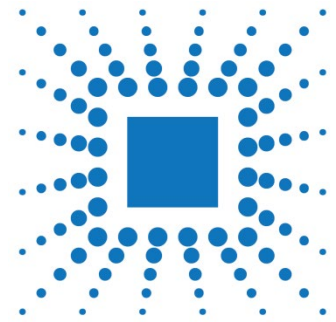


CASE STUDY

**Green Impact, Locally Grown:  
Regional Sustainable Procurement  
Strategies with a Ripple Effect**

**Alameda County**

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**SUSTAINABLE  
PURCHASING  
LEADERSHIP  
COUNCIL**  
CASE STUDY  
LIBRARY

## Abstract

Alameda County’s commitment to green purchasing starts with a commitment to a thriving, healthy local environment. Although public procurement is a powerful lever for change in markets, driving regional sustainability forward can be difficult if the County only has influence over its own purchasing dollars. But through local relationships with other public purchasers, one entity can grow the influence and benefit of sustainable procurement strategies, and achieve even greater, more impactful results.

Starting in 2013, the County focused its sustainable procurement leadership on its local community, accelerating green procurement among other local public agency partners through **coordinating a Green Purchasing Roundtable, forging collaborative procurements** and **creating opportunities for piggybacking** on pre-negotiated, pre-greened County contracts. The Roundtable, a central feature of the County’s approach, brings together public agencies to share green purchasing strategies and recommendations for products and services that meet a high standard for human and environmental health.

Running a high functioning sustainable purchasing program can be a challenge for public agencies, but by providing technical assistance and facilitating collaboration between public buyers, Alameda County is able to equip jurisdictions with the tools and resources needed to use dollars already in their budget to further sustainability efforts, improve local community health, and expand the scope of impact collaboratively.

## Summary

<i>Goals</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Results</i>
Build knowledge and capacity for green purchasing in local public agencies	Host Green Purchasing Roundtable events	16 events; 345 attendees; 31 public agencies represented
Expand green procurement practices at the local level	Create green contracts that allow other buyers to take advantage of bulk pricing	13 public partners such as cities piggybacked on procurement contracts
Achieve collaborative procurements with other public agencies	Enter Memorandum of Understanding with project partners to procure electric vehicles and charging stations under a group bid	90 electric vehicles purchased; projected fuel cost savings of \$500,000 between 2014 and 2019; 1.5 million lbs of CO <sub>2</sub> pollution prevented

## Goals

Alameda County, California was an early leader in green purchasing, beginning in the early 1990's with a focus on buying recycled content products in order to 'close the loop' in supporting regional recycling programs. In the 2000's, efforts were expanded to include a wider range of initiatives, including green and healthy cleaning products, green building, and hybrid vehicles. In 2010 and 2011, the Board of Supervisors adopted two foundational policies that continue to strengthen and guide work on green purchasing, the Alameda County Climate Action Plan for Government Services and Operations Resolution (*R-2010-170*); and the Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy (*R-2011-108*).

These most recent policies declare the County's commitment to climate and environmental protection, and recognize the importance of the County taking a leadership role in advancing these goals regionally. County leaders have recognized that the environmental impact of changes in procurement can be limited in scale of impact if only the County's own purchasing is influenced. Driven by climate and sustainability goals, the County was motivated to expand the impact of its green purchasing efforts through additional program goals:

- *Expand Green Procurement Locally* – As a model for municipal governments within Alameda County, the county has an opportunity to assist local sustainability efforts. This puts into practice the county's commitment to the well-being and sustainability of our local community, by expanding efforts towards these goals.
- *Build Local Capacity* – Sharing resources and providing technical assistance to other jurisdictions on sustainable purchasing helps to maximize the impact of the expertise Alameda County has developed on green purchasing. It equips agencies to put a commitment to sustainability into practice through procurement when they otherwise may not have the capacity to do so.
- *Accelerate Collaborative Climate-Friendly Purchasing Efforts* – The County and its local partners have ambitious greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals. Strategic sustainable procurement can use existing expenditures to contribute to climate protection. Because some efforts, such as charging station availability, can multiply impact when implemented throughout a region, procurement coordination can be a key strategy for effective climate action.

## Strategies and Actions

As a major purchaser of goods and services, Alameda County is committed to making procurement choices that help to ensure a healthy environment. However, we can't promote efficiency and reduce pollution on our own, and thus we have worked to create a regional network to share green purchasing strategies, build capacity at the local level, and accelerate local green procurement.

In 2013, the County's Office of Sustainability initiated a partnership with StopWaste, a public agency that works to reduce waste in Alameda County. StopWaste contributed their experience in convening the local public agencies to bring key stakeholders to the table, while the County staff brought their expertise in technical and market research on green products and services.

Our goal was to expand the reach of the County's work, and ultimately, to make green purchasing more accessible to staff at public agencies within our County, particularly cities. We know these agencies often have limited staff capacity to focus on green purchasing. So by sharing what we know, and providing them "plug and play" bid language, a process for collaborative purchasing, or a green contracts they can piggyback on, we could make it that much easier for the agencies to take action and contribute to a reduced environmental footprint in the region.

We made sure to highlight collaboration within our EPP resolution (R-2011-108), adopted by our Board of Supervisors in 2011. In it we stated a commitment to "... lead by example, collaborate, and share key learnings with businesses, the public, and other government agencies."

Alameda County recognizes that one of the greatest barriers that smaller agencies and organizations face is limited capacity. Many agencies may not have time to conduct extensive market research when purchasing goods and they may struggle with greening their procurement practices. The Roundtable fills this need by sharing research findings and best practices with these agencies, thereby alleviating some of the pressures that smaller organizations face. Additionally, the Roundtable is an opportunity to share the County's pre-negotiated green contracts, and allows other public agencies to piggyback on our contracts, consequently saving purchasers valuable staff time. Increasing collaboration and communication across agencies and jurisdictions ultimately increases local capacity by saving staff time and increasing financial savings through the advantages of bulk pricing.

The County has employed the following strategies to accelerate regional green procurement efforts:

- **Negotiating terms of green contracts to allow for piggybacking.** Piggybacking is written into the terms of the County's green procurement contracts. Interested public agencies have the opportunity to piggyback – to borrow negotiated terms – on these pre-arranged contracts and can take advantage of the County's volume discount pricing.
- **A competitive bid process with a local preference promotes fairness.** Public agencies must adhere to strict procurement guidelines to ensure they are using taxpayer funds efficiently. When sustainable procurements are run according to these rules, other government entities are more easily able to borrow terms or strategies to use for their own procurement. At Alameda County, procurement rules also provide enhanced contracting and procurement opportunities for Small, Local and Emerging Businesses (SLEBs) which promotes and fosters inclusiveness, diversity and economic development within Alameda County.

- **Collaborative procurements.** In order to negotiate better prices, Alameda County partners with other public agencies on large-scale procurements. The County worked with 9 other agencies in a group bid to advance electrification of the participating agencies' vehicle fleets and the regional charging infrastructure required to make the transition to electric vehicle fleets possible.
- **Roundtables.** Green Purchasing Roundtables are a regional forum where representatives from cities, public utilities, educational institutions and other public buyers convene to share information about green purchasing strategies. The Roundtable highlights a wide range of product categories with greener alternatives, from cleaning supplies and furniture to computers and asphalt. The County is able to research and share which alternatives not only have environmental benefits, but are proven in the field, more cost-effective, and better for the health and safety of workers. Topics have range from a focus on a specific product such as green carpet to strategies for implementing green purchasing. Some examples include including climate-smart purchasing, healthy building materials, and engaging employees in buying and using green products. Staff from relevant roles, such as purchasing, public works, and sustainability, are able to talk with one another and connect across functions to better understand green purchasing best practices and how to surmount barriers that may be present within their organizations. Over the years, the Roundtables have reached a total of 43 different organizations including local public agencies, school districts, and the private sector.
- **Provide technical assistance.** Alameda County has provided hours and hours of technical assistance to the cities within the county, as well as others working on green procurement. Because sustainable procurement can add complexity, individualized advising can make a big difference for small city staff with limited capacity.

## Financial Impact

To document efforts, the County worked with vendors to measure uptake of piggybacked contracts by other public agencies so that results could be aggregated. For collaborative procurement, the County conducted a comparison to estimate cost savings, and also used calculators to convert projected vehicle and trip conversion to fuel savings, and fuel savings to projected greenhouse gas emissions reductions.

### Collaborative Procurements: Electric Vehicles

The collaborative procurement saved Alameda County and its partners \$349,000 on the purchase of new electric vehicles, and the 90 vehicle fleet was projected to save \$500,000 in fuel cost savings from 2014 to 2019.

### Piggyback Contracts

The piggybacked contracts have provided time savings for local agencies who did not need to spend resources on the bidding process. Furthermore, these piggybacked contracts have allowed small jurisdictions to benefit from the County's pre-negotiated bulk pricing that could not have been obtained on their own. Over \$1,402,800 in office supply purchases made by 9 cities (2017-2018) have been made based on these more economical, pre-greened contracts.

## Results

### Expanding Local Green Procurement

13 cities that may have previously been limited in their abilities to advance green purchasing have been able to utilize the County's green contracts to secure recycled paper and office supplies for their own jurisdictions. In addition to this, 12 local preschools have used the County's specifications

### Electric Vehicle Fleet



Alameda County's fleet includes hybrids and fully electric vehicles for staff to check out and use for work-related travel.

to purchase paper and janitorial supplies that are safer for staff and children that may be working or playing near where chemicals are used.

### Sharing Knowledge

Through convening 16 Green Purchasing Roundtables, resources were shared with 345 employees from 31 different public agencies. Roundtables provide a space for employees to gain technical assistance from subject matter experts, learn about the co-benefits of environmentally-friendly products on health and safety, and get questions answered.

### Cross-Jurisdictional Collaboratives

Alameda County was the lead agency in organizing with nine other agencies around the San Francisco Bay Area to enter into a collaborative procurement contract. After being awarded funding from the Federal Highway Administration to support fleet electrification in municipal operations, the agencies purchased 90 fully electric vehicles and the infrastructure needed to support their roll-out and usage, including over 50 charging stations.

## Benefits

- **At least 13 local government jurisdictions were able to take advantage of bulk pricing** by piggybacking off of the County’s green procurement contracts for office supplies and paper, securing access to tools for buying and ordering more sustainably.
- **12 local preschools**, connected through the County’s Green Childcare program, utilized County specifications for **safer and greener cleaning chemicals**.
- Local agencies achieved business process savings through piggybacked contracts. In particular, an option for consolidated ordering of office supply products contributed to one agency’s **reduction in ordering by 60%**, as well as fewer vehicle miles traveled by delivery vehicles due to consolidating deliveries to just one day per week.
- Green purchasing best practices shared with **345 attendees and 31 local**

Roundtable



City and public agency representatives gather at the Roundtables to learn and share green purchasing strategies.

**public agencies over the course of 16 Roundtable events.**

- A procurement process built to support small, local, emerging businesses additionally rewards those that have made their operations or product offerings sustainable, thereby **boosting the local green economy.**
- Green purchasing created **markets for recycled-content and low-toxicity products.**
- Collaborative procurement used economies of scale to allow the County and its partners to **save \$349,000** on the purchase of 90 electric vehicles.
- The fleet of 90 electric vehicles is expected to have a **total fuel cost savings of \$500,000** between 2014 and 2019.
- Electric vehicles eliminate tailpipe carbon emissions and was estimated to prevent **1.5 million pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> pollution** from being released into the atmosphere between 2014 and 2019.
- The County's leadership on the collaborative purchasing of electric vehicles laid the groundwork for procurement and grant administration for other municipalities, thereby **accelerating fleet electrification in smaller government agencies by at least a year.**

## Lessons Learned

- Lack of motivation or commitment may not be the main barrier to green purchasing for smaller organizations that lack staff capacity for research or pre-work. If sustainable procurement can be made easier, many more buyers might jump on board. Saving time for purchasing staff can be a way into their hearts!
- True collaborative purchasing, where multiple agencies combine their volume into one bid, takes significantly more time and effort than simply piggybacking. Each agencies must agree to the terms within the bid, and must get legal and political sign-off to move forward. However, for cutting edge technology, it can be an effective way to lessen the barrier for smaller agencies to participate, as it allows them to rely on the lead agency to be the subject matter expert.
- Green purchasing leadership can look like taking the first step and inviting others to follow. Especially for public purchasers, being able to point to successful work by others can help pave the way.
- Nothing beats face-to-face interaction. Getting together around a table can allow buyers to be more open about their challenges and lead to solutions.



- Within local government purchasing, local business preferences and sustainable specifications can build a win-win for the local economy, building capacity of these vendors to serve more of their customers with environmentally responsible products and business practices.
- With all of the climate change in the news, organizations are beginning to prepare and respond. Climate-smart purchasing can link these efforts to the power of dollars already in your budget. Good first steps include purchasing alternative fuel vehicles and allowing for reduced product delivery trips.

## References and Additional Resources

- Alameda County's Green Purchasing Roundtable: <http://www.acsustain.org/what/purchasing/roundtable.htm>
- Piggybacking Resources: <http://acsustain.org/documents/PiggybackingResources.pdf>
- Electric Vehicle Program: <http://acsustain.org/next/evp.htm>
- Bid Excerpts: <http://www.acsustain.org/what/purchasing/bids/excerpts.htm>