

County of San Diego: 2020 CSAC Challenge Awards Executive Summary

COVID-19 EMERGENCY PROCUREMENT RESPONSE AND APPROACH

OVERVIEW: The County of San Diego implemented online surveys to efficiently collect interest, identify availability, and obtain quotes from COVID-19 suppliers and service providers.

CHALLENGE: During public health emergencies, the County of San Diego supplements the local hospital systems with supplies, personal protective equipment (PPE), and other medical equipment. This is in addition to the items required by County departments to keep employees safe and maintain critical services to the public. The COVID-19 pandemic was unique in that every government agency, business, organization and individual on earth simultaneously needed the same supplies and PPE, creating shortages, supply chain disruptions, and dramatic price fluctuations. COVID-19 also created unique requirements, including hotel rooms for quarantine and isolation purposes and meal deliveries to vulnerable populations so that they could shelter in place. Agencies that were able to accelerate their procurement process were in a better position to acquire critical supplies, PPE and services and at a better price. At the same time, the accelerated process still had to meet all federal, State and local requirements to ensure maximization of available funding and resources.

SOLUTION: Since the start of the COVID-19 public health emergency, the County has been inundated with calls and emails from prospective vendors. Many were legitimate offers, but some exhibited price gouging, offered counterfeit items, or were outright scams. In order to maximize the time and resources of procurement staff, a filtering mechanism was needed to identify and prioritize the most promising offers. The Department of Purchasing and Contracting (DPC) created online forms using the popular SurveyMonkey website to achieve this purpose. Forms were created for supplies and PPE, hotel and motel rooms, and restaurants and caterers for meal delivery. Each form provided information detailing basic requirements and direct links to key resources such as program guides and regulations. Questions included all pertinent information a buyer would need to rank and identify the best value for the County. Prospective vendors could also upload documents such as technical specifications, menus, and signed procurement forms.

Purchasing staff were then able to export all responses to a spreadsheet that could be easily sorted, filtered and searched. Potential vendors were identified quickly based on price, product type, service area, amenities and many other factors. This process saved substantial staff hours and resources that would have been required to reach

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out to every potential vendor individually. It also provided the County insight into current local market conditions in a format that was conducive to data analysis.

INNOVATION: Public procurement is not known to be a flexible or fast process. Its reputation is quite the opposite. However, by using an emergency procurement approach that was accessible to potential vendors 24/7 and could be changed or updated at any time, the County of San Diego was able to secure critical goods and services quickly and in sufficient quantities, oftentimes weeks before other agencies. The County kept pace with rapidly changing conditions and demands by leveraging existing and familiar tools and using them in new ways. This was critical in the County's overall response to the pandemic and allowed hospitals to maintain and expand capacity while reducing the spread of the disease and its impact to residents.

RESULTS: Since the County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was activated on March 11, 2020, DPC has purchased over 30.1 million and distributed 13.8 million units of supplies and PPE. In the first three months alone, when the items were at their most scarce and difficult to find, 17.2 million items were ordered and over 7.8 million items were distributed. The supplies and PPE survey received 1,292 offers from interested vendors and the hotel/motel survey acquired information on 16,133 available rooms from locations all around San Diego County. This was in addition to the 2,000 rooms the County had already contracted for COVID-19 related purposes. The County also received 459 responses for its Great Plates Delivered programs for meal delivery services. The hotel/motel and meal delivery contracts were awarded to local businesses heavily impacted by COVID-19 and helped support the local economy as well as residents.

REPLICABILITY: This approach to emergency procurement is highly replicable. Online survey tools such as SurveyMonkey are already widely in use and licenses are inexpensive. They are easy to use, have a low learning curve, and are highly adaptable.

PROJECT/PROGRAM CONTACT:

Jack Pellegrino, CPPO, CPCM
Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting
Jack.Pellegrino@sdcounty.ca.gov; (858) 505-6562