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How My CAP Saved Me

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LETTER FROM THE CEO

Charging Into NAEP’s New Year

Doreen Murner
CEO, NAEP

As the year winds to a close, we often look back and take stock on our year and look ahead to what the new year will hold. Much like for you, 2013 has been a very busy non-stop year for NAEP. As you gear up for the new year know that NAEP is ready to help you succeed. I’d like to share updates on some of our exciting initiatives rolling out in 2014.

After considerable thought and input by a task force of NAEP members and after extensive testing of the software, designed by Unimarket, the NAEP Contract Library Portal is in the final stages of completion before launching at the 2014 Annual Meeting in May.

This portal is a searchable database of procurement contracts from GPO’s and suppliers across the country. It will give you the ability to search on a wide variety of purchasing parameters and then compare currently available contracts, including those outside your location that you might not normally know about.

You’ll be able to see the details of the contract including pricing schedules, shipping terms, and contract terms, among other search details. When you’re ready, you can select the contract right for your institution.

The NAEP Contract Library Portal is essentially automating a business function that you do every day—namely searching for contract information from disparate locations. The portal is a one-stop shop designed to decrease the amount of staff time and energy you spend searching and comparing contracts.

The NAEP Spend Metrics initiative, in partnership with Spikes Cavell, will look at the broader spend analytics across all of higher education. This white paper, which will be published in the first quarter of 2014, will give us a bird’s-eye view in understanding current higher education spend, such as spend by category or by various spending patterns. We will be able to analyze the data by small school, large school or public vs. private. NAEP will host webinars digging deeper into that data throughout 2014.

Another exciting initiative rolling out in 2014 is a new ERP system and NAEP website. NAEP is long overdue for an upgrade to our association management software and this new cloud-based system will help us stay agile and more adaptable in an ever-changing business climate. The NAEP website will sit on top of this new platform and promises to be more intuitive and easier to navigate, allowing you to find what you need quickly.

We’ll be creating robust forums for discussion topics like supplier diversity, sustainability and strategic procurement, to name just a few hot topics. Launching at the Annual Meeting in Louisville in May 2014, we will hold several tutorials ahead of the redesign to make sure you’re comfortable using the new system.

And one final update on a project this year that promises to inform your work into 2014 and beyond, the 2013 NAEP Innovators Forum White Paper: Procurement and the Impact of Technology and Expectations is currently published on the members-only section of the website.

Take some time over the holidays to read this thoughtful research paper that creates a roadmap you can use to improve outcomes regarding the application of procurement technology within your department and your institution.

Have a safe, happy and healthy new year. Come back recharged because NAEP will be charging into 2014 and beyond!
Supplier Relationships—Arms-Length or Hand-in-Hand?

by Cory Harms, M.S.
Iowa State University

As purchasing professionals, we have a very interesting relationship with vendors. At times we need to be objective, neutral, and distant, but we also must keep in mind that we rely on them for ideas, information, and service. We try to be at arms-length during the bid process but need to be hand-in-hand when it comes time for contract execution. This is especially true as we move into an e-commerce relationship in which the transaction process needs to be seamless, and opportunities for efficiency mean working closely together.

When I started in purchasing, it seemed that we always wanted to keep vendors at a disadvantage. Negotiation meant getting the upper hand. At NAEP conferences, it meant keeping the suppliers separate from the Members (except during the vendor show). We kept information sacred and only shared with a vendor when necessary. Thankfully, I perceive that we are entering a new era, as we work more closely with vendors to find mutual advantages.

Vendors are, arguably, our most valuable resource for information. As purchasing professionals, we should think about strengthening our outreach to that community to help us improve our processes. I have some suggestions for those of you who may be leaning in this direction.

Focus Groups/Vendor Information Meetings

To find out if your bid process, website, payment process, or purchase order process encourage responsiveness from good vendors, hold sessions to educate them and to elicit feedback. What can you do to make your bid process more user-friendly? What information are they needing from your website and what do they have a hard time finding? Do they find it difficult to get paid timely? Asking these questions may help you find ways to improve. You may be so locked into your own way of doing things that you don’t see what might make things better.

Requests for Information

Sometimes you may put out a bid and have no clue about the item, market conditions, changes in technology, and other developments. That is the perfect opportunity to ask the vendor community what is new, what is changing, and what information it needs to know in order to respond to your bid intelligently. This can take the form of contacting prospective vendors and informally asking them questions. If you have concerns about fairness, you can issue an official Request for Information (RFI) and ask for the same information. The bottom line is that you can use the vendor community to put out a better bid and get better responses.

Sustainability/Green Practices

You, like many, are probably being asked to find ways to support your institution’s green initiatives. You may ask for information in bids or specify green products. You may be even more effective by meeting with current vendors to discuss ways to improve your existing contracts. Can you move to bulk shipments to save fuel? Can you eliminate or reduce some packaging? Can you streamline order processes to eliminate paper? Are there products you can substitute that are less impactful? Chances are good that your vendors will have useful answers and helpful suggestions.

Improve Existing Contracts

Existing contracts are often overlooked for improvement. If no one is complaining, you probably don’t touch a contract until renewal time. This is another opportunity to ask vendors if they can offer ways to improve. There may be new options that they offer for on-site stores, freezers, or vended products. They may have new e-commerce options, or there may be any number of new offerings that you are not taking advantage of.

Vendors are a valuable resource—one that I think many of us don’t utilize as much as we could. I know I am trying to work more closely with many of our vendors to try to continually improve our contract efficiency. I want to reach out to them to find out how we can do things better. I encourage you to take a moment to think of ways you can engage your vendor community and start mining that valuable resource.

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I am sure that, as purchasing professionals, we have run into complications with a contract after it has been signed. I am also fairly sure that many of us have had a contract that we thought was running smoothly. No complaints from the department. No complaints from the vendor (no news means good news, right?). Then we find out later that one or both are unhappy.

I experienced this exact situation as a new agent taking over an existing janitorial contract. The contract was up for renewal, and the department mentioned issues concerning the level of service it was receiving. The problem was that these issues were not communicated to the vendor, so the vendor was never given an opportunity to correct them. The department agreed to renew the contract and to provide the vendor with feedback about performance throughout the year. As another year passed and the contract was up for renewal again, the department came to me with the same story. The quality of work was still below standards, but the department still had not discussed the issues. At this point, I realized that just issuing the contract was not enough; I needed to help the department manage the contract. I decided to do some research and create a contract administration plan (CAP) that I could use to help this contract and future ones.

Whether we use spreadsheets or documents, the CAP is more than a piece of paper. It is a process—a way to evaluate and review the contract over its life. This process starts at the bid stage by making sure we understand the needs of the department and then articulate them in the RFP. The CAP process also includes adding requirements in the contract resulting from the RFP and creating a plan for review and evaluation throughout the contract’s life. It should have a way of measuring the results at contract end in order to create a better RFP and contract for the next cycle. We often spend so much time on creating the proposal and awarding/writing the contract that we may tend to lose sight of our administration of it. Contract administration is an important part of the process because it ensures that we are monitoring performance (that we get what we pay for) and because it can reduce the risk of future problems and possible legal issues. The most important part of the plan is requiring timelines for communicating, so that issues aren’t allowed to linger or worsen.

It is important that the CAP start at the beginning of the procurement process. It is at this point that we are developing the scope of work, specifications, and expectations. This is the critical time to identify the performance-based aspects so that the CAP can be put into place directly upon award.

When writing a CAP, we need to determine its purpose and scope. Much of this information will come from the Statement of Work. We also need to consider what is not in the contract. We need to anticipate the problems that could occur and have a plan for dealing with them. For example, if a dispute arises (e.g., poor performance, failure to deliver, or nonconforming goods), we should describe how it will be resolved. This may already be in the contract, but we can provide more detail, such as describing who will be contacted and, if the issue is not resolved timely, what further actions will be taken.

We should also identify each person who will be involved (his/her responsibilities and contact information). Everyone involved should know whom to contact for issues, questions, and everyday things that arise. This will serve as a quick reference tool for everyone involved, or for someone new stepping into the contract. By stating these roles in the CAP, we can avoid someone saying “I didn’t know I was supposed to do that!”
As I learned in the contract mentioned above, it is important to set a timeline for communicating with the department and the vendor and to provide feedback to both sides. The amount and frequency of meetings will depend on the type of contract. The meetings may be based on a timeline or on milestones. If the work is seasonal, we may not need to meet during the off months but may want a meeting (1) before the busy season starts, (2) once or twice while work is being performed, and (3) at the end of the season to plan for the next season. If there are no clear dates for meetings, we might ask the department and the vendor how often they want to meet. If they are not willing to suggest a time right then, we could offer to contact them later.

If our plan includes meetings or reviews, it should include information about how meetings will be scheduled, who will schedule them, who will attend, and how often they are required. A kick-off meeting should be scheduled at the beginning of the contract to formally introduce (in person, if possible) all of the contacts. We should provide copies of the contract to all parties and discuss the contract and scope of work in detail. Future review meetings should focus on vendor performance and areas that are going well or in need of improvement. We may ask the vendor for input on areas of process improvement (s/he may work with many other customers and may be able to provide advice). If there are any issues, we should discuss them timely. This will go a long way towards preserving the relationship.

If other communications are necessary during the contract period, the CAP can include information on the best forms of communication for the parties involved. Whether it is by phone, email, or an online portal. Sometimes getting the vendor and the department to communicate effectively can be difficult. They should not need to go to us every time there is a problem. They need to learn to work through issues and come to us only when they cannot come to an agreement. Email is not always effective and can create confusion, especially if it is the only way the department and vendor are communicating. We can incorporate a chain of command, if necessary (e.g., if the account manager is not handling issues, the district/regional manager should be contacted, and so on). The same should apply for issues that the vendor may have with our institution. If the department contact is not able to handle the issues, the vendor should have instructions on who to contact and what actions to take.

The CAP should include a list of any requirements that the vendor must meet. Examples could be certificates of insurance, affidavits of compliance for employee background checks, payment bonds, parking permits, etc. Identify how each item should be submitted or obtained and who to contact.

The CAP may also describe how the contract will be monitored and who will be responsible.

At this point, I realized that just issuing the contract was not enough; I needed to help the department manage the contract.
Some examples are a daily log, a check sheet, or progress reports. Some questions to consider are: Is someone going to check each item in every shipment? How will each item be evaluated and accepted? What will be done with items that are not acceptable? What milestones or timelines may be used?

The final part of the plan should include a checklist of the items that need to be completed before the contract can be closed out. This could include final deliveries or work to be performed. A final evaluation or exit interview may also be conducted to discuss lessons learned and general performance.

Now, this may seem like it could create a lot of extra work (and who has time for that?). The question is how often do we deal with these types of issues—every day? How much time do we spend resolving issues and disputes? Do we get to plan those into our schedule? No! By identifying and addressing these potential issues in a CAP and by setting the meetings upfront, we are able to plan, saving time in the end.

Every contract is different, and our level of involvement with each one is going to differ. We should be sure to work with the department to figure out how involved we should be. Some departments will manage the contract and schedule the meetings, and we may only need to check in periodically. If we try to be too involved, the department may feel we are micromanaging. But, it may not be opposed to the vendor taking charge (I have a vendor that schedules meetings, tracks open issues on a spreadsheet, and emails notes after each meeting). On the flip side, we should not underestimate the level of involvement the department needs from us. Some departments will want us to be more involved. If so, it may be helpful for us to include a document to record meeting notes, attendees, the date, and follow-up actions. This provides an electronic file that can be referred to if any issues arise. A spreadsheet may also be another method of doing this. Setting calendar tasks are also good reminders.

Sometimes, even with all of the work we put into a good CAP, we will still have contracts that fall apart due to poor performance or because the vendor is not a good fit. The benefit of the plan is that we will know things and can react quickly. Obviously, a CAP is not needed on every contract. Whether or not depends on the type of contract, the nature of the work, and the length of the engagement. When a CAP is needed, it can help assure that our end-users are satisfied. Our role is to figure out how to make that happen, and a well-structured CAP can save our contract by encouraging open communication, providing a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, and identifying and minimizing potential risks.

Stacy Sassman, CPPB, is a Purchasing Agent at Iowa State University. She graduated from Iowa State University in Business Management and has a background in customer service, retail management, and sales. She serves on the NAEP Pro-D Committee and has presented at both regional and national NAEP meetings. Email: ssassman@iastate.edu.
Vendor Orientation: Putting Vendors on the Right Path

by Cory Harms, M.S.
Iowa State University

Penny Davis
University of Colorado

The vendor orientation/vendor informational session is becoming a more common practice for purchasing departments. It can be a great way to connect with new vendors to help them navigate the often confusing waters of doing business with an institution. It can also help long-time vendors better understand the process or correct things they may have misunderstood. This article will give two perspectives—from Iowa State University and University of Colorado—on how to hold an effective vendor session.

Iowa State University

Vendor outreach can be a very valuable tool to help you find new sources, establish better relationships with existing vendors, educate the entire vendor community on how to better interact with the University in procurement transactions, and get ideas from the vendor community on how you, as a Purchasing entity, can better communicate or work with them. It is important that, when you get vendors to come to a session, you give them the most value you can. At Iowa State University (ISU), some of the things found to be helpful are described below:

Give an idea of the scope of university procurement: It may help to explain the volume of what you buy and the types of things the university purchases. You may purchase things unique to your institution that they may not know about. If you have a power plant, police force, farms, hospitals, dental schools, vet colleges, or similar specialty departments, it helps to lay out all of the areas that procurement covers.

Explain the avenues of procurement: This is a great time to let vendors know the accepted forms of procurement. Describe your PO process, p-card program, eprocurement and any other qualified forms of procurement. Let them know what not to do as well. It is also helpful to describe the payment process and the importance of purchase order numbers and sending invoices to the correct places.

Talk about the bid process and how to compete under the bid limit: Explain your bid limits, bid process, and the methods for contacting departments to market themselves for purchases that occur under the bid limits. If your campus is closed to solicitation, then this is a good time to explain the policy and how they can still promote themselves through the purchasing department.

Plug your website: Since most of us place a great deal of information on our websites, this is a good time to show vendors how to access the parts of the site that relate to them. It is helpful to create a site for vendors to find vendor-related information and links. Items that you can demonstrate related to your website might include vendor registration, bid postings, and staff information. Include an area with important links, emails and contacts.

Other helpful information: This is also a good time to give brief information on tax exemption and how to get tax-exempt forms, to discuss when the institution might need certificates of insurance, and how to deal with trademark issues if logos, nameplates, or icons need to be used.

Look for other agencies or university departments that can contribute: To give your vendors the most bang for their buck, you may be able to have other agencies or entities that you work with (other universities, municipalities, state government) participate and give a short presentation on their procurement department. You may also have departments in your institution that offer vendor services or do outreach. Purchasing at Iowa State partners with the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) Purchasing Department and with an ISU procurement assistance program to do a joint session.

Introduce your staff and agents: Leave time at the end of the session to bring in purchasing agents and staff who are available to introduce themselves and answer questions. Make space available for vendors to meet and discuss things with agents or staff.

At Iowa State University, these sessions have been extremely helpful, first emphasizing outreach to MBE/WBE and HUB zone businesses. This improved communications with that vendor base and created a better working relationship. The next priority was the local, small businesses, and then, finally, all businesses in the database. It has increased ISU’s sourcing pool and has created a better relationship with, and procurement experience for, many long-time vendors.

ISU’s vendor sessions are patterned after those of the University of Colorado (CU), one of the pioneers in offering a comprehensive vendor session. Some of CU’s insights follow in the rest of this article.

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Vendor Orientation, continued from page 13

University of Colorado

The concept of offering a vendor orientation session is more widely accepted today than when CU’s article previously appeared in the 2007 Procurement Journal. Although the benefits of such a program remain strong, there are new tools and resources available that can help make your presentation a higher value product. Consider the improvements discussed below.

Offer orientation materials electronically: Offer a registration form or link on your website and allow electronic submission. Send a confirmation email that lists session specifics. Vendors find maps and parking directions to be helpful. Attendance will be better if you also send a reminder before the session. It is likely that you already include technical procurement information (such as rules and definitions) on your website, but you might also consider having other materials available electronically for vendors who are not able to attend a session. This can include an electronic brochure (“Doing Business with…”), a “Quick Links” sheet for commonly requested items (such as individual campus urls to facilities management or purchasing agent commodity assignments).

Follow up with feedback requests: Let the attendees know their comments are valued. If orientation content is not informative and useful, the objective of helping the vendor become better able to work with your school has not been met.

Build relationships with business community resources: Establish complementary relationships with your local and regional business community. Used wisely, this exchange model leads to success for all parties. Many business resources offer free counseling services for vendors and are happy to help you market your orientation sessions. The University of Colorado communicates routinely with staff from the Small Business Administration (SBA), Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Colorado Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC), and many other business development organizations. As a result, CU Procurement staff are often asked to participate in panel discussions or breakout sessions at business development events.

Offer sessions at multiple locations: If your institution is spread across multiple campuses with some distance in between, it can be beneficial to offer orientations at remote locations. Many business resources have meeting space available and will allow you to use their space at no charge. This will likely reach a greater pool of potential attendees, since not every vendor is able to travel to centralized offices. It increases the opportunity for vendors to be better educated about your process so that they can better respond to solicitations. It can increase the potential for greater competition.

Set the orientation schedule annually: Send it to business community contacts and ask that it be included on their calendars.

Integrate virtual resources into the presentation: Your laptop is up and running, so use it to maximum effect. Don’t stop at PowerPoint! Spice up your presentation with a few clicks to a current bid posting or a live page on your website.

Coordinate vendor interface with procurement staff: Outreach takes on a whole new dimension when you incorporate some face time. Work with your procurement team in advance to offer short, individual meetings with vendors after orientation.

Demystify eprocurement: This phrase is well known but can instill fear in the heart of a vendor who is not experienced (and even some who are). Orientation is your opportunity to describe an electronic procurement environment and dispel the fear of something new or different.

As you can see, there are many benefits to providing vendor information sessions. Either author would be happy to provide information to Members who want to start a program. Contact information is provided in their author bios.

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Seems like only yesterday the new buzzword on campus was “sustainability,” and university departments were charged with identifying current problems, anticipating future challenges, and developing solutions toward this goal. Most institutions created sustainability committees, and some even made the funding available to hire additional staff to take on the associated tasks and deliver results. Administrations and IT departments developed systems to capture real data, and this information served to educate committees about those areas that would provide the most valuable payoffs while allowing for quick implementation. With this shift in preferences, suppliers began responding to the campus opportunities created by this new focus.

Accountability for undertaking and accomplishing these efforts was established, in large part, by the American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), which was formed in 2007. More than 670 higher education presidents have adopted ACUPCC, embracing disciplines and processes that seek to eliminate the net greenhouse gas emissions from their campuses. As a result, many colleges and universities began planning, financing, and implementing a host of energy-efficient and renewable energy projects. Along with that, they have developed reporting procedures aimed at measuring success.

This quest drastically changed the demands on campus, and procurement departments began to develop policies targeted at sourcing goods and services sustainably, measuring success across the entire supply chain. In turn, these requirements affected the throughput practices of suppliers; they have influenced product development, design, and manufacturing.

It Takes Two to Achieve Sustainability
Sustainable procurement on campus isn’t just about buying solar panels and installing green roofs; it’s about partnering with companies that have outstanding environmental credentials. Not only are suppliers required to propose environmentally friendly products, they also need to manufacture them in a manner that offers measurable sustainable efficiency in all areas of operations.

U.S. colleges alone spend billions annually on different products to help fulfill this mission. Institutions are working collectively with their supply bases and internal departments to incorporate these vital environmental, social, and economic concerns into procurement decisions, which assist the campus communities in evaluating total cost of ownership rather than merely initial cost of purchase. A great example is the University of Kansas Sustainability Plan, completed in 2011. According to Jeffrey R. Sev-
leads with cutting-edge energy conservation and proactive energy reduction and alternative energy programs for the entire university complex. Many of our academic and administrative units are also contributing sustainable specifications, which are progressive and competitive.”

Michigan State University (MSU) has taken a similar systems approach by encouraging collaboration among faculty and staff from various disciplines to address on-campus environmental and consumption issues. This approach has included dividing the work into four critical areas: water, energy, food, and supply chain. A subcommittee including faculty, staff, and students has been created to address each of these four areas.

“In parallel with this effort, we decided to carefully analyze our spend data and partner with an external consultant to identify and measure our Scope 3 emission hot-spots, evaluating key industry sectors with the most concentrated spend,” said Kim Kokenakes, C.P.M, Director of University Services at MSU. Greenhouse gases (GHGs) are classified into three different scopes, based upon the source of emissions. “This activity has helped identify opportunities for focus and engagement with MSU suppliers. Additionally, a baseline was developed, allowing for metrics that can highlight improvements in related GHGs. During the second collection of supplier information, water utilization was added, in addition to GHGs.”

Kokenakes explained that MSU also recently partnered with the Michigan Economic Development Council (MEDC) to expand opportunities for Michigan companies to do business with MSU. In fact, earlier this year, MSU established a goal of 50 percent spend level within the state of Michigan. “Institutionally, there is a strong orientation toward sourcing locally and within Michigan,” Kokenakes explained. “MSU’s success can be measured using new technology advancements that provide the ability to track spend by country, state, county, and community.”

**For Suppliers, the Message Has Been Received**

Today, professionals will be hard-pressed to find a major global organization that isn’t incorporating sustainability into its daily practices. Most companies recognize that compliance with emission-reporting requirements is only a part of being environmentally and socially responsible. They are closely analyzing their commitment to community, recycling, human and labor rights, natural resources, stakeholders and their supply chains.

Some companies, like Interface, Inc., are already committed to becoming carbon neutral, and it is halfway there. As part of its Mission Zero commitment, Interface is dedicated to eliminating negative environmental impact by 2020. Grainger, Inc. publically discloses its carbon footprint and offers more than 29,000 products identified as green. The company also has Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design (LEED) facilities and is striving to improve every year. FedEx was recognized among the top twenty 20 commercial solar-power users in the U.S. by the Solar Energy Industries Association in September 2012, and it has many practices in place toward its sustainable commitment.

A recent report developed by Second Nature and NACUBO uncovered some interesting findings. Most notably:

College campuses are drivers of the market transformation: The U.S. higher-education sector represents budgets totaling $350 billion annually—about 2.5 percent of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP).

Higher education has the capacity to create new and better markets for goods and services: College and university campuses not only possess the purchasing power to encourage emerging and local energy markets, but they are also in a position to sustain these markets. In the same way that the movement toward local food sourcing has, in many regions, brought back the local farm through assurances of a steady buyer (e.g., campus dining services), higher education institutions can be a stabilizing force as a buyer of localized energy development, which in turn can spur innovation and small-business job growth with long-term investments in wind, solar, geothermal, biomass, and bio-methane in particular.

The challenges of sustainability are a new normal in institutional day-to-day operations. Campuses are voting with their policies, and suppliers are getting the message. Businesses recognize that it is essential to act with responsibility throughout the entire supply chain because they see the value of building scalable sustainable relationships with their customers, and colleges see value in expanding their interaction with suppliers beyond just transactions. Tapping into supplier expertise and capabilities drives innovation, improves quality, and encourages the exchange of insights about trends and best practices.

This is a moral obligation to ensure that the right choices are made to affect an even greater change for the future. Perhaps the following paragraph from President Obama’s Climate Action Plan sums it up best:

“Climate change represents one of the greatest challenges of our time, but it is a challenge uniquely suited to America’s strengths. Our scientists will design new fuels, and our farmers will grow them. Our engineers will devise new sources of energy, our workers will build them, and our businesses will sell them. All of us need to do our part. If we embrace this challenge, we will not just create new jobs and new industries and keep America on the cutting edge; we will save lives, protect and preserve our treasured natural resources, cities, and coastlines for future generations.”

Across any campus horizon, the opportunities are endless.

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**Judy Schaffer** is the Director of Regional Contracts-Mid Atlantic, as well as the National Director of Social Responsibility, for E&I Cooperative Purchasing. Her responsibilities include overseeing all interior product contracts, as well as sustainability initiatives to serve E&I’s membership. Prior to joining the Cooperative, Judy served as the Director of Purchasing of Hartford Community College. She has also served on the NAEP Board of Directors, the NAEP Editorial Board, Sustainability Committee, Membership Committee, and as President for the MD/DC/VA region. Email: jschaffer@eandi.org.
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sent out an email recently to the NAEP listserve to see what our colleagues have been doing that is new or different. I received a number of interesting responses.

Patricia Reich of East Stroudsburg University seems to think that higher education, along with corporate America, may be re-thinking outsourcing and off-shore buying. There are problems associated with buying overseas, such as long lead-times, complicated logistics, lack of quality control, and export control compliance issues. Buying local helps to create a more positive relationship with the local community, provides a welcome boost to the local economy, and helps schools with some green initiatives, since there would be less of a carbon footprint.

Here at the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC), we used to order envelopes from an overseas source. The envelopes would literally come on the slow boat from China. The lead-time was very long and, if there was a problem with the quality, it took forever to get it resolved. We have now started using a domestic local supplier. They cost a little more, but there are a lot fewer hassles.

Marianne Peffall of West Chester University said that her school is part of a pilot program for using single-use accounts. These accounts are used to make a one-time payment to a supplier using an electronic card. The benefits include process savings, better controls, cash stays in the university accounts longer, and there is a potential for rebates and/or cash discounts. It will be interesting to see how the pilot goes.

Tammy Blose of Milton Hershey School says that it is in the process of converting its paper forms to electronic forms. She said that approvals for invoices that are for blanket purchase orders are done electronically, so that Accounts Payable can make payment.

Pitt Community College has implemented a document imaging system that has really changed its filing system. Wade Quinn says that Purchasing & Accounts Payable used to have two separate filing systems in two different buildings. Document transfers took place via interoffice mail or email. Now both departments share the same electronic filing system. They have access to any and all documents that have been imported into the system. Purchasing has a separate filing system for bid documents. It can input the current data as it receives them and will be importing existing files over the next year. It also has plans to allow Facilities access in the future so that it can enter its invoices and contracts.

Are we finally past the time where we view suppliers as adversaries? Burr Millsap of the University of Oklahoma seems to think so. He views the selection of a strategic supplier as similar to the hiring of a key employee because of the increased focus on strategic sourcing and supply chain management. Maybe we can finally start to take our focus off of just cost alone and put it back on overall value, as it should be. What do you think?

As always, John Riley of Arizona State University has come up with some innovative ideas. His question is, “Who has more expertise, buyer or supplier?” He thinks that instead of developing specifications in which we tell the supplier which specific items the buyer wants, we should state our expectations and then allow the supplier to say how it will meet them. The supplier should also state how it will measure its performance so that both the buyer and the supplier will know whether or not the expectations are being met.

This idea definitely has merit, since we are all moving toward strategic sourcing. Also, all procurement professionals have areas in which we are not experts. We have to rely on people from other departments to supply needed expertise. Now is the time to use the suppliers’ knowledge base as well.

John’s second idea is for web-based supplier performance measurement. For example, a custom contractor has an independent website to be used by department employees to measure performance, make complaints and make compliments.

This reminds me of Angie’s List, the website that people can use to choose to select contractors or to leave their comments about contractors they have already used. Of course, John’s idea would be more specialized and vendor- or job-specific. It would make the relationship between school and supplier much more manageable.

Although, maybe there will be a time where NAEP Members have a version of Angie’s List just for us. It would certainly keep the suppliers on their toes.

The third idea from John is for reverse auctions in which we tell the supplier which specific product to bid based on what the procurement department has determined is an acceptable equivalent. In other words, Supplier A bids Chair X and Supplier B bids Chair Y. We could purchase the lowest price chair because we have already determined that they are equivalent.

That is for now. What you think of these ideas? Also, if you have any other ideas please let me know. Thanks.
Is It Time To Rethink Vendor Relations?

by Brian K. Yeoman

Having spent more than half of my adult life in the purchasing profession, I wonder if we need to rethink our role with regard to vendor relations. Many of us, myself included, were inculcated in the belief that purchasing officials must remain independent, free of obligation, and above suspicion. Our impartiality and fairness could not be compromised, and this held equally to users whose needs were served by purchasing. When it came to vendors, this relationship was taken to the extreme to ensure that there never existed an opportunity for the perception of compromise in our actions and deeds.

To ensure that this was communicated to anyone and everyone in the supply chain, we all adopted some form of a formal written set of ground rules that described the properly distanced relationship between purchasing employees and vendors. Typically these rules set forth standards of behavior and a code of conduct to govern both parties. This deep-seated moral imperative was not only baked into policy and procedure, it has been codified in law. It applied solely to purchasing professionals and excluded all others in the decision and spending hierarchy.

The purchasing profession’s mindset now seems to be that, above all other matters, maintaining integrity and credibility requires provisions for and control over a number of disparate factors, but it almost always begins with vendor relations. For example, there must be a workable procedure for vendors to file complaints and receive prompt and fair hearings, and there must be control over circumvention of prescribed purchasing procedures. Our obsession with prohibiting meaningful two-way engagements is why I submit it is time to reevaluate our relationship with the vendor community. We must acknowledge that we are highly dependent upon it in order to provide our value-adding services to our colleges and universities. It is folly to treat vendors as if they are the enemy and, therefore, not engage with them.

We extend this separation complex to a distance even greater than arm’s length. We impose it on other facets, such as the review and approval process for the award for contracts, inspection and testing, the use of bonds, back-door selling, audits, breach and default, documentation and public records, cost and price analysis, prequalification of vendors, vendor evaluations, assessments of performance, and suspension and disbarment.

In this era of the globalization and the emergence of public private partnerships (3P), joint ventures, licensing agreements and outsourcing, it is no wonder that vendors (and many within the purchasing profession) are confused about what the old rules really mean. It practically screams for a call to action—a time to rethink how we want this critical interdependence to move forward in the 21st century and lose its 19th century Victorian nature.

Every interaction between a vendor and a purchasing department employee provides an opportunity to build rapport, respect, and reputation. To begin to establish a new model, purchasing professionals should foster:

- Mutual confidence and trust—In the statements and the intent of both parties.
- Mutual recognition of a common set of goals—Demands must not exist; reasonable notice must be possible in the event of changes. There should be a willingness to waive or modify nonessential details of an agreement if modifications do not materially affect quality or service.
- Mutual understanding of the conditions and challenges facing both parties—Of both usage and production.
- Mutual recognition that profit is what makes it possible to be in business—The price willingly paid for the vendor to be there tomorrow.
- Open, honest, complete, and clear communication—It must become the most valued principle, not obsessing over arm’s length.

The nature of the beast is that there will always be opportunities to improve upon understanding the need, application, and use of the purchase, its scope and limitations, the outlook for continued need, and any special requirements. Why not embrace this as our value-adding paradigm, recognizing that the sources best equipped to assist us and our institutions are in fact the vendors? Let’s embrace a much more partnership-based approach to the acquisition of goods and services for our employers.

A Good Vendor Relationship Is Worth Its Weight in Gold

Vendors have a legitimate right to know who we are. Be candid in identifying the purchasing staff in terms of whether they are general agents or special agents and the extent of their authority. More important, identify the objective. Articulate a vision in which the vendors can come to think of the change in relationship as one in which the chief purchasing official is asking them to become so intertwined with the institution’s goals that they could begin to think of themselves as employees.

We absolutely cannot escape the fact that buyers are dependent upon vendors for the effective execution of their duties and responsibilities. Good vendors are worth their weight in gold. They should be extended the basic human rights granted to every college and university employee. “Treat each other as you would like to be treated yourself” is a fitting motto for redefining the relationship. Take a cue from our friends in the Development Office who long ago invited vendors into better balanced relationships.
Others on campus have moved in this direction also, notably academic departments challenged by the reduction of state and federal support. Higher education today could not exist if it were not for the warm embrace of the vendor community. The Purchasing Department may be the last place on campus where the Victorian age mind set of us versus them lingers on as the dominant paradigm.

It may be necessary to review departmental purchasing ethics of vendor related matters. The ethics of organizations such as our own, NAPM, and NIGP will need to be examined to help us to establish and maintain proper vendor relations in the 21st century. Our vendors deserve to be a part of our rethinking, for we have an obligation to share what we as purchasing officials expect of them in a redefined relationship, and they have a responsibility to explain what is and is not possible.

Is There a Perfect Vendor Relationship?
The perfect vendor relationship may be rarely attainable, but it may be the case that somewhere someone will develop one. We should not be overly concerned with that, though, because perfection is in the eye of the beholder as they say. What we do know is that we need to move from where we are now to something more akin to partnership in the truest sense of the word. The perfect vendor relationship from our view obviously is one that will furnish the specified quantity at the prescribed time at an acceptable price. It will respond positively to unforeseen events and contract changes, give advance notice of problem areas, take the initiative in technical innovations, and render expert advice when requested. It will provide the best value (not necessarily the lowest purchase price but the lowest overall cost) in the best attainable quantity, high reliability, continuous constructive improvements, and with the least contract management needs.

We desire to have all of the above plus superior communications skills, exemplary character, technical capability, adequate resources, efficient management, and sound pricing.

What we don’t know are vendors’ expectations in such a redefined model. We have spent so much time trying to distance ourselves that we truly don’t understand many of their methods, goals, objectives, or challenges. It is sort of like a bad relationship. To recover and move to a different future we are going to have to understand a whole lot of what we were afraid to approach. The process can be robust and it portends great promise. Like all great shifts, the journey begins but with a single step, and I encourage you to take it. You too can do great things!

Brian K. Yeoman is Director of Sustainable Leadership at NAEP and is the retired Associate Vice President for Facilities Planning and Campus Development at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. Email: byeoman@bc40.org.


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Behind Every Success Is Support From Above

by Jesse L. Moore
Purdue University

I’m stunned by the recent attacks on supplier diversity professionals and programs. Understand, I’m stunned but not surprised. In the past week, the highest state official charged with advocating on behalf of women and minority businesses has been asked to step down. Just today, I was informed that a national electrical firm’s manager of supplier diversity was escorted from his office unceremoniously after many years of exemplary service to diverse businesses all across the country, and colleges and universities large and small continue to assign the responsibility of supplier diversity to procurement staff with little or no authority or resources to carry out those responsibilities. I am troubled by these trends and concerned for the future of supplier diversity, especially within higher education.

It’s troubling periods such as this that bring my thoughts back to my tenure here at Purdue University as the first Director of Supplier Diversity. It has not been without its own set of challenges, but the model developed here is one that is working for us. From the beginning, the decision was made to bring on staff to develop and implement a program that would result in an increase in contracts being awarded to women and minority businesses. That program places a heavy emphasis on outreach and communicating with diverse business organizations to ensure they realized that the university was serious about expanding opportunities for qualified companies that had not historically been included in the process.

But the most important factor was the support I received from the top officials of the university. “politically correct” programs like supplier diversity instead of channeling those dollars to what he considered more important activities. I asked Joe if I could share his response to that alum with you, and he graciously granted me that privilege. Below, in its entirety, is one the best examples of the support I have enjoyed as the first Director of Supplier Diversity at Purdue University.

“Dear Mr. XXX:
Your letter to the Purdue Alumnus concerning Purdue’s diversity initiatives was referred to me. Increasing the diversity of the university is an overarching goal of Purdue’s strategic plan. While at first glance, this may seem like an exercise in political correctness, the goal is an essential component of a much broader initiative to make Purdue a better university in all ways and specifically a more valuable resource for the state of Indiana. President Martin Jischke frequently tells audiences at his speaking engagements that Purdue belongs to the people of our state. “This is your university,” is one of his favorite statements, and we take those words to heart. In a perfect world, the various ethnic groups on campus would approximate their proportions in Indiana’s population, and they would achieve comparable academic success. However, this is not the case. For example, the percentages of African American and Hispanic people in the student body, faculty and staff are significantly lower than their representation in the state and national populations. Women also are underrepresented in our enrollment.”

“While Purdue welcomes students from every background today, this was not always the case. Prior to the 1960s when you and I were students, the university accepted very few minority students and actually went out of its way to discourage their enrollment. We are not proud of this history, but we cannot deny it. Purdue’s past policies were consistent with discriminatory practices that were pervasive and considered acceptable in education, business, government and other areas of our society for most of our nation’s history. The passage of civil rights legislation and the shift in the attitudes that has led most Americans to recognize that these practices were unfair have opened up many opportunities. But these changes have not eliminated the effects of decades of systematic discrimination. Many generations of people did not have a realistic chance to enroll at Purdue or universities like it, and we are still suffering the effects of that as a state and a nation.”

“Likewise, many generations did not have a fair chance to be successful in business, and that is the reason for the existence of the Office of Supplier Diversity Development. Many firms owned by minority individuals or women are relatively small, newly founded and have not had full access to the information needed to be successful in competing for Purdue contracts. Conversely, many people responsible for purchasing decisions within Purdue are unfamiliar
with these firms. The Office of Supplier Diversity Development works to improve understanding at both ends of these potential transactions.”

“Ultimately, every Purdue contract is awarded to and every purchase is made from the lowest and best bidder—just as every student is admitted to the university under the same academic standards and every employee hired is the most qualified for the position.”

“Purdue initiatives like the Office of Supplier Diversity Development and the many programs that are designed to promote academic success for minority students are not intended only to assist minority-owned firms and minority students. They exist also to support the economic and social development of the state and nation. We know without question that students who graduate from Purdue will in overwhelmingly proportions become highly productive citizens, earn higher incomes, pay more taxes, be more involved in their communities and send their children to college, which will perpetuate their success in future generations. Similar benefits will accrue with minority- and female-owned firms that become successful. When these things happen, everyone benefits—not just the direct participants of these targeted programs.”

“You indicated in your communication that you would like Purdue to judge everyone on individual merit. I hope I have made it clear that the university does this, but that it also has a commitment to helping individuals and organizations overcome the lingering effects of a past era when a different reality was the norm.”

“Thank you for expressing your views and please let me know if you have additional questions or concerns.

Joseph L. Bennett
Vice President for University Relations”

God bless the Joe Bennetts of the world, without whom we would not be successful.

Thank you, Joe! The support you afforded me in the early years was critically important and much appreciated.

Jesse L. Moore was recruited by Purdue University in February 2005 to create its first Office of Supplier Diversity Development and to serve as its Director. His challenge was to increase the opportunities and the number of contracts awarded to women- and minority-owned businesses. Moore has also served as State Procurement Officer in the Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE) within the Indiana State Department of Commerce, Executive Director of Economic Development and Small Business for the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, and Executive Director of the Indianapolis Black Chamber of Commerce. Email: jmooore@purdue.edu.
Happy Birthday to Me!

by Bob Ashby, C.P.M., CPCM
University of Nevada, Las Vegas (retired)

As you read this, I will have just celebrated my 75th birthday. It is hard for me to imagine. As I pondered the significance of this achievement (who amongst us thinks he/she will ever reach this age?), I looked back at those years and tried to identify the four most important things I’ve learned. Since the NAEP’s Educational Procurement Journal is published quarterly, I will, in this my 75th year, be able to explore and address each of these four lessons before my next birthday. They are:

• Life is easier if you try to get along with folks rather than imposing your will on them;
• Have goals, since you’ll never know where you are headed or whether you have arrived, if you don’t plan your route first;
• Always be prepared, because it would be a shame to miss out on that special someone or special job simply because you weren’t;
• Be ethical, since your number one asset is your good name and reputation;
• It is never too late to learn and improve yourself for the sole sake of, well, learning and improving yourself;
• You have likely been mentored by someone, so pay it forward;
• “There ain’t a horse that can’t be rode or a man who can’t be throw’d.” (Darrel Royal, coach of three-time national Champion University of Texas in the 1960s)

Yes, yes, I realize this is a list of seven, not four, but I could not figure out which three should be tossed. You, reader, have advised me in the past which subjects you wanted me to address, so I will let you tell me which of these seven are the four most important.

For now, I will address the first lesson: Get along with folks.

Early in my tenure as Director of Purchasing and Contracts at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV), the Director of Facilities, a retired Army Colonel, rumbled into my office to address one of my directives that he didn’t like. He introduced himself by proclaiming “I’m Colonel Archibald, the Director of Facilities.” As I had been a “lowly” Petty Officer in the Navy, he was not amused when I responded, “I’m Radarman Second Class Ashby, and I’m the Director of Purchasing and Contracts.”

Colonel Archibald proceeded to explain to me that my directive on processing “emergencies” was too restrictive and would prevent him from accomplishing his job in a timely manner. He then invoked the name of his VP as an implied threat for me to change my position. One of my options was to tell him “my way or the highway.”

My other option was to follow the advice of that great American sage, Kung fu master Bruce Lee, who said, “Notice that the stiffest tree is the most easily cracked, while the bamboo or willow survives by bending in the wind.”

I told him I’d make him a deal. If he would come to me with his “emergency,” not try to work around me, and convince me that it was not caused by his lack of planning, then I would find a legal way to help him. But I warned him that if I found out just once that he had burned me by faking the crisis, I would no longer honor his emergencies and, instead, would place his request at the bottom of my pile. He thought it over and agreed. We shook on it. He even called a department-wide meeting, introduced me to his staff from managers to janitors and related to them our agreement and the consequences of breaking it, and to the best of my knowledge, he never burned me. What could have been a contentious situation resulted in a good business and personal relationship.

Another time, I received a contract from the Provost, a man who thought that whatever he said, regardless of legality, was okay because he said it. To show his power, he would sign any and all contracts that suppliers brought him, regardless of the terms and conditions or his lack of signature authority (sound familiar?). Each time, I would remind him that he did not have approval authority. I’d then call the supplier, explain that fact, negotiate more favorable terms and pricing, and then let the Provost know the final results. For those of you way ahead of me, yes, the Provost became irate. He became even more irate when I told him that I had signature authority and he didn’t. As with Colonel Archibald, I remembered the words of Bruce Lee and suggested to him that I serve as his personal Contracts Administrator. I said I’d come by to pick up any contract he wanted to sign, would review it, modify it as needed, and then let him tell the supplier that he had made the changes in consultation with his advisor. I even told him he could sign as the authorized signatory but that I would then have it co-signed, as necessary. He was happy, and we had good, legal contracts coming out of his office after that. Win-win.

Many other such examples come to mind, both in my business and personal life, but I am sure many of you have similar or even better examples. But lest you think I believed working cooperatively always worked, the seventh lesson above brings to mind the time that UNLV’s chief architect referred to my department as “the Department of Obstruction.” In that instance, I rather remembered a saying from my Irish grandpa, “You can accomplish more with a kind word and a shillelagh (a small hardwood club, good for quick repetitious beating) than with just a kind word.”

Now it is your turn. Which of the above seven lessons would you like to see me address? Or do you have an eighth one to propose? Write me at ashbybob@embargmail.com.
Nashville is an amazing place. I just returned from Music City USA. Besides there being statues of Elvis on every corner, there is music everywhere. Even while you are waiting to cross the street, the city pipes in music to the corner traffic controls. It is a place full of songwriters and musicians, all trying to create a specific image through words and music.

I was there for the annual meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education—an amazing and energetic event, since so many students attend. One of the more interesting sessions explored the role of music in sustainability. The concept was that sounds can create either a good or a bad mood, in the same way that landscape can affect a person’s state of mind. Referring to the social justice side of sustainability, the conclusion is that an institution manages landscape to create a happy, welcoming, and inclusive environment; it should also manage its soundscape for the same reason. The presenters advised conducting an inventory of the campus soundscape, and then deciding if that fairly projects the intended mood.

Since landscaping workers are replacing four trees just outside my office right now, it occurred to me that, in a well-managed soundscape setting, they would schedule this activity after normal business hours. I also started thinking about theme songs, music that is identified with a particular show, movie, or event. The music almost immediately brings to mind the associated production. Even today, many people probably know most of the words to the ‘Beverly Hillbillies’ theme song or can hum ‘The Sound of Music.’

“What does this have to do with purchasing?,” you ask. Simply this: you must manage your image as a department. Is automation today so pervasive, that the first, and perhaps only, contact an enduser may have with your department is through your website? What does it look like? Does it highlight your successes? Does it give the impression that you care about your clients? Does it suggest that you are helping clients achieve their goals? Is it focused on them, instead of being focused on you? Does it have music and video to answer clients’ questions, instead of simple text? Does it have a theme song?

Too radical for your conservative institution, you think? Think again. All your clients are super busy. They want an answer, and they want it now! Preferably in 140 characters or less. If a picture is worth 1,000 words, how much better would it be to provide video answers—with music! Wouldn’t your clients linger longer at your website if the music were catchy? Isn’t that what you want them to do? Next time you are in a mall, listen to the music played in the various stores. It is all carefully selected to keep you there longer, and to buy more.

Perhaps you can engage your Music or Marketing students to provide advice and assistance. Wouldn’t it be great for them to be able to say that they designed the soundscape for your site! And it brings your department closer to the academic side of the institution! Which cannot be a bad thing.

Have fun with it!

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