



July 2, 2021

PCA *Purchasing Cooperative of America*

1 Who exactly is PCA?

PCA is the Purchasing Cooperative of America, a full-service national purchasing cooperative that allows school districts, government agencies, and others to meet state and local requirements to perform a competitive bid.

2 Why is this so valuable?

The bid process is time consuming and expensive. Further, it can be extremely frustrating, and all decisions are ripe for appeal. By “piggybacking” on the efforts of a purchasing cooperative, you can avoid the time, cost, and frustration associated with the process.

3 What process does PCA use that allows the program to meet state procurement mandates?

PCA performs a full competitive bid, utilizing a “model agency.” This means that PCA selects a local municipality and engages in a bid that is open, transparent, and robust. In other words, PCA does the work for you and ensures it is done in way that ensures it meets all state requirements.

4 How is pricing established?

PCA publishes notice of the bid in various national and local outlets and accepts sealed bids from every company who wants to participate. Submitted pricing is then reviewed by a committee and the vendor(s) who offer the best value are selected.

5 Is the pricing openly available?

PCA and its vendors are committed to full transparency. That said, the full catalog of products and prices available through the Triple S family of distributors is publicly available.

6 Can't I get better pricing if I perform the bid myself?

The simple and honest answer is “maybe.” But it is important to keep in mind that the PCA pricing represents a ceiling and not a floor. In other words, you are welcome to negotiate with your supplier to ensure you receive the best possible pricing. (And it also must be stressed that you will save quite a bit of money as a result of not having to conduct a time-consuming and expensive bid).

7 Am I limited to buying those things that are listed in the PCA-Triple S product catalog? What if I want to buy something that is not included? How would the price be determined?

Triple S’ was issued an award that covers “Janitorial Products, Equipment, and Related Items.” The award is broad enough to cover almost all product categories that fall under the “jan/san” and cleaning umbrella. This allows for the addition of products that are not currently included in the catalog through contract amendment – Triple S will simply submit recommended pricing for any product you want/need added to the list of approved products for review and acceptance by PCA. The pricing of such products should be consistent in terms of markup over MSRP when compared to the products that were originally part of the bid.

8 PCA's website stresses that we can buy lots of different types of products from a variety of vendors. What does that mean, how can we find their pricing, and have they bid out the pricing on those items as well?

PCA is a full-service purchasing cooperative that issues contracts for a full range of products – everything from art supplies to HVAC equipment to technology products – and, as a member of PCA, you have the ability to take advantage of all contracts. Further, PCA utilizes a full competitive bidding process for all of its contracts, meaning that you can be confident your purchases meet state procurement requirements. As for pricing, most PCA contract pricing is available from the individual vendors. We are sure they would love to hear from you!

9 How does PCA differ from other purchasing cooperatives and group purchasing organizations?

PCA is a direct alternative to more well-known national purchasing cooperatives such as U.S. Communities, National IPA, Omnia Partners, TIPS, Sourcewell, and others. It is not a Group Purchasing Organization or GPO. The biggest difference is purchasing cooperatives conduct a competitive and transparent bid process while a GPO directly negotiates with a supplier to establish pricing.

10 Does PCA have any advantages over the other purchasing cooperatives listed?

PCA has intentionally kept itself “small” compared with the other purchasing cooperatives. This allows the organization to remain flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances (with the supply chain issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic serving as the perfect example!). PCA representatives are available to work directly with entities who utilize their contracts. This is generally not true of other purchasing cooperatives.

11 I see PCA is based in Texas but my facility is not located there. Does this matter and why is Texas the location?

Because PCA is a national purchasing cooperative, it does not matter that they are located in Texas. By utilizing a transparent and open bidding process, you can be sure their contracts will be accepted in your state and will meet all state procurement/bidding requirements. PCA is simply located in Texas because of the state's commitment to cooperative purchasing. The state originally established a series of local agencies whose sole purpose was to help school districts navigate the procurement process and secure favorable pricing; with PCA serving as one of the agencies. This has allowed Texas to maintain a leadership role. And now schools, agencies, and others across the U.S. can take direct advantage!

12 Am I just putting money in the state of Texas' pockets?

No, the state of Texas does not receive any benefit through PCA. The state set up the cooperatives specifically to ease the burden on schools and other facilities. No money lands in their pockets.

13 Ok...I am sold. How do I get started?

The first step is to become an active member of PCA. All facilities, buildings, and organizations are welcome to join the cooperative and membership is complimentary (free!). Signing up simply involves completing an online form – available by visiting <https://www.pcamerica.org/members> and following the instructions. Hundreds have already taken this crucial first step and you are encouraged to join them!

14 So, please sum this up for me...

Performing a competitive bid is time-consuming, expensive, and tremendously frustrating. Recognizing this reality, national purchasing cooperatives have been set up to allow school districts, government agencies, and others to avoid having to do it themselves. The cooperatives, including PCA, essentially do the work for you! By conducting a robust, transparent, and open competitive bid process, PCA allows you to “piggyback” on their efforts, giving you assurance that you are meeting all state procurement requirements.