

Program Title: Agency Certification Program

Category: Procurement

State: Nebraska

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During the 2000 legislative session State laws changed requiring the Nebraska Department of Administrative Services, Materiel Division, State Purchasing Bureau to certify the state agencies on procurement practices as part of the requirements to receive direct purchase authority.

The State Purchasing Bureau was assigned the task of developing a certification program. Our first step was to determine the training curriculum. Research was done on State Statutes and Executive Orders from the Governor on procurement. We also checked with other states through NASPO and with NIGP on what was available. NIGP did offer training but was too costly for our budget so it was determined we needed to develop one ourselves.

Our next step was to develop an agenda. While developing the agenda, it was determined that the other divisions within Materiel have an impact on procurement and needed to be part of the certification training. There are six other divisions other than State Purchasing that are part of the Materiel Division, the State Print Shop, Copy Services, Recycling, Surplus Property, Office Supply Bureau, and Mail Services. Since these services involve and affect procurement practices, we included them as part of the certification training.

Due to the amount and type of information being required for the certification process, it was determined that a procurement manual for agency personnel was needed as a guide to use after certification was completed. The purchasing staff divided into process groups with each group having goals and a deadline. The purchasing staff then met and the groups presented their responses to their goals for all to review. Through this process we developed the Procurement and Services Manual(Exhibit 1).

The following is an overview of the agenda:

The certification starts with the Department of Administrative Services Materiel Administrator thanking everyone for attending, letting them know why they are being certified and what services the Materiel Division provides.

State Purchasing Bureau Procurement Manager reviews the statutes, executive orders, and procurement services manual.

Each division within the Materiel Division gives a short overview of the services they offer with ideas on budget reductions. Each division also developed handouts for reference. (Exhibit 2).

The procurement manager reviews specification writing. A standard format for specification was developed by the purchasing teams when the manual was created(Exhibit 3).

The certification class is divided into small groups with a State Purchasing buyer assigned to each group to guide them through the specification writing process. Each group is given a product by the State Buyer to develop a specification per the new standardized format. The small groups then get back together and review each others specification.

Standardization of the format for specifications creates a more efficient process for the vendors to bid, the agencies to review, and for State Purchasing to award. The vendors see the same format and become familiar with it. Standard format allows for a faster review time of bids by agencies and State Purchasing. By requesting the vendors to respond to each specification it is easier to determine if specifications are met. It also makes it easier for the buyers at State Purchasing to see if the specification was restrictive or sole source in nature.

A format for specification makes it easier for the agency procurement staff. In some cases they didn't know where to begin. They can now use our format and fill in the blanks.

The procurement manager does a short review and administers a test(Exhibit 4) to verify the training result.

We have had more than 125 agency personnel complete the training with all agencies being certified at this time. We offer the certification training quarterly for new hires or for anyone wanting a refresher course. There was an evaluation form completed after each session. (Exhibit 5)

Since the agency's staff has been trained, the vendors needed to know how to deal with State of Nebraska procurement. The state purchasing staff conducted three(3) vendors seminars throughout Nebraska informing them how to work with state government. We included other public entities, the University of Nebraska, and city and local governments as part of the training facilitators. By advertizing in local newspapers and having the governor's office promote to local chambers of commerce, the response was excellent. The vendors have requested we have one again this year, our goal is to continue with these. During the planning stage of the vendors' seminars it was evident we needed a manual for them to use as a reference. Again, the Purchasing Staff divided into teams with goals to develop certain portions of the manual. The Purchasing Staff met and the groups presented the responses to their goals for everyone to review. Through this process we developed the Vendors Manual. (Exhibit 6)

Nebraska State Purchasing Bureau has been able to reduce their staff of buyers from seven(7) to six(6). The result was a savings of over \$40,000 per year. Even with the reduction in staff, process time on purchases through the State Purchasing Bureau has reduced from and average of 22 days before the certification to 16 days after. (Exhibit 7). The request for proposals for service contracts have increased from 26 to 35 with product contracts increasing from 179 to 192. There was a reduction in individual purchases due to increase in contracts and change in processes.

Involving the other divisions within Material in the certification process has contributed to

many other cost savings and improvements. The agencies have saved thousands of dollars in mailing fees. Rather than sending everything first class, the mail room decides the best way. It has help increase the amount of product being recycled from an average of 53.3 tons per month to an average of 70.2 tons per month. Agencies better understand the services and charges from the State Print Shop and Copy Services Area and many learned what services were available.

Agencies have since requested State Purchasing to give the certification training to additional staff after they were certified. State Purchasing conducted an additional training at the State Patrol Training Academy for Administrative Services Building Division and at the Game and Parks Division.

By training government employees to know who to ask for assistance, what state law requires, and how processes work, Nebraska state government has become more efficient and cost effective in saving tax dollars and conducting business wisely.

