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How Procurement Can Support IT Sustainability

Cooperatives offer expertise and
resources for green operations



As the public sector adopts more cloud technology and digital devices, there is a new emphasis on environmental sustainability.

Other factors also drive momentum for sustainable IT. Public interest is growing in environmental ethics and a green economy. Some state legislatures and local councils have enacted mandates for sustainability to improve ecology and mitigate climate impacts. And sustainability has become another dimension of public expectations for transparency and accountability in government.

“When it comes to sustainability, governments are asking how to get there as fast as the public expects,” says Sergio Paneque, a Center for Digital Government (CDG) senior fellow and former chief procurement officer for the state of New York. Yet governments continue to struggle with how to identify, procure and manage solutions that meet sustainability criteria. One resource is a cooperative purchasing organization that offers broad sourcing and established contracts to procure green IT solutions from vetted vendors.

“The ability to use an established agreement with a purchasing cooperative makes it easier to apply sustainability standards for equipment and services purchases, even if government IT is decentralized,” says Sean McSpaden, CDG senior fellow and former deputy state CIO in Oregon. “These agreements also make sustainable purchasing easier for smaller organizations, including local governments and school districts.”

Sustainability in IT Procurement

Energy consumption has become an important concern for both environmental impact and cost controls as governments store more data, use more applications and create more digital services. And as governments use more devices — sensors, mobile phones, computers, servers and storage systems — they want to use them efficiently and recycle or dispose of them responsibly.

Governments can address these concerns in several ways.



Reducing energy consumption and costs. Greater use of cloud services has already made a positive impact on energy consumption for government IT. Specific benefits come from consolidating data centers in the cloud and using as-a-service models for IT infrastructure and applications. These benefits include reduced power usage, a smaller technology footprint and economies of scale.

Matching devices to needs. User devices such as computers, phones and tablets can be evaluated against sustainability criteria. For other types of devices, usage data can identify opportunities to reduce future purchases. Departments may need fewer printers, for example, as they digitize more processes.

Handling e-waste. IT vendors increasingly offer takeback programs and recycling, resale, or reuse services that divert electronic equipment from landfills. Make sure to review the quality and coverage of these vendor offerings based on the following three questions.

1 Are disposals and recycling handled by certified facilities and processes? Look for certifications such as e-Stewards, Responsible Recycling, National Association for Information Destruction and International Organization for Standardization.

2 Is all data on a device secured and erased properly? Insist on security processes that wipe data on-site or provide a documented chain of custody for off-site data deletion. In either case, ask if the wipe processes comply with specifications from the National Institute of Standards and Technology. The vendor should provide certification of data erasure.

3 Can disposal costs be recovered through asset resale? Ask if the vendor will handle the resale of retired assets to specialized IT buyers while maintaining compliance with regulatory requirements, such as preventing illegal export.

Meeting Criteria

Sustainability criteria for a given product can include everything from its energy efficiency to the eco-friendliness of its packaging and even the carbon footprint of the factory where it was manufactured.

Vetting prospective vendors and products for that information can require time, effort and a high level of expertise.

That's why many organizations leverage a purchasing cooperative that has already done that legwork for them.

"With a cooperative purchasing organization, agencies can feel confident they are working with companies that are supporting the effort to minimize their impact on the world," says Richard McVay, senior director of IT for OMNIA Partners.

A purchasing cooperative offers:

- Access to expertise for navigating sustainability certifications, supplier research and purchasing issues to help your procurement team meet agency sustainability standards.

Steps for Success

Develop clear sustainability policies that cover purchasing considerations such as solution types, vendor criteria and sourcing preferences

Set realistic timelines for achieving sustainability goals

Educate internal stakeholders about developing effective sustainability criteria

Encourage suppliers to proactively develop sustainable offerings

Calculate life-cycle costs of a product to determine true expenses, including environmental impact

Leverage a cooperative to reduce the expense and complexity of sustainability purchasing

- Use of competitively solicited and publicly awarded cooperative contracts, which make it easier to procure sustainable solutions. In many cases, these contracts are customizable to accommodate agency-specific requirements.
- Collective purchasing power, which offers broader product selection and lower costs.

Sustainability: An Achievable Vision

With tight budgets and lean procurement teams, agencies can struggle to achieve goals for sustainable IT. By working with a purchasing cooperative, government staff gain access to a range of resources and solutions that optimize procurement time and budget investments. An agency of any size can leverage these cooperative advantages to bring green IT practices to reality.

This piece was written and produced by the Governing Content Studio, with information and input from OMNIA Partners.



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