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**MONITORING AND IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF MONTGOMERY  
COUNTY'S POST-AWARD PROCUREMENT PROCESS**

Report Submitted to:

Prof. Art Heinricher

Prof. Ed Ma

Washington, Project Center

By

Jon Magnussen

Curtis Britton

Anthony Staffier

Jon Magnussen  
Curtis Britton  
M. Anthony Staffier

In Cooperation With

Marsha Watkins-Thomas – Administrative Specialist

Montgomery County Government – Office of Procurement

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this project is to assess current customer service levels within the Office of Procurement and make recommendations for improvement. Interviews were conducted with Contract Administrators and Contractors to evaluate customer service. The interviews focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the procurement system, response times to contractor inquiries, and inter-office communication methods. Recommendations were made to the Procurement Office to revise the procurement regulations, and provide training for Contract Administrators and Contractors.

## **Authorship Page**

This project was a collaborative effort among the three authors. Every section of this paper has been written and edited by each of us.

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## **Executive Summary**

Montgomery County is a self-governing county located just outside of Washington DC in Maryland. The County Government provides many services to their citizens that are simply unheard of in most towns. The people that live there expect that these services are carried out in a timely and cost-effective manner.

It is the job of the Office of Procurement to distribute goods and services to the County residents. Every year, the Office spends over 500 million dollars to supply the county with the products it needs. They must ensure that customer satisfaction remains high and that contractors get their jobs done satisfactorily and on time.

The Montgomery County Office of Procurement is preparing to evaluate and set new customer service standards. The goal of this project is to assess the quality of customer service within the Office of Procurement and make recommendations for improvement. We focused on four main areas to achieve this goal: major strengths and weaknesses of the current procurement process, communication methods and response times to contract disputes.

Interviews were conducted with using department contract administrators and contractors in order to gather the required information. The using department interviewees were selected from four different departments: the Department of Public Works and Transportation, Health and Human Services, the Department of Information Systems Technology, and the Department of Housing and Community Affairs. We selected these departments based on the number of contracts they have each year, the size of these contracts, and the number of contract administrators within each department. Our phone interviewees were chosen in a similar fashion.

We performed content analysis on the transcripts and looked for themes in four areas: strengths and weaknesses of the current procurement system, response times to contractor inquiries and communication methods. We identified themes specific to individual departments as well as themes common to all departments.

Based on our results, we found that the Office of Procurement was doing many things well. The staff was very knowledgeable in procurement regulations. They were supportive during contract disputes. Response times to contractor complaints were considered to be adequate by the contract administrators. The procurement specialists were always available when the contract administrators needed them. The main strength of the Procurement Office was its staff.

Although the Office of Procurement had many strengths, we found some areas that needed improvement. These include inflexible procurement regulations, contract administrators lack of knowledge on procurement regulations, and procurement specialist's lack of understanding of department specific field knowledge.

Recommendations that would help to improve customer service in the Office of Procurement. We recommended that the Office revise the procurement regulations, train the contract administrators on procurement regulations, and train the procurement specialists in department-specific field knowledge.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

Montgomery County is a self-governing county located in Maryland just outside of Washington DC. A self-governing county is different in many ways from ordinary cities and towns. Montgomery County has over 855,000 people that depend on it to distribute goods and services. The County Government provides many services to their citizens that are simply unheard of in most towns. The people that live there expect that these services are carried out in a timely and cost-effective manner.

It is the job of the Office of Procurement to distribute goods and services to the County residents. Every year, the Office spends over 500 million dollars to supply the government with the products it needs. They must ensure that customer satisfaction remains high and that contractors get their jobs done satisfactorily and on time.

There are three parties involved in the procurement process: the Procurement Office, the using departments, and the contractors. Using departments in the County require goods and services that the contractors provide. The Procurement Office selects the most cost-effective, reliable contractors to ensure quality goods and services are delivered to the using departments. The contractors supply the goods and services to the using departments based on the contract specifications. When a using department is dissatisfied with a contractor's performance the Office of Procurement is supposed to be notified. At this point, the Office must address any problems with the contractor and decide what actions should be taken.

The procurement process is divided into two parts: the pre-award and post-award processes. The pre-award process begins when a need for a good or service arises and lasts until the contract is signed. The post-award process begins when the contract is

signed and lasts until the contract has been completed to the satisfaction of both parties involved. The pre-award process has a large effect on the post-award process since it includes all the necessary preparations that lead to the awarding of a contract, such as competitive bidding and contractor selection.

The Montgomery County Office of Procurement is preparing to evaluate and set new customer service standards. To do this, the Office of Procurement must know which areas need improvement. The goal of this project is to assess the quality of customer service within the Office of Procurement and make recommendations for improvement. We focused on four main areas to achieve this goal: major strengths and weaknesses of the current procurement process, communication methods and response times to contract disputes. Interviews were conducted with using department contract administrators and contractors in order to gather the required information. Based on the assessment of these interviews, recommendations for improvement were made. This project will help ensure that the Montgomery County continues to receive quality services from the Office of Procurement in the future.

## **Chapter 2 Background Information**

### **2.1 The Montgomery County Government**

A county government is in charge of managing and administering public policy and the affairs of a given county. The goals of county governments are essentially the same throughout the United States: to enhance the quality of life for its residents by delivering cost effective goods and services to the public in a timely manner.

Montgomery County is one of the most populous and affluent counties in Maryland. The county government must supply goods and services to approximately one million people who have a median household income of over \$70,000. Its government is composed of an Executive branch, a Legislative branch, and a Judicial system. The Executive branch implements and enforces the County's laws. The Legislative branch has three main areas of power: legislation, land use, and budget. The Judicial branch is in charge of resolving all matters involving civil and criminal law within the County. (Montgomery County Vision Statement, 1999) The Office of Procurement is under the Executive branch.

### **2.2 Purpose of a Procurement Office**

The Office of Procurement has two main purposes. The first is called the *pre-award process*, which begins when a need for a good or service arises and ends when a contract is signed. During this process, the Office of Procurement will draft a contract specification, release an invitation for a bid, determine the best contractor for the job, and get the contract signed. The Office of Procurement assists using departments and agencies in acquiring quality goods and services for use within the county. Essentially, the Procurement Office selects contractors who they feel will provide the right products

or services at the right price. This method of acquiring goods and services for the County ensures that competitive bidding is utilized which maintains the integrity of procurement regulations and laws.

The second purpose of the Office of Procurement is to ensure that the specifications set forth in the contract are met. This is referred to as the *post-award process*, which begins when the contract is signed and lasts until its completion. During the time that a contract is carried out, many problems can arise. The source of the problem could be either the Montgomery County Government or the contractor. If a contractor does not fulfill the requirements of the contract, *the using department* (the department that is receiving the contractor's goods or services) will notify the Procurement Office and request assistance. In this case, the Office of Procurement either provides guidance with the intent of fixing any problems caused by the contract violation or terminates the contract entirely. (Procurement Regulations, 2000).

Many of the problems that occur in the post-award process can be eliminated by carefully carrying out the pre-award process. Contractor selection and product/service specifications are two pre-award elements that play a key role in the outcome of the post-award process. If a contractor is chosen wisely, chances are the product or service will successfully be delivered to the using department. On the other hand, poor contractor selection can lead to many problems in the post-award process. Likewise, if the specifications developed in the pre-award process meet the needs of the using department and are clearly written, there is a higher probability of the post-award process being successful. Once again, if these specifications are poorly written there is a greater chance of failure in the post-award process.

### **2.3 Current Procurement System**

The current Montgomery County Government Procurement System is run slightly different from many comparable systems. One of the major differences is that the specialists who handle pre-award processes also handle some of the post-award processes. Thus, the two processes are not completely separated, as they are in most procurement systems (McNeal, 2000). The current Montgomery County Government Procurement System also includes a “bridge contract plan” and an “open solicitation clause”. The bridge contract allows for many parts of the pre-award process to be skipped if the selected contractor has previously been selected through a competitive bidding process by another government agency. A “bridge” is used when the same specifications are required in Montgomery County that exist somewhere else. Montgomery County can use the same contract with a vendor as long as the contract was the outcome of fair competitive bidding. The open solicitation clause allows for several contracts with several contractors to occur on a continuing basis. Competent contractors that have met the pre-established qualifications can accept the job without going through the bidding process.

The contract administrator at the Montgomery County Office of Procurement has dotted line authority over the using department’s contract administrators. In other words, he has control of the contracts, but the contract administrators don’t report directly to him, but instead to their department directors. This chain of authority can lead to disputes in the post-award process. For example, a contract administrator may be under pressure from his or her director to finish a job in a certain amount of time. If a problem

arises, the contract administrator may not report it to the Procurement Office. This can cause even greater problems, which could have been avoided if the Procurement Office had been notified of the problem quickly.

Another weakness in the system is that the contract administrators are not always trained in contract resolution. Contract administrators within the using departments are typically technical experts so that they can provide adequate specifications for the contracts they handle, but they have little or no formal training in contract administration or problem resolution. It is also possible that contract administration is not their primary job. For the most part, the only training they have had in the field of contract administration is through a short course taken to become familiar with the area. Again, this can cause problems in the post-award process. An inexperienced contract administrator may not know how to handle a problem properly.

## **2.4 Contract Specifications**

It is important that a contract gives very clear specifications for a good or service. Anything that is unclear can lead to conflict during the post-award process. Holding (1975) says that if a specification lacks necessary parts, the contract may be awarded even if the bid does not meet the needs of the government. An oversight such as this may not become apparent until someone notices that the product does not meet its intended purpose. At this point, it is up to the contract administrators in the using departments to fix the problem. If the specification had been written correctly the first time, the problem in the post-award process might not have occurred.

When the government uses the term "quality", they mean how well the product meets contract requirements and not whether or not the product is good or bad. Unnecessary features should be left out of the specification because they may eliminate good alternatives. In the Montgomery County procurement process, a using department creates the specifications for a good or service. The Office of Procurement reviews the specifications and releases an IFB, Invitation for Bid, or an RFP, Request for Proposal. When the using department accurately specifies what it requires, the Office of Procurement can expedite the process of obtaining bids for a contract. A good specification from a using department will help to eliminate vendors incapable of performing the required tasks. There are many different types of specifications. The government can specify a product by brand name or a list of products that it will accept. It can also ask for samples and select products based on this or even have a custom product designed. It can even select a product just by specifications and cost. In any case, the specification must be comprehensive, without a gray area that could allow for interpretation. (Holding, 1975)

#### 2.4.1 Quality Assurance

Holding (1975) says: "A notable deficiency in many public purchasing systems is the lack of a centrally administered inspection program." He goes on to say that there are three basic reasons why a procurement office might think that there is no need for an organized inspection system. The three reasons are:

- The belief that contractors would not make a non-complete product on purpose.
- The belief that the using departments will take care of this themselves.



- The belief that if the goods and services were poor then the department would receive many complaints from unhappy citizens.

As the author points out, these beliefs may be misguided. For this reason, he says that a government quality assurance system is needed. The Montgomery County Government Office of Procurement does not have a quality inspection program. Instead, it relies on using department contract administrators and their teams to ensure that the contractors are doing their jobs. This has proven to be a problem in some instances because it gives the contract administrators the ability to informally change a contract without notifying the Office of Procurement and change the contract independently. If the inspection team were an in-house operation, there would be less chance of the contract administrators handling contract disputes without the Office of Procurement. Holding (1975) says that “an excellent means of making certain that thorough inspections will be conducted is to set forth procedures, techniques, and standards, whether in a separate inspection manual or as part of the purchasing procedures manual.” The author also believes that the inspection staff should be separate from the purchasing staff to provide an extra check to make sure the goods or services meet the specifications as outlined in the contract.

A complaint system, where files are kept on problematic contractors, can be a useful addition to the procurement process. Holding says that “Instances of nonconformance with specifications, noncompliance with contractual terms and conditions, or other types of complaints concerning suppliers’ performance should be recorded and referred to central purchasing.” (Holding, 1975) Files should be made of all complaints on all suppliers so that future-purchasing committees can be sure to avoid

bad contractors. This filing system should be available to anyone and will serve as yet another check to ensure quality assurance. Holding says:

“When a certain number of complaints about a supplier have been received within a certain time, his record should be reviewed and action taken. The actions could include visiting the supplier to discuss his performance, writing letters that caution him against continued poor performance, and informing him of the criteria for removing him from the bidders list.” (Holding, 1975)

He goes on to say that if supplier performance is not up to specification, this should be grounds for withholding payment until the problem is fixed. The inspection group should also have some system set up to handle complaints with contractors. According to Holding (1975), there are two ways that this can be handled. The first way, which he believes is the best because it has the most quality assurance checks, is to let the inspectors contact the vendors to fix the problem. The second way is to have the inspectors contact the purchasing agents and let them deal with the problem. The author goes on to say “it may be necessary to revise a delivery schedule, cancel a contract, or initiate a new purchase action.” The downside of the inspection group is the amount of personnel that it requires. The Office of Procurement does not currently have the funding or personnel required for a system of this type. (Holding, 1975)

## **2.5 Decisions Made in Contractor Selection**

There are three main decisions procurement offices make when selecting contractors. First, they must decide whether to utilize one single contractor or several. A contractor may have exclusive rights to a certain product, which forces the procurement

office to choose that contractor. In another example, one contractor in particular may have a reputation for supplying outstanding services, far better than its competition, which may persuade the procurement office to choose it over any other contractor. On the other hand, if a variety of supplies are needed for a using department, utilizing a variety of contractors might be the most cost-effective choice to make. Second, they must decide either to purchase from a manufacturer or a distributor. Purchasing from a manufacturer will often be more cost effective. However, the government cannot always purchase directly from the manufacturer. Sometimes it will be necessary to find a distributor to provide a good or service. For example, the Montgomery County Government has accounts with distributors such as the Home Depot and Staples where they buy office supplies and other goods. Finally, they may decide to purchase goods or services from a local source or ignore geographical location all together. By selecting a local source, the government may support the local community because it is doing business with its citizens. Time factors into this decision as well. A contractor that is located far from the using department could provide a service at a lower cost, but would require more time to deliver it than a local contractor. Each of these factors go beyond selecting a contractor simply because its products or services are of suitable quality and cost. (Lewis, 1951)

### 2.5.1 Choosing a Contractor

As mentioned earlier, contractor selection is a pre-award step that plays a key role in the outcome of the post-award process. The initial selection of a contractor is very important. In order to prepare an Invitation for Bid, one needs a written specification,

product costs, standardized factors, and a timeframe. Duncan and Tignor (2000) talk of benefits of effective planning. If the using departments can reduce the number or rush purchases and ensure that adequate materials are on hand at all times, they can increase the efficiency of Montgomery County and reduce costs. Not having sufficient knowledge about a vendor can lead to problems. The time spent during this process leads to fewer conflicts with vendors and contracts in the post-award process. Burt (1984) states “the right source is one that can provide the right quality of materials or services, on time, at a reasonable price, and with the services required to create a satisfied customer”. Dr. Tignor (2000), the director of the Montgomery County Office of Procurement says, “the aim of any good procurement function is to obtain goods and services of the proper quality at the best possible prices.” The selection of these goods and services is very important. Burt (1984) feels that there are three common problems that occur in the selection process:

- Insufficient attention is given to the screening of possible suppliers.
- Purchasers do not take full advantage of unknown/unused sources.
- Competitive bidding is not used much in the private sector and overused in the public sector.

In Burt’s (1984) opinion, a procurement rule of thumb is to avoid requesting a bid or quotation from a specific contractor unless knowledge is available on that contractor’s qualifications. He believes that purchasing departments should have time to become acquainted with the contractors before selecting them to be a contract supplier. Burt (1984) says that visiting the contractor’s facilities allows the buyer to understand what the contractor is capable of doing. During these meetings, the focus should be on the

services required and the prospective supplier's ability to satisfy these requirements (Burt, 1984). In Montgomery County, the procurement office does not engage in personal visits to vendors' facilities. The Office of Procurement does not have the resources to investigate contractors to this extent. It relies on written quotes and past experiences with vendors to make decisions.

Corey (1978) states that, "under normal supply and demand conditions, vendor selection is a matter of choosing from among a number of qualified sources. However, in periods of shortage, buyers have to put considerable effort into identifying sources and persuading them to make supply commitments". Both of the authors, Burt (1984) and Corey (1978), put emphasis of the pre-award process. Corey (1978) defines, "the process by which a buyer ultimately arrives at a contract agreement with a seller may be conceived as a series of cuts, each one narrowing the list of candidates". Again, Burt (1984) and Corey (1978) have a similar outlook on the selection process. Both authors say that companies tend to favor distributors that they have done business with previously. A common situation Montgomery County encounters is the repeated use of non-county project managers, consulting firms, and contractors when using departments engage in mini-contracts. At this time there is no method for monitoring how a contract administrator allocates smaller contracts for the department. This is because purchase orders below \$5,000 or contracts below \$25,000 are not required to go through the Office of Procurement. As in private industry, networking is sometimes utilized instead of a fairer bidding approach. Ultimately this practice makes it difficult for new contractors to enter the system. Allowing new vendors to enter the market can add diversity and new options in products, services, and price. However, bringing in new suppliers involves

uncertainties and administrative costs. The new vendors must be evaluated and researched to ensure they can meet the goals of the contract. In the identification process, a list of potential sources is created and after the evaluation process a smaller list of qualified vendors remains. Corey (1978) recommends that the evaluation stage be designed to get all of the qualified vendors who satisfy all the necessary criteria. This would allow the final decision to be based on price alone. In writing for the United States Supreme Court, Justice Black said:

“Like private individuals and businesses, the Government enjoys the unrestricted power to produce its own supplies, to determine those with whom it will deal, and to fix the terms and conditions upon which it will make needed purchases.” (Tether, 1977)

This holds true for all governing bodies, including Montgomery County. The Montgomery County Office of Procurement chooses contractors accordingly, based on the County’s needs as well as the needs of the using department.

## 2.5.2 Contractor Relationships

Carlisle and Parker (1989) say: “Cooperation between industrial users and sellers is a far more powerful strategy for making them both more profitable in the long term than any adversarial approach yet devised.” The authors believe that Americans are worried about profits and individuality and not getting the job done as well as possible. When government agencies engage in contracts involving large monetary commitments for goods and services an emphasis should be placed on cooperation with contractors. In

the end, this will yield a more satisfactory result for both sides and allow for a higher level of quality to be attained.

Carlisle and Parker (1989) say that there is a need for more trust in buyer-seller relationships. Companies are usually interested in short-term projects, which result in less time for building relationships. Carlisle and Parker believe that there is a direct correlation between how an organization acts internally and how it acts towards its suppliers. Organizations are broken down into three phases: Pioneer, Rational/Scientific, and the Integrated phase between the company and the vendor. Basically, the first phase is the beginning of the organization. Usually, there is only an idea of what the group wants to accomplish. The second phase, Rational/Scientific, is when the ideas start to turn into goals and the organization forms good internal relationships. The third phase is Integration between the organization and the vendor. Carlisle and Parker (1989) say that organizations should figure out which phase they are in and try to migrate towards Integration.

Carlisle and Parker (1989) say that there is a need for an intermediate group, such as a procurement office, that will take in ideas from executives and buyers. This will allow both sides to be heard and therefore the group should come up with a good compromise. An intermediate group would also serve to add new ideas and work out any problems with the contracts before it is carried out. There is a lot of disagreement on this topic and many believe that the intermediate groups add an unnecessary bias to the decision making process. (Carlisle, 1989) An organization should not have cost-minded buyers make all the decisions. They say “this results in a failure to consider all of the needs of the implementing groups in the resolution of the issues.” (Carlisle, 1989) The

closer the relationship between the buyer and seller, the more likely it is that the contract will be successful. This is especially important during the post-award process because it will lead to better negotiations and problem solutions.

### 2.5.3 Government Reputation with Contractors

MacManus (1992) said, “businesses don’t think too highly of government as a business partner.” Surveys show that the harshest judgement comes from companies that have never had a contract with the government. MacManus believes that the reasons for this poor attitude towards government contracts is that it generally takes a long time to be paid for their services. The government maintains that this is required to ensure that the job was done right. (MacManus, 1992) The current policy of the Montgomery County Office of Management and Budget is to pay contractors within a 30-day period of completion of a contract and Montgomery County agrees to pay interest on the money if payment is not made on time. Regardless, the government’s (not necessarily Montgomery County’s) unfavorable image could cause problems during the procurement process. Companies can be quick to blame the government for any issues that may arise during this process. Any delays that occur during this process tend to be frowned upon by vendors, even if they are part of a standard procedure. Thus, it is important for a government agency to set clear guidelines for their business to minimize trivial complaints.



#### 2.5.4 Getting The Most Out Of Contractors

Kelman's (1990) research shows that industry contracts are usually longer in duration than government contracts. He said that "two main factors work toward creating such standard relationships: the incentive for good performance created by the linkage of past performance with future orders; and the site-specific knowledge that vendors gain from working for a long time at a customer's operation." (Kelman, 1990) Contracts of shorter duration require that the vendor continue to do a good job because he can easily be replaced. One of the best ways to get good performance from a contractor is to reward them with repeat business. (Kelman, 1990)

#### 2.5.5 Contractor Performance

According to Fearon (1993), there are several aspects that government agencies look at when considering how a contractor will perform. These include:

- Proven track record of obtaining the contract goal at the right price
- Meeting the contract requirements.
- Statistical data that backs up their performance record.
- The ability of the vendor to set priorities and fix problems that may prevent the contractor from completing the contract successfully.
- Consistency and the ability to improve their product in ways that benefit the agency.

There are two ways to measure contract performance. These are outcomes and output. Outcome is the way a contractor's service affected the agency. "Measurement of outcomes, or results, is used to indicate how effectively awarded contracts assist agencies

in meeting their program and mission requirements.” (Kestenbaum, 1995) Output is what was actually produced by the contractor. These are two entirely different things. Output is the product of the work, and outcome is the result and its effect on the buyer.

## **2.6 Contract Negotiations and Awards**

The Montgomery County Office of Procurement is investigating ways to improve the post-award process and eliminate or reduce conflicts with contractors. Barlow (1982) said that one of the most difficult problems confronting a purchasing agent is being forced to negotiate when an arrangement has gone bad. The reasons for reopening a negotiated contract usually fall into one of three categories: price, specifications, and quantity. If problems arise with a vendor, amendments must be made. As mentioned earlier, a contract can be terminated by legal action against the vendor or efforts can be made to reevaluate and change the contract with buyer and seller approval.

Contracts are awarded to the bidder who demonstrates that they are able to produce a quality product or service that meets the contract specification and can offer the lowest price for goods and services. Therefore, a contract is not always simply awarded to the absolute lowest bidder. (Holding, 1975) “Guidelines for evaluation and award should encompass a determination of who submitted the lowest bid, whether the low bid is responsive, and whether the low bidder is responsible.” (Holding, 1975) To determine if the low bidder is responsible we must look at several aspects of the company. These include:

- Financial stability
- Production capability

- Ability to deliver on time

A contractor may demonstrate these abilities through previous contracts either with the government or other agencies. Responsiveness, in terms of contract specification, means that the bid does not have any contradicting terms or calculation mistakes in it. (Holding 1975)

## **2.7 Contract Modifications and Terminations**

The Office of Procurement works with using departments and vendors to make amendments to contracts. A contractor, procurement specialist, or a contract administrator in the using department may request contract modifications. These modifications help using departments and the county to have projects and services completed by the vendors. There are two types of orders involved in contract modifications that do not change the original specification of the contract. These are *field orders* and *change orders*. Field orders are used when unexpected situations arise. For example, if a major traffic light went out, a field order would be issued so that it could be fixed immediately. A field order would be appropriate when construction has already started and can also be used for goods and services. Field orders modify contracts more quickly than an amendment process and are beneficial for a work in progress where limited modification is required. They are not allowed if sufficient time is available for either a change order or contract amendment to be made.

When there is sufficient time, the procurement specialist can authorize a change order to modify the contract. These changes can include a variety of different things,

such as an alteration in the delivery time, price or quantity of goods and services in a contract. They can occur with or without the consent of the contractor.

Finally, contract amendments can be made if a modification is needed that goes beyond the original scope of the contract. Both the contracting officer and the contractor need to sign the amendment in order for it to be valid. (Montgomery County Government, Procurement Regulations, 90-93)

These types of contract modifications, especially field and change orders, can lead to contract disputes. In the case of field and change orders, where a contractor's consent is not necessary, a contractor could claim s/he was never informed of any changes made to their contract. This is why it is necessary for there to be good communication between the Office of Procurement and the using department contract administrators as well as with the contractors themselves.

There are three ways in which a contract may be terminated. The first is by default. This happens when a contractor materially breaches a contract. The second is for convenience. This occurs when the county decides that it is in their best interest to terminate a contract. In the Montgomery County Office of Procurement there are specific procedures for terminating a contract with a contractor. The Director of the Office of Procurement is the only person authorized to terminate a contract. (Duncan, 2000) Finally, a contract may be terminated upon mutual consent of both parties involved. This type of termination requires the County Attorney's approval (Montgomery County Government, Procurement Regulations, 1997).

A contract is terminated for default when a contractor has failed to provide the goods or services in the specified time or when the contractor has failed to comply with

the terms and conditions of the contract. Once the using department is aware of the negligence of the contractor, the department monitors and documents the problem. At this point the Director of the Office of Procurement is notified of the poor performance. The using department requests assistance from the Office of Procurement to help fix the problems at hand. If the problem persists, the department requests termination of the contract by the Director and the Office of Procurement. At this point, the Procurement Office must notify the contractor of its deficiencies and request completion of the required work within a certain attainable time period. If the contractor is unable to complete the work, negotiation of liquidated damages is discussed. The office determines if the county should continue with the contractor, and if not, notifies the contractor that the contract is terminated for default (Duncan, 2000).

Termination for convenience is used when the County decides that the contracted goods or services are no longer needed. In this instance the department reviews the relevant contract and determines that the services are no longer required. The department is responsible for preparing a report with evidence supporting termination for the Director of the Office of Procurement. The using department issues payments for outstanding invoices before the termination.

The Procurement Office sends the contractor the termination letter. Settlement of outstanding goods and services is agreed upon, and titles for County belongings are exchanged. This means that financial obligations are determined and settled between the parties. The contract is then officially terminated (Duncan 2000).

Termination by mutual consent is used when both parties agree to contract termination without assigning fault or any compensation to either party. In this case the

using department receives an approval notice from the Office of Procurement. A report is then prepared for the Director of the Office of Procurement and outstanding payments are made. The Procurement Office arranges for the transferring of titles of County property and the contractor is officially notified of the termination (Duncan, 2000).

## **2.8 Monitoring Customer Satisfaction**

Any business or agency that strives to be successful must have good customer relations. Many businesses and agencies have developed a standard for customer service. The mayor of Washington D.C., for example, has implemented a minimum standard for telephone customer service. He requires that all government-employed telephone service representatives have a basic knowledge of their functions within the agency they work for, that they remain courteous at all times, and that they return phone calls within 48 hours. (District of Columbia: Mayor's Office, 2000) Montgomery County recently implemented an initiative called "*Montgomery Measures Up!*" This program is an effort to define what the County is seeking to achieve for the community and then measure the progress achieved. It reports on the performance of the County and develops new methods to improve the quality of Montgomery County.

Many businesses and agencies have even gone as far as hiring a third party to monitor their employee-customer relations. ("The Center for Excellence in Local Government", 1988) Methods for monitoring customer service include surveys, interviews, and the use of a "mystery shopper," where a person will act as a potential customer in order to gain information regarding such things as employee courtesy. Regardless of which method or methods are chosen, the goal remains the same: to

provide up-to-date information that detects and details any flaws or weaknesses, and strengths that exist in the business's system. Evaluating response times to complaints, quality regarding products or services, and common courtesy when interacting with customers are good areas to investigate. (Milford, 2000)

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

The purpose of this project was to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the current post-award process. Specifically, we investigated customer service standards and response times to contract disputes. To gather the required information for this project, we conducted a series of interviews with using department contract administrators as well as contractors themselves. We took this data and performed content analysis to determine where the Office of Procurement needs to focus its attention. From this analysis, we made recommendations that would help to improve customer service issues and speed up response times to contractor complaints.

### **3.1 Data Collection**

The primary source of information for this project was a series of personal interviews with using department contract administrators. We chose to use face to face interviews for several reasons. Personal interviews allow the interviewer to draw the person out and get them to speak from experience. They also allowed us to watch for reactions and body language, which helped to show how the interviewee felt. The people who we interviewed were close to our office, so they were easily accessible. These interviews were done in a semi-standardized format. This means that there was a list of predetermined questions but the interviewee was allowed to digress from the question. This allowed the interviewee to tell us all the information that they could think of and identify strengths or weaknesses we had not foreseen.

The personal interviews had three main goals. The first was to generate a list of strengths and weaknesses in the current post-award process. We looked for strengths



because this would allow us to tell the Office of Procurement what they were currently doing well. The list of weaknesses helped us determine what needs to be done in order to improve customer satisfaction. The second goal of the personal interviews was to collect data on response times when people contacted the Office of Procurement. We wanted to know how long it took for the contract administrators to obtain a resolution to their problem after they had contacted the office. We also wanted to know if these times were adequate and what could be done to improve them. The third goal of the interviews was to identify the communication methods used by the Office of Procurement and the contract administrators. We wanted to determine if the using departments could contact a procurement specialist when they needed one. We also wanted to know if the procurement specialists were able to respond to the inquiry in a timely and knowledgeable manner.

The interviews consisted of straightforward questions that did not include risk to the interviewee. For this reason, we used an informational interview style. The questions, included below, were open-ended to allow the interviewee to digress from the topic. The first question in the interview allowed us to understand the interviewee's overall impression of the Office of Procurement. This question was used to break the ice and get the interviewee thinking about procurement. We then moved on to assess communication between the Office of Procurement and the using department. Response times were the focus of these questions because they required more thought. Finally, we asked specifically about the strengths and weaknesses of the current post-award process. These were the most difficult questions to answer so we asked them at the end of the interview.

The first question in our interview was:

*Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?*

We asked this question because we wanted to get a general feel for how contract administrators felt about the Office of Procurement. It also made a good opening question because there was no risk in answering and it set the mood of the interview. The second question jumped right into communication issues:

*What are your primary methods of communicating with the Office?  
Phone/Email/Fax/Mail/Personal Meetings*

The purpose of this question was to introduce the topic of communication between the Office of Procurement and the Using Department Contract Administrators. It also served to guide us into the next question:

*When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem? Is this adequate?*

- 1. Within 24 hours*
- 2. Within 1 week*
- 3. More than 1 week*

This question began our research on response times. After the interviewee answered this question, we asked if the response times they experienced were adequate. If they were not, we drew them out and tried to find out what could be done to help them. This led us to our next two questions, which dealt with response time delays and communication improvement possibilities:

*In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post-award procurement process?*

This question was designed to find out what the contract administrators felt were causing delays when they had a contract dispute. This provided us with ideas on how to make the process go more smoothly. The next question was aimed at inter-office communication and how the Office could make it better. The fifth question was:

*What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?*

The goal of this question was to determine the kinds of things the Office of Procurement could do to help fix any communication problems between the procurement specialists and the contract administrators. There was some discussion of the need for a “call center” at the Office of Procurement, and this question might help determine whether or not a call center would be warranted. After we have determined what kind of communication and response time problems existed, we moved on to learn about the contract administrators experiences with contract terminations. The sixth question was:

*Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?*

The aim of this question was to determine what problems a contract administrator might encounter when they were involved in a contract termination. This is very important because contract terminations are the most complex and time-consuming portion of the post-award process. The next two questions were designed to help determine the strengths and weaknesses of the current procurement system:

*What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post-award process?*

*What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post-award process?*

The final question was the only one in our interview that involved risk:

*When a contract dispute arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?*

The goal of this question was to get an understanding of why a contract administrator would try to avoid using the Office of Procurement when dealing with contract disputes.

After creating the interview questions, we pre-tested them on three different audiences. The first pretest was conducted on a Procurement Manager in the Office of Procurement. This helped us make sure the questions were worded in a straightforward way and that the interviewee could easily understand them. The next pretest was conducted on a respondent. This helped us determine how an actual interviewee would handle our questions. The final pretest was conducted on our sponsor. This final pretest ensured that we had effectively worded the interview and that all questions could be easily understood by anyone who took it. It also checked the validity of the questions and ensured that the correct information would be gathered. After each pretest we redrafted the questions before testing again.

Now that we had determined the questions for our interviews and pre-tested them in the field, we needed to decide what our frame would be. We used stratified sampling to determine the specific people to interview. To do this, we first separated the population (using departments) into sub-groups. For this project, we wanted to interview departments that were heavily involved with the Office of Procurement. We chose three criteria to separate the departments. We first looked at the number of contract

administrators in each department (Figure 4.1). This is very important because it gives an idea of how many contracts the department deals with and also the complexity of the contracts. The second criterion was the total number of contracts that each department handles (Figure 4.2). This is important because we wanted to select sub-groups that were actively involved with the Office of Procurement. The third criterion used to select the specific sub-groups of the population was the number of contracts that were completed in the past year and cost above \$100,000 (Figure 4.3). We wanted the number of contracts above \$100,000 because this would tell us how many contracts the department dealt with that were in the area where customer service issues were bound to turn up. Contracts with values under \$100,000 are usually purchase orders and are not likely to cause customer service issues.

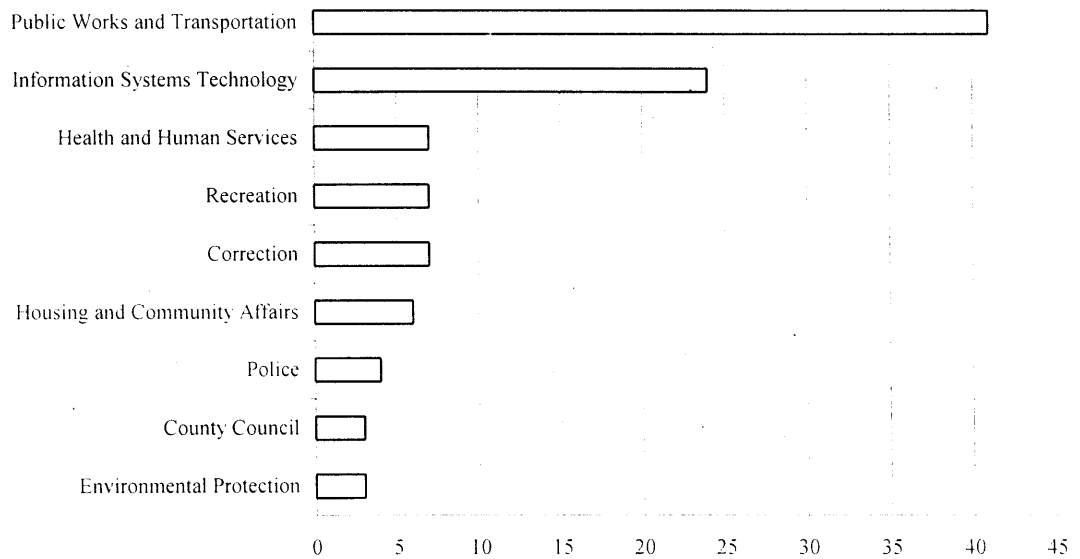


Figure 4.1 Number of Contract Administrators By Department

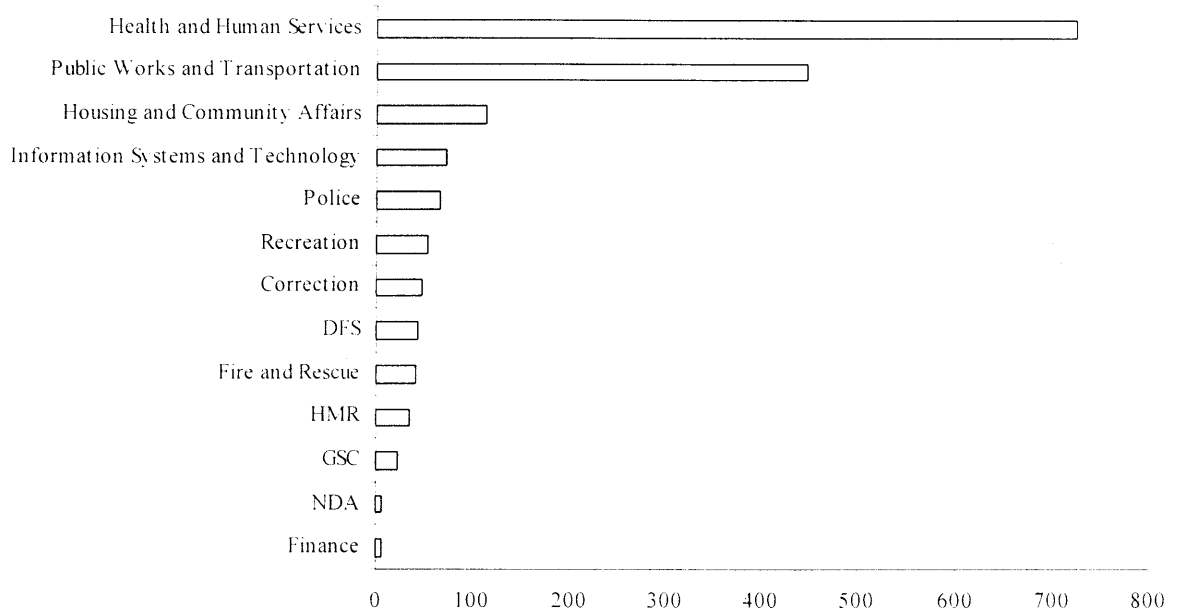


Figure 4.2 Number of Total Contracts By Department

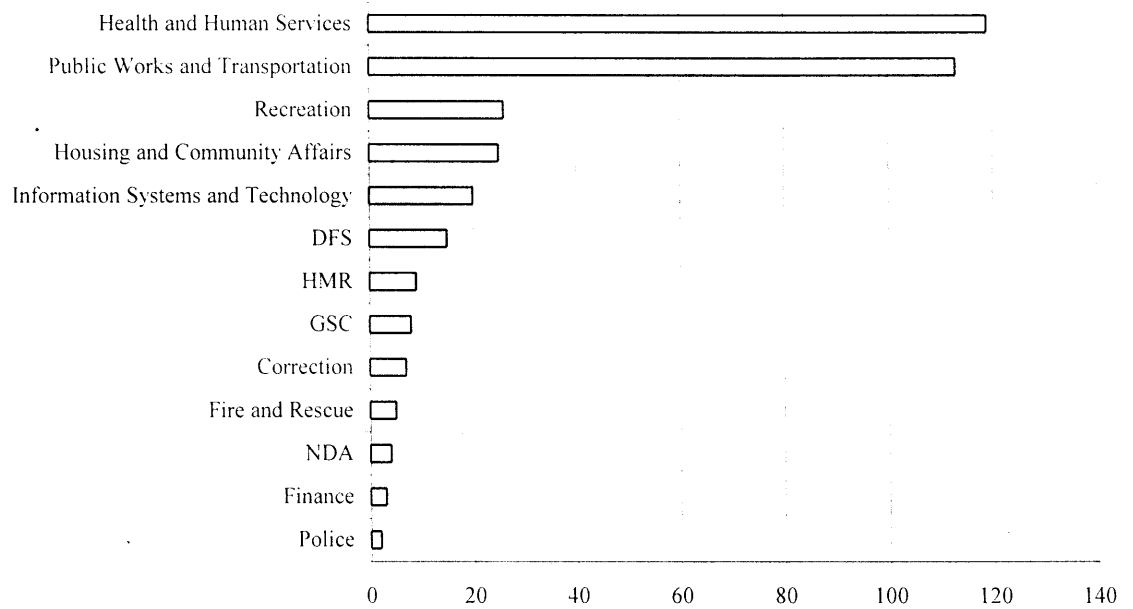


Figure 4.3 Total Contracts Above \$100,000 By Department

We collected data pertaining to our criteria on each sub-group of the population and plotted it. This showed five departments that were always in the top six in each of our criteria. The departments were:

- Health and Human Services
- Public Works and Transportation
- Information Systems and Technology
- Housing and Community Affairs
- Recreation

We decided to eliminate the recreation department because many of its contracts were personnel related. Contracts for personnel rarely involve disputes in the post-award procurement process. This is because the contract is for payroll purposes.

With the specific departments selected, we chose specific administrators to interview from the list of candidates. Again, we decided upon some criteria that each person needed to fit. The first criterion was that they needed to have active contracts with the Office of Procurement. The reason was that we wanted their experiences to be fresh in their mind. We also wanted them to know how the Office is currently working. The second criterion was that they should have at least two years of experience in working with contracts and the Office of Procurement. We felt that this was the minimum amount of time that a person would need in order to have a full understanding of how the Office worked and its strengths and weaknesses. The third criterion was that the people should have worked with a contract termination. The reason was that we needed people who have had experience with dispute situations and how the Office of Procurement handled them. Due to the time constraints of this project, it was impossible

for us to investigate each of the 120 contract administrators. The best way for us to obtain the information we needed was through the buyers that worked with the contract administrators. In order to reduce any bias, we asked the director to assure the procurement specialists that our findings would not discuss specific people but rather the office as a whole.

The information we were looking for is qualitative. We wished to learn how people feel the Office of Procurement was doing in the areas of customer service and response times. We wanted to know what could be done to improve customer relations and response times to complaints. The director of the office collects quantitative data on a yearly basis, so it is not necessary that we find this information. There are 120 total contract administrators. We interviewed 10% of this number, or 12 people. We chose the number of contract administrators to interview in each department based on the number of contract administrators in that department. For this reason, we interviewed seven people from public works and transportation, two from health and human services, two from information systems and technology, and one from housing and community affairs personnel.

After selecting the specific people to interview, we first sent them a memorandum by mail. This note was signed by our office director and gave a brief overview of the project and our purpose in interviewing them. We followed up with a phone call to setup an interview time. During the phone call, we introduced ourselves, gave a brief summary of the project, and asked if we could schedule an interview. The script for this phone call can be found in Appendix F. We also notified them that the interview should last between 15 to 30 minutes, depending on how much they had to say.



The interviews were conducted in the same manner for each person. First, we introduced ourselves and explained a little about the project. We then started asking our questions. We tried to draw them out when the need arose but we did not deviate from the questions to ask new ones so that there was consistency between interviews. We believed that people that work in government might be afraid to be recorded on tape, so we decided to hand transcribe each interview. We did not want them to be afraid to answer our questions. Two out of the three of us attended each interview. One facilitated by asking the questions and the other helped to draw the person out while taking notes. We transcribed the interviews immediately so that we did not forget what the person said.

The personal interviews will provide the basis for our recommendations to the Office of Procurement. To supplement our data, we also interviewed contractors that worked for the Montgomery County Government. This provided us with two different aspects of customer service in the Office of Procurement.

The secondary source of information for this project was phone interviews with contractors. This allowed us to see customer service from the perspective of the contractor as well as the using departments. We chose to use phone interviews for several reasons. The Office of Procurement needed to understand how contractors felt about the Office of Procurement and what they believed it could do better. A semi-standardized interview was the best way to do this because it allowed the interviewee to digress from our questions if they had something to add. We chose a phone interview over a personal interview because the contractors were not all easily accessible. Due to the time constraints of a phone interview, we were able to conduct more of them, which allowed us to get input from a larger variety of contractors.

The goals of the phone interview were very similar to the personal interviews. However, due to the limited time that we were able to speak on the phone, the goals were more focused. The first goal of our phone interviews was to gain insight on the contractors perspective regarding weaknesses in the current procurement system. The second goal was to determine what could be done to improve the customer service needs of the contractors. The third goal of the phone interviews was to answer some quantitative questions for the “Montgomery Measures Up!” program. These questions could be used by the Office of Procurement in the future to determine the number of complaints from contractors regarding contract administrator support.

The phone interviews consisted of straightforward questions that involved no risk for the respondent. For this reason, we used an informational style interview. The questions were open-ended to allow the interviewee to digress from the topic. The interview contained three open-ended questions and two five-point Likert questions.

The first question was:

*What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?*

The purpose of this question was to generate a list of major problems with the current post-award procurement system. The answers to this question supported the personal interview responses while contributing a new perspective to the results. The second question was:

*What is the average response time you experience when dealing with the Office of Procurement? Is this adequate?*

The purpose of this question was to gain insight on response times contractors received from the Office. It allowed the contractor to tell us if the times were sufficient. The third and final open-ended question of the phone interview was:

*Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?*

This question provided an opportunity for the contractors to suggest to the Office of Procurement recommendations that would lead to better service.

The final two questions were designed to get qualitative answers for the “Montgomery Measures Up” program. These questions were used to identify the level of customer service support at the Office of Procurement and the support that contractors received from contract administrators. To answer these questions, we used a five-point Likert scale with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent.

***On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:***

***Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement***

<i>Poor</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Very Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

***Support from contract administrators after a contract has been signed***

<i>Poor</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Very Good</i>	<i>Excellent</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

After we created the interview questions, we pre-tested them on three different audiences. The first pretest was conducted on a Procurement Manager in the Office of Procurement. This helped us make sure the questions were worded in a straightforward way and that the interviewee could easily understand them. The next pretest was conducted on a contractor. This helped us determine how an actual interviewee would

handle our questions. The final pretest was conducted on our sponsor. This final pretest ensured that we had effectively worded the interview and that all questions could be easily understood by anyone who took it. It also checked the validity of the questions and ensured that the correct information would be gathered. After each pretest we redrafted the questions with our corrections before testing again.

In order to be able to compare our personal and phone interviews, we decided to interview contractors that worked for the same four departments used in our contract administrator interviews. We also decided to use contractors that had completed a contract in the past year and that had contracts valued at greater than \$100,000. Choosing contracts within the last year yielded contractors that have had recent experience with the Office of Procurement. We also wanted contracts of high value because this was where the most customer service issues occurred. In order to select individual contractors to interview, we gathered information on all the contractors that met our criteria and sorted them by department. Due to the length of our phone interviews, we decided that we could interview one contractor for every contract administrator that we interviewed. Here is the breakdown of interviews by department:

- Department of Public Works and Transportation – 7
- Department of Health and Human Services – 2
- Department of Information Systems and Telecommunications – 2
- Department of Housing and Community Affairs – 1

Based on these numbers, we selected the appropriate number of contractors from our department groupings. To select the specific people, we took the total number of contractors that met our criteria in each department and divided it by the number of

contractors that we wanted. We shall refer to this number as  $x$ . We then selected every  $x^{\text{th}}$  contractor from our list. If we were unable to contact a contractor, we went to the next contractor on the list.

The phone interview began with a brief introduction and statement of our project. We didn't have to get by any gatekeepers because we had direct contact numbers that the procurement specialists used to contact the contractors. After the short description of our project, we asked if they had three minutes to answer some quick questions. If they said no, we asked if there was a time that we could call back when they would be available to talk. The final script for this phone call can be found in the Appendix B. The interviews lasted between three and seven minutes.

The first half of the phone interview was used to gather qualitative information. The phone interviews helped us gain an understanding of what the Office of Procurement could do to help the contractors work more effectively. This provided an overall picture of how the contractors felt about customer service within the Office of Procurement. The second half of the phone interview was designed to answer quantitative information needed for the *Montgomery Measures Up!* guide. In the future, this interview could be done as a final step after a contractor had completed his/her work, or just before a contract was terminated.

### **3.2 Content Analysis**

After our data collection was completed, we performed content analysis on the interview transcriptions. Based on the goals of this project, we chose to look for four main themes when performing content analysis. These themes were:

1. Strengths of the current procurement system
2. Weaknesses of the current procurement system
3. Response times to contract disputes
4. Communication

In order to determine common themes among the departments, we first analyzed all of the interviews as a whole, looking for recurring themes between the departments. We also analyzed department specific problems to see if there was a common cause. After analyzing the departments as a whole, we analyzed the transcripts by department. This was done to determine department specific problems that our contract administrators had experienced.

We analyzed all twelve of the contractor phone interviews collectively. The phone conversations were brief and to the point. The responses had to be questioned for validity because that some of the answers didn't correspond to the question asked. The answers relevant to the problems that respondents had with Procurement were incorporated in the results section. We also used the quantitative data gathered from the last two questions of the phone interviews to compile results, which were entered in the *Montgomery Measures Up!* guide. Collectively the phone interview provided information to make recommendations on how to contact vendors in the future with these questions.

Once preliminary assessments were made concerning the problems encountered with the procurement system, the director of the Office of Procurement was informed of our findings. The reason was to gain feedback from within the office and to see if our recommendations would be appropriate for the Office of Procurement. We did this in the

form of a personal meeting. During this meeting, we showed our proposed recommendations and asked for any comments or additions that the director might have that would make her work easier. The Director's recommendations were incorporated into our report.

Based on the results of our content analysis and input from the Director of the Office of Procurement, we determined recommendations to improve upon the current customer service levels within the Office of Procurement. These results were presented to the Office of Procurement in our final report.

## Chapter 4 Results and Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss and analyze the results of our interviews. To determine which characteristics were common to all using departments, we began our content analysis by identifying common themes in the interviews. We then focused on each individual department. This allowed us to determine department specific themes. We focused our content analysis in four areas:

- Strengths of the current procurement system
- Weaknesses of the current procurement system
- Response times to contractor complaints
- Communication methods

### 4.1 Common Themes

To determine common themes among the using departments, we analyzed all twelve interview transcripts, looking for recurring themes. We also analyzed the sources of department-specific problems to determine if there was a common problem that each department shared. We discovered that the using departments shared several common characteristics.

#### *Strengths of the Current Procurement System*

The main strength of the Office of Procurement is its staff. When asked to identify major strengths of the current procurement system, our respondents said, “The staff. They are responsive to our needs and they really know what they’re doing” and “They (buyers) are quick to respond and are very clear on what needs to be done.” The



procurement specialists were repeatedly described as being “*knowledgeable*”, “*caring*” and “*quick to respond*”.

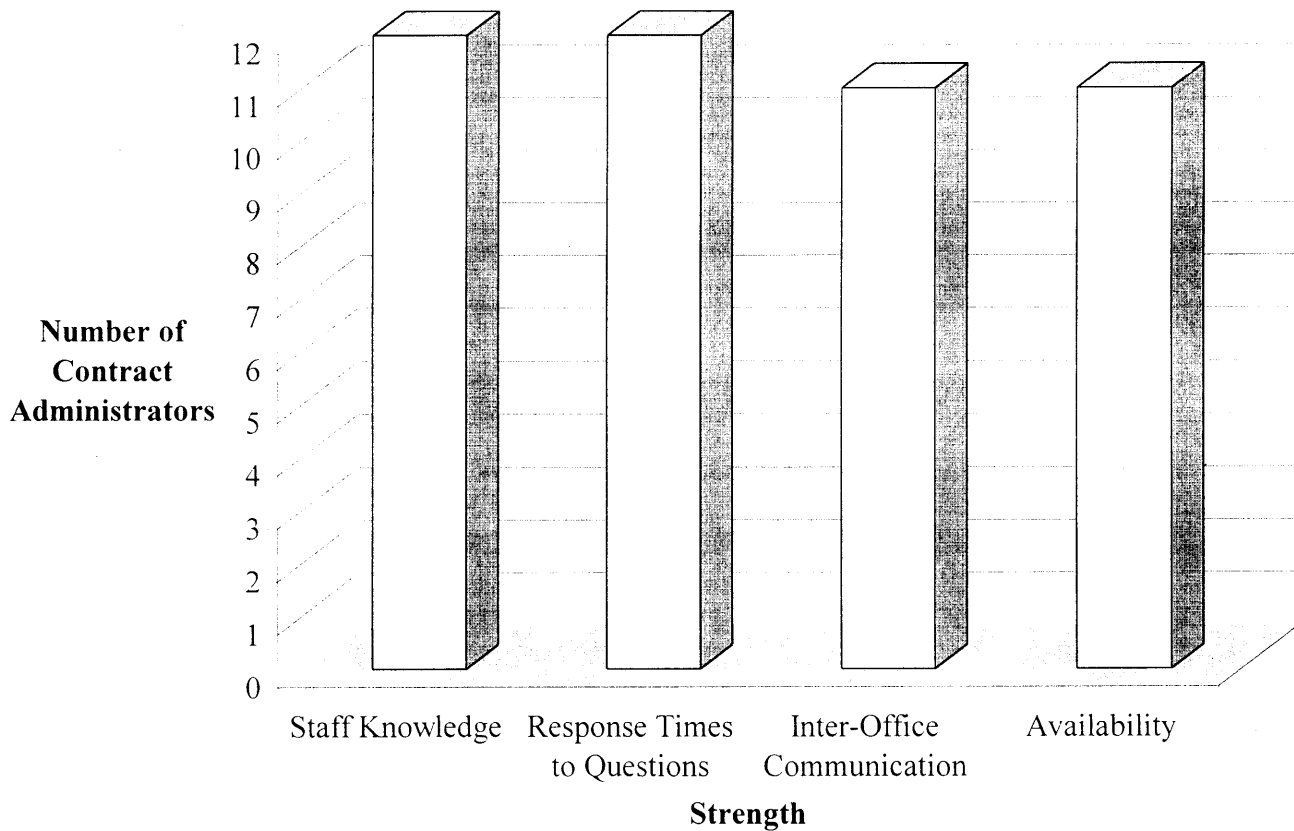


Figure 4.1 Strengths of the Current Procurement System

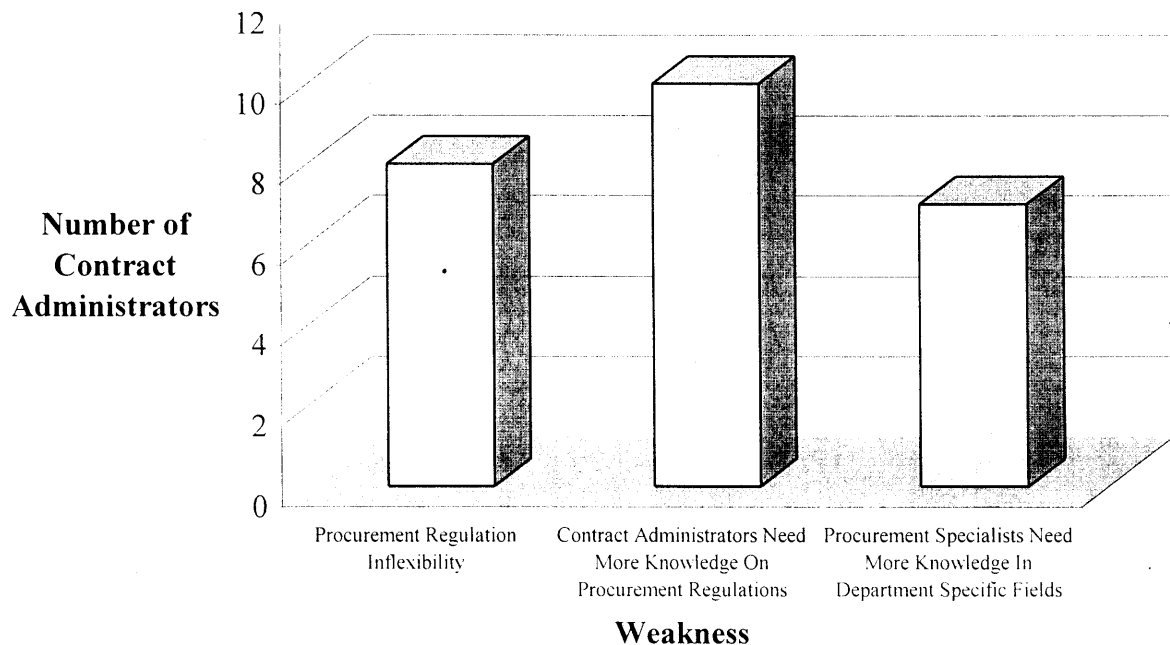
As shown in Figure 4.1, all twelve of our interviewees reported that the procurement specialists were responsive when answering their questions. All of our respondents also said that the staff had an excellent knowledge of the procurement regulations and how procurement worked. In fact, no negative comments were made regarding the personnel.

According to Figure 4.1, another strength of the current procurement system is the availability of its staff. Eleven out of twelve of our interviewees felt that the staff was

always there when they needed support. The respondents also said that inter-office communication was excellent. Eleven out of twelve respondents said that they rarely, if ever, had to wait to speak with a procurement specialist.

### *Weaknesses of the Current Procurement System*

When we asked to identify major areas that needed improvement in the current procurement system, we found that many of the weaknesses were department specific. This was due to the fact that each department has its own special needs and deals with its own types of contracts. However, this did not mean that the problems were unrelated. Many of these weaknesses could be linked to a common problem. We found three specific areas where problems tended to overlap:



• Figure 4.2 Weaknesses in the Current Procurement System

- Inflexible Procurement Regulations
- Lack of Training for Contract Administrators on Procurement Regulations
- Lack of Training for Procurement Specialists in Department Specific Fields

As can be seen in Figure 4.2, eight out of twelve interviewees felt that the procurement regulations were not flexible enough to meet the needs of their department. For example, a Health and Human Services respondent said, *"The regulations are geared more towards widgets and products and we are in the business of supplying services to our patients."* A Department of Public Works and Transportation respondent said, *"A broader interpretation of the law is necessary to serve the needs of each individual department."* It is clear that the interviewees felt that the Procurement Regulations could be changed to improve department flexibility.

Another area that our interviewees felt needed improvement was training for contract administrators on procurement regulations. Figure 4.2 shows that ten out of twelve of our respondents would like to see more training on procurement regulations. One interviewee wrote, *"Contracts are intentionally written with a gray area in them so we can take care of certain small problems without the aid of the buyer."* This could show that there has been a lack of understanding on how procurement works. Several of our interviewees wanted to see training specific to certain topics in procurement regulations. Specific topics that were mentioned by our respondents include contract amendments and terminations. The interviewees said that the training seminars have covered only the very basic topics and often gave too much information to comprehend at once.

Some of our respondents wanted to see more help or support when writing contracts. They said that the process of writing a contract would be less painful if they had more assistance from the Office of Procurement. Many times, the contract administrators had written a contract that they felt followed the current regulations, but in reality this was not the case. This problem could be eliminated if the contract administrators were more familiar with procurement regulations.

In addition to training for contract administrators on procurement regulations, the interviewees also felt that the procurement specialists could use some training in specific department-related fields. Comments such as "*Buyers should be more educated in contract law, and Maryland construction law*" were found in the interview transcripts. Our respondents felt that it would be very beneficial to have the procurement specialists go through training on department related topics. For example, the Department of Public Works and Transportation would like the procurement specialists to have training on the way contractors work. This type of training would be beneficial to the Office of Procurement because it would help the procurement specialists understand. It would also lead to less delay when the procurement office is reviewing contract disputes because they would have a working knowledge on how the department works.

Another widespread complaint was that the current structure of the Procurement Office does not give buyers enough authority. This causes delays in the process when multiple signatures are needed to complete or amend a contract. Checks and balances are a necessity when dealing with contracts of large monetary value and less experienced buyers. Using departments would prefer a more streamlined system. It's understandable why such requests would be voiced, to expedite the writing of contracts and speed up the

amendment process. However, this may not be possible because the existing system was implemented to protect the integrity of the procurement system.

### *Response Times to Contractor Complaints*

A response time is the time it takes for the Office of Procurement to respond to a dispute and provide assistance in finding a solution. According to our interviewees, response times to contractor complaints were very good. As can be seen from Figure 4.5, ten out of twelve of our respondents said that they received either a resolution to their problem or confirmation that it was being looked into within 24 hours. All twelve of our interviewees said that the Office of Procurement responded to their inquiries in an adequate amount of time. In fact, there were no complaints regarding response times. The using department contract administrators also mentioned that when there was a delay, they understood that the Office of Procurement was doing its best to get a solution to the problem. They also realized that the Office of Procurement was not always to blame for delays they might experience. A lot of the delays were due to contractor non-responsiveness and the need for approvals from the County Attorneys Office. The blame for delay was never placed on the Office of Procurement.

*Question – When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, how long does it usually take to get an answer to your problem?*

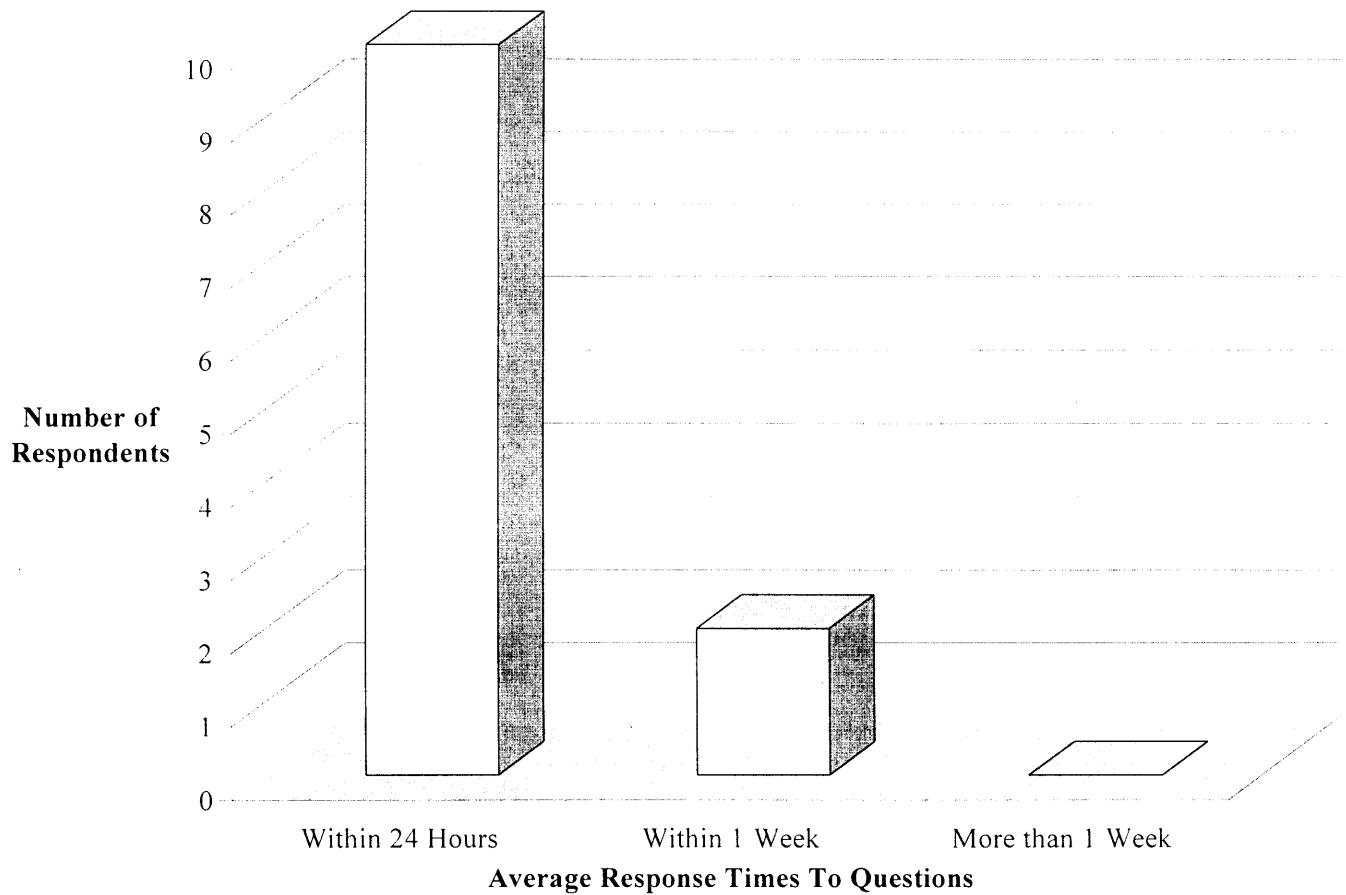


Figure 4.2 Average Response Time to Contractor Inquiries

### *Communication Methods*

Communication was another strength in the Office of Procurement. All twelve of our respondents had no problems contacting the office. The contract administrators said that if they were unable to get into contact with their procurement specialist, their call was always returned promptly. The main form of communication between the offices was the telephone. In fact, all twelve interviewees said this was their method of choice.

Several respondents said that email was too impersonal for procurement matters. Another strength of the Office of Procurement was its location. The building is located near the contract administrator offices. This has made it very convenient for the contract administrators to meet with procurement personnel in person. In fact, 10 out of 12 interviewees mentioned that they occasionally met in the office. This was good because it allowed the procurement specialists to meet in person with the contract administrators. This helped to build trust, which was important for the process to run smoothly.

### *Discussion*

Based on these results, we can see that the Office of Procurement is doing a good job maintaining a high level of customer satisfaction. For the most part, the contract administrators were very satisfied with the procurement staff, inter-office communication, and response times to their complaints. They felt that the main areas that needed improvement were:

- Flexibility of procurement regulations
- Training for the buyers on department specific knowledge
- Training for contract administrators on procurement regulations
- Procurement Office Structure

Now that we have analyzed the transcripts for common themes between departments, we will now examine each department separately, looking for department specific characteristics.

## 4.2 Department of Public Works and Transportation

The Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT) is the largest of the four departments interviewed. This department has more contract administrators and contracts than any other using department in Montgomery County. The majority of their contracts are with construction contractors who build and maintain roadways and public buildings. These contracts are usually awarded to the lowest-bidder and are typically long-term projects. The following results are based on content analysis performed on the transcripts from seven contract administrators in the Department of Public Works and Transportation. There are 41 contract administrators in the department.

### *Strengths of the Current Procurement System*

Many of the DPWT interviewees mentioned that there was a sense of trust between the contract administrators and the procurement specialist they work with. Trust was mentioned in four out of the seven interviews as being a major strength. One respondent said, *"When I make a contract recommendation to her, she goes for it. This is because of the relationship we have. She knows that when I make a recommendation, I have done my homework to make sure the contractor checks out."* This shows the level of trust between the buyers and contract administrators in this department. The procurement specialists experience and attention to detail was also praised, and many interviewees noted that the buyers were able to understand their needs. In summary, the DPWT interviewees felt that the main strength of the Office of Procurement was its staff and their trust in the contract administrators.



### *Weaknesses of the Current Procurement System*

Five out of seven DPWT contract administrators felt that they needed a more in-depth knowledge of procurement regulations. They mentioned that specific training on topics such as contract terminations and contract amendments would be helpful to them. The contract administrators realized that the Office of Procurement has held biannual training seminars on procurement regulations, but felt that only covered the basics of the procurement process.

The interviewees felt that the procurement specialists did not have enough knowledge of the way contractors worked. One respondent suggested "*buyers be more educated in contract law, and Maryland construction law.*" Buyers need to understand some of the problems specific to construction contracts. Five DPWT interviewees stated that they never felt uncomfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement if a contract problem arose. However, two interviewees admitted that they might occasionally avoid contacting the Office with a problem if they felt that the buyers might not completely understand the situation. One interviewee explained that sometimes he might be able to resolve a problem or close a deal quickly due to his extensive knowledge of the field. Another interviewee explained that contracts were written with a gray area to allow for certain discretionary problems to be solved without the Procurement Office's aid. These examples demonstrated a need for buyer training in the DPWT's field of work. The contract administrators also admit that their lack of knowledge in Procurement Regulations contributes to this problem.

Another theme found in our interviews was that the distribution of power within the Office of Procurement could cause unnecessary delays in the procurement process.

According to the DPWT contract administrators, this distribution of authority does not allow the buyers to make important decisions about the contracts they are working with. This can lead to delays in the contract approval process because the managers will need time to get familiar with the contract details. Although the interviewees did feel that some management intervention was necessary, they claimed that the buyers should be able to handle more tasks without approval.

### *Response Times to Contractor Complaints*

Due to their involvement with construction contracts, the DPWT contracts tend to take longer to approve than most others. The DPWT contract administrators said that the contractors or the number of people that must approve the amendments caused many of the delays in the procurement process. Similar to the other departments, the DPWT contract administrators felt that the response times to their questions were adequate.

### *Communication Methods*

The DPWT respondents felt the Office of Procurement needed to keep the using departments informed of any changes that they were making to the procurement regulations. Three of our interviewees mentioned that they were in the middle of writing a contract specification and were not informed of the changes until after they had submitted the documents. Due to this miscommunication, the contract administrator had to rewrite the specifications to fit the new procurement regulations.

## *Discussion*

The Department of Public Works and Transportation is pleased with the performance of Office of Procurement. As mentioned earlier, time is critical for this department, and a large portion of the DPWT's praise for Procurement focused on response times. However, problems have occurred due to the buyer's lack of knowledge in construction and lack of decision-making power.

### **4.3 Department of Health and Human Services**

Two contract administrators were interviewed in Health and Human Services. There was a total of seven contract administrators in this department. The transcripts were analyzed based on content. The Department of Health and Human Services is a service-oriented department that funds and provides health care services for the citizens of Montgomery County. The majority of their contracts are for professional services, which do not always coincide with the rigid procurement regulations. Their needs are very different from departments that purchase goods. For example, a purchase order for printer paper is more straightforward than a medical service contracted for health care patients. The competency and reputation of a vendor is much more important when professional services are being purchased. Buyers in procurement should be aware of these situations to assist the Department of Health and Human Services. These contracts can not always be handled in a lowest bid manner.

### *Strengths of the Current Procurement System*

The department of Health and Human Services described the Office of Procurement as being sensitive to their needs. One respondent said, *“The buyer that we have now understands the needs of the Department of Health and Human Services. There is also a great deal of trust between myself and the buyer, which helps to build relationships with the Office of Procurement.”* If a confusing, difficult or unusual circumstance arose, the Office would make an extra effort to resolve the situation. When a buyer was not completely educated on a specific topic or service, they were willing to learn and easily trained. This eagerness to learn was attributed to the buyers’ overall interest in Health and Human Services. This enthusiasm of the Office of Procurement to better understand the Department of Health and Human Services is beneficial to the contract administrators in this using department.

### *Weaknesses of the Current Procurement System*

A weakness identified in the interviews was the Office of Procurement’s reluctance to terminate a contract for default. They would rather terminate a contract for mutual consent, even when the contractor was at fault. It was said in an interview that in some instances where the vendor was defaulting on a contract, failing to provide the goods and services it was expected, Procurement was more concerned with vendors taking legal action against the County rather than resolving the issue for the department. If a vendor thought the County terminated a contract unfairly they might sue the County. For this reason the Office of Procurement would opt to terminate for convenience to preserve a relationship with the vendor, and in the long term the using department

suffered. A negligent vendor was still allowed to bid on contracts in the County and they didn't have a default termination on their record. This lack of pursuing termination might also result from the using department's failure to monitor contractor's performance.

Using departments experienced inconsistent responses to questions regarding procurement regulation from Procurement personnel. If different buyers were questioned on a topic, different answers were sometimes given. The Contract Administrators relied on answers from Procurement to guide and provide accurate information relating to the contract process. Inconsistencies reduced trust building and have made interactions between procurement and HHS more difficult.

Another weakness cited was that they had neglected to eliminate irresponsible contractors before the negotiation process. A recent example was provided by the one interviewee, where clearly written contract specifications were made available to vendors in the form a Request for Proposal (RFP) by Procurement. When the contractors returned the proposals, three out of the seven received were incomplete. This demonstrated the contractor's irresponsibility and non-responsiveness. However, the Procurement Office insisted on negotiating with these contractors. This practice was a burden for the using department because they still had to negotiate with vendors that had not completed the first step to bid on a contract.

Bridge contracts (using a previously approved contract to acquire goods and services) were mentioned in the interviews. It was necessary to write an entirely new contract to take advantage of the bridge contract instead of simply using a purchase order. The added task of requiring a contract to be written in order to employ an existing contract was cumbersome and inefficient. During the conversation, the respondent said

how easy it was to write a purchase order and noted that this would be an easier way to utilize a bridge contract.

Yet another complaint was that the Procurement Office did not take a role in contracts that supplied goods to the whole community. For example, every time medical supplies were needed a new contract must be written. Popular commodity codes are used when a good or service is needed by a large majority of using departments in the County. One respondent thought they were not being monitored and utilized for countywide contracts with countywide usage. In this instance, it would be helpful if medical supplies were obtained in a similar manner as paper. Many departments such as, Fire, Police, Department of Correction, and Health and Human Services use medical supplies. It was felt that making these supplies available throughout the County without a new contract would be logical.

The maximum threshold allowed for a purchase order for services is \$25,000. This type of purchase order still requires at least five competitive bids. Health and Human Services said that with the cost of goods and services increasing, more power should be allocated to the department. As long as the contract was bid competitively a higher limit for purchase orders would allow for less time dedicated to writing contracts.

A problem Health and Human Services had was writing a contract to award grants. The money was granted by the Federal Government to distribute to organizations in the County. Currently there is no difference between grants and contracts. Contracts require insurance, so if a grant is written in the form of a contract some of the grant money that should be going to the organization is spent on insurance. The money was given to the County with the expectation of distributing it to worthy organizations. The

need to write a contract to distribute federally granted money was viewed a waste of time and money.

Training more specific towards departments would help the department of Health and Human Services. The semi-annual seminars that Procurement offered were not in depth. They dealt with an overview of the procurement process and were not department specific. The consensus among contract administrators in HHS was the services they provided were different from those of other departments, who purchased more tangible products. An education process for contract administrators specific to health and human services were desired. The interviewees felt this would improve the relationships and interactions with contractors. A certification process for contract administrators was also mentioned and appeared to be desirable among respondents. Although the Office of Procurement had provided training directly for HHS, it was possible that with employee turnover, the interviewees did not participate.

### *Response Times to Contractor Complaints*

The two respondents said that, response times for solutions to contract disputes depended on the amount of preparation the using department did before the complaint was relayed to procurement. Workload was given as a reason for delays in procurement, as well as the need for a supervisor to approve large contract.

### *Communication Methods*

The department of Health and Human Services uses the phone and email as the primary sources of communication. A respondent said if needed, the Office of Procurement was always available to meet to discuss contract parameters. However, communication has also been a large part of wasted hours for Health and Human Services. HHS thought that the Office did not keep the department updated with the new laws and procurement regulations.

### *Discussion*

The Department of Health and Human Services was pleased with the personalized attention it received from the Office of Procurement. However, as discussed earlier there were several weaknesses that the department described in our interviews. Most of the complaints pertained to Procurement Regulations, and not with the buyer/department relationship. A few negative comments did reflect on buyer knowledge and consistency, but the interviewees were also aware of the willingness of buyers to educate themselves in health and human services. It was made clear that the Department of Health and Human Services was unlike the other using departments and, therefore, might need different methods of dealing with Procurement.

#### **4.4 Department of Information Systems and Telecommunications**

The Department of Information Systems and Telecommunications (DIST) is responsible for all county related use of computers, networks, and telephones. They require the Office of Procurement be familiar with the latest technologies. We



interviewed two contract administrators from the Department of Information Systems and Telecommunications. Twenty-four contract administrators work for this department.

### *Strengths of the Current Procurement System*

The Department of Information Systems and Telecommunications interviewees had a good working relationship with the Office of Procurement's buyers. Specifically, they described the staff as being knowledgeable, supportive and responsive to their needs. If they had a problem or complaint, the Office of Procurement always responded in a timely manner. According to our respondents, the strength of the Office of Procurement was its personnel.

### *Weaknesses of the Current Procurement System*

The DIST interviewees cited a few weaknesses within the Procurement Office. Specifically, they agreed that the procurement specialists could benefit from training in the using department's field of work. This is especially important for the DIST department due to its involvement with rapidly changing technology. Without the proper background, it became difficult for the buyer to understand terms and concepts found in the contract specifications. If the procurement specialists were to receive training in this field, there would be less confusion and a more timely resolution of problems.

The contract administrators also complained about the Office's lack of support in a recent termination. The using department was not sure whom they should pay since the contracted firm no longer existed. The Procurement Office advised the using department to consult the County Attorney instead of resolving this matter with the County Attorney

itself. This caused the termination process to drag on for an extended length of time. The interviewee felt that the Procurement Office “bounces everything back to the using departments” and that they could be more supportive in confusing situations such as this one.

One respondent commented, “*The procurement office is protest-phobic. They will do anything to avoid protest with a vendor. This is not beneficial to the county. They over-think everything.*” This is similar to the HHS complaint that the Office of Procurement was too worried about lawsuits when working with contract terminations. The DIST interviewee explained that the Office of Procurement only hurts the County by avoiding needed protests.

Our respondents also mentioned that the chain of command within the Office slowed down the procurement process. This was further proof that there was a concern among using departments on problems related to the Procurement Office’s hierarchy. This could be caused by one of two things. Either the procurement specialists did not have enough department specific knowledge to answer the using department’s questions or the managers in the Procurement Office did not have the ability to allow the procurement specialists to solve problems on their own due to the procurement regulations.

### *Response Times to Contractor Complaints*

The DIST interviewees agreed that the buyers did an excellent job in responding to complaints and questions. Occasionally, one interviewee explained, delays were caused when the Office of Procurement over-analyzed an issue. This over-analysis, he

continued, was a result of trying to conduct fair bidding and ultimately was caused by the fear of protests. This is not to say that the DIST was overwhelmingly dissatisfied with response times. They described the Office of Procurement as being “very responsive.” One interviewee said “I’m very happy with the response times. If I have an issue or a question about something I’ll either get it answered right away or I’ll hear back from them ASAP.”

### *Communication Methods*

The DIST respondents seemed to have no trouble getting in touch with a buyer at the Office of Procurement. There were no major complaints about the Office of Procurement regarding understanding either. They did point out that the training seminars the Office of Procurement held for the using departments were too broad and too much information was delivered to them at once. It would be better, they said, if the Office of Procurement could break these down and only focused on one or two topics at a time. They also believed that more trust in them was needed. As they put it: “we know what we need and they always question us.” Finally, the buyers sometimes lacked enough knowledge of the using department’s field of work, which occasionally causes delays. They agreed that training for the buyers would probably help improve communications. As one interviewee put it, the buyers were knowledgeable about the things they were buying, but they could not know everything without actually getting into the field.

## *Discussion*

The DIST interviewees agreed that the Procurement Office's personnel were responsive and helpful, but lacked a sufficient understanding of the technical industry. This could lead to communication problems and delays. Also, the interviewees disliked the current hierarchy in the Office. Too many signatures were needed in some instances, which caused delays. But they were happy with the buyers and felt the Office of Procurement was doing a good job.

### **4.5 Department of Housing and Community Affairs**

The Department of Housing and Community Affairs is responsible for maintaining residential and commercial areas. The contracts from this department are similar to those in the DPWT, dealing with construction. Some of the other areas the DHCA works with are community outreach programs that involve assisting community members with housing, distributing grants, and providing services for businesses. One person was interviewed from this department's six contract administrators.

### *Strengths of the Current Procurement System*

The interviewee from the Department of Housing and Community Affairs was satisfied with the service from Procurement. The word "*responsive*" was used throughout the interview. He felt that the procurement specialist was always able to provide accurate answers to his questions. He had no problems communicating, and was never reluctant to speak with a procurement specialist. The respondent stated that

Procurement was very knowledgeable on the legal aspects of contract negotiations and contract disputes. The support during contract terminations and modifications to ongoing contracts was a strength the Office of Procurement Possesses.

### *Weaknesses of the Current Procurement System*

The interviewee from this department could not recommend any improvements that the Office of Procurement could do to serve his needs better. He is completely satisfied with the current system, and the service received from the Office. The lack of problems discussed by this respondent could be attributed to the quality of vendors working with this department. Apparently discrepancies between the DHCA and contractors have always been resolved in the field with this respondent.

### *Response Times to Contractor Complaints*

The interviewee was very happy with the response times he experienced when making a complaint with the Office of Procurement. He was aware of how long it took to work with contracts and felt that the response times were adequate under the current circumstances in the system.

### *Communication Methods*

The interviewee's main form of communication with the Office of Procurement was the telephone. He noted that an occasional face-to-face meeting was necessary to clarify a contract with the Office of Procurement in the preliminary stages of contracting.

It had never been difficult for the interviewee to contact the Office at any stage of the procurement process.

### *Discussion*

After reading the Department of Housing and Community Affairs transcription, one might think that the Office of Procurement was perfect. However, the types of contracts that this department dealt with are not usually as technical and demanding as some of the other departments. Due to these facts, we conclude that this department did not have many problems with the Office of Procurement because they did not have many contract disputes or problems. The process is straightforward and, therefore, relatively problem free. Our respondent also emphasized the good relationships he had with his contractors along with the contract administrator's ability to resolve problems on the job without assistance from the Office of Procurement. The results from this department differ from those of the other three departments investigated. However, as a measure of customer service this illustrates the differences among departments in Montgomery County.

## **4.6 Contractor Phone Interview Results**

The intent of our phone interviews with contractors was to compliment or add to the results from the personal interviews. Unfortunately, the phone interviews fell short of our expectations. Even though we took great care to word questions in an open ended and straightforward manner, respondents still replied with curt disinterested responses.

Interpreting qualitative data consisting mostly of monosyllabic answers was difficult, and inconclusive. A few contractors provided information that coincided with data we collected from the using departments. Two of the questions we asked provided us with quantitative data to use in the Montgomery County Program Measures guide. However, the validity of the answers must be questioned when analyzing the data received from the contractor interviews due to the poor responses.

The first question in the interview was designed to determine weaknesses in the procurement office after a contract has been awarded. There were no negative responses to this question. Many respondents replied with a one-word answer or short phrase, such as “Yes”, “Nope”, or “Sure”. Attempts to draw the interviewee out to elaborate on their answer were not effective. One of the interviewees said that he interacted more often with the using department and not as much with the Office of Procurement. This might also be true for other respondents. This could be another reason why they were not interested in answering our questions.

The second question focused on response times the contractor received from the Office of Procurement. The question was:

*When contacting the Office of Procurement with a question or problem, how long does it usually take to get a response? Is this satisfactory?*

All twelve interviewees said that the response times were very good. However, in some cases the answers to this question didn't even correspond to the question asked. For example, the responses to the second question were, “Sure”, and “Quick”. These answers led us to believe that the person was not paying close attention to what was being asked. Two of the answers we received were, “Yes.” We can conclude that they were referring

to the second part of the question, and chose to ignore the first part. No one gave a numerical answer in hours, days, or weeks. Based on the responses to this question, we concluded that the people we interviewed were content with the response times they received.

The third question in the contractor phone interviews was designed to allow the respondent to give recommendations to the Office of Procurement on how to improve customer service. Seven people said they had no recommendations. Three interviewees praised the office's efforts to assist vendors. One interviewee said, "*Montgomery County is leaps and bounds ahead of other counties in Procurement. They do a great job.*" One respondent made legitimate complaint. This particular respondent had been operating a grant program for the past 10 years, and he was not pleased that he must write a contract to distribute grants to organizations.

The final two questions were created to answer some quantitative questions for the Montgomery County Program Measures guide. They were in the form of a Lichert scale. Both questions asked the interviewee to give a numerical rating on a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best). The first question was related to the customer service provided by the Office of Procurement. The second question dealt with support given by contract administrators in the using departments. All twelve of our respondents rated these questions as either a four or five, which is above average on the scale.

The results of the contractor phone interviews are more beneficial for future reference than for the evaluation of weaknesses in the current Procurement system. These results forebode the reengineering of methods to be used for future assessment of the customer satisfaction of contractors that work for Montgomery County.



## Chapter 5 Conclusions

This project investigated and assessed customer service at the Montgomery County Office of Procurement by interviewing Contract Administrators and Contractors.

Based on our analysis of the interview results, the following are our conclusions:

### I. Strengths

1. The main strength of the Office of Procurement is its staff.
2. The staff is very knowledgeable in procurement regulations.
3. The staff is supportive during contract disputes.
4. The procurement specialists are always available when needed.

### II. Weaknesses

1. Procurement regulations are inflexible.
2. Contract Administrators lack of knowledge on procurement regulations.
3. Procurement specialists lack of understanding of department-specific-field knowledge.

## Chapter 6 Recommendations

The purpose of this section is to make recommendations, based on our results, to improve the customer service and support in the Montgomery County Office of Procurement. Based on our interview results, we recommend that the Office of Procurement should:

- **Revise the Current Procurement Regulations**

One of the largest problem areas within procurement, according to our interviewees, is that the procurement regulations are not flexible enough to meet the specific needs of each department. The regulations need to be able to handle services with the same ease that they do products. They also need to allow for grants and special federally mandated purchases to be awarded without the need for a contract.

- **Train Contract Administrators on Procurement Regulations**

Currently, the Office of Procurement offers a biannual training seminar to all contract administrators. Many of our respondents felt that this was inadequate for their needs. The existing overview courses should be followed by courses on more specific topics in the procurement regulations. These topics include but are not limited to:

- Contract Negotiations
- Contract Amendments
- Contract Disputes
- Specification Writing

- **Administer a Survey to Determine the specific topics that Contract Administrators need to learn**

This survey would ask the contract administrators to rate their knowledge in each of the different procurement areas. The Office of Procurement and the County Attorney's Office could then work together to design courses around these topics. With this training, the using department contract administrators would be much better able to handle contract disputes and negotiations.

- **Train Procurement Specialists on Department-Specific Field Knowledge**

Procurement specialists should receive training in their respective using department's field of work. This training would allow the procurement specialists to better understand the contracts they deal with. It will also lead to improved communication between the procurement specialists and the using department contract administrators.

- **Review Implementation of the Contractor Phone Interviews**

In the future when the Office of Procurement assesses the customer service satisfaction of contractors, we recommend they do not replicate the methodology used for the phone interviews in this project. It is apparent from our results that phone interviews are not the best way to accomplish this task. When the Office of Procurement is addressing yearly program measures during the budget process, an online survey might suit their needs better. The survey could consist of questions with a Likert scale format. We recommend the survey is brief, consisting of five to ten questions, with a section at the end for other comments, and some open-ended questions regarding strengths and

weaknesses of the Procurement Office. The Office of Procurement could inform the vendors of the survey through email, when available, and with mailings.

## **Appendix A Contract Administrator Interview Questions**

### *Introduction:*

The purpose of this interview is to determine the customer service satisfaction levels for the Post Award Procurement process.

### *Interview Questions:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?
- 2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?  
Phone/Email/Fax/Mail
- 3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:
  - a) Within 24 hours
  - b) Within 1 week
  - c) More than 1 week
- 4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?
- 5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?
- 6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?
- 7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

- 8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?
- 9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

## Appendix B Contractor Phone Interview Questions

### *Introduction:*

Hello this is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm working with The Montgomery County Government to evaluate contractor relations with the Office of Procurement. I would like to ask you a few brief survey questions regarding customer service at the Office of Procurement? (No Time?) Is there a time that we could call back that would be better for you?

### *Interview Questions:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?
- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory?
- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

1      2      3      4      5

Support from contract administrators after a contract has been signed

1      2      3      4      5

## Appendix C Contract Administrator Interview Transcripts

### Contract Administrator Interview

#### *Interview Information:*

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

November 9, 2000 10:00 am

Department of Public Works and Transportation

#### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?

*Well, over the years the Office of Procurement has become much more customer friendly. They are much more understanding to the people in my department and field. It took them a long time to think in the way of a contractor, and they are still not all the way there. But is it much better than before. They need to realize that there is a difference between types of contracts. I work with contractors and I know their style well. There is a difference between buying some pencils and constructing a road. This needs to be addressed by the system.*

- 2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?

Phone/Email/Fax/Mail

*I use both phone and email but my primary way of contacting the Office of Procurement is by phone. It is just much easier to use the phone because I can put it*



*on speaker phone while I rummage through my files to find things. Email is too impersonal and I have to know what I am going to say before. It requires too much planning.*

Are there ever times when you can't get a hold of the Office. Are the phones busy or is the office closed when you need them.

*Yes, this does happen occasionally. Not often though. The people who work in the office, especially my primary buyer are very responsive. If they are not there to take my call, they call me back as soon as they can. I am never left in the dark.*

- 3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:
- a) Within 24 hours
  - b) Within 1 week
  - c) More than 1 week?

*This really depends on the situation. It depends on the complexity of the problem and the amount of research that they will need to do to fully understand it. In construction, I have many different needs. I deal with both contractors and enlisting the services of consultant engineers and subcontractors. The Office of Procurement is very responsive to my needs.*

Was this an adequate amount of time?

*Yes, oh yes. It was very fast.*

- 4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?

*I think that the Office of Procurement does the best they can in responding to my contractor complaints. The problem lies when the contract has to go elsewhere to be approved. The County Attorney's office does not know much about construction contracts. This is where the complication and wasted time occur. They need to be more informed and knowledgeable in this area.*

- 5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?

*Again, I don't feel there is a problem with communication between the office and myself.*

Do you feel that the Office should be open later or have more people to answer the phones/your questions?

*No, everything on my end is very good. I don't have many problems contacting them and they are very quick to return my calls.*

- 6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?

*Yes. My experience with the Office of Procurement during these matters is that they handled the problem in an expeditious way. They were very quick to give a response and resolution to the problem. This is another place where the County Attorney holds up the process. I have worked in construction, design, and project management so I get to see these things from all sides. I know what is going on from each view point. The Office of Procurement is not construction oriented. They are more worried about legal nuances.*

Do you feel that the buyers could benefit from some informal training pertaining to construction and how consultants work?

*YES, oh yes. I think it would be wonderful if they were able to get some real world experience as to how contractors really work. You see, the speed with which these problems are fixed is very important. If we make the wrong decision, it could cost us a lot of money.*

7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

*The buyer that I work with now works very quickly. She has a lot of confidence in me. When I make a contract recommendation to her, she goes for it. This is because of the relationship that we have. She knows that when I make a recommendation, I have done my homework to make sure the contractor checks out.*

8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?

*When you are contracting a big job, timing is everything. If a contractor gives a bid, the longer you wait, the more chance there is for market fluctuations to occur. If you tell them ok, you can start the next day, you will get a good rate or a large discount. However, if you wait and think about it for a while, you are going to pay much much more. There profit margin is largely what determines there price. If they have to keep their people working while the Office of Procurement is dealing with a dispute, this is going to cost us money. This is all about bonding and bonding is dollars.*

*I feel that there is a problem with the heirarchy within the Office of Procurement. The folks at the front line can't make a decision for themselves. Many times they need to go ask their supervisor who knows even less about the topic of construction*

*and contractors. This is very frustrating. I think it is true that they need some guidance in these matters, but I think they need some more say. Again, it all comes down to experience.*

Do you receive any training from the Office of Procurement. Do you feel that it is adequate?

*Yes, we receive some basic annual training. I think it is adequate, although it does not go into topics such as contract termination and things like this. I think we hassle them more than they hassle us. This is a cooperative relationship and we need to make it work. They help us out in these matters when we don't know how something works or the procedure to do something.*

- 9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

*Yes, there are times when this might occur. This might occur when I feel that the Office would not understand the situation that I am in because of their lack of training in construction. I don't want to make it seem like I am doing anything immoral or illegal. My office has some goals: get the job done, save the county money, and work in an efficient and effective way. We are a self-supporting agency – we raise money through the parking system. If a contractor offers to do a side job for \$50,000 that is still within the bounds of the contract, I might let him do it without going through the Office of Procurement. I know that the Office of Procurement would end up trying to contract the job out and it would end up costing five times this price. Until there is enough flexibility in the system, things like this may continue to happen. For example, I am working on a case now where the contractor bid on a*

*contract without seeing the amendment that was made to it. I called him and faxed it over to him before he had to deal with the Office of Procurement. I know that he will tell me the truth and tell the office some random bullshit so he can raise the price. But they called me and told me to let them take care of, so I let them.*

## Contract Administrator Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 16, 2000 1:00 pm

Department of Public Works and Transportation

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?

*Outstanding customer service. At the buyer level very responsive and accessible.*

*When the proofing of contract is needed to cut down time they will invite us over to clarify the contract and bring everyone up to speed. For instance one time in late December the funding of a contract was about to expire. The actual contract was still good, but we needed more money for the job. One of the buyers dropped everything so that we could make the necessary changes to the contract to get more money for the job. Something that usually takes a couple of weeks was done in time for Christmas.*

- 2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?

Phone/Email/Fax/Mail

*Email, face to face, voicemail, are used equally, about 33% each. Face to face is the most helpful.*

3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:

- a) Within 24 hours
- b) Within 1 week
- c) More than 1 week?

*Our claims and disputes go to Art. He is very responsive. When a vendor makes a claim we decide if we agree or disagree with the claim. If we disagree there is a dispute, if we agree with the claim than a change order is requested. I receive very personal service from Art.*

4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?

*Few of our disputes reach the office of procurement. I would venture to say that the delays are with the contractors. The procurement office is pretty efficient.*

5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?

*SAME BUILDING. We do so much contracting that it would be very convenient if procurement was available within the same building when writing contracts and for working out disputes. This is just my opinion.*

6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?

*Dealing with a termination is never a pleasant experience. The County Attorney had more to do than procurement did. There was a lot of confusion with the bonding*

*company of the deal, not the contractor. In result something entered in a takeover order trying to minimize S for finishing the job.*

- 7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

*Experience and Accessibility. Promptly return messages. They are open to contract ideas.*

- 8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?

*Buyers more educated in contract law, and Maryland construction law.*

*Training: the seminars are adequate. On the training note I want to say that I am always encouraging my guys to know the procurement laws. It is a waste of time if one of them has a question to ask procurement that they could answer themselves if they read the regulations.*

- 9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

*Never. We issue field orders with regularity to the director. A field order is the best thing for us most of the time. To respond in a timely manner and change something. To respond in a timely manner and change something with out a change order that take weeks to get completed. There is no unilateral recommendation to procurement to terminate for cause or for convenience. We usually make a recommendation to procurement on what would be the best possible way to terminate under the circumstances.*

*Recommendations: using departments need to be educated on procurement laws.*



## Contract Administrator Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 9, 2000 1:30 pm

Department of Public Works and Transportation

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?

*They are an effective organization that performs a necessary deed.*

- 2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?

Phone/Email/Fax/Mail

*Usually I'll call them but I also use email for general questions and IFBs. And if I need to talk to them about something larger and more important I'll talk to them face to face.*

- 3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:

- a) Within 24 hours
- b) Within 1 week
- c) More than 1 week?

*They are very responsive and usually get back to me well within time limits: usually within a day. Formal steps can be time consuming, but this isn't the fault of the Procurement Office since time is needed to review an issue and people may be involved from outside the Office of Procurement.*

- 4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?

*Typically they are caused by the contractor. The County attorney can also cause delays.*

- 5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?

*I think things are fine the way they are. Like I said, I usually get a very quick response from them and they're easy to get in touch with.*

- 6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?

*Luckily I haven't.*

- 7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

*Their documentation is excellent. They follow the law very closely - they're very "by the book." They are available and they're consistent in their decisions.*

- 8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?

*Most of the procurements can take a while to get executed - like maybe 3 months or so, but sometimes we need to get things rolling after only 2 to 4 weeks. Over the*

*years the Office of Procurement has helped us out with this problem and the process has improved.*

- 9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

*Contracts are intentionally written with a gray area in them so we can take care of certain small problems without the aid of the Procurement Office, so if a problem is in this realm of "discretionary" I wouldn't feel comfortable dealing with the Procurement Office.*

- 10) If the buyers in the Procurement Office had some sort of formal training in your area of work do you think this would help?

*I think it would be great if they allowed their staff to observe what we do, but unfortunately that type of thing isn't promoted. I think that could eliminate a lot of problems. For example, the Procurement Office is required to give vendors an equal chance at getting a bid, so for us that means that one year we might buy from one company and the next year we might be buying the same thing from a different company and so on. Generic specifications are written intentionally so they include as many vendors as possible. We run into problems when something we bought a year ago from one company breaks down and we need to buy parts for it even though we're working with a different company this year. This forces us to work with many vendors at the same time and as a result our inventory is bigger than we need it to be. I think these types of problems might be cleared up if the buyers had some basic training in our department.*

## Contract Administrator Interview

### *Interview Information:*

11/13/2000

11/13/2000 9:30 am

November 13, 2000 9:30 am

Department of Public Works and Transportation

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?

*I receive excellent service from the buyer that I deal with at the office of procurement.*

*They are very dedicated to customer service. Whenever I need a requisition with a fast turnaround time for appraisals they are very quick to complete them in the necessary time. We always select the lowest bid, and sometimes there is a time restraint.*

- 2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?

Phone/Email/Fax/Mail

*Phone. I'm not very good with email. I have a difficult time with it. Sometimes I will visit across the street to deliver something or pick something up just to expedite the process. So there is face to face contact as well.*

- 3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:

- a) Within 24 hours
- b) Within 1 week
- c) More than 1 week?

*I have not had any formal complaints in regard to contractors. There are some contractors that we have that do a less than satisfactory job, but they will be reviewed next time we choose the new appraisers for the next three years the responsiveness of the vendors will be discussed. I make note of the timeliness of there performance and bring it up when they are chosen again. More than likely they won't be picked again.*

- 4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?

*I don't have a problem getting responses from the office. When I need vendor numbers the person at the front desk is very quick to retrieve them for me. I will usually fax over the request and within a couple of hours I have the numbers.*

- 5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?

*Nothing.*

- 6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?

*I have only been here for two years, and I have never had to deal with a contract termination. I can't speak for the person that was here before me, but I have not been in that kind of situation with a contractor.*

- 7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

- 8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?

*In response to contract administrator training we do go over to procurement and receive training in procurement areas. However the sessions are loaded with information and for someone that doesn't know the process very well it can be overwhelming. Most of the time you will leave with an abundance of information and won't completely understand what it all means until you do work and learn on your own. More specific training to areas would be beneficial instead of large crash courses.*

- 9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

*The buyers in procurement are understanding and I always feel comfortable dealing with them.*

## Contract Administrator Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 13, 2000 1:00 pm

Department of Public Works and Transportation

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?

*Well, in recent times, the outlook has been very favorable. I have been working with the county for 21 years now. Back in 1984, it would have taken three to four months just to get a contract amendment, nevermind getting an actual contract signed. Now it takes just six to eight weeks to get a contract. The whole process is much smoother than before. I can get a contract amendment in just a couple weeks to a month now. Sometimes even quicker if it is urgent.*

- 2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?

Phone/Email/Fax/Mail

*I mainly use the phone.*

Are there ever times when you can't get a hold of the Office. Are the phones busy or is the office closed when you need them.

*No, I never have a problem. If the person I am trying to reach is on the phone, I just leave a message. They get back to me as soon as they can, usually by the end of the day.*

3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:

- a) Within 24 hours
- b) Within 1 week
- c) More than 1 week?

*I almost always get a response back in just one to two days. This is very adequate. I don't have a problem with these response times at all. They are very responsive.*

4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?

*I think that the main thing that takes a lot of time is their review of the contract. Obviously they won't be familiar with a contract until they have read it, and this is necessary for the whole process to work. I also understand that they are very short staffed and are backed up with other contracts.*

5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?

*I don't really see a problem with the communication between my office and the Office of Procurement. My buyer is very good about getting back to me in a timely manner.*

Do you feel that the Office should be open later or have more people to answer the phones/your questions?

*No, as I said, I have never had a problem getting a hold of the Office.*



- 6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?

*Yes, I have worked with a contract termination before. The office was very supportive. They backed me up the whole way. I needed to let go of a sub of a contractor. The guy was not doing his job right. I needed the survey done and he was not cutting it. Once the office of procurement realized that the subcontracter was at fault they were behind me all the way. I worked with procurement to get the contract terminated.*

- 7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

*I like the buyer that I work with now. I also like the fact that I get to deal with just one person down there. It makes life a lot easier. And they understand my needs and I have built up trust with them which aids the whole process. Procurement is more focused when dealing with a limited amount of people.*

- 8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?

*The buyers need to understand that there are lots of different issues and reasons for contracts. There is a lot of terminology and definitions that they either need to understand or trust me to understand them. I think that sometimes they have a narrow mind and only think about the legal aspect. I also wish that they would help me write the contracts in the first place so I don't have to spend all my time trying to make it the way that they want it. The new contracts do not allow for additional task orders to be added with out a task order. These take 3-4 weeks each. This is not practical and really hinders getting jobs done. A broader interpretation of the laws is*

*necessary to serve the needs of each individual department. Another problem is there are 54 steps needed to build a road. These steps have been in place since '84. Now all of the sudden procurement wants to change them.*

Do you feel that the buyers could benefit from some informal training pertaining to construction and how consultants work?

*Yes, this would be very helpful. I would definitely help them to understand where I am coming from and hopefully help make the whole process faster.*

Do you receive any training from the Office of Procurement. Do you feel that it is adequate?

*Yes, periodically they will offer training. I think that it is adequate but I can see where some people might benefit from more specific training on topics such as Contract Termination.*

- 9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

*I always feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement with contract issues. They are always there to help me out. I try to call them right when I have a problem and they help work it out with me.*

## Contract Administrators Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 14, 2000 9:00 AM

Department of Public Works and Transportation

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?

*I'm very happy with the service...very pleased. They are prompt and knowledgeable.*

*I usually get a response within 2 days. That is a good response for contract approvals.*

- 2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?

Phone/Email/Fax/Mail

*Phone, email, fax, personal meetings...basically everything. I'd say I call them more than anything else though. They're pretty easy to get in touch with. If I need something urgently, I just take a walk over there and meet with my buyer. It's nice to have them so close by. I have been working with the Office of Procurement for 15 years now.*

- 3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:

- a) Within 24 hours
- b) Within 1 week
- c) More than 1 week?

*I'd say no more than a week. I mean some things take a minute or so if it's just a quick question on something, but other things take some time. But I would say that I always get an answer within a reasonable amount of time. I feel that their response times are adequate for my needs.*

- 4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?

*Hmmm, well, vacations can get in the way of things. If someone is away for a week or so that always slows things down. I would say that the process itself can be slow at times, like if you need to get multiple signatures for something.*

- 5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?

*I think things are good the way they are now. I can always get in touch with them right away, and if I really need to I can always just walk over to the Office. If I can't get a hold of my buyer, I just email her or leave a message and she gets back to my pretty quick.*

- 6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?

*Yes I have. I have had problems with contracts before, and the Procurement people were very helpful and things got cleared up right away. It was no problem at all.*

*The Office of Procurement told me exactly what I needed to do, like keep a memo of*

*my problems with the contractor. They supported me, so you could say my experience was a good one. They provided very good support and I felt that they were there to back me up if I needed it.*

- 7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

*They are efficient and they do a good job advertising projects. They always get my advertisements out on time. They also do a good job getting good contractors to work for me.*

- 8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?

*They need to keep us informed of changes made to the procurement regulations. Sometimes we think we are following the regulations but the procurement office won't let us know that they changed the regulations until after they see our request for proposals. Procurement regulations are constantly changing and I just wish that they would keep us better informed on this.*

Does the Procurement Office provide you with adequate training?

*Yes, I think they do. About every two to three months there is an announcement made about the seminars. They are not mandatory though.*

Do you think that the seminars should be targeted at specific topics? Would this help you understand procurement processes better?

*Yes, this may help. Something like a conference for regulation changes would be good I think.*

Do you think it would help if the buyers were trained in your area of work?

*I think it would be a good idea to train the buyers, yes. That would help put us all on the same page. I think it would eliminate some of the delays and confusion between us and the buyers.*

- 9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

*I call them right away. I don't think I've ever felt uncomfortable doing this. If I need some guidance, I don't hesitate to call.*

## Contract Administrator Interview

### *Interview Information:*

11/14/2000  
1:30 pm

November 14, 2000 1:30 pm

Department of Public Works and Transportation

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?

*I am very satisfied with the service I receive from the office of procurement.*

- 2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?

Phone/Email/Fax/Mail

*Oh yeah, the telephone. See where I work there is a lot of documentation needed. I send memos to the procurement office. But I use the telephone a lot. And then I use memos sometimes to talk to them later in the contract process.*

- 3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:

- a) Within 24 hours
- b) Within 1 week
- c) More than 1 week?

*Oh Yeah, I'm satisfied with the response times, yeah. If I have a question they'll answer it right away, or if some issue comes up they'll respond within a couple of days, which is perfectly fine. Usually I'll get through to them on the first try, but if I leave a message they get back to me right away.*

- 4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?

*Oh yeah, a lot of the delays occur because we need so many signatures to complete a contract. I mean we are dealing with a lot of money here. The delays happen when maybe a buyer needs to get a supervisor's signature. I think if the buyers had more power in certain situations in the contract process it would be faster. And sometimes it takes a while to review the legal issues involved with a certain contract if a problem comes up. That can take time as well.*

- 5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?

*Reduce paper work. Government requires to many laws and signatures to complete anything. We try to educate them on principles that are related to what we do as civil engineers. If they knew more about construction it would be beneficial to the process.*

Do you think it would help if the buyers were trained in the technical aspect of the contracts they deal with?

*Oh yeah. I think this would help a lot. That's a pretty good idea. Sometimes the buyers don't really understand where we're coming from and make suggestions that might not be too good. I think that would help reduce this problem.*



- 6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?

*One time I had a situation with a consultant that was suppose to be organizing a job for our department. He was not managing the construction correctly. There was a subcontractor under the consultant that was performing okay. We had to work with procurement to figure out what steps were going to be taking against the consultant. Procurement was informative about the legal aspects to take in this situation.*

- 7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

*The major strengths are that they are highly committed to their job and are experienced. Knowledgeable comes to mind, and the person I deal with has a great turn around time. With the process? Procurement keeps me well informed about the changes in laws. They have seminars to help train in contract administration. Another thing is when we were talking about dealing with people is the cost analyst had a background in construction so it was easy dealing with him. He didn't question the cost as much cause he knew it was necessary.*

- 8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?

*From an engineering point of view if a contractor is not performing we would just document it and get rid of them. On the other hand procurement has to follow all laws even if the contractor is at fault to be fair. The laws aren't bad but more discretion could be used when dealing with bad contractors. If proper documentation is available and the county didn't do anything wrong then they should terminate more easily.*

9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

*No, we have open dealings with the office of procurement. If you don't get them involved early then it can be bad. The longer you wait to tell procurement the bigger the problem gets. Procurement informs me of the legal issues with problems.*

## Contract Administrator Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 20, 2000 9:00 am

Department of Health and Human Services

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?

*Good Quite good.*

- 2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?

Phone/Email/Fax/Mail

*Historically we would only use the phone, but now email is very convenient, for minor interactions.*

- 3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:

- a) Within 24 hours
- b) Within 1 week
- c) More than 1 week?

*Luckily we don't have too many complaints with contractors. Mainly I would say this is because the contracts we deal with are professional services. I usually receive a response to inquires with in a week.*

- 4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?

*Considering that the office of procurement deals with all of the contracts and using departments in the county, pure volume and work load would slow the process.*

- 5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?

*The training in the last 4-5 years has been better. There has been some staff turnover. I don't know what the experience level is or what previous experience these buyers have in procurement. I find what we are spending time training them. Also in the past there was a problem with them closing at 4:30, but we have learned to work with this and it isn't a problem now.*

- 6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?

*Yes I have dealt with a termination, but it was a long time ago. My dealings with the office were good. They supported us all the way and it was taken care of in a timely manner.*

- 7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

*In health and human services we feel like we are the stepchild. We deal with professional services, and the leadership at the office of procurement is outstanding.*

*The leadership is communicated to the staff and buyers. The buyer has an interest in HHS. This allows for training and informing them of our needs much more easily.*

- 8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?

*There are too many layers in the hierarchy. This is slowing the process. Also there is too much scrutiny of the contracts. We know what we need. Trust? Understanding that it is hard to tailor to a big county I say the training of buyers is adequate. However it would be good to gain more depth in training. I know if we needed something special they would get it for us.*

- 9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

*I wouldn't be uncomfortable. We have an understanding that we try to follow in this office. "come clean and lay all the cards out on the table." If someone messed up let it be known so that the problem can be solved more quickly and before it gets worse.*

## Contract Administrator Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 8, 2000 10:00 am

Department of Health and Human Services

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?

*Maybe we should give a preface to our answers. We are very fortunate to have a buyer in the Office of Procurement that is sensitive to our needs. Health and Human Services needs professional services and we are very pleased with the responsiveness of the office of procurement, and its understanding of the needs of our department. We consider ourselves lucky to have her. This department is unique because we have a system of centralizing contracts, compared to other departments. In the past, it has been difficult to deal with the Office of Procurement because the buyer did not understand where we were coming from. The buyer that we have now understands the needs of the Department of Health and Human Services. There is also a great deal of trust between myself and the buyer, which helps to build relationships with the Office of Procurement. The buyer must be sensitive and educated in Health and Human Services, to serve this department the best.*

2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?

Phone/Email/Fax/Mail

*We basically use all the methods. Phone and email are the primary methods but if there is a need, we get together and meet. In the past we have met with Dr. Tignor at the Office of Procurement to discuss contract issues. We generally do this when it is necessary to debate a topic or get a point across. Again, we are very fortunate in that we are one of the few departments that have a centralized contract administration division. Our sole job is to work with the contracts for our department. This is a luxury that many departments do not have. Many other contract administrators have lots of other tasks that they must handle and therefore procurement is not always the first thing on their mind. Here, we only work with contracts and therefore we are very familiar with how the procurement system works and what needs to be done to handle contract disputes. We believe that there needs to be a lot of trust between the buyers and the using department contract administrators. They also need to be familiar with the Department of Health and Human Services. In the past, the procurement specialists have been unknowledgeable in this field. They have consistently tried to second guess our information and recommendations.*

3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:

- a) Within 24 hours
- b) Within 1 week
- c) More than 1 week?

*This really depends on how much preparation takes place before the complaint is issued with the Office of Procurement. For example, I can think of a recent situation that we were involved in. In this department, we document everything that we can. We have to partly because of the legality of our contracts. In this particular case, we were having a problem with a contractor. We had our people document all of our problems because you can't just terminate a contract because we don't like Joe Contractor. It took us approximately six months to document the case. We did this all before going to procurement with the problem. After we submitted the complaint with the Office of Procurement, we had a resolution just two weeks later. This contract was terminated by mutual consent. The Office of Procurement typically is afraid of law suits and won't usually terminate contracts for vendor default, so by terminating by mutual consent the vendor is less likely to take recourse against the county. The Office of Procurement should just terminate the contract for default, who cares if someone sues, they get sued all the time, that is what county attorneys are for. So, even if a contract should be terminated by default, you still terminate it by mutual consent?*

*Yes. We are very worried about lawsuits and this sort of ends the contract with everyone being happy.*

Was this an adequate amount of time?

*Yes, very adequate. It was an exceptional turn around time. Again, this really depends on the amount of preparation that goes into the documentation. If a contract administrator does not document their problems with the contractor, it becomes much more difficult for the Office of Procurement because they must do their own research.*



*This is what takes a lot of time and can cause delays in resolution of some contract termination cases.*

- 4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?

*Again, documentation of the problem is the key here. Without it, there are going to be delays for several reasons. The procurement specialist who is working on the case is going to need to do a lot of research on the complaint. It is likely that they will also need to familiarize themselves with the contract.*

- 5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?

*Communication is a very big thing for us. It has been the cause of numerous wasted hours on our part when we thought we were doing what was needed. The Office of Procurement needs to keep us up to date with changes. We need to be notified as the changes occur or we will not be able to respond quickly. When the laws change or the procurement regulations change, we need to be notified immediately. For example, we had an incident this spring involving this issue. We had a whole board of RFP's on our board that could not get through procurement. The reason was because Procurement changed the format of the RFP but did not inform us about it. We had made several recommendations to them, some even grammatical, that were not addressed in the new format. We ended up writing the RFP both ways because the Office of Procurement would not make up their mind. The RFP's were held up for over a month because of this issue. Communication is key to avoiding this kind of setback in the future. Another thing that we don't like is that there is no*

*standardization on issues. Every buyer does things differently. We will get an answer on an issue one time and the next time there will be a totally different response. We need some consistency on the answer we receive so that we know what to expect when the issue arises in the future. As is stands now, the answers we get are subjective to the buyer and their thoughts.*

- 6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?

*Yes, as I said before, we just finished a contract termination situation with the Office of Procurement. The way we look at these situations is that we want to give the contractor the benefit of the doubt. We need to have a middle ground between ourselves and the vendor. We like to set up meetings with the contractor to discuss the problems that we are experiencing. We make sure that they understand where we are coming from and we give them some time to fix it on their own. Give them every opportunity to fix the problems that they are having before we proceed to inform the Office of Procurement in which case they will begin the process for contract termination.*

- 7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

*We must say that we have seen a dramatic improvement in the Office of Procurement since Dr. Tignor has taken over as director. She is really down to Earth, an educator and people person and it has made our lives much easier because she understands where we are coming from. If we can't do it one way she takes the extra step to figure out how to do it. In the past, the Office of Procurement has tried to play "gotcha" and made it seem like we were always wasting there time. They made us*

*feel like we were dumping complaints on them at the last minute. And using departments would purposely try to swamp the office of procurement at the last minute on requests and negotiations.*

- 8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?

*We just recently had a Professional Services Contract. We felt that it was clearly written. We feel that the Office of Procurement should find out if the contractor is responsive and responsible. This is something that they used to do but now it seems like they wash their hands clean by not dealing with this issue. We received six or seven proposals from this RFP. Three of the proposals were incomplete, which we feel means that the contractor is not responsive. However, the Office of Procurement still wants to negotiate with them. What is the purpose of this? It is unnecessary and a waste of our time. We also feel that the guidance that the Office of Procurement is fuzzy. They are so afraid of lawsuits that they don't know what to recommend. We have attorneys. We are not worried about lawsuits. They don't want to make a decision because they are too afraid of the legal repercussions.*

*Can we take a minute to talk about bridge contracts? A bridge contract is where we use another contract that has already been approved to buy something at a previous time. It has been approved by the county attorney and the Office of Procurement in the past. So why do we need to write an entirely new contract to take advantage of the bridge contracts. Why can't we just write a purchase order. We are buying the same goods at the same price from the same vendor and it has been*

*approved before. Writing up a new contract for this is a waste of time and money. A purchase order would be sufficient in these instances.*

*Another issue that we have is instances where the federal government mandates that Birth Control is given to a certain group of women. They grant us money and we are supposed to buy goods directly from the manufacturer at their manufacturing cost. This is how it is mandated by the law. So why do we need to write up a contract for this. There is no competition as we are buying direct from the manufacturer specified in the law. The manufacturer does not want to have to agree to a contract because they feel that the goods may be sold to people who do not fall under the law. This makes it very difficult to deal with them. We don't see much sense in the Office of Procurement looking into Birth Control options that cost \$30 when we have ones mandated by law that cost \$1.82. I am ready to take a violation and go over their heads and just buy the products. Hopefully some sort of agreement can be reached. The problem is that the procurement regulations just aren't flexible enough to allow for common sense. The regulations are geared more towards widgets and products and we are in the business of supplying services to our patients. There should be a system of waivers for just this reason. Unfortunately, we are not granted waivers anymore due to some bad press that has gone on in the past.*

*Another recommendation that we would like to make is that the Office of Procurement takes the lead role in contracts that supply goods to the whole community. Goods that several different departments may use. We want them to negotiate contracts for medical supplies the same way they get contracts for paper. There are several different departments that use these medical supplies: fire, police,*

*department of correction, health and human services, etc... It would be nice to just be able to say I need some medical supply and not have to write a whole new contract. This would also save the county a lot of wasted time and money. And we are not just talking about medical supplies. We think the Office of Procurement needs to look at the big picture. That is the whole reason that the commodity code system was developed. Someone needs to monitor the popular commodity codes and make county wide contracts for the ones that have widespread usage.*

*Another area we feel that the Office of Procurement could help us is in the area of training. I mean they come around every year with Procurement 101 which covers the general procurement guidelines, like what is an RFP etc... What we would like to see is some sort of organized curriculum and possibly even a certification process for contract administrators. I know that the procurement specialists are required by Dr. Tignor to attend procurement training seminars on a yearly basis. There has been talk of having us do this but it never seems to work out. I think this would be extremely helpful. Also, it would be helpful if the training sessions were geared towards our department. The contract administrators that buy widgets have different methods of dealing with vendors. We get human services for people and appropriate training pertinent to our department is necessary.*

*We would like to see an increase in the threshold. We think that a threshold of \$50,000, as long as we have five competitive bids, is a good number to work with. We would also like to see some more trust in the buyers. We have been working on several small projects with our team director and the Office of Procurement. One of these is a system where we put out a public notice that acts as an open invitation to*

*the public to propose their services to meet our needs. An example of this is the Care For Kids program. We would also like to see a difference made between grants and contracts. If the government gives us a grant, we want to be able to just give the department a check without having to write up a contract for it. Unfortunately, this is the only way that the current procurement system can handle this. For example, if a department was granted \$3,000 for a project, we would like to just cut them a check for the money. Instead, we spend time and money writing up a contract that tries to explain why they are getting this money even though it is a grant. We end up spending some of the grant money on insurance.*

- 9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

*Again, I bring up the Birth Control issue. This is one time when I think that going around the Office of Procurement is what needs to be done. When it comes to the point where the Office is not using common sense and we need to get something done, that is when it is time to go around it.*

## Contract Administrator Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 14, 2000 3:00 PM

Department of Information Systems and Telecommunications

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?

*The people I deal with are very responsive. I have a great relation with the Office of Procurement.*

- 2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?

Phone/Email/Fax/Mail

*I use everything: the phone, email, letters, and I even walk over there sometimes to meet one on one. I'd say I mainly use the phone though.*

- 3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:

- a) Within 24 hours
- b) Within 1 week
- c) More than 1 week?

*The response times are more than adequate. I'm very happy with the response times. If I have an issue or a question about something I'll either get it answered right away or I'll hear back from them ASAP.*

- 4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?

*I'd say the vendors themselves, contract negotiations, terms and conditions, and attorneys if they get involved. A lot of times something will come up and lots of signatures are needed to get things moving again, and that can take some time.*

- 5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?

*I'm not sure if anything needs to be fixed as far as communication goes. Like I said, if I need to get in touch with them they're quick to respond.*

Aside from quick responses, are there ever any times that a lack of understanding between you and the Procurement Office is an issue? And if so, do you think training the buyers in your field would help this problem?

*I guess you could say that sometimes we're not too clear on some technicalities involved with contracts and certain legal issues, but the Procurement Office is very good about helping us in this area. And the same goes for them – sometimes they don't fully understand where we're coming from, but we do our best to work together. So I'd have to say that some form of training for the buyers would probably be a good idea.*

- 6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?



*Fortunately I haven't.*

- 7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

*The staff – they are responsive to our needs and they really know what they're doing.*

- 8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?

*The County regulations <laughter>. Actually, the idea that you brought up earlier – training the buyers, that seemed like a good idea.*

- 9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

*If a problem arises I'll notify the Office of Procurement right away. I've been working with the Office of Procurement for six years and i've never felt uncomfortable doing this. Again, the staff is excellent over there. They really know what they're doing.*

## Contract Administrator Interview

### *Interview Information:*

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

November 13, 2000 2:00 pm

Department of Information Systems and Technology

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?

*It doesn't really matter who you deal with in the office of procurement, most of the problems are engrained in the system. Overall I have a good working relationship with procurement. However they tend to look at things from perspective, not deviating and bending to better understand the needs of different using departments. some contracts need to be dealt with differently and one standard set of unbending laws doesn't always support this need. The procurement office is **protest-phobic**. They will do anything to avoid protest with a vendor. This is not beneficial to the county. They over-think everything. They should look out for the county and if a protest arises just deal with it. From there perspective a small staff doesn't want a protest because sometimes they can tie up the system.*

*In general procurement needs to trust the using departments more understanding that we know more about what we need then they do. If we need a specific type of*

*computer equipment and three companies can provide it, then the RFP's should go to those companies. Its common sense.*

- 2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?

Phone/Email/Fax/Mail

*Phone, I always call.*

- 3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:

a) Within 24 hours

b) Within 1 week

c) More than 1 week?

*Usually when I call with a request or problem I get a response within a week. I work with them on a day to day basis, and receive quick response times.*

- 4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?

*The chain of command in procurement slows down the process. Now that I'm working with a Junior my requests are handled more expeditiously that before.*

*Conversely, now the junior does not have enough power to make necessary decisions.*

*I frequently receive responses saying that they (juniors) know what the decision will be but that they have to clear it with a higher up. With everyone being so busy it is very timely waiting for supervisors make approvals. I would say this delays the actions in the post award process. Junior should have more authority to make decisions. Juniors lighten the load for managers.*

- 5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?

*The training we receive is in the form of short seminars. The sessions are very broad and cover many topics. For instance one of the seminars covers the types of procurement. It would be good to break all of these down and concentrate on each individual one in a seminar.*

*I do receive mailings that I keep for reference about procedures. Procurement is basically a bunch of laws, and they are always changing. I suppose they do an adequate job informing of the new laws. Recently though I feel as though procurement is starting to deal with risk management and the insurance for jobs. But they are inconsistent in doing this. I think they are understaffed and are doing it sometimes but not all the time yet. We need to know what they plan to do. Back to training I think the buyers have a good idea about the goods and services they are buying but, they can't know everything without working in the field they are buying for. In these case the departments need to be trust more. We know what we need and they always question us.*

- 6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?

*I had a good experience with the office of procurement during a termination. They held meetings with the vendor to settle the dispute.*

- 7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

*I have great support from procurement. Now I have a good understanding of processes and am able to talk with county officials about contracts. Procurement is*

*knowledgeable except the laws tie them up. In some cases though they make the policies the hinder them, such as the contract to use a bridge contract.*

- 8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?

*Recently a firm went bankrupt in February. It was very unclear how to contact the firm to compensate them for the work they had done because there was no establishment anymore. Procurement told me to deal with the attorney. The attorney was slow responding to me with information. It was a huge time consuming process to get the attorney to figure out a way to deal with the bankrupt firm. Procurement should have dealt with the attorney and the firm to resolve the situation, but instead they kept washing their hands of the problem. Finally due to persistence I found the person that should be paid for the services. It took about 9 months to resolve. Procurement bounces everything back to the using departments. It was unclear if I was responsible to procurement or to the attorney. In the mean time finance needs to pay the firm and doesn't know how to pay them. The office of procurement needs to be more supportive in these situations. And provide more guidance.*

- 9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

*Procurement has a difficult time with informal mini RFP's. It used to be easy to write a mini RFP, but now they are just as difficult. This is a reason that people try to use existing contracts for new goods and services.*

*Bridge- bridge contracts are a really good idea and initially they worked really well. However now procurement has you write a contract to use the existing*

*contract. I don't even use bridge contracts anymore because you might as well start from scratch. The contract you have to make to use an existing contract has to be modified so much that a new one in most cases is easier.*

## Contract Administrator Interview

### Interview Information:

4/11/2007

11/8/2000 3:00 pm

November 8, 2000 3:00 pm

Department of Housing and Community Affairs

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) Could you give us a few words that would describe your overall impression of the Office of Procurement?

*The quality control is effective at the office of procurement. Inquiries made in regards to legal changes with contract administrators are accurate. The people at the Office of Procurement are responsive and helpful. They are up to speed, despite high turnover rate. They have annual meetings to bring people up to date.*

- 2) What are your primary methods of communicating with the office?

Phone/Email/Fax/Mail

*Mostly by phone, but if our office wasn't so close to the Procurement Office we'd probably use email a lot. We also have personal meetings from time to time.*

*Whenever there is a need to meet in person I have no problem being able to meet with one of the buyers. Actually later this week I have a meeting with a buyer to discuss a 300-page proposal that I submitted to the office earlier last week.*

3) When you make a complaint about a contractor with the Office of Procurement, do you usually get an answer to your problem:

- a) Within 24 hours
- b) Within 1 week
- c) More than 1 week?

*Like I said, they're very responsive. Some complaints or questions take longer to answer than others, but I'd say I've never had any complaints about their response times. There was one person who used to work at the Procurement Office who was not very quick to respond, but he's no longer there, so it's not an issue anymore. Other than that, they are quick to resolve problems and very knowledgeable about legal issues concerning vendors and the procurement process.*

4) In your opinion, what are the main factors that cause delays in the post award procurement process?

*I'm not the right guy to ask about this. I've never really had any problems with delays or contract disputes. There was only one default contract and that was due to bankruptcy. The issue was resolved, but it wasn't a termination due to default or mutual consent.*

5) What do you feel could aid your efforts to better communicate with the Office of Procurement?

*They are very communicative. I can't think of anything to improve communication. I've never had any problems getting in touch with them and they always respond quickly. Whenever I contact the office they respond right away to acknowledge me*



*and my request, what ever it might be. I have never had a problem getting in touch with the office.*

- 6) Have you ever worked with a contract termination? What was your experience with the Office of Procurement during this process?

*Fortunately I've never had to deal with a contract termination, so I can't really say.*

- 7) What, in your opinion are the major strengths of the current post award process?

*The whole process is pretty solid. Like I said, they are quick to respond and are very clear on what needs to be done. They are up on what insurance and bonds that jobs need before they are started.*

- 8) What, in your opinion are areas that need improvement with the current post award process?

*I have always had a good experience with the office of procurement.*

- 9) When a contract problem arises, when might you not feel comfortable dealing with the Office of Procurement to try to resolve the problem?

*I work with fairly responsible vendors. There is a good relationship between my department and them. Whenever there is a question I usually have no difficulty resolving the situation in the field. I suppose if there was a large discrepancy in the field then there would be a need to alert the office of procurement but my contracts don't come to that. I frequently meet with the vendors to bring them up to speed on what is happening.*

## Appendix D Contractor Phone Interview Transcripts

### Contractor Interview

*Interview Information:*

November 26, 2000

Department of Public Works and Transportation

*Interview Transcription:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?

*Nope*

- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory.

*Yes*

- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

*(Respondent now puts us on hold, and proceeds to connect us to his assistant, who answers the remainder of the questions.)*

*They always respond quickly, which is good. they are always there and that's very helpful. So I can't really think of anything they could improve...*

- 4) On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

**4**

Support from the contract administrators after a contract has been signed

**4**

## Contractor Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 27, 2000

Department of Public Works and Transportation

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?

*None, they have their responsibilities, we have ours, we get along just fine. (laughs)*

- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory.

*They are responsive so I don't have any complaints about timeliness.*

- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

*No no no no no. Well, a reduction in the cost for a bid would be nice. (chuckles)*

*That would save some money on the ol' plastic card, (chuckles). Oooops, someone just buzzed in. I'm afraid I have to let you go.*

- 4) On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

**5**

Support from the contract administrators after a contract has been signed

**4**

## **Contractor Interview**

### *Interview Information:*

November 27, 2000

Department of Public Works and Transportation

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?

*No*

- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory.

*Yes*

- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

*Nope.*

- 4) On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

**4**

Support from the contract administrators after a contract has been signed

**5**

## Contractor Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 28, 2000

Department of Public Works and Transportation

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?

*No, none that I can think of.*

- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory.

*Oh yeah they are good times.*

- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

*At this point I can't think of anything.*

- 4) On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

**4**

Support from the contract administrators after a contract has been signed

**5**

## **Contractor Interview**

### *Interview Information:*

November 28, 2000

Department of Public Works and Transportation

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?

*I usually work with the department.*

- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory.

*Fine*

- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

*No not really*

- 4) On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

**5**

Support from the contract administrators after a contract has been signed

**5**

## **Contractor Interview**

### *Interview Information:*

November 26, 2000

Department of Public Works and Transportation

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?

*No I never have any problems dealing with the office of procurement.*

- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory.

*The response times are great I have no problems with them.*

- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

*Honestly I can't recommend anything.*

- 4) On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

**5**

Support from the contract administrators after a contract has been signed

**5**

## Contractor Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 26, 2000

Department of Public Works and Transportation

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?

*I don't think I have ever had a problem after a contract has been awarded?*

- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory.

*Yeah I guess the time is fine.*

- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

*Ahhh. No I think they do a good job*

- 4) On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

**4**

Support from the contract administrators after a contract has been signed

**4**



## **Contractor Interview**

### *Interview Information:*

November 27, 2000

Department of Health and Human Services

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?

*No*

- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory.

*No, not applicable*

- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

*One issue that I'm sure you are aware of is the fact that a contract has to be written to give a grant. I have been starting a grant program for 10 years and this has always been difficult. A way to treat them differently would help.*

- 4) On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

*N/A*

Support from the contract administrators after a contract has been signed

*5*

## **Contractor Interview**

### *Interview Information:*

November 27, 2000

Department of Health and Human Services

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?

*No*

- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory.

*Yes, fine.*

- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

*Nothing at all.*

- 4) On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

**4**

Support from the contract administrators after a contract has been signed

**4**

## Contractor Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 27, 2000

Department of Information Systems and Technology

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?

*No*

- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory.

*Quick.*

- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

*No not really. I work with the departments. The only thing is there is a delay with purchase orders from Procurement. I receive them way after they are issued, sometimes a couple of weeks. So if they could get those out faster.*

- 4) On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

**4**

Support from the contract administrators after a contract has been signed

**4**

## Contractor Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 27, 2000

Department of Information Systems and Technology

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?

*No*

- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory.

*Sure*

- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

*No, Montgomery County is leaps and bounds ahead of other counties in Procurement.*

*They do a great job.*

- 4) On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

**5**

Support from the contract administrators after a contract has been signed

**5**

## Contractor Interview

### *Interview Information:*

November 26, 2000

Department of Housing and Community Affairs

### *Interview Transcription:*

- 1) What, if any, are the major problems that you have encountered with the Office of Procurement after a contract has been awarded?

*We have never had any problems with Procurement.*

- 2) When contacting the Office of Procurement what would be a typical response time you encounter, and is this satisfactory.

*They are good about getting back to us.*

- 3) Can you recommend some things that the Office could do to better serve your needs?

*I think they do a good job.*

- 4) On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best), how would you rate the:

Quality of customer service at the Office of Procurement

**4**

Support from the contract administrators after a contract has been signed

**4**

## Appendix E Glossary of Terms

### **AWARD**

The release of a fully executed contract to an offeror. This release may be accomplished by a contracting officer by depositing the contract in the mail, with a common carrier, delivering it to the offeror, or notifying the contractor by phone, telegram or other means which communicates acceptance of offer by the County.

### **BUYER**

(See **Procurement Specialist**)

### **CONTRACT ADMINISTRATOR**

An authorized government official in a using department with the responsibility of administering a contract.

### **CONTRACTING OFFICER**

Authorized officials (including the Chief Administrative Officer, the Director, and others delegated by these officials to act within their authority) who may execute contracts or contract modifications on behalf of the County.

**CONTRACTOR**

Any individual or organization doing business with the County whether for services, construction or for the sale of goods or services pursuant to a contract.

**DIRECTOR**

Director of the Office of Procurement.

**INVITATION FOR BID (IFB)**

A formal solicitation in which competitive sealed bids are invited through a public notice procedure which requires that bids be received by a specified time and opened publicly. Invitations for Bids are evaluated solely in terms of bidder responsibility, bidder responsiveness, and price.

**PROCUREMENT**

Buying, purchasing, or otherwise acquiring any goods, services, or construction. It also includes all functions that pertain to the obtaining of any goods, service, or construction, including description of requirements, selection and solicitation of sources, evaluation of offers,

preparation and award of contract, dispute and claim resolution and all phases of contract administration.

**PROCUREMENT SPECIALIST**

An individual within the Procurement Office in charge of buying, purchasing, or otherwise acquiring any goods, services, or construction for the County.

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)**

A solicitation to prospective offerors, the response to which is analyzed in accordance with selection criteria set forth in the solicitation for the purpose of ranking the proposals received. A Request For Proposal is generally utilized (instead of an REOI) when specifications can be prepared.

**USING DEPARTMENT**

Any County department, office or agency subject to the procurement requirements imposed under Chapter 11B, Montgomery County Code.

**VENDOR**

(See **Contractor**)



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