



Tabletop Session Summary

June 10, 2021

Promising Practices in the Procurement Process: Improving Programmatic Decisions

Presenters: Julie Corbett and Bi Vuong, [National Comprehensive Center](#); Cynthia Beltre, [Boston Public Schools](#); Meredith Miller, [Office of State and Grantee Relations, U.S. Department of Education](#); Rachel Peternith, [Office of General Counsel, U.S. Department of Education](#)

This tabletop discussion examined strategies to prepare for procurement, select vendors, and to monitor progress to ensure that American Rescue Plan funds are used effectively.

Session Highlights

- » The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Programs and Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Programs Frequently Asked Questions document was released on May 26, 2021. It provides guidance on allowable uses of funds under ESSER and GEER, as well as guidance on when non-competitive procurements can be utilized.
- » There is a sense of urgency in making decisions regarding the relief funds. To prepare for procurement, it is important to have the right people at the table (including those involved in service delivery) from the beginning. It is also important to define programmatic expectations (e.g., expectations for meals, transportation, family engagement), how outcomes will be measured, budget parameters, and the timeline.
- » In recruiting and selecting vendors, it is helpful to think about any logistical barriers that could prohibit vendors from responding to a request for proposal (RFP) and to provide the evaluation criteria in the initial RFP. Encouraging partnerships between organizations to provide more comprehensive services can also be helpful in expanding the vendor pool. Finally, it is critical to check references, preferably with organizations serving students with similar demographics.
- » The financial structure of a contract can influence outcomes. A traditional structure would enable vendors to receive payment for services regardless of outcomes, while a performance or a success structure would make payment for services contingent upon also achieving certain benchmarks and/or specified outcomes.
- » Boston Public Schools is strengthening their procurement process by bringing together a cross-departmental team to think strategically about the application and evaluation process for proposals. Since purchasing in Boston is decentralized, they are also trying to make vetted lists of vendors and instructional materials available to supporting decision-making. The list of instructional materials is based on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s CURATE project, an effort to review and highlight evidence-based instructional options for educators in the state.



Shared Resources

- » [Frequently Asked Questions: Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Programs/Governor's Emergency Education Relief Programs](#)
- » [Massachusetts Tools for Schools](#)
- » [Promising Procurement Practices to Maximize Learning Recovery](#)

Questions and Answers on Promising Practices in the Procurement Process: Improving Programmatic Decisions

Is there any prohibition against or recommendations for multi-year procurement?

States must follow their own procurement policies per 2 CFR 200.317, including any rules related to multi-year contracts. Districts must follow the standards outlined in the Uniform Guidance in 2 CFR 200.318 et seq. The Uniform Guidance does not prohibit multi-year contracts; however, contracts must be tailored to the period of availability of the federal funds being used. If, for example, a school district is using ESSER I funds, a multi-year contract generally should conclude by the end of the period of availability of those funds, September 30, 2021.

What are practices that state education agencies should be using to support processes at the local level given their capacity constraints?

States could offer tools and resources for districts to use. They could provide a vendor list that has been vetted and examples of the measures/metrics that districts should be able to require of those vendors. For example, if purchasing a curriculum, what type of professional development is provided with the curriculum? States can also provide different models of contracting, and allowing districts to have the flexibility of using multi-year contracting could be helpful as well.

Additionally, states have a role in monitoring how relief funds are being used. Asking questions about procurement can be a way to monitor organizational processes about the disbursement of funds. This may also encourage collaboration among different offices including procurement, finance, the superintendent's office, academic programming, etc.

