



ESAs Combine Technology with Purchasing for Enhanced Member Service

Cooperative Purchasing is a well-known and popular solution used by ESA's to harness the collective spending power of member agencies to attract better pricing and reduce the time and cost to perform bids while meeting most state public procurement requirements.

So what's new under the sun with cooperative purchasing? A group of Minnesota ESAs decided to put a 21st Century spin on the service by incorporating their popular supply contracts into an online marketplace they named Express. They spent a year working with a company that developed an online purchasing platform tailored specifically to meet the needs of school and government. Together they honed a one-stop, single sign-on web-based marketplace from which member schools can search for supplies, create and share shopping lists, gain approval for ordering through their normal approval chain, and place orders to multiple vendors using a p-card or purchase order.

According to Jeremy Kovash, the executive director of Lakes Country Service Cooperative, which took the lead in developing Express, participating schools save by being guaranteed to receive contract pricing. "It's kind of like Amazon.com for member schools, easy to use. Sign on to Express and there are no multiple passwords, or contract numbers to remember. You're in and creating your order with automatic contract pricing."

Districts also see savings with the time saved in finding the best value to fit their needs. Instead of searching through three catalogs for the best projector, a school can do a one-stop search according to price, vendor, or feature.

The marketplace has the ability to host both large, national vendors and smaller regional or state vendors. Express has national purchasing power thanks to the Minnesota ESA participation in the 26-state Association of Educational

Purchasing Agencies (AEPA).

"Let's say you're a small district like Warroad, Minnesota, on the Canadian border, and you want to buy a copier. We have two national copy machine distributors so the deal that Warroad gets for a copy machine is the same that the company would give for one copy machine to, say, the school district in Los Angeles," Kovash said. Many of the vendors on Express were bid through AEPA.

Express is only 18 months old and has multiple participating ESAs and their members in Minnesota and the Dakotas. In addition, LCSC partnered with the software developer to offer an entry level platform to make it easier for other states to implement their own marketplace. The Express platform has been used by ESAs in Kentucky, Kansas and Nebraska as a launching pad for their own branded purchasing sites.

For more information, you may contact Jeremy Kovash at jkovash@lcsc.org. Jeremy also invites everyone to attend a presentation on the development of Express as a member service on Thursday, December 3rd at 1:30 PM at the AESA Conference in New Orleans.

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