

eQuote Tool Offers Smooth Transition into State's Future of Automated Purchasing

It is the eve of the implementation of Team Georgia Marketplace—the e-procurement program expected to revolutionize purchasing for the state—and the Department of Administrative Services (DOAS), State Purchasing Division is doing all it can to prepare state entities for the great change it promises to bring. In this effort, all state agencies are being transitioned into conducting purchasing activities online, through the promoted use of various eTools introduced by DOAS. As of November, all state agencies are required to use eQuote with all RFQs within an entity's delegated purchasing authority (DPA). The electronic procurement sourcing tool is not new to state agencies; eQuote was introduced in October 2004 and was re-launched with system enhancements in March of this year. Ideally, eQuote will continue to provide efficiencies and enhanced functionalities that will help drive the state toward strategic goals of improved technology use and the statewide implementation of Team Georgia Marketplace.

eQuote began as a simple tool used by state buyers to electronically solicit and receive small value bids, and although there has been improvements throughout the years, the program's overwhelming use was for informal solicitations. However, using customer feedback, the program has matured into a robust electronic quote program, with enhanced functionality and options. eQuote Phase II is now used to solicit bids up to the agency or college's delegated purchasing authority (DPA), as well as beyond their DPA, with State Purchasing (SPD) approval, as indicated in the Georgia Procurement Manual.

The newly enhanced eQuote program provides a world of convenience to its many users that include all state agencies, departments, boards, bureaus, commissions, institutions, other state/local entities, and political subdivisions. Additionally, State Purchasing has seen an increase in vendor accessibility and usage of eQuote II such that our original database of approximately 10,000 active vendors has increased to approximately 14,000 active vendor contacts since our March 2008 re-launch.

eQuote Phase II offers the following benefits to its many users:

For purchasing agents, eQuote:

- Greatly reduces open solicitation time by up to 50%, according to competitive solicitation rules
- Generates email notifications to vendors of solicitation changes, addenda, and notice of award information
- Saves time for recreating an eQuote by allowing a purchasing agent to copy a previous eQuote for a new eQuote solicitation
- Allows eQuote awards to be split and awarded to multiple vendors
- Allows the addition of an unlimited number and type of document attachments and the ability to make edits between eQuote posting and closing time, alleviating the need to cancel an eQuote because of the changes
- Generates invitations to selected non-registered vendors that include links to the vendors guide and VRS, to encourage registration
- Automatically tabulates the eQuote responses

For suppliers, eQuote:

- Helps prevent simple arithmetic errors and eliminates the paper needed to respond to a bid solicitation
- Sends immediate confirmation after submitting the response, alleviating common concerns associated with paper bid responses
- Allows the opportunity to opt out (i.e., select "no bid") of portions of solicitations that include more than one item
- Allows the addition of an unlimited number and type of document attachments and affords the ability to make edits to their submitted bids between eQuote posting and closing time

Through eQuote Phase II, DOAS has brought more than convenience to state entities and suppliers—ultimately, its use saves the State time and money. In little more than four months time, through the use of eQuote Phase II, DOAS has surpassed process improvement standards for the entire calendar year of 2007. More specifically, during the last calendar year, only 399 eQuotes were awarded with contract amounts averaging just under \$12,500. This is in stark contrast to the 1,268 eQuotes awarded between March and December of this year, with an average contract amount of \$22,012. Similarly, while end-users enjoyed a total cost avoidance of more than \$755K last year, March through December 09, 2008 has brought a cost avoidance of \$14.9M.

eQuote has been widely used by state agencies before the mandate; however, DOAS will continue to offer classroom trainings to assist in acclimating needing agencies. Additionally, DOAS offers an online course and user guides for agencies and suppliers for their convenience. Classroom training schedules and resources are available on the State Purchasing website (<http://statepurchasing.doas.georgia.gov>).

It will take a couple more years before Team Georgia Marketplace is implemented by all Georgia agencies. Only the Department of Administrative Services, the Department of Corrections, and the Department of Human Resources, will participate in the pilot program this January. In the meantime, DOAS is working jointly with state agencies, offering eQuote and other programs to bridge current paper-based processes to the electronic, automated processes that are the future of Georgia.

Team Georgia Marketplace is the result of a statewide Procurement Transformation Initiative launched by Governor Perdue in 2005. The initiative's purpose is to update and improve the practices, capacity, information tracking, and technology of procurement for state agencies. Ideally, Team Georgia Marketplace will ensure better data tracking and customer collaboration to better meet the enterprise needs of public purchasing across the state. To learn more about the Team Georgia Marketplace, its core function, user benefits and project progress, visit the State Purchasing website.