Atlanta has long been internationally renowned for its liberal arts, graduate and professional academic programs. More recently, the university has received acclaim for its green initiatives. The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) named Emory University the nation’s top higher education institution in its annual “Best of Green Schools 2013” report.

Yet Emory didn’t set out to win awards when it made sustainability a core commitment a decade ago. In 2004, the university’s President James Wagner, Provost Earl Lewis and Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration Mike Mandl simply set a vision “to help restore the global ecosystem, foster healthy living and reduce the university’s impact on the local environment,” according to Emory’s Office of Sustainability Initiatives.

The school’s sustainability achievements include:

- The Piedmont Project, an annual workshop that teaches faculty and graduate students how to incorporate sustainability into classroom curriculums.
- Sustainability-related courses offered in 47 departments across campus.
- A bus fleet powered entirely by a biodiesel blend made with used cooking oil from campus cafeterias.
- Reduced petroleum consumption and greenhouse gas emissions by offering local and sustainable food in its facilities. By 2015, Emory will be serving 75 percent local or sustainable ingredients in campus and hospital cafeterias.
- Roughly half of the University’s 700 acres of land remains undeveloped, supporting the protection of the Wesley Woods, Baker, and Lullwater forests.
- Reduced water and energy use, and waste reduction. For instance, Emory’s water management plan encourages incorporating water-saving technology into green buildings, cisterns to collect grey water and rainwater for use in irrigation and toilet flushing. In some buildings, large heat wheels pull moisture from the air while efficiently ventilating buildings.
- Since 2001, all new construction on campus has been required to seek at least LEED silver certification [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) is a certification by the U.S. Green Building Council].

USGBC has recognized Emory for having among the highest number of square feet of LEED-certified space of any campus in America, with 11 buildings having achieved LEED gold status and six projects pending that, once certified, will total 3 million gross square feet of LEED-certified space.

PATRICIA-ANNE TOM is a contributing writer to American School and University, a sister publication of Government Procurement.
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BUILDING A DETAILED CATEGORY ANALYSIS

By Jonathan White

In the spring of 2013, NIGP’s strategic partner, Spikes Cavell, developed a Guide to Procurement Savings designed to show public sector procurement teams how they can use spend data to understand, change and measure their procurement function. Previous issues of Government Procurement have featured articles on understanding the current procurement situation through data and six different types of procurement savings that could be identified using that data.

Now let’s take the next step and explore creating a category analysis across all parts of an organization’s expenditure.

WHY CATEGORY ANALYSIS?

A category analysis and management approach in procurement usually marks a distinct organizational change. Rather than departmental budget holders “going shopping,” there is a transition to well-organized, planned procurement efforts that offer better value and efficiency and leverage the organization’s buying power.

Many public sector procurement departments are still living with fewer staff and resources available to carry out savings projects. Under such circumstances, it takes a deliberate and focused effort to overcome hurdles and carry out a category analysis, but the benefits can be significant.

The first requirement for category analysis is that an organization’s expenditure be organized into meaningful categories. You may be able to use the commodity/cost/subjective/object codes that were applied to your spend as it worked its way through your accounts payable system. In other cases, you may have to undertake additional categorization effort and classify vendors or expenditure outside that system to obtain data robust enough for a category analysis. Bringing purchasing card expenditure into the analysis is also required to provide visibility of all expenditure. Once the data is joined and any categorization issues are rectified (which is outside the scope of this article) then you are on the way to building your initial category overview.

CATEGORY OVERVIEW

A high-level overview of spend by category provides you the necessary perspective to begin identifying categories where it makes the most sense to take action. (See Table I.) The action you take in one category may be very different than the action you take in another category, even though both deliver savings.

Once you have a category overview, you can look for patterns and outliers in the data. Match those observations with an understanding of your

**Overview of spend by category**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total Spend</th>
<th>Total Transactions</th>
<th>Total Suppliers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>29,515,804.92</td>
<td>4,621</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>17,580,291.26</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities &amp; Energy</td>
<td>13,576,382.87</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste &amp; Environmental Services</td>
<td>8,270,213.27</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>6,017,390.00</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Equipment &amp; Services</td>
<td>5,192,492.45</td>
<td>1,216</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicles</td>
<td>2,896,852.96</td>
<td>2,265</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>2,672,840.30</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities Management</td>
<td>2,400,015.99</td>
<td>1,359</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation Management</td>
<td>2,266,467.48</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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team’s time and capabilities, the organization’s strategic objectives, and an estimate of the value of potential savings and efficiencies that could be delivered. These factors will contribute to choosing which categories to act on.

Construction might be the highest category of expenditure (as is the case for many public organizations), but that spend may already be managed by a facilities team within your organization. There may be significant spend on security equipment, but there may be no category expert in the procurement team right now who has the experience to tackle that category. There may be organization-wide initiatives (such as getting more and better technology into the classroom) that could direct focus to the Information Technology category, even though it wouldn’t otherwise be the first category chosen to work on. The key is to have a category overview the procurement team can use to determine its overall strategic direction and next actions.

A MORE DETAILED CATEGORY ANALYSIS
Once you have chosen one or more categories to focus on, a more detailed category analysis should be built around those categories. Spend on vehicles could be broken down into Cars and Trucks, Parts, and Heavy Equipment. It’s one thing to understand that you spent money with 110 Information Technology companies and decide that 110 is too many, but the next step is to understand who those vendors are and whether they are Computer Systems Integrators, IT Hardware and Software Providers, Telecommunications Services companies or something else within IT entirely (See Table II.)

You may then begin to ask questions about how many departments are using each vendor, what contracts are already in place in each category and whether amount of spend, number of transactions or number of vendors have shown any significant increase or decrease in the last three years. The answers to these questions and more help determine what, if any, action should be taken within the category.

You may identify savings opportunities early on in the category analysis process and want to start working on them right away. However, one of the keys to delivering well organized and well planned procurement efforts is not only having plans for the projects you are working on, but also having visibility of what you are not working on. Without the category overview at the beginning of the process, you won’t know whether the projects you are working on are really the most important or will deliver the greatest benefits to your organization.

The next article in this series will go into the category analysis in more detail and provide ways public sector organizations can use expenditure data to prepare for the contracting process.

JONATHAN WHITE is Territory Director for Spikes Cavell, Inc., which equips decision makers in the public sector with the business intelligence, online tools and analytical insight to transform the way they procure goods and services. The Spikes Cavell Observatory is an online platform that facilitates delivery of spend and contract visibility quickly, affordably and with little effort on the agency’s or institution’s part.

A more detailed category analysis: information technology (Table II)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>vCode Vendor Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer Systems Integrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT Resellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software Developers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managed &amp; Outsourced IT Service Providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed Telecommunications Service Vendors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Communications Service Vendors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printers, Copiers &amp; MFD Vendors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installed Software Providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking Service Providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Telecom Equipment Vendors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I’m an outdoorsman.
(So naturally, I ended up behind a desk.)

Sure, I’d rather be outside than stuck in an office. That’s why I started working for our parks department in the first place. But since then, my job has changed a bit. I guess you could say that if my department were a machine, I’d be the guy with the oilcan. Instead of sitting on a mower, now I’m buying them, making sure our parks stay a place folks can be proud of. So I have to make sure every machine is an investment that pays off. Like our Grasshopper mowers did. Seems like they do more in a day than our other machines do in a week. And we’ve cut our equipment inventory by using our mowers all year long to throw snow, aerate and pick up leaves. I haven’t heard one complaint from my crews — except for our maintenance guy, who claims he doesn’t have enough to keep him busy. Go figure. But, in the end, all that matters is our city parks have never looked better. And even though I’m a desk jockey now, I’m proud to have helped make it that way. After all, I’m an outdoorsman at heart.
Top 5 Misconceptions About the Procurement of Energy Commodities

WHY OVERCOMING THEM IS CRITICAL TO REDUCING COSTS

By Bob Wooten

Every day, energy decision-makers are bombarded with phone calls and emails from energy firms proclaiming they have the best ideas about how to procure energy. However, energy procurement may be just one of many “hats” the decision-maker wears. The resulting confusion can lead to faulty opinions about energy procurement best practices. These misconceptions are typically held by those “responsible” for energy procurement – purchasing agents, facility managers, assistant superintendents, city managers, county judges, auditors, and others. While most energy managers have a great deal of expertise managing facility operations, they are not experts in the energy commodity markets. Here, we outline the five most common misconceptions held by energy decision-makers or anyone who is part of a team making energy procurement recommendations for their organization.

**MISCONCEPTION 1:** “I ALREADY UNDERSTAND THE ENERGY MARKETS AND HOW TO PROCURE ENERGY”

Especially if the decision-maker is someone who has procured energy before or has some background in the energy markets, the tendency is to believe he or she knows enough to handle things successfully. While many energy managers are certified to handle demand-side issues, which relate to how an organization uses energy once it’s delivered to them, managing the physical energy commodity itself requires a completely different knowledge base. Just as you wouldn’t want to trust cardiac surgery to someone who “used to be in the medical field” but never performed surgery, you wouldn’t want to leave energy procurement in your own hands or anyone else’s who is not fully involved every day in the energy wholesale markets. Your job is not to be an energy expert, but rather to shepherd the process for your organization – you must rely on seeking expertise to make the process successful.

**MISCONCEPTION 2:** “I MANAGE PROCUREMENT OF ALL COMMODITIES ACCORDING TO THE BID CALENDAR”

Every purchasing professional maintains one, and it is the lifeblood of the procurement organization: the master bid calendar. This is how almost all procurement is managed, by working with contract expirations and end user needs to determine when each contract should be bid. The reason this doesn’t work with energy commodities is the same reason energy is so unique – volatility. Energy commodities in general, and specifically electricity, are the most volatile commodities you will ever procure. The impact on your budget of locking in a fixed price for electricity on Tuesday afternoon as opposed to Friday morning, for example, can easily be a difference of hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. While you can’t do anything about the volatility itself, you can manage your procurement process by having the tools and resources in place to follow the market and lock in prices during favorable market dips, thereby saving your organization tremendously in the long run.

**MISCONCEPTION 3:** “MY SUPPLIER IS VERY GOOD AND ALWAYS HELPS ME SECURE THE BEST PRICE”

It has been a growing trend to foster “partnerships” with suppliers, and in the energy world this sometimes means sticking with one supplier and trusting that they will always help you secure the best pricing. We mentioned before how essential it is to follow the market in order to find the best windows to secure pricing, and relying on one supplier to provide this guidance can lead to problems. This one supplier is only able to give you “their view” of the market. In addition, they are only able to deliver one solution – theirs. To ensure you are achieving the best possible procurement (product strategy, price, term, contract, etc), you must use a competitive
process that incorporates supplier responses from all suppliers in the market, not just the incumbent. Don’t worry – your current supplier will understand.

**MISCONCEPTION 4: “MY CONTRACT DOESN’T EXPIRE FOR ANOTHER YEAR, I’M FINE”**

So many opportunities for savings in energy commodities are lost by not being ready to execute a contract. Unless they are within six to twelve months of contract expiration, many make the mistake of believing there is no point to even discuss energy procurement. It has been shown time and time again, though, that this strategy is the equivalent of rolling the dice and hoping for a seven. The best approach is to continually monitor the markets, because history shows that the best contracting window may be even three years prior to the expiration of the current contract. For example, in today’s market, known as a “declining market,” energy market prices are lower the more years you go out. This characteristic can mean that a 12-month contract purchased and starting today may be priced at 7 cents per kilowatt hour whereas a 12-month contract purchased to start in 24 months may be priced at 5.5 cents per kWh. The bottom line? It’s never too early to start looking at energy prices!

**MISCONCEPTION 5: “WE CAN’T CONTROL ENERGY PRICES, SO THERE IS NO NEED TO MONITOR THE MARKET”**

This is a summation of much that has already been discussed. The misconception is that since no one has a crystal ball, there is no point in even trying to manage the process. In this scenario, the decision-maker just throws up his or her hands and says “We’ll bid this out next September.” The procurement is executed regardless of what other factors are happening in the market, and frequently attempts made by consultants and others to help are rebuffed because the belief is that no one knows the future, so why even try. Just because you have “put the energy contract to bed” for the next three years doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be monitoring the market and your contract’s performance. This monitoring will help determine how well your previous strategy performed, as well as show you market windows to make future decisions. A continuous feedback loop regarding contract strategy and performance is essential to increase an organization’s opportunities for future savings and cost control.

So all in all, don’t be a reactionary victim of doing things the same old way. Many analytical studies show that energy is one of the top three areas of spend for organizations. Take charge, and establish a proactive, managed strategy that pulls in expertise and professional resources to truly transform your organization, save thousands of additional dollars and make energy the hero of the annual budget.

**BOB WOOTEN, C.P.M., CEP, is Director of Government Accounts for Tradition Energy, where he manages energy procurement for a wide variety of governmental entities including cities, schools, colleges, universities, housing authorities and municipal districts. Contact Bob at Bob.Wooten@TraditionEnergy.com.**
ProcureSource has launched a first-of-its-kind online directory of cooperative purchasing contracts for use by state and local governments, school districts, higher education and nonprofits. The new service, available at www.procuresource.com, will serve as a centralized and simplified resource to locate and compare contracts.

The use of cooperative contracts to deliver savings and save staff resources on the RFP process has become a widespread best practice for purchasing professionals. Because of their popularity, there are so many cooperative options that it can be difficult to identify the differences and discern whether the various cooperative procurement processes meet public procurement standards.

ProcureSource was launched to address these challenges. The free service is a clearinghouse of information on available contracts, documents and details needed for public agencies to make an informed decision on their ability to use each contract. At launch, the online directory includes the major national cooperatives and a few local cooperatives and includes more than 1,500 suppliers who hold cooperative purchasing contracts. Each listing includes details on the contract, information on the cooperative, and supporting contract documents if they were available.

“ProcureSource elegantly provides the key information about cooperative programs and their contract offerings in a simple way that’s easily understood and makes for quick comparison,” said Rick Grimm, CEO of NIGP: The Institute for Public Procurement. “ProcureSource is a boon to cooperative contracting due diligence.”

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THE ‘ISSUE’ OF BUZZWORDS

By Fred Marks

I have a particular distaste for buzzwords and a disdain for people who use them. I have fought a losing battle during my professional career and beyond against buzzwords, but the more I fight, the more buzzwords seem to be used.

English is a very accommodating language. We linguistically borrow words from other languages and treat them as our own. We take words from technology and incorporate them into our daily speech. It’s an easy trap to fall into. Maslow calls it the “Golden Hammer.” He wrote “if all you have is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail.” Every profession has its buzzwords, and purchasing is no exception. Think of your daily conversations in your office when discussing professional subjects. Do you think an outsider would understand you?

I like email because of the flexibility and ease of use. Emails have the dual function of being both formal and informal communication methods. They have taken the place of postal mail mostly because of their speed and ease, so we should use them accordingly. It is a disservice to use texting abbreviations like LOL or OMG in formal communications; it takes away from the impact of the writer intended. A formal email should have a subject line that includes a reference to the matter being discussed. It should be written with complete sentences, a formal salutation and closing, a copy line for all those concerned, and the signature should be your name, title, name of organization and contact information. Informal emails can be just as effective but written instead of texting. “Can we meet at 2:15?,” “Let’s have lunch!,” and “Should we close the two lanes on the George Washington Bridge?” are good examples.

Purchasing requires that practitioners have excellent communication skills. We communicate our needs to others, we are contract writers and administrators, we write memos, letters, and emails. Buzzwords are just tacky and a lazy way to write and speak. I have sat through my share of RFP Oral Presentations. I’ve seen everyone from the polished marketing manager in the red power tie or the lady in the red dress (red is supposed to be a power color, but now its becoming softer, like pinks and purples) to Lenny and Squiggy sitting in flannel shirts, asking each other “can we really do this?”
The next time you have an oral presentation, tell the presenter that if they use jargon or buzzwords like “issue” or “paradigm” or “110 percent,” they will lose points and will be in serious danger of you walking out before they finish. You will get a much clearer presentation, and you get the added joy of watching them change the way they speak to you. You also get the chance to watch them clean up their presentations and think about every word they speak. For the most part, a majority of sellers who participate in presentations give the same marketing speech to every one of their prospective clients. Software sellers are particularly vulnerable to this tactic. I see nothing wrong with using “Clarity of Oral Presentation” as a criterion (following the original Greek, “criteria” is plural, “criterion” is singular).

If you want to do this right, make a list of your five most hated buzzwords and give them triple word score. Make it interesting, a game for your evaluators. Here are my five, and I start to get up and gather my things when a speaker hits three, especially if the speaker is supposed to be an expert on a subject, or worse yet, being paid to speak to a gathering. I generally like to hear what leaders of an organization or an expert have to say, but if they descend to the depths of jargon or buzzwords, it turns me off and I start to do my nine times table backwards in my brain. And they lose more points with a glitzy Power Point presentation with clip art, fancy fonts, and words and music flying in like Halley’s Comet.

“Epic” is offensive to me as it doesn’t meet the standard of anything remotely like a long poem with heroes, derring-do, and pages and pages of names I can’t pronounce. Unless you are writing a Homeric Poem, or Beowulf or a ditty from Quintus Ennius, stop using the word. Nothing we do in purchasing is epic!

“With all due respect” or its cousin from below the Mason-Dixon Line “Bless his heart” is nothing more than a signal that the next words out of the speaker will be rude or bad-mannered.

“At the end of the day” can be used to denote any time period the speaker wishes. It’s used with its sibling “sunset,” and it should mean “when the job or function is complete.” “Issue” is now being used instead of “problem.” Why do we coat our problems with honey instead of addressing them head-on? To take the impact out of a problem, or to sound smarmy, does the problem no real service. A problem has to be addressed forthrightly and directly.

And the gold medal goes to “To be honest.” What it really does is say to the listener that everything you’ve said prior to this has been false and disregard everything except what I’m saying now.

These are only a few of my most hated buzzwords. Make your own list and purge them from your writing and vocabulary. In my working days, to keep my sanity, I’d award the “Ros Prize” for buzzwords, named after Amanda McKittrick Ros who was arguably the worst poet in the English language. Clarity was not her strong point. In her day, people would have contests to see who could read her works out loud without bursting into laughter. Look her up when you have time, it’s an exercise in how not to write. And if you want to do it right, pin a picture of the Lady on your office wall to remind you of how not to write. Her picture alone should keep you from sliding down the razor blade of poor writing.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Government Procurement is pleased to welcome back Fred Marks, who has agreed to come out of retirement (again) to write an occasional article – no pressure. Frederick Marks, CPPO, VCO, is a retired purchasing officer who has held positions as a supervising buyer for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey as well as director of material management for Northern Virginia Community College. Contact him at fmarks@mindspring.com
Governments and other institutions around the world have adopted green purchasing as a way to reduce the human health, environmental and social impacts of routine purchasing decisions. Purchasers around the globe have adopted remarkably similar approaches to integrate these considerations into standardized purchasing practices, have encountered remarkably similar challenges in their efforts to do so, and are beginning to build common solutions collaboratively to make green purchasing even easier.

This article highlights some trends and examples gathered from recent reports and conferences on international green purchasing efforts (sources listed at the end).

**DEFINING GREEN PURCHASING**

In the United States and in other countries that first adopted green purchasing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, green purchasing began with a narrow focus on buying products made from recycled content or that are more energy- or water-efficient.

As the science of product life cycle assessment matured, highlighting the significant environmental impacts throughout the manufacturing, use, and disposal of products, purchasers began expanding the definition and practice of green purchasing to reflect the full range of potential impacts. They began considering the total energy used to make a product, the environmental impacts of mining or harvesting the raw materials, the hazardous materials found within products,
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the energy, water, and indoor air quality emissions associated with using a product and the impacts of product disposal. They also considered social impacts such as the manufacturing conditions in which workers make a product, the wages they are paid, the use of child-labor and other issues.

As green purchasing evolved, a variety of related terms was introduced to capture the broader considerations. Purchasers around the world have adopted terms such as:
- Green Public Procurement (GPP)
- Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP)
- Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP)
- Socially Responsible Procurement
- Responsible Purchasing
- Ethical Purchasing
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Procurement
- Sustainable Purchasing

All of the terms share a common set of principles that can be summarized with the following definition: Green purchasing is the intentional practice of buying goods and services that generate human health, environmental, and social benefit and that are produced and delivered in ways that minimize human health, environmental, and social damage while continuing to balance concerns about the product or service’s price, performance and availability.

GLOBAL ACTIVITIES

More than 50 countries around the world have national requirements to buy greener products and services. Even more have green purchasing activities at the national, state or municipal level.

Here are a few highlights from around the world:

Europe. A 2011 study of 230,000 European government

### Nations With Green Purchasing Requirements

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18 | FEBRUARY/MARCH 2014
contracts signed in 2009/2010 concluded that 55 percent included at least one core green purchasing requirement and that 26 percent included all of the European Union’s green purchasing elements. The 28 members of the European Union are governed by the EU Public Procurement Directives of 2004, which require governments to adopt green purchasing policies. The EU has identified 10 priority sectors: construction; food and catering services; transportation; energy; computers and other office equipment; clothing and uniforms; paper and printing; furniture; cleaning products; and health sector equipment. The EU is also developing common green purchasing requirements for 19 product groups and has published a “Buying Green Handbook.”

India. As India continues its rapid modernization efforts, green purchasing is growing in importance. A proposed 2012 law to formalize government procurement processes addresses purchase price, the costs of operating and maintaining products and product performance, including an explicit reference to the environmental characteristics of the products. India has an active Green Purchasing Network and is launching an India Green Building Council to develop green building standards. Indian companies are certifying products to international green standards to meet internal and international demand. Godrej, India’s largest furniture manufacturer, for example, has certified products to the UL GREENGUARD indoor air quality standard to meet demand from hotels, hospitals and consumers in India and its customers abroad.

Japan. In 2000, Japan passed its first green purchasing law requiring the federal and local governments to buy greener products and services. The resulting policies identified 246 items in 19 product and service categories covered by the law, including paper, office furniture, office machines, phones, appliances, air conditioners, water heaters, vehicles, fire extinguishers, clothing, buildings and public works projects. One-hundred percent of Japanese federal government’s purchases, 88 percent of cities’, and 68 percent of towns’ and villages’ purchases are reported to meet the requirements. In 1996, Japan also launched the world’s first Green Purchasing Network (GPN) to promote green purchasing throughout the country. GPN Japan has 2,920 members from 2,381 businesses, 286 government agencies, and 300 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have pledged to buy greener products. GPN Japan has also produced a database of more than 15,000 products in 17 categories so purchasers can compare purchases.
against the requirements of the Green Purchasing Law.

**Thailand.** A 2008 resolution in Thailand requires the government to buy greener products and services based on a lifecycle evaluation of competing products. It encourages the use of products certified by the Thai Green Label, which includes 58 standards in 22 product categories. Government purchases of Thai Green Label-certified products includes items such as paper, printers and printer cartridges, envelopes, pens, lights, paints, copy machines, furniture, and batteries.

**United States.** U.S. green purchasing requirements date to the “buy recycled” requirements introduced in 1984 revisions to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). They have expanded regularly through additional legislation and Executive Orders. Executive Order 13514, signed in 2009, mandates that 95 percent of all federal government contracts require products and services that are energy- and water-efficient, bio-based, environmentally preferable, non-ozone depleting, and contain recycled-content, non-toxic or less-toxic materials where practicable. More than half of the states and many cities and counties throughout the country have adopted related green purchasing requirements.

**GLOBAL CHALLENGES**

While green purchasing practices are increasing around the world, there are common challenges reported by purchasers that need to be overcome to facilitate further progress. The most frequently cited challenges include:

**Sporadic implementation.** Government purchasers around the world report that green purchasing activities are easier for some product categories than for others. They also report varying levels of political support, which affects their ability and willingness to integrate human health, environmental and social considerations into the purchasing process. In developing countries, understandably, green purchasing priorities are subordinate to other more pressing priorities such as ensuring access to suitable housing, clean water and energy.

**Poor reporting.** Procurement systems are typically designed to track expenditures; they are not historically designed to track progress against environmental and social goals. Large contracts covering multiple product categories such as construction or office supply contracts include multiple opportunities to include greener products, but the individual value of those purchases is rarely (if ever) quantified. As a result, it is challenging to know how effective green purchasing

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**Erin Greer**
Managing Editor
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20 | FEBRUARY/MARCH 2014
programs are or what metrics should be used to track progress.

**Pricing concerns.** Some purchasers continue to believe that greener products cost more than competing products. While numerous studies demonstrate that greener products can save money in some cases, the perception that greener products and services will cost more prevents some purchasers from seeking or considering greener options.

**Performance concerns.** Although performance requirements can be defined in contracts, some purchasers worry that greener products will not perform as well as traditional products. As a result, they fail to consider the benefits of greener products and services.

**Complex tradeoffs.** Purchasers around the world also report that it can be difficult to identify greener products because there are tradeoffs. An energy-efficient product, for example, might use more water or contain more hazardous materials than a competing product. Purchasers are not environmental experts and without clarity on which human health, environmental or social benefits should be prioritized, it can be difficult to build green requirements into the purchasing process.

**GLOBAL SOLUTIONS**

Like the challenges reported by purchasers from around the world, the solutions to those challenges are remarkably familiar. Purchasers around the world are looking to eco-labels and purchasing networks to make green purchasing easier. They also recognize the value of international harmonization efforts to reduce confusion about how to identify and buy greener products and services.

**Eco-labels.** The most useful green purchasing tool cited by purchasers worldwide is eco-labelling. An environmental label, based on third-party certification to a respected environmental standard, makes it much easier to identify greener products and services. Many countries have developed their own environmental labels to recognize greener products. The United States government has developed a number of labels focusing on specific environmental claims – Energy Star for energy efficiency; Water Sense for water efficiency; BioPreferred for bio-based content. Other countries have developed single labels that address multiple environmental concerns. The Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN) is a network of 26 environmental labels that meet internationally accepted ISO Type 1 environmental label requirements. GEN has
created mutual recognition agreements among some of its members to foster the emergence of global environmental standards. Other organizations, like UL Environment, are also focusing on the need for global standards.

**Green Purchasing Networks.** Japan launched the first Green Purchasing Network (GPN) in 1996 to share green purchasing practices, develop green purchasing tools, and identify greener products and services. Other GPNs have emerged throughout the world, including the Responsible Purchasing Network in the United States. The International Green Purchasing Network (IGPN) was founded in 2005 to facilitate communication among regional GPNs and the promotion of global best practices. Working closely with members of the global eco-labelling community, IGPN and individual GPNs are harmonizing efforts to define greener products and services and the purchasing practices that make their purchase possible.

**United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).** The United Nations has also recognized the tremendous power of government procurement to address environmental challenges and has launched an effort to improve international collaboration. The Sustainable Public Procurement Initiative (SPPI) is a key component of the UNEP’s Sustainable Consumption and Production program. UNEP is focusing its activities on the tools necessary to scale green purchasing initiatives globally through access to better information and improved green purchasing tools.

**GLOBAL CHALLENGES, LOCAL ACTION**

Global challenges, including global environmental challenges, require global solutions. Global solutions require local action. Government purchasers around the world are doing their part by buying greener products and services from greener companies. Local purchasing decisions made by purchasing professionals around the globe are creating the economic incentives for a greener, healthier, more sustainable world. Purchasers around the world are proving that it is possible to buy a greener future on a global scale.

**SCOT CASE** has been researching and promoting responsible purchasing since 1993. He is the Market Development Director for UL Environment and serves on the board of the International Green Purchasing Network. Contact him via Twitter @scotcase, email at scot.case@ul.com or in Reading, PA, at 610-779-3770. This article represents the views of the author only and do not necessarily reflect the views of UL Environment or its affiliates or subsidiaries. This article is for general information purposes only and is not meant to convey legal or other professional advice.

**SOURCES**


— Fourth International Conference on Green Purchasing (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia), September 2013;

— International Symposium on Ethical Purchasing (Sapporo, Japan), February 2014.
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Mississippi state law provides an allocation of money to public classroom (K-12) teachers that they can use to pay for instructional supplies and equipment. If they don’t use the Educational Enhancement Funds (EEF) by March 31 of the current school year, they lose the money and it carries over to the total allocation for the next year. The money is allocated to each district based on attendance data, and each district’s allocation is divided by the number of teachers in the district to determine each teacher’s share – typically in the range of $330 or so per teacher. In all, the statewide allocation for fiscal year 2014 is about $10 million (plus $1 million in unused funds carried over from last year).

In the past, in order to spend the allocation, teachers had to go through a complicated process involving requisitions, purchase orders and multiple contracted vendors. Just spending the money kept paperwork flowing through school offices statewide. Thousands of man-hours were required in school accounting departments. Business offices across the state issued multiple purchase orders to vendors for each teacher each year, and also issued thousands of checks.

Seeking to simplify the purchasing process, the Mississippi Department of Education worked with the State Department of Finance and Administration to implement a statewide purchasing card (p-card) system enrolling 35,000 classroom teachers. Mississippi State Senate Bill 2761 authorized the State Department of Finance and Administration to issue procurement cards for use by classroom teachers to purchase classroom supplies, instructional materials and equipment.
MORE CARDS WITH LOWER LIMITS

Mississippi already had a smaller p-card program used by state government departments. About 2,200 cards are used for small-dollar state government purchases of equipment, goods, and services in transactions of less than $5,000. The state p-card program has a range of monthly credit limits and per-transaction limits, varying by state agency. (The state also has a travel card system.)

Rather than issue a new RFP, the Department of Education opted to work together with the Office of Purchasing, Travel, and Fleet Management (OPTFM) in the Mississippi Department of Finance and Administration and through their existing p-card supplier. “It just made sense to use the established contract rather than them trying to do their own,” says Lance Fulcher, OPTFM director.

“Our two agencies sat down and had conversations of how we could make this work,” adds Fulcher. “The program was something brand new, and it took a lot of collaboration between agencies. You have to have the working relationships to pull off a program this big. In reality, it broke down fences in procurement.”

Experience administering the existing state p-card program helped pave the way for launching p-cards for classroom teachers, which involved issuance of many more cards and each with smaller spending limits. The Office of Purchasing, Travel, and Fleet Management was faced with the challenging logistics of issuing 35,000 cards to teachers throughout the state in an extremely short 90-day time period. In addition to distributing the cards, policies, procedures, and guidelines had to be established, and training materials and application forms had to be designed.

“The intent of the card is to provide an easier way to get the supplies into the classroom, to help dollars
flow more easily into the classroom,” says S. Melissa Barnes, director of the Office of School Financial Services, Mississippi Department of Education.

Each school district’s responsibility includes tracking the cards until they are distributed, and connecting each card number to a teacher. The cards do not bear the teachers’ names and do not require passwords or personal identification codes. Instead, account numbers are registered to the recipient and recorded in the district office. For audit purposes, only one individual can use a particular card. When a teacher leaves, a new card is issued to the new teacher.

Teachers receiving cards sign a “Statement of Understanding” that the funds available on the card are public funds and can only be used for their classrooms. A copy of the Mississippi Educator Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct is attached to the Statement of Understanding.

Procedures are in place to identify any purchased items that the district requires be placed on its fixed asset inventory. The district shows the item as equipment donated to the district by the State of Mississippi.

The teachers’ p-card program in Mississippi won the 2013 George Cronin Gold Award for Procurement Excellence awarded by the National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO).

EDUCATING NEW CARD USERS

Use of each card is limited to school supplies, with usage regulated with the help of merchant category codes (MCCs) developed by credit card companies. Teachers have online access to account status for complete real-time visibility into transactions and account balances.

If selected for audit, teachers must turn in receipts to support their purchases, which are reviewed by the Mississippi Department of Education Office of Internal Accountability. In the most recent audit, a sampling of 180 cards was selected, 100 percent of purchases on those cards were inspected, and the audit did not identify any disallowed purchases.

UMB Bank is the p-card supplier for the state and also for the new program for teachers. There was a big push to educate the new card users on the program and how to use the card. “The bank had to answer questions from 35,000 people, which was a drain on their call center resources,” says Fulcher. “We helped with some of those calls, to get it to a manageable number. We worked to explain the tax situation and to help them understand that if the card was declined somewhere, it just means the MCC category for that vendor is not one we had open.”

The cards can be used for anything the teacher can justify as being used for classroom instruction. Typical purchases include pencils and paper, but chemicals used in a laboratory or welding supplies for a vocational class could also qualify. (Audits can include requests for lesson plans to support how an unusual purchase was used in the classroom.) Some legitimate classroom purchases needed to be made from vendors one wouldn’t ordinarily expect to supply “school supplies.” For example, a tractor supply store might be a legitimate merchant for a purchase by an agriculture teacher. “We could open it up to the usage, but that would take someone doing it manually,” says Fulcher.

RELEIVING ADMINISTRATIVE STRAIN

The p-card system relieved administrative strain on the school system, especially around the first of the school year when most of the funds are used. The program saved on the man-hours needed to manage the purchase orders and other paperwork flow. The program also generates a rebate.

“It was something brand new to promote efficiency and get money to the teachers, so it isn’t held up in an office,” says Fulcher.

The program is in its second year, and one surprise along the way was the rash of activity at the beginning of year two. Some 10 percent of the card-holder population changed, with some cards being canceled and others added – more than they had anticipated. Even 3,500 cards is a large number to deal with, but “we just worked through it,” says Fulcher.

“It just took more cooperation,” says Barnes.

Pending improvements include looking at how cards can be distributed and into teachers’ hands more quickly. Another possibility is a uniform amount across the state instead of a different amount for each district.

“We think it’s a great program,” says Fulcher. “We have had a lot of questions from other states about how they could do it. You have to have people who are willing to work together. You will have issues and have to work through them. You have to be able to talk through them, and the bank provider has to be willing to work with you – to tell you what they can and can’t do.”

Statewide contracts for office supplies are in place, and teachers have always been encouraged to use those contracts, both when the old processes were in place and now with the new p-card program. A monthly newsletter communicates what contracts are in force or up for renewal. However, some schools are located in rural areas and may not have easy access to a contracted supplier. Internet sales are also increasing.

LARRY ANDERSON is editor of Government Procurement.
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The Universal Public Procurement Certification Council (UPPCC) announces that 379 individuals successfully completed the fall 2013 UPPCC certification examinations administered October 14-26, 2013. The coveted Certified Public Procurement Officer (CPPO) and Certified Professional Public Buyer (CPPB) credentials, recognized throughout the public procurement profession, demonstrate an individual’s comprehensive knowledge of public procurement. Of these 379 newly certified individuals, a total of 249 earned the CPPB certification while 130 earned the CPPO certification. This newest class of professionals brings the total number certified for CPPB and CPPO to 9,574 and 2,439 respectively.

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A couple of years back, my agency awarded a contract for three roof replacements to a Hispanic-owned business. They were the lowest responsive and responsible bidder in our invitation to bid (ITB). Our pre-award conference was unique in that, before bringing in the company president, their project superintendent asked me “Is it OK if I translate for my father, since his English is not that good?” I responded that this would be perfectly fine, since my Spanish was probably even worse!

One of the things that stood out about this contract was that our own project manager was quite skeptical. He was concerned whether this new company could perform to his expectations. After all, he had not used them before and did not have the same confidence he had in other, more familiar contractors. By the way, these other contractors were all middle aged Caucasian males (nothing against this group; I have many in my own family). It is natural to gravitate towards those things we are comfortable with. I get that.

The other thing significant about this project was that the work was done on time and on budget. The icing on the cake is that there was not a single change order at any of the three locations. Frankly, that was unheard of at my agency. The project manager was surprised, impressed, and requested we include this contractor on all future bids.

Great story, but is public procurement truly ready to embrace a diverse market of suppliers and contractors? While Hispanic businesses make up a significant portion of small business start-ups in the United States, there are many other ethnic groups that also play a vital role in our local economies. This example could have easily included an African-American or Native-American business.

Honestly, when I hear stories about racial discrimination in our ranks that seems to come so easily, I do tend to wonder about our readiness. A respected colleague of mine was mowing the lawn of his newly purchased home when a car stopped and honked. “How much do you charge?” the woman shouted. The homeowner was Gilbert Jalamo. Since this was a predominantly white neighborhood, the woman assumed a Hispanic man must be the hired help. By they way, Gil is a certified professional and one of the highest ranking procurement officials in the Houston area.

Like many others in procurement, I am continually faced with questions that include: “don’t minority businesses cost more?” and “what exactly do those people want from us?” My response is usually, “no, they do not cost more” and “a fair shot at our business.”

So what do we do now? We know that disparity has existed in the past in public contracting (many studies conclude), and that our emerging market of suppliers and contractors is comprised of all races and genders.

My suggestion is that we take a close look at our past experiences and learn from them. How about we first acknowledge that we have room for improvement? That’s a start. We can also realize that the “normal” profile for a contractor is changing. In just about any industry we buy in, there is a highly diverse group of providers. Regardless of what we have done in the past, perhaps we should focus on the best value solution for our organization, regardless of the company’s size, ethnicity or gender.

Maybe the next time someone asks “¿Cómo estás?” with regard to diversity in our procurement practices, we can say “Muy bien, gracias.”
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