

Procurements made easier: Working with DGS can save time and money

THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT of General Services (DGS) is a resource for local governments. As the Commonwealth's centralized agency responsible for the procurement of goods and services, we are available to support your staff as they develop solicitations, explore ways to attract better responses to your business opportunities, and help make your purchases and solicitations more transparent for your citizens.

In Virginia, procurement is governed by a hodgepodge of laws, regulations, ordinances and rules that vary by locality, school board, state agency, institution and authority. The one constant across all those public bodies is the goal of the procurement professional: To obtain high quality goods and services that meet the needs of the body and its citizens at a reasonable cost.

Meet eVA

All state agencies are required by Code to use eVA, the state's electronic procurement system managed by DGS. However, this powerful, convenient tool also is used by nearly 1,000 local government entities. We know that local governments value transparency. eVA provides free, public access to past, current and future procurements while also giving access to detailed information on the rules, regulations, processes and standards behind these procurements so your citizens can feel confident in how their tax dollars are being spent.

We have account executives dedicated to localities and are located throughout the state. They are your procurement office's primary resource. They will provide consulting, assist with the utilization of eVA, help identify vendors registered in your county, city, or town, assist with putting them in touch with the right people related to contracts, fleet, construction, and any other area where they need assistance.

Local procurement officials also can take advantage of eVA's numerous web-based tools such as Quick Quote, a paperless alternative to faxed and telephone quotes that allows them to get electronic bids from suppliers for small-dollar purchases. Other tools include the eM-all online shopping feature, sealed eSourcing, contract management and a variety of analytical reports that allow you to evaluate spending, manage workloads and monitor buying. We also have an award-winning mobile application that puts procurement at users' fingertips.

Overall, more than 13,000 state and local government buyers use eVA to publicize business opportunities, receive quotes for goods and services, and place orders. Currently, there are over 95,000 vendors registered with eVA.

eVa in action

Bedford, VA: Anthony Browning, the Bedford Regional Water Authority's logistics coordinator, needed to purchase a new turbine pump, but every quote he received was nearly twice as expensive as the pump it was replacing.

Browning asked his department head for a few more days and called the Department of General Services' Division of Purchases and Supply (DPS). The next day a DPS account executive helped

Browning place a Quick Quote in eVA, the state's electronic procurement system. The move paid off when a few days later, Browning made the award to a vendor that previously had not served the authority at a price that was nearly \$10,000 less than the paper quotes he had received.

That was in July of 2017. Since that time, Browning and the authority have used eVA more than 110 times to purchase everything from carpeted floor mats for their cubicles to a tri-axle dump truck. Through the end of 2018, the authority had spent more than \$469,000 using eVA and saved tens of thousands of dollars in the process.

"It's probably one of the best systems I've ever worked with," Browning recently told DGS. "It's so easy to use. It only takes a couple times playing with it to feel like old hat. It used to take me a couple-three hours to put out a small bid request; the other day I did two in less than an hour!"

Hanover County: Steven Rusch, the Purchasing Division Director for Hanover County, was looking for a less expensive way to manage the county's contracts. He also wanted to make the contracts and solicitations available to the public. DGS provided Hanover County with a custom link to their solicitations posted in eVA that the county linked from its website. Rusch said the move not only saved the county money and improved transparency, it has helped with contract management.

Contracts

One of the key areas in which we render assistance to localities is in establishing contracts. DGS establishes long-term, statewide contracts that leverage the buying power of state agencies, institutions and local governments to reduce the cost of goods and services. This leveraged buying power results in approximately \$30 million in annual savings. Types of contracts we've assisted with include school buses, office supplies, and fuel. The 2018 General Assembly expanded the use of our fuel contracts to include volunteer fire companies and emergency medical services that are recognized by an ordinance to be a part of the safety program of a county, city, or town.

These contracts provide the highest quality goods and services with minimal cost and risk, as they are compliant with the Virginia Public Procurement Act (VPPA) and legislative requirements, and are usable by all public bodies (which have easy access for ordering through eVA). Many of our contracts are for multiple awards, which offer a variety of vendors from which to choose.

On the other hand, we know there are goods and services you need that we don't have readily available; in these cases, our account executives are ready to help you draft solicitations that follow your local rules.

Training

Our mission to ensure quality, ethical government purchasing extends beyond our more than 100 employees in our procurement division. Through our Virginia Institute of Procurement (VIP), we educate



other state and local public procurement professionals on the essential principles and best practices of contract development and management, supplier relationship management, and advanced knowledge of the Virginia Public Procurement Act and other regulations.

VIP offers professional certification at three levels: Virginia Contracting Associate Officer (VCA); Virginia Contracting Officer (VCO); and the Virginia Contracting Master Program (VCM). More than 1,400 public procurement officials in Virginia have obtained a VCA, with more than 760 VCOs and nearly 50 VCMs, our newest and most advanced certification. We also offer continuing education opportunities to satisfy the recertification requirements.

Our most popular educational opportunity is the annual Public Procurement Forum, which will be held Nov. 17-20, 2019, in Virginia Beach. DGS recently sponsored the 30th Public Procurement Forum, which provided 73 workshops on 48 different topics and was attended by nearly 800 public procurement professionals and over 160 suppliers.

Our goal with our training programs is to enhance the quality of procurements statewide by arming our public procurement professionals with the most up-to-date knowledge, skills and best practices in the field.

Virginia Distribution Center

DGS' procurement division also manages the Virginia Distribution Center (VDC), a cooperative procurement and distribution facility that provides goods and materials to state and local government entities across the Commonwealth.

VDC leverages the collective buying power of state agencies, local governments, mental health and correctional institutions, universities and colleges, and political subdivisions, along with efficient freight methods to stock over 1,000 high quality, low-cost items such as food, janitorial supplies, paper and plastic products, and safety supplies.

Approximately 185 localities and local school districts use VDC. Schools benefit from our statewide milk and dairy contract, which saves money and administrative staff time. This is one of our more than 70 contracts for products that local governments and school systems use.

VDC houses an onsite Quality Assurance Laboratory that randomly tests every product – from toilet paper and flags, to chicken tenders and flashlights – to ensure the products it sells meet specifications.

Other DGS local government resources

The Department of General Services' commitment to local governments does not end with our procurement division. We also serve localities through fleet management, our state and federal surplus programs, and our graphic communications services.

Local governments can take advantage of the DGS Office of Fleet Management Services' contracts for short-term vehicle rentals, as well as our contracts for motor fuels and alternative fuels. Localities also can enroll their vehicles in the Vehicle Management Control Center program, which provides roadside assistance, routine vehicle maintenance, and help with vehicle crashes.

The DGS Office of Surplus Property Management is another great resource for local governments to purchase everything from educational supplies, to office equipment, vehicles, heavy equipment and more for pennies on the dollar. You can visit either our Richmond or Wytheville location.


If you are looking for something special, our Surplus team can go out and find it.

The City of Virginia Beach needed a wrecker and two cargo trucks. The items were originally procured for more than \$378,000 new. The city was able to procure the surplus items from DGS at a cost of \$13,000.

In Middlesex County they were able to procure a boat and 7 pieces of office furniture that originally cost over \$47,000, for a little over \$1,025 from DGS Surplus.

DGS also provides creative services for local governments through its Office of Graphic Communications. OGC can help by designing a new logo, web graphics for social media, brochures, posters, tradeshow materials and more.

Collaboration

We at DGS are grateful to our local government partners and look forward to continuing to work together on procurement opportunities and challenges. 

About the author: Sandra Gill is the Deputy Director at Virginia Department of General Services



Virginia's industry leading e-procurement solution, free to all local government and other public bodies

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