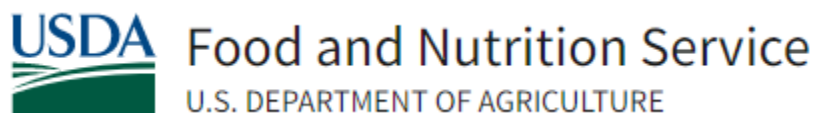




USDA Cooperative Agreement
Procurement Practices in School Meals:
Making Real Change Work for Healthier Meals



Compiled by Dottie Arnold, MSc, FCSA, Urban School Food Alliance



The Urban School Food Alliance was created by school foodservice professionals in 2012 to address the unique needs of the nation's largest school districts. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, we share best practices, develop procurement strategies, and advocate for the health and wellness of students.

MISSION STATEMENT

Leveraging our
Collective Voice to
Transform School Meals

VISION STATEMENT

To be the leading change agent for
advancing high-quality school meals
that foster student achievement.

Values Statements

Remain visionary and lead with influence. We responsibly use our expertise and experience to strengthen school meals and we strive to set an innovative standard for what a positive school meal experience should be.

Nourish children and prioritize student health. We believe that all children require high-quality, healthy meals to learn and grow and we put the well-being of students at the forefront of every decision.

Ensure access. We are tenacious about ensuring that all students have access to the food they need.

Partner with purpose. We believe that partnership and collaboration are key to cost-effective systems-change success, particularly within Alliance member districts.

Elevate environmental stewardship. We strive to keep sustainability at the forefront of our decision-making.

To learn more, visit: www.UrbanSchoolFoodAlliance.org



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 SECOND YEAR IN REVIEW

This project's efforts are focused on redesigning the procurement process to put power in the hands of school nutrition program administrators through training and business process improvements to build better partnerships with suppliers and reinvent how the school meal marketplace does business. Through the review and assessment of current rules, practices, and training materials, including the expertise of stakeholders involved all along the supply chain, this project aims to provide School Nutrition Leaders with easy-to-use procurement tools and a voice in the process. As the second year of this Cooperative Agreement comes to a close, all objectives continue to be in progress. The deliverables highlighted in this report will demonstrate the complexity of this project, along with its many achievements during the second year. All three phases of this Cooperative Agreement are in progress and will be completed in Year three. The three phases of this project are as follows:

- I. Phase One: Investigative
 - a. Create an Advisory Procurement Workgroup of diverse stakeholders to speak into the work; Review procurement rules at federal, state, and local levels; Review procurement training available and identify gaps.
- II. Phase Two: Development
 - a. Develop a national bid template; Develop procurement trainings to address identified gaps; Conduct TeamUp trainings around the country relating to procurement; Develop a toolkit for hosting a local producer webinar; Produce webinars with school districts
- III. Phase Three: Piloting Change
 - a. Conduct Pilots with districts, state agencies, and regional offices committed to trying new ways of procuring school food using the information gathered from the project; Prepare a proposal for a new school food procurement business plan to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Congress.

The second year of this Cooperative Agreement facilitated the development and submission of the first draft of the bid template content development to the USDA. The Urban School Food Alliance (USFA) senior staff worked with contractor Keri Warnick to complete the first draft of the bid template content, which was submitted to the USDA. This bid template content includes a library of template documents created to provide any district with the ease of assembling a formal solicitation in a Request for Proposals (RFP) format. Each available document is designed to be used with minimal edits, offering an "off-the-shelf" approach for each template. Every document is ADA-compliant, clearly labeled, and tagged with a form ID and revision date. The library offers users a wide array of template documents suitable for various bids. Among the documents provided, to name a few, are a solicitation information details sheet, forecasting and cost analysis spreadsheet, scope of work spreadsheet, Standard terms and conditions, and Federal Regulations that all schools must include, along with bid-specific Special Terms and Conditions, delivery fees, and a request for references, plus many other supporting documents necessary for a solicitation packet. After submission, the USDA provided feedback on this first draft content and USFA is currently working on revisions along with a step-by-step guide.

Along with developing the bid template content, USFA and Partners for Public Good (PPG) initiated Phase Three of this Cooperative Agreement, *Piloting Change*. The Pilot project process, content, district selection, and overall plan were created in year two and will be implemented in FY 26. The extent of this pilot project's development is shown in this report. Additionally, the following deliverables will be highlighted in this report: School Needs Assessment Survey Launched and Completed; School Needs

Assessment Survey Report Completed and Submitted to the USDA; Sourcing Locally Toolkit and Webinars for Local Producers Launch; Pilot Development and Launch; Procurement Research project plan and next steps for bid template content development.

This project works to address the following commitments put forth by the Office of Secretary Rollins through the creation of the bid template content and other project deliverables:

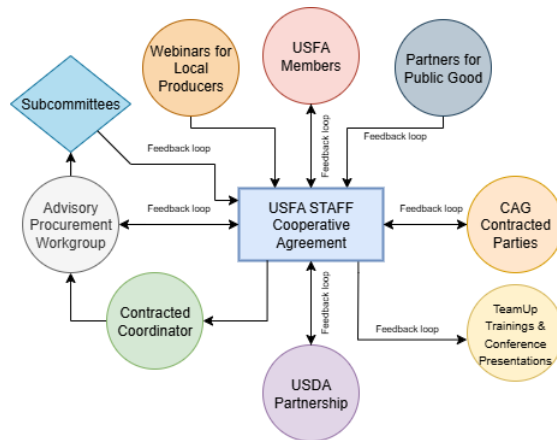
- Support state innovation through approvals of waivers and pilot projects.
 - Pilot a template that could lead to the standardization of solicitation and reduce the need for state oversight and review of procurement by school food authorities.
 - Pilot a more cohesive and efficient procurement system for all stakeholders involved, based on ideas and practices identified throughout the Cooperative Agreement. Utilize Procurement pilot projects for this concept.
- Clarify statutory, regulatory, and administrative requirements.
 - Clarify Buy American reporting.
 - Clarify Cooperative GPO memo SP05 CACFP03 SFSP02-2017.
 - Clarify what procurement regulations apply to food purchases.
- Develop and implement modernized systems.
 - Create Electronic bid template content for school food procurement hosted and maintained by the USDA FNS.
- Encourage states to choose policy options that protect both participants and the taxpayer.
 - Align state procurement thresholds with Federal regulations.
 - Standardize the interpretation of Federal regulations for Child Nutrition procurement and compliance reviews.
 - Identify opportunities for aligning state with federal regulations and identify what SFAs want in the form of training and tools, with the School Food Procurement Needs Assessment Survey.
- Strengthen strategies to encourage healthy choices, healthy outcomes, and healthy families.
 - Improve the food supply chain and promote competition in school food procurement.
 - Bid template standardizes solicitations for schools, simplifies compliance with Federal documentation (Buy American, lobbying, etc.)
 - Suggest that the USDA develop and maintain a certification program with a registration number for vendors who have submitted approved documentation for procurement. Make the certification specific to food so they don't have to comply with non-applicable documents.
 - Value-based and local procurement is included in the specification development tool, promoting the procurement of healthy and local foods by schools.
 - Webinars for Local Producers provide an overview of school food procurement for producers and farmers nationwide. Local producers entering the school food marketplace increase healthy local food options for schools.
- Infuse each nutrition program with new energy and vision.
 - Reduce confusion and fear in school food procurement with the creation of Bid template content.
 - Saves time and increases efficiency.
 - Promotes the use of technology to enhance the solicitation process.

- Promotes multi-year contracts with price adjustment in line with food industry best practices to improve the supply chain, increase competition, make new foods available, and stabilize prices.
- Facilitate Webinars for Local Producers with procurement training between school districts and producers of all sizes.
- Develop the procurement knowledge and skills with USFA’s TeamUp trainings.

These commitments remain paramount to the continued development of the vision for year three of this Cooperative Agreement and to the work being developed for the Procurement Pilots. In this final year, USFA is excited to release the final School Food Needs Assessment Survey Report, Sourcing Locally Toolkit, and additional project deliverables as they are completed.

1.2 COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration with diverse groups of stakeholders is critical to this Cooperative Agreement’s success. One of the key collaborative relationships under this Cooperative Agreement is the Advisory Procurement Workgroup (APWG), which was organized by USFA’s senior staff. This workgroup includes a wide array of stakeholders: small, medium, and large district representation; state agency representatives; a buying cooperative director, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) foods processors, a small processor that is challenged to get into the school marketplace, American Commodity Distribution Association (ACDA), Association of School Business Officials (ASBOINTl), School Nutrition Association (SNA) representatives, along with large and small distributors.



Additionally, this project includes subcommittees, which were identified in Year 1. The primary goal of these subcommittees has been to represent their stakeholder group, providing feedback on different elements of the work occurring to ensure that all members of the school nutrition procurement and supply chain are well-represented. Over the course of the first two years of this project, USFA has sought project feedback from the subcommittees through emails, virtual meetings, and online surveys. USFA Senior Staff has selected the following subcommittees:

- I. State Agency
- II. School Food Authorities
- III. SNA State Directors
- IV. Industry
- V. Urban School Food Alliance Members
- VI. Outside Stakeholders

As of March 1, 2025, the Harvard Kennedy School’s Government Performance Lab team transitioned under the Partners for Public Good (PPG) and continued work on the Cooperative Agreement under PPG. PPG is a new, non-partisan, not-for-profit team of doers, coaches, and advisors focused on making government work for its people. PPG helps improve the core levels of government, like budgeting, procurement, technology, and staffing, to create more durable, reliable, and responsive state and local

governments for residents. One major way that PPG sources and spreads procurement best practices is through its Procurement Excellence Network, a free online community for public sector leaders seeking to transform government procurement practices. PPG's journey began in 2011 at the Harvard Kennedy School's Government Performance Lab, where the team set out to develop and test methods for improving government operations. PPG's experts have collaborated with more than 200 local and state governments across the U.S., Canada, and Latin America to reimagine their procurement and contracting systems. PPG contracted with USFA in the second year of the Cooperative Agreement to manage the work of the Project Pilots and the continued procurement research of this project.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1 FY25 COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT: *Objectives for the Cooperative Agreement*

The following objectives are in progress or completed for the Cooperative Agreement.

Phase 1: Investigative Phase- Create an Advisory Procurement Work Group:

1. Complete: Conduct the second in-person meeting of the Advisory Procurement Work Group in an easily accessible location, working with the USDA to select the date and prepare the agenda.
2. Tracking the pain points¹ identified in Year 1, in a linear matrix.

Phase 1: Investigative Phase- Reviewing Procurement Methods:

1. Continuous: Collect available training programs. Review training for relevance and ease of learning. Identify specific topics needed to fill gaps for a better procurement process.
2. Completed: Identify federal procurement rules that are challenging industry to engage in school procurement and inhibiting districts from engaging with a broader pool of small, minority-owned producers or processors.
3. Completed: Collect and compare a sampling of state procurement rules, including further processing methods allowed for USDA foods, to identify the inconsistencies of rules and suggest consistency in various areas for food procurement.
4. In Progress: Collect and compare a sampling of local procurement rules to identify barriers at the local level for procuring school food in a cost-effective manner, with local and community vendor partnerships in mind.
5. In Progress: Review and update the online document with existing procurement training courses available, including where to find them. Shared on the USDA and USFA website and offered to all State Agencies, and shared at allied organization presentations.
6. In Progress: Work with Advisory Procurement Work Group to prioritize development of training needed, concentrating on specific topics in procurement rather than overall generic 'procurement training.
7. In Progress with delay: Identify and contract an experienced consultant(s) to develop at least 3 short, single-topic training courses needed to fill the topic gaps identified, with USFA and USDA input and oversight.²

¹ Pain points were identified by the Advisory Procurement Workgroup at the inaugural meeting in February 2024. These pain points reference the workgroup's choices of the most critical challenges in school food procurement.

² Once the School Food Needs Assessment Report receives final USDA approval for public release, training will be developed.

Phase 2: Development - Develop a Bid Template:

1. In Progress: Develop information for an interactive bid template that assists in developing a more standardized procurement process in school nutrition.
2. In Progress: Include tutorials, with simplified messaging, on a variety of procurement topics.
3. Complete: Pilots of the bid template content.
 - a. The content of these templates was pilot-tested by four entities and revised based on the pilot feedback. Pilot testers utilized these templates to develop test solicitation documents for reimbursable meal vending machines, USDA Foods processing, and food service equipment. Pilot testers included:
 - i. Katie Cossette, St. Vrain Valley School District, CO, 31,312 enrollment
 - ii. Mallory Reeves, Orange County Public Schools, FL, 209,000 enrollment
 - iii. Sara Martinez, Valley Mills ISD, TX, 680 enrollment
 - iv. Faith Family Academy, TX (Charter School), 2,911 enrollment
 - v. MRPC Cooperative, TX, utilizes versions of the documents to conduct 16 solicitations annually, 1.4 million enrollments.
 - b. In Progress: Include an ongoing specification catalog, created and maintained by USFA, with major food items from all food categories. USFA already has an interactive template for purchasing local produce.

Phase 2: Development - Conducting TeamUp Workshops with Procurement Trainers:

1. In Progress: Conduct Team-Up/Procurement Training in FY25
 - a. Midwest Region: Minneapolis, MN - TeamUp on Procurement 101, October 17, 2024, 41 attendees.
 - b. Southwest Region: Baton Rouge, LA TeamUp on Procurement 101, November 19, 2024, 80 attendees.
 - c. Midwest: Ankeny, Iowa - TeamUp on Puzzle Pieces of Procurement, May 28, 2025, 98 attendees.
 - d. Southeast: Gatlinburg, TN – TeamUp on Value-Based Procurement, June 23, 2025, 55 attendees.
 - e. Mid-Atlantic: Charleston, West Virginia – TeamUp on Putting the Puzzle Pieces of Procurement Together, September 4, 2025, 70 attendees.
 - f. Mid-Atlantic: Baltimore, Maryland - Putting the Puzzle Pieces of Procurement Together, September 29, 2025, 95 attendees.
1. In Progress: Conduct other training sessions based on the training developed above, as requested/accepted by state agencies, national conference planners, or state associations, allowing participants to use templates, update their own bids with assistance, suggest improvements, and open discussions about solving challenges.
 - a. April 21 - 24, 2024: ACDA presentations with Dr. Katie Wilson and Jill Kidd
 - ACDA Presentations: “Viewing Procurement Through a New Lens” - Dr. Katie Wilson and Jill Kidd, RD, SNS, 70 Attendees.
 - ACDA Presentations: “Procurement 201” with Jill Kidd, RD, SNS, and Nancy Byrne of Affinity Sales, ACDA second session: 60-70 Attendees.
 - b. July 13, 2024, ANC Presentation, "Putting the Puzzle Pieces of Procurement Together," 34 Attendees.

- c. August 15, 2024, CESA Presentation on Puzzle Pieces of Procurement, 38 small rural school districts in attendance.
- d. August 13, 2024, "Equipment Procurement Regulations and Ethics" Presentation at Vulcan K-12 Academy, by Jill Kidd, 30 Attendees.
- e. September 11, 2024, "Puzzle Pieces of Value-Based Procurement," at Farm to School USDA Grantee Gathering, 21 Attendees.
- f. September 24, 2024, NASDA Presentation on the Cooperative Agreement and Webinars for Local Producers, 85 Attendees.
- g. October 23, 2024, School Nutrition Industry Partner Conference, "Going Deeper into Local and Values-based Procurement," Jill Kidd, MS, RD, SNS, 50 Attendees.
- h. November 13-15, 2024, National Agricultural Marketing Summit, "Lightening Round Presentation on the Cooperative Agreement - Webinars for Local Producers," Dottie Arnold, MS, FCSA, Albuquerque, NM, 162 Attendees.
- i. December 10, 2024, "School Nutrition: Your Piece of the Puzzle," Presentation for Industry partners, Dr. Katie Wilson, 30 Attendees
- j. April 13, 2025, Pain Points of Procurement and Cooperative Agreement updates, ACDA meeting with Industry Members, 60 attendees
- k. April 14, 2025, Pain Points of Procurement and Cooperative Agreement updates, ACDA meeting with Associate Members, 20 attendees
- l. June 24, 2025, Kitchen Managers Role in Procurement training, Tennessee State SNA Conference, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, 75 attendees
- m. June 24, 2025, Viewing Procurement Through a New Lens: Change is Inevitable, Tennessee State SNA Conference, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, 35 attendees

Phase 2: Development - Webinars for Local Producers:

1. In Progress: Identify a variety of small producer organizations that can assist in developing the webinar content and communicating access to the webinars to their constituent base.
2. In Progress: Create producer webinars, including building partnerships with other organizations that can assist the producers with engaging in school procurement (such as GAP certification).
3. In Progress: Producer Webinars
 - a. April 30, 2025, Seattle Public Schools and the Tilth Alliance, 40 registrants
 - b. June 30, 2025, Practical Farmers of Iowa and Waukee School District, 36 registrants (Recording available)
 - c. September 17, 2025, Northeast Organic Farmers Association of New York, 71 registrants (NOFA-NY)

Phase 3: Piloting Change - Objectives for Conducting Pilots (FY25- 26)

1. In Progress: Identify ideas and practices, from all stakeholders in the system, identified throughout this Cooperative Agreement, that could make for a more cohesive, efficient procurement system for all involved.
2. Completed: Select 4-5 committed districts, with USDA's guidance and USFA's technical support, to implement ideas from this Cooperative Agreement, using the tools and trainings identified as best practice, to try a new way of doing business for one year.

2.2 SHORT TERM & LONG TERM GOALS: Cooperative Agreement 2025 Grant Year

Short Term Goals:

1. Establish the Advisory Procurement Workgroup and subcommittee selection. (Completed)
2. Identify the top 6 pain points³ for school food procurement. (Completed)
3. Develop Scopes of work for the research, training, and different aspects of contracted work for this grant. (Completed)
4. Announce the creation of the Cooperative Agreement throughout USFA networks to build awareness of this project and its purpose. (Completed)
5. Identify school regions for bid template content pilots. (Completed)
6. Facilitate TeamUps, in collaboration with state departments of education, in all USDA regions. (In progress/Continuous)

Long Term Goals:

1. Work to identify specific issues in school food procurement that can be catalysts for overall change. (Continuous)
2. Develop a plan of action based on the top 6 pain points to include a recommended set of training materials available or redeveloped on specific topics in procurement. (In progress/Continuous)
3. Develop research and surveys associated with Phase 2 of the Cooperative Agreement. (In progress)
4. Develop content for a new universal bid template for school food procurement. (Continuous. Reviewed by the USDA. USDA Feedback received August 7, 2025, and USFA is developing and step-by step guide and other resources as requested)
5. Utilize the Advisory Procurement Workgroup to share their feedback on project progress. (Continuous)

2.3 SNAPSHOT OF DELIVERABLES: October 1, 2024 - September 30, 2025

The Urban School Food Alliance (USFA) has completed Year Two of the Cooperative Agreement. During the four quarters of this second year, USFA completed a series of deliverables associated with project goals and objectives. The completed Cooperative Agreement Deliverables include, but are not limited to, the following:

- I. October 2024, Harvard continues Research for the Cooperative Agreement
- II. October 2024, USFA and Harvard Survey Correspondence with USDA; Waiting for approval
- III. October 2024, Bid Template Content Development by Contractor, Keri Warnick
- IV. October 17, 2024, TeamUp for Puzzle Pieces of Procurement, Minneapolis, MN, 41 Attendees
- V. October 23, 2024, School Nutrition Industry Partner Conference, “Going Deeper into Local and Values-based Procurement,” Jill Kidd, MS, RD, SNS, 50 Attendees
- VI. October 30, 2024, Year One - Technical Report completed and submitted to the USDA
- VII. October 30, 2024, Draft of the Local Producer Organization list created by Contractor, Shared Plate Strategies
- VIII. November 2024, USFA and Harvard Survey Correspondence with USDA; Waiting for approval

^{3 3} The definition of pain points: the top challenges faced in school food procurement across all sectors. To view the full list of how these pain points were voted on, view the meeting summary [here](#).

- IX. November 2024, Bid Template content pilots led by Contractor Keri Warnick
- X. November 2024, Harvard continues Research for the Cooperative Agreement
- XI. November 19, 2024, TeamUp for Puzzle Pieces of Procurement, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 80 Attendees
- XII. November 13-15, 2024, National Agricultural Marketing Summit, “Lightening Round Presentation on the Cooperative Agreement - Webinars for Local Producers,” Dottie Arnold, MS, FCSA, Albuquerque, NM, 162 Attendees, Albuquerque, NM
- XIII. November 21, 2024, “Start Sourcing Locally” documents created for school districts, by USDA region, by Shared Plate Strategies
- XIV. December 2024, USFA and Harvard Survey Correspondence with USDA; Waiting for approval
- XV. December 2024, Bid Template content pilots facilitated by Keri Warnick
- XVI. December 2024, Contractor leads Advisory Procurement Workgroup, February meeting planning and preparation
- XVII. December 2024, Harvard continues Research for the Cooperative Agreement
- XVIII. December 3, 2024, USFA met with University of Wisconsin project leads for the Hmong Farmer community. It was determined that a webinar would be put on hold
- XIX. December 3, 2024, NASDA joins the Advisory Procurement Workgroup
- XX. December 6, 2024, Draft Outline for Producer Training Flyer created by Shared Plate Strategies
- XXI. December 10, 2024, “School Nutrition: Your Piece of the Puzzle,” Presentation for Industry partners, Dr. Katie Wilson, 30 attendees, *not funded by Cooperative Agreement
- XXII. December 16, 2024, Cooperative Agreement Year 1 Technical report published on USFA website
- XXIII. December 17, 2024, Year One Technical Report overview shared with USFA Board of Directors
- XXIV. December 19, 2024, Webinars for Local Producers Contract sent to Shared Plate Strategies
- XXV. December 19, 2024, Year One Technical Report overview shared with USFA Member Districts
- XXVI. December 29, 2024, TeamUp Iowa planned for May 28, 2025
- XXVII. January 2025: launch of marketing pamphlet for TeamUp
- XXVIII. January 2025: USFA planning for the February gathering of the Advisory Procurement Workgroup
- XXIX. January 2025: TeamUp Georgia is in progress for October 28, 2025
- XXX. January 2025: TeamUp North Dakota is in progress for October 15, 2025
- XXXI. January 2025: Webinars for local producers content development
- XXXII. January 17, 2025, bid template content presentation to USDA, Keri Warnick, and USFA Senior Staff
- XXXIII. Harvard continues research for the Cooperative Agreement
- XXXIV. January 24, 2025, School Food Procurement Needs Survey launched by Harvard Kennedy School’s Government Performance Lab and USFA
- XXXV. February 19, 2025, bid template content presentation for the Advisory Procurement Workgroup by Keri Warnick, the CAG bid template content developer
- XXXVI. February 19, 2025, preliminary research presentation by the Harvard Kennedy School’s Government Performance Lab team for the Advisory Procurement Workgroup

- XXXVII. February 19-20, 2025, Advisory Procurement Workgroup Meeting, 22 members, USFA staff, USDA staff, four contractors in attendance
- XXXVIII. February 26, 2025 - February 28, 2025, initial webinar inquiries sent to the Local Producer Organization list:
 - 1. Farm to School Frederick (Mid-Atlantic Region)
 - 2. Practical Farmers of Iowa (Midwest Region)
 - 3. NOFA VT (Northeast Region)
 - 4. Washington Farms: Local Farm Finder (Western Region)
- XXXIX. February 28, 2025, Harvard Kennedy School's Government Performance Lab, research completed and technical report complete, Feeding the Nation's Children: Challenges and Opportunities Related to School Food Procurement Regulations
- XL. February 28, 2025, School Food Procurement Needs Survey completed
- XLI. March 1, 2025, USFA began its contract with Partners for Public Good (PPG) to support efforts to research state school food procurement rules and regulations and to design and implement pilot projects
- XLII. March 13, 2025, USFA staff meeting and Cooperative Agreement planning, Washington, D.C.
- XLIII. March 26, 2025, Webinars for Local Producers one-pager submitted to USDA for approval
- XLIV. March 28, 2025, Cooperative Agreement subcommittee overview on procurement research and the bid template content development, 37 attendees
- XLV. March 31, 2025, Webinars for Local Producers standard PowerPoint submitted to USDA for approval
- XLVI. March 2025: Pilot⁴ development with the Partners for Public Good (PPG) and USFA
- XLVII. March 2025: PPG transition
- XLVIII. March 2025: Pilot Application Development
- XLIX. March 2025: Pilot one-pager Development
 - L. March 2025: Advisory Procurement Workgroup February 2025 meeting summary development
 - LI. March 2025: Webinar inquiries to local producer organizations - relationship development with producers
 - 1. Future Harvest (Mid-Atlantic Region)
 - 2. Grow Appalachia (Southeast Region)
 - 3. Farmer Focus (Nationwide Region)
 - 4. Tilth Alliance (Western Region)
 - LII. March 2025: Development of Webinar for Local Producers Toolkit Draft
 - LIII. March 2025: Planning for a Webinar for Local Producers with Seattle Public Schools and the Tilth Alliance, to be held online on April 30, 2025
 - LIV. March 2025: Planning for June 2025 Webinar for Local Producers, Procurement Overview for Producers
 - LV. March 2025: Webinar development with Future Harvest, planned for September 2025
 - LVI. April 2025, Webinars for Local Producers development and planning
 - LVII. April 2025, Partners for Public Good (PPG) and USFA Pilot Development
 - LVIII. April 7, 2025, Pilot Overview sent to the USDA for approval

⁴ Please refer to section 9.1 for a full description of the Pilot and note that this is the reference for the word "pilot" in this deliverables list.

- LIX. April 13, 2025, Paint Points of Procurement and Cooperative Agreement updates, ACDA meeting with Industry Members, 60 attendees
- LX. April 14, 2025, Pain Points of Procurement and Cooperative Agreement updates, ACDA meeting with Associate Members, 20 attendees
- LXI. April 21, 2025, Pilot Timeline sent to the USDA for approval
- LXII. April 28, 2025, Harvard Kennedy School's Government Performance Lab's Research Report was published on the USFA Website
- LXIII. April 30, 2025, Webinar for Local Producers with Seattle Public Schools and the Tilth Alliance, 40 registrants
- LXIV. May 2025, Planning for the next Virtual Advisory Procurement Workgroup Meeting
- LXV. May 2025, Sourcing Locally Documents re-design and edits
- LXVI. May 2025, Webinar for Local Producers with Practical Farmers of Iowa and Waukee School District planning and preparation
- LXVII. May 1-2, 2025, Bid Template Development meeting with Keri Warnick and Jill Kidd, Austin, TX.
- LXVIII. May 5, 2025, PowerPoint for Practical Farmers of Iowa, submitted to USDA approval
- LXIX. May 7, 2025, Updated School District Procurement Pilots Overview sent to USDA for approval
- LXX. May 7, 2025, Pilot Interest form forwarded to the USDA for approval
- LXXI. May 26, 2025 - May 28, 2025, initial webinar inquiries sent to the Local Producer Organization list:
 - 1. Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (Northeast Region)
 - 2. Center for Rural Affairs (Mountain Plains Region)
 - 3. Sweetgrown Alabama (Southeast Region)
- LXXII. May 28, 2025, TeamUp for the Puzzle Pieces of Procurement, Ankeny, Iowa, 98 participants
- LXXIII. May 30, 2025, NOFA-NY Webinar for Local Producers secured for September 2025
- LXXIV. June 2025, PPG Survey Report editing and preparation for submission to the USDA
- LXXV. June 2025, Planning for the next Virtual Advisory Procurement Workgroup Meeting
- LXXVI. June 2025, Pilot Applications Open for school districts
- LXXVII. June 2025, Pilot project development
- LXXVIII. June 6, 2025, Submission of Bid Template Content to USDA
- LXXIX. June 13, 2025, NOFA-NY Webinars for Local Producers planning
- LXXX. June 23, 2025, TeamUp for the Puzzle Pieces of Procurement, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, 55 in attendance
- LXXXI. June 24, 2025, Kitchen Managers Role in Procurement training, Tennessee State SNA Conference, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, 75 attendees
- LXXXII. June 24, 2025, Viewing Procurement Through a New Lens: Change is Inevitable, Tennessee State SNA Conference, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, 35 attendees
- LXXXIII. June 27, 2025, USDA approval of the Webinar for Local Producers PowerPoint
- LXXXIV. June 30, 2025, Webinar for Local Producers with Practical Farmers of Iowa and Waukee School District, 31 registrants
- LXXXV. July 2025, Webinars for Local Producers content development
- LXXXVI. July 2025, Pilot Project development with PPG
- LXXXVII. July 2025, PPG development of Procurement Research Plan for FY26
- LXXXVIII. July 2025, Bid Template content development

- LXXXIX. July 12, 2025, ANC Presentation, Specifications Do Not Have to Be Rocket Science, 56 Attendees
 - XC. July 28, 2025, Interest Form Pre-Assessment completed by PPG and USFA for Pilots
 - XCI. August 2025, Bid Template content development
 - XCII. August 2025, PPG development of Procurement Research Plan for FY26
 - XCIII. August 2025, Webinars for Local Producers content development
 - XCIV. August 4, 2025, District Interview Guides completed by PPG and USFA for Pilots
 - XCV. August 7, 2025, USDA bid template content edits and feedback sent to USFA. Step-by-step guide to be developed by USFA to submit with the bid template content
 - XCVI. August 11, 2025, District Selection Materials (Acceptance Letter, Commitment Letter, FAQs, MOU) developed by PPG and USFA for Pilots
 - XCVII. August 12, 2025, Pilot Districts selected by USFA and PPG and then sent to USDA for approval
 - XCVIII. August 14, 2025, Pilot Project Plan completed by PPG and USFA
 - XCIX. August 14, 2025, School Food Needs Assessment Survey Report submitted to USDA
 - C. August 29, 2025, State Agency Pilot Webinar Content completed by PPG
 - CI. September 2025, Webinars for Local Producers content development
 - CII. September 2025, Bid template content edits and user guide in development
 - CIII. September 2025, Pilot Communications Flyer created by Three Strands Media
 - CIV. September 4, 2025, Pilot Cohort Kickoff Meeting Content (Slide Deck) completed by PPG
 - CV. September 4, 2025, TeamUp on Putting the Puzzle Pieces of Procurement Together, Charleston, West Virginia, 70 attendees
 - CVI. September 16, 2025, Sourcing Locally Toolkit submitted to USDA for approval
 - CVII. September 17, 2025, Webinars for Local Producers with Northeast Organic Farmers Association of New York and New York SNA, Buffalo Public Schools, and BOCSE, 71 registrants
 - CVIII. September 18, 2025, Advisory Procurement Workgroup Virtual Meeting, 30 attendees
 - CIX. September 26, 2025, Pilot Cohort Initial Discovery Calls Content (Slide Decks and Virtual Whiteboard) completed by PPG
 - CX. September 26, 2025, Pilot Site Visits Schedule and Agenda completed by PPG and USFA
 - CXI. September 28, 2025, Webinar planning with Ogallala Commons rescheduled for November 18, 2025
 - CXII. September 29, 2025, TeamUp on Putting the Puzzle Pieces of Procurement Together, Baltimore, Maryland, 95 attendees.

III. PHASE 1

3.1 ADVISORY PROCUREMENT WORKGROUP YEAR TWO: *Revisiting the Pain Points*

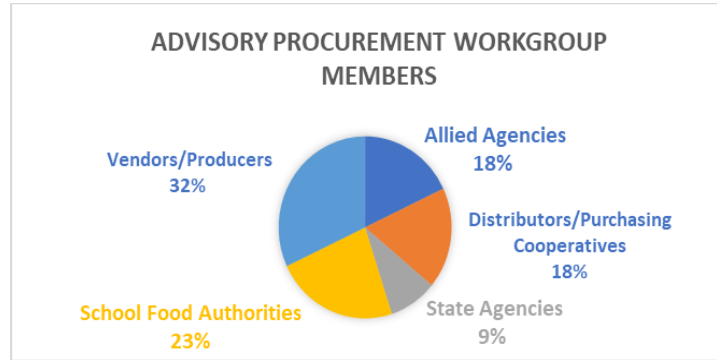
Over the course of the two years of this Cooperative Agreement, the Advisory Procurement Workgroup has maintained all original members and added additional new members⁵ in 2025. At the second in-person meeting on February 19-20, 2025, 100% of members were in attendance and worked to revisit the pain points⁶ established in year one, discuss the pain points gathered throughout the year at USFA's

⁵ The complete list of members is in Appendix I.

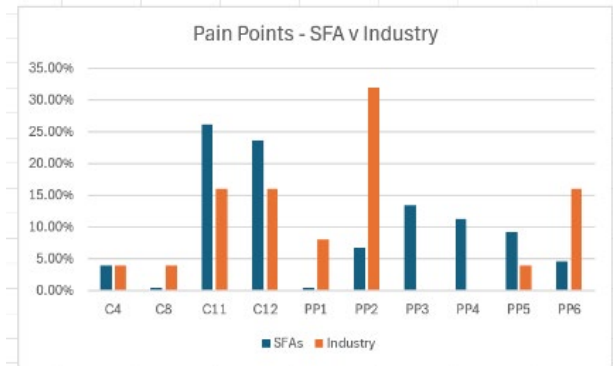
⁶ The definition of pain points: the top challenges faced in school food procurement across all sectors. To view the full list of how these pain points were voted on, view the meeting summary [here](#).

many training events, and discuss concepts for building successful Pilots for Year Three of the Cooperative Agreement. Additionally, USFA shared the new Pain Point Matrix with members to showcase how the work from years one and two is tied to their identified pain points. The top 6 pain points are as follows:

1. Lack of federal/state/local alignment
2. Lack of best practice model for procurement to make schools better customers
3. Electronic bid process/use of technology
4. Need for ongoing training, every year
5. Need for better forecasting in every bid
6. Regulation complexities



Throughout 2024 and 2025, while facilitating national trainings, USFA’s Senior Staff surveyed participants regarding their top pain points in school food procurement. More than 325 responses were collected on pain points between the School Food Authority and Industry sectors. The top 6 pain points remain the same, with two additional points identified. The following graph displays the feedback gathered for pain points. Pain Points (PP) represent the original pain points identified, and Category (C) represents the newly identified pain points. These new pain points (7 and 8 on the list below) serve as a point for future reflection as this project continues to evolve, and have not been formally adopted by the Advisory Procurement Workgroup.



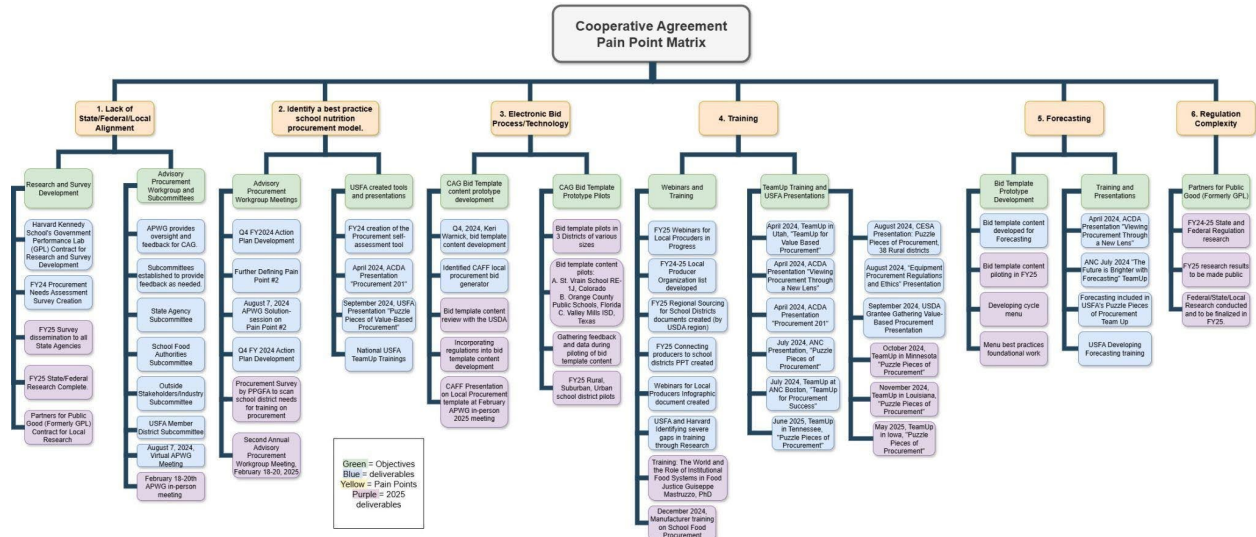
The 2025 revised top 8 Pain Points (with description) as identified by the APWG and over 325 individuals across sectors:

1. Lack of federal/state/local alignment
2. Lack of best practice model for procurement to make schools better customers
3. Electronic bid process/use of technology
4. Need for ongoing training, every year
5. Need for better forecasting in every bid
6. Regulation complexities
7. Distribution issues, shortages, competition
8. Lack of small business, broader supply chain⁷

⁷ This pain point was identified across all sectors of school food procurement. It references the challenges faced with supply chain issues, the lack of small businesses in the procurement process, and other challenges identified within the industry sector.

3.2 Pain point matrix: Connecting to the Procurement Pain Points

Since the inaugural APWG meeting in February 2024, USFA has developed a pain point matrix that shows how the Cooperative Agreement addresses the top six pain points in school food procurement



through project deliverables. As depicted in the diagram above, FY25 is shown in purple. This diagram also serves as a visual representation of the action plan for the Cooperative Agreement. This diagram does not include every completed item from FY25. The full list can be found in the previous section labeled 'Snapshot of Deliverables'. During the final year of this project, USFA will continue to map the deliverables to the identified pain points.

3.3 2025 Virtual APWG Meeting

USFA held the Virtual Advisory Procurement Workgroup meeting on September 18, 2025, at 2 PM EST. 78% of the Advisory Procurement Workgroup were able to attend this meeting⁸. During this virtual meeting, Partners for Public Good (PPG) led the workgroup in an overview of the plans developed for the Procurement Pilots as part of this Cooperative Agreement. The Pilot's status report was shared, along with a detailed project plan and outline. The process for selecting the Pilot districts was outlined with the APWG, along with the chosen districts that will be a part of the Procurement Pilots in FY26. Once the workgroup received these overviews, PPG led a discussion and asked questions about the Pilot plan using a virtual Whiteboard, which enabled in-depth group interaction. The following list highlights the feedback, questions, and notes from the APWG members present at this Virtual meeting.

Interactive: Diving into the Pilots

USFA has continued to prioritize feedback for this project to ensure collaboration. Facilitating the interactive portion of the meeting, USFA and PPG led the discussion on the design and layout of the Pilot Plan. This process enabled Advisory Procurement Workgroup members to comment on and ask questions about the various elements of the work plan process. The following list displays the questions⁹ and workgroup notes from APWG members during the interactive Virtual Meeting on the Pilot plan development:

⁸ Attendance can be found in Appendix.

⁹ Please note that all questions were answered by USFA and PPG during this meeting and all comments/questions will be taken into consideration throughout the Pilot development.

Discovery & Design:

1. *Gather district needs and also best practices to share.*
2. *This will include speaking to the vendors that are working with the districts to get their perspective confidentially.*
3. *The state agency webinar went very well, and state agencies were very excited about this project and were willing to give their expertise.*
4. *Include a pilot of the e-bid template.*
5. *It is important to ensure that part of the collective responsibilities is to ensure accountability.*
6. *Rank and prioritization of the pilot ideas with key evaluation metrics – impact, feasibility, cost, etc.*
7. *Assess what data they have access to, develop a prioritization of data needs, and back-up plans if the desired data is unavailable.*
8. *Q: I have a question: if you create a specific procurement for each district, how will you compare one to another?*
9. *Q: I assume the state agency webinar was only for states involved?*
10. *Q: How will you determine alignment? How will you ensure all stakeholders' voices are heard?*
11. *Q: Regarding the district data collection, how is the data being collected or requested?*
12. *Q: Does the data request include history and forecasting? Maybe student preference too?*
13. *Q: What guardrails will exist in terms of different pilot ideas?*

Implementation:

1. *Opportunity to share with the 5 pilot districts about common challenges, great ideas, and processes. Provide information to USFA to include in a new business plan.*
2. *Look at peer learning networks' best practices so that participants feel ownership of the network and build camaraderie.*
3. *Interview teams were very well represented of the districts. They included entire procurement teams, superintendents, and business officials. The districts are very engaged.*
4. *Training plan for each district – Professional Development (PD) is always important, especially for individualized or district needs.*
5. *This phase will gather best practices already occurring, but also allow the districts to try new ideas that might streamline their procurement activities and become better customers.*
6. *Q: Is the procurement plan based on the pain points we identified?*
7. *Q: Are any of the meetings live, or are they all virtual?*
8. *Q: How would the implementation plan be prioritized?*
9. *Q: How many Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)? Max/min*
10. *Q: Multiple rounds of review and refinement?*
11. *Q: Examples of what kind of metrics and surveys would be utilized? Should it be standardized?*

Evaluation:

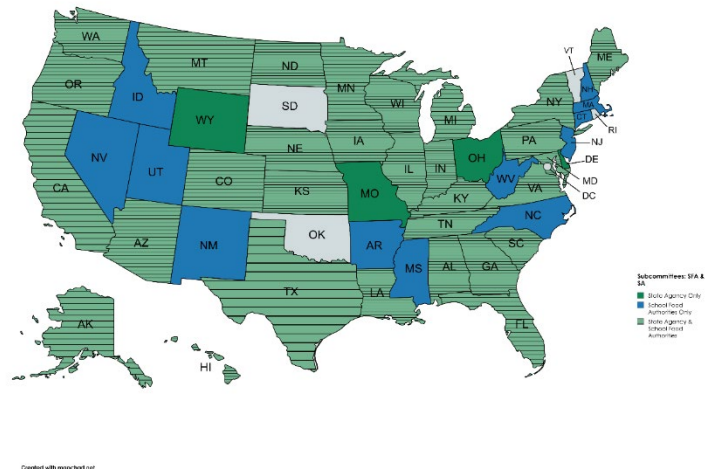
1. *Preparing the report on activities, learning change opportunities, and developing the new business plan proposal for USDA.*
2. *These plans will be presented to USDA, discussed, and then refined to be presented to potential Congressional change.*
3. *Q: Expected timeline for adoption of the new plan?*

4. Q: How will the evaluation be scored? Through what methodology?
5. Q: Will data collection include information from vendors about the experience from their perspective?
6. Q: What's next for the districts that participate? Any further incentives beyond first-year participation?
7. Q: Should they have collected data by this stage so that the deliverables would be an aggregation of what data has been collected and what's missing to see if there are persistent gaps across districts?
8. Q: Will member districts have access to the final report?
9. Q: What's next- report/plan to help them keep moving forward?
10. Q: Will USDA be part of the evaluation, or will they be reviewing the results at the end?
11. Q: How do you plan to measure the success of this plan?
12. Q: Is there clear language on forecasting that an SFA needs to partner to get what they need to serve children?

3.4 2025 Cooperative Agreement Subcommittee Feedback

The primary goal of these subcommittees is to represent their stakeholder groups and provide feedback on various aspects of the project, ensuring that all members of the school nutrition procurement and supply chain are well represented. The State Agency and School Food Authority Subcommittees are open to all State Agency Directors and School Business Officials. These committees remain open to allow all individuals interested in this work the opportunity to provide feedback. USFA has found this to be the most effective way to establish a feedback loop for this project, while also honoring the complex schedules and workloads of all individuals working within the school food sector.

During FY25, USFA engaged the State Agency and the School Food Authority Subcommittees to seek feedback on the release of the School Food Needs Assessment Survey. Contractor Jo Dawson also engaged these subcommittees for assistance in releasing the survey across all states and territories in the United States of America. One result from this effort to engage subcommittee members was that USFA received all positive feedback on the plan to release the survey, with many individuals excited to receive the results. The results of this survey will be released to the public once they have been approved by the USDA. The map to the right shows state involvement and representation across all virtual meetings for Cooperative Agreement feedback for the Year.



3.5 Virtual State Agency Subcommittee Virtual Meeting

USFA held the State Agency Subcommittee Virtual meeting on March 28, 2025. The purpose of this meeting was to provide an update on two cooperative agreement elements: the online procurement template documents and the procurement survey of school food authorities. There were 36 members in

attendance, with a mix of representatives from all regions, including approximately ¾ State Agencies and ¼ School Food Authorities. This meeting allowed subcommittee members to share feedback with the project team and to remain informed about progress. As the project progresses, subcommittees will be contacted for input on project deliverables and for USFA to provide project updates to members.

IV. RESEARCH AND FINDINGS: Feeding the Nation’s Children: Challenges and Opportunities Related to School Food Procurement Regulations¹⁰

4.1 Executive Summary

One of the most significant deliverables completed in FY25 was the public release of the research on procurement rules and regulations. In collaboration with the Urban School Food Alliance, the Government Performance Lab (GPL) at the Harvard Kennedy School sought to map the current state of school food procurement rules and regulations at both the federal and state levels. We aimed to assess the overall impact of these regulations on (1) School Food Authorities (SFAs), especially as they navigate complex layers of regulations, and (2) vendors, including producers, distributors, and processors, who may face barriers in participating in procurements.

The research focused on a scan of state websites from a sample of 21 randomly chosen states across each of the seven USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) regions. Because state websites are likely a core source of information for SFAs, our research approach is representative of what SFAs, or other practitioners, may find it helpful when aiming to understand regulations. We identified three major categories of findings:

- Differing rules among states — and between the federal government and states — impact all aspects of school food procurement. For example, we found that most states had dollar thresholds for purchasing methods lower than federal limits, and many states prescribe different ways of conducting certain types of purchases, even if the procurement vehicles (e.g., Request for Proposal (RFPs), Invitation to Bid (ITBs)) remained consistent from state to state. Information on procurement dollar thresholds was difficult to find in many of the sampled states.

Only four states in our sample mirror the federal purchasing thresholds:

	Federal	Southwest Region OK	Mountain Plains Region KS	Mountain Plains Region MO	Northeast Region VT*
Micro	< \$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	<\$40,000
Small	\$10,000 - \$250,000	\$10,000 - \$250,000	\$10,000 - \$250,000	\$10,000 - \$250,000	\$40,000 - \$250,000
Formal	>\$250,000	> \$250,000	> \$250,000	> \$250,000	> \$250,000

- There is an opportunity for many states to improve the information and training made available on their websites. In some states, we found robust training offerings, helpful templates and models, and easy-to-navigate, consistent resources. Other states offer limited information on how to navigate procurement regulations, and few states offer training on general best practices in procurement, such as conducting market research or negotiating contracts.
- Barriers to engagement and antiquated processes create a reduced vendor pool for SFAs. For instance, many states have statutes requiring that bids be advertised in a newspaper of record, even as the larger procurement industry moves fully online and vendors who work across states struggle to stay informed or find opportunities. Notably, we identified that many states are

¹⁰ Disclaimer: The following was contributed by the Harvard Kennedy School’s Government Performance Lab.

deploying innovative approaches to address challenges related to procurement, developing robust training resources to support SFAs and local school food purchasers, and updating policies to increase local purchasing, thereby boosting economic development.

The GPL identifies substantial opportunities for state agencies overseeing child nutrition programs to enhance their public-facing communication and available resources for SFAs, reassess their procurement thresholds and other procurement practices in comparison to peer states and the federal government, and improve the accessibility and navigability of their websites. We hope this research encourages readers to evaluate where inconsistencies between federal and state regulations — and across states — may be beneficial, given unique local goals. At the same time, we acknowledge the complexity these inconsistencies introduce to school food procurement. Furthermore, this report can serve as a tool for states to identify model practices, training, and resources to provide SFAs, based on what peers offer.

Findings:¹¹

Helping children across the United States access nutritious meals each day is one of the most critical roles of government. How that meal ends up at a child’s lunch table depends upon SFAs’ successful procurement of the food components of that meal, but also the purchase of the paper products that meal will be served on, the contract with the repair firm, which must fix a broken refrigerator, and even the last-minute coordination with a local farm to buy apples if a major delivery is delayed. Our research acknowledges that SFAs must navigate a complex and evolving regulatory environment as they make purchases and sign contracts. Across our three categories of rules, information & training, and vendor pool size, the challenges include:

Rules:

- The complexity of federal rules governing federally funded school food purchasing create navigation barriers for SFAs. While many of these rules aim to achieve important goals, such as buying American-grown food, food safety, anti-corruption and fairness in contracting, there often are not sufficient training, tools or resources on how to navigate regulation on state websites.
- State rules governing school food procurement vary across states, and in many cases, are more restrictive than federal rules. (And, though out of the scope of our research, it is critical to note that local and SFA-level rules may at times be even more restrictive than state rules.)
- Critically, state rules and procedures did not vary across all dimensions. For example, many states had different procedures for how to collect three quotes in informal purchasing or at what threshold a micro-purchase could take place. Still, we saw slight variation in how states talked about Buy American requirements or divergence in mentioning the federal guidance to increase contract participation from small businesses, minority-owned businesses, women’s business enterprises, veteran-owned businesses, and labor surplus area firms.

Information and Training:

- States vary in guidance they provide on their websites related to school food purchasing. In some cases, the information was far more comprehensive. Very rarely were states recommending the use of certain procurement methods in specific circumstances or providing

¹¹ *Disclaimer: A full list of findings can be found in the final Research Report approved by the USDA and published on the USFA website..*

SFAs with guidance on how they might attract a larger pool of bidders by increasing the accessibility of procurement practices.

- The availability of training on state websites also varied widely. However, we observed general trends, including many states referencing USDA and ICN trainings, and similarity in training topics, including meal patterns, community eligibility provisions, Buy American, USDA foods, ethics, and Farm to School among others. There was very little training referenced that promoted capacity building around procurement or taught procurement best practices.

Vendor Pool:

- When state procurement rules are poorly communicated or contradictory, SFAs may face additional shortages in their vendor pool, as suppliers struggle to navigate many layers of regulation. When bid advertisements or methods of response are not modernized to digital standards, SFAs may find it challenging to keep vendors informed of contracting opportunities.

From this research, state agencies overseeing child nutrition programs might consider where there are opportunities to:

1. Improve their websites to include clearer and more consistent information for SFAs, especially improving the ease of access to key information about procurement dollar thresholds, and producing content specifically tailored to prospective vendors to help them understand regulations.
2. Work with their state legislators to provide information about where their procurement thresholds are out of step in comparison to peer states, or whether aspects of procurement procedures (e.g., submission by fax or posting in newspaper) could be modernized in comparison to other states.
3. Explore how they might take steps to reduce burdens the vendor community faces in terms of finding bids, such as by having state websites host or co-promote solicitations issued by SFAs.
4. Identify whether additional resources and guidance could be provided to SFAs, noting that some of the most advanced states provide numerous template documents to SFAs to reduce duplication of effort, and
5. Place additional highly reviewed training resources on websites and add additional training on procurement best practices to websites as well.

Website features that create barriers for SFAs:

- Conflicting information
- Broken links
- Too many links
- Information is buried in a cluttered website page or in a training video
- Outdated information
- Short descriptions that don't provide enough information

Website features that support SFAs:

- Simple headings
- Working links
- Pleasant color palettes
- Child nutrition pages with a dedicated procurement section
- Up-to-date information
- Information shared in various ways: how-to guides, toolkits, templates, forms, manuals, and handbooks
- Easy-to-read fonts

The research had limitations that are important to note. First, only public-facing state websites were reviewed. It could be the case that some states have robust intranets or internal documents that contain additional guidance and training on various aspects of school food procurement. Other states, such as Tennessee, employ technical consultants to provide this information directly to SFAs in lieu of displaying it on their website. Second, in some cases, we found inconsistent information about threshold dollar amounts on state websites. We made an educated guess of the threshold amount by reviewing

additional sources, including state procurement manuals guiding general state purchases. However, the possibility exists that we relied on incorrect or outdated information. Looking ahead, further research on this topic might include:

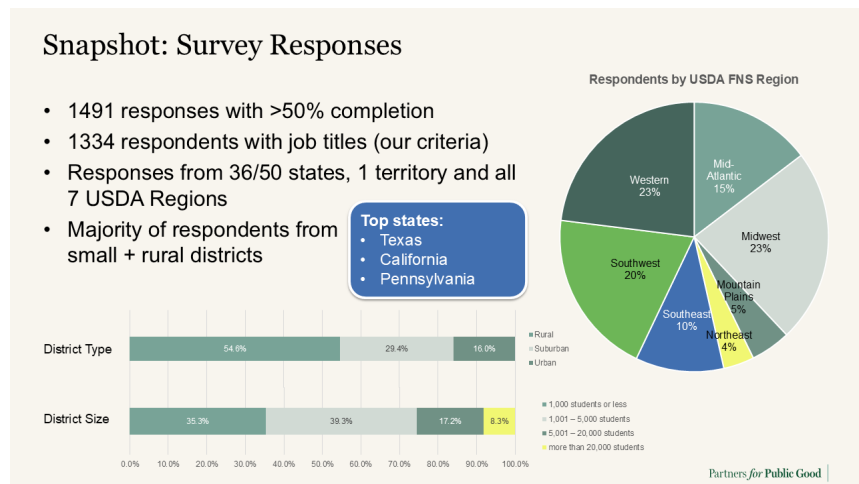
- Additional research on purchasing thresholds across all U.S. states, beyond our sample of 21.
- User-research interviews with SFAs to understand how they commonly navigate state websites, their go-to sources for procurement answers, and to understand what non-public-facing guides and websites they typically consult.
- Exploration of how frequently SFAs, school districts, or other local authorities are setting restrictions on school food purchasing practices more stringent than state or federal rules. In summary, this research could support recommendations around future opportunities to reduce the administrative complexity of school food procurement, increase overall training, and can serve as a tool for comparison of practices and innovations across state and local food purchasing teams.

V. SURVEY RESULTS: School Food Procurement Needs Survey

The Harvard Kennedy School’s Government Performance Lab and the USDA worked to approve the survey for distribution across all state agencies and school business officials. It was this joint effort and collaboration that made this survey successful. The team at the Harvard Kennedy School’s Government Performance Lab has transitioned since the completion of this survey. The research team now resides under the Partners for Public Good (PPG), with whom USFA began a new contract for the Cooperative Agreement in February of 2025. Partners for Public Good (PPG) is a new, non-partisan, not-for-profit team of doers, coaches, and advisors focused on making government work for its people. PPG helps improve the core levers of government like budgeting, procurement, technology, and staffing to create more durable, reliable, and responsive state and local governments for residents. One major way that PPG sources and spreads procurement best practices is through its Procurement Excellence Network, a free online community for public sector leaders seeking to transform government procurement practices. PPG’s journey began in 2011 at the Harvard Kennedy School’s Government Performance Lab, where the team set out to develop and test methods for improving government operations. PPG’s experts have collaborated with more than 200 local and state governments across the U.S., Canada, and Latin America to reimagine their procurement and contracting systems.

The objectives of the survey were to identify the top pain points that school nutrition directors and school business officials face related to school food procurement, and to gather information from school nutrition directors and school business officials from across the country about 1) their perceived training needs, and 2) what training topics would be most helpful,

including the format, length, other components. This survey aimed to understand where differences in



perspective occur across school district size, urban/rural/state/years of experience, role, etc. The graph above shows initial findings and the number of respondents. USFA submitted the first draft of this report to the USDA in August 2025. USFA will release this report to the public once it is approved by the USDA.

VI. PHASE TWO:

6.1 BID TEMPLATE CONTENT DEVELOPMENT: *First Draft Submitted to USDA*

On June 6, 2025, USFA submitted the first draft of the developed Bid Template Content to USDA. The goal of this project deliverable is to develop information for an interactive bid template that facilitates a more standardized procurement process in school nutrition. The following are the objectives as stated in the original submission of this Cooperative Agreement for the development of a bid template.

Objectives for developing a bid template:

1. Develop information for an interactive bid template that facilitates the development of a more standardized procurement process in school nutrition.
2. Include tutorials, with simplified messaging, on a variety of procurement topics.
3. Include an ongoing specification catalog, created and maintained by the USFA, that lists major food items from all food categories. USFA already has an interactive template for purchasing local produce.

USFA Consultant Keri Warnick developed the bid template content and has extensive experience coordinating co-op bids. The content of these templates was pilot-tested by four entities and revised based on the feedback received during the pilot. Pilot testers utilized these templates to develop test solicitation documents for reimbursable meal vending machines, USDA Foods processing, and food service equipment. A library of template documents was created to make it easy for any district to assemble a formal solicitation in a Request for Proposals (RFP) format. Each available document is designed to be used with minimal edits, offering an "off-the-shelf" approach. Every document is ADA-compliant, clearly labeled, and tagged with a form ID and revision date. The library offers users a wide array of template documents suitable for various bids. Among the documents provided, to name a few, are a solicitation information details sheet, forecasting and cost analysis spreadsheet, scope of work spreadsheet, standard terms and conditions, and Federal Regulations that all schools must include, along with bid-specific Special Terms and Conditions, delivery fees, and a request for references, plus many other supporting documents necessary for a solicitation packet. Four districts of varying sizes from different states volunteered to test the templates by building a sample solicitation packet using a set of scenario-based instructions.

Pilot testers included:

1. Katie Cossette, St. Vrain Valley School District, CO, 31,312 enrollment
2. Mallory Reeves, Orange County Public Schools, FL, 209,000 enrollment
3. Sara Martinez, Valley Mills ISD, TX, 680 enrollment
4. Faith Family Academy, TX (Charter School), 2,911 enrollment
5. MRPC Cooperative, TX, utilizes versions of the documents to conduct 16 solicitations annually, 1.4 million enrollment

Development process:

1. The Advisory Procurement Work Group identified six pain points in school food procurement that have led to fewer vendors in the school market and decreased competition.
2. Conducted a review of existing systems and hired a contractor to develop the content for an interactive bid template.
3. Piloted the interactive template by developing a test solicitation in 4 districts
4. Demonstrated the template for the APWG, subgroups representing state agencies, school districts, USDA, and industry.
5. Invited industry members to review a solicitation developed using the template materials
6. Made adjustments to the materials based on reviewer and pilot feedback.

The consensus feedback for the template has been entirely positive. Users are anxious to gain access to the tool. The template materials will be required to be reviewed by the pilots conducted in 5 districts during Phase 3 of the Cooperative Agreement. Districts will conduct a comprehensive review of the procurement process using template materials adapted to their state and local requirements, and the results will be included in the assessment of the pilots. Procurement pilot progress will be shared with the USDA National and Regional Offices as needed throughout the school year as well as the State agencies of participating districts. The school district procurement cycle starts in the fall, when it reviews prior-year participation data and surveys to update next year's cycle menu. The five pilot districts may use the bid template content.

The next step for the bid template content is for USFA to work with contracted parties to develop a step-by-step guide to writing a solicitation using this bid template. Once this guide is completed, it will be submitted to the USDA for approval and will serve as a mandatory component for the bid template content developed.

VII. TEAMUP TRAININGS: *Overview of Year Two Trainings*

USFA Senior staff, alongside contractor Donna Martin, have held a series of TeamUp trainings across the country during FY25. At the request of many states, this training has consistently received very positive feedback at every session. Along with developing a formalized training PowerPoint, the USFA team and its contracted graphic design team, Three Strands Media, have created a TeamUp Training Brochure¹², which can be found on the [Cooperative Agreement webpage](#). Additionally, a full-length virtual training was taped for the Procurement Team in [Baton Rouge, LA](#). Many of these TeamUp trainings have been recorded. The purpose of these recordings is for states to use as training materials for their staff and to provide access to those who were unable to attend in person. The full list of completed TeamUp trainings for the second year of this project is as follows:

- a. Midwest Region: Minneapolis, MN - TeamUp on Procurement 101, October 17, 2024, 41 attendees.
- b. Southwest Region: Baton Rouge, LA TeamUp on Procurement 101, November 19, 2024, 80 attendees.
- c. Midwest: Ankeny, Iowa - TeamUp on Puzzle Pieces of Procurement, May 28, 2025, 98 attendees.

¹² To view the brochure, please see Appendix III.

- d. Southeast: Gatlinburg, TN – TeamUp on Value-Based Procurement, June 23, 2025, 55 attendees.
- e. Mid-Atlantic: Charleston, West Virginia – TeamUp on Putting the Puzzle Pieces of Procurement Together, September 4, 2025, 70 attendees.
- f. Mid-Atlantic: Baltimore, Maryland - Putting the Puzzle Pieces of Procurement Together, September 29, 2025, 95 attendees.

The total number of individuals trained at TeamUps in FY25 is 439, with additional individuals that will be trained in Q1 of FY26. Through the course of facilitating TeamUps for FY25, USFA identified a need to develop a Menu Best Practices Self-Assessment Tool. It has been noted that the menu is the driving force that begins the procurement process. It must meet all federal guidelines and be appealing to the customer. Other factors to consider in menu planning include equipment, food cost, cultural food preferences, labor costs, skill levels, and the availability of USDA Foods. This menu best practices tool is currently in development and will be submitted to the USDA in FY26.

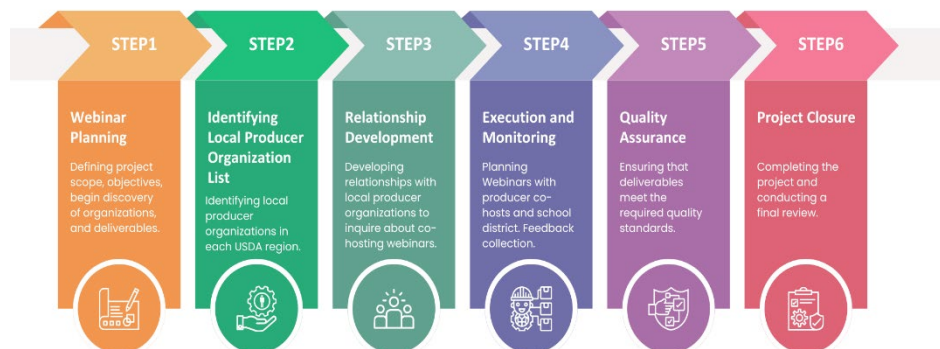
VIII. 2025 WEBINARS FOR LOCAL PRODUCERS

The following are the objectives of the Webinars for Local Producers deliverable of the Cooperative Agreement:

- 1. Identify a variety of local producer organizations that can assist in developing the webinar content and communicating access to the webinars to their constituent base.
- 2. Host producer webinars, including building partnerships with other organizations that can assist producers in engaging with school procurement (such as GAP certification).

In FY25, USFA collaborated with the contractor Shared Plate Strategies to develop initial drafts of the “Start Sourcing Locally” documents and to support the first draft of the list of local producer organizations. This list was further developed by USFA staff to map out organizations nationwide that work to connect with local producers. It was used to contact these organizations, build relationships, and develop webinars in 2025.

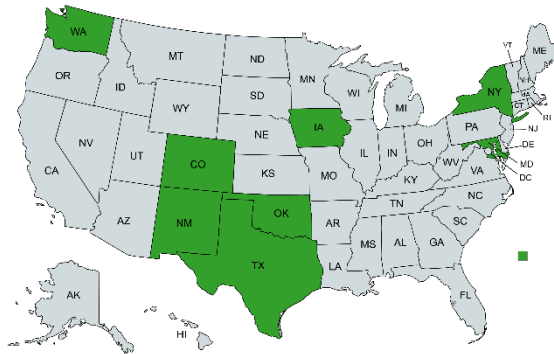
Webinars for Local Producers Workflow



The USFA hosted three webinars with a total of 147 registrants, in collaboration with school districts and local producer organizations of all sizes across the country in FY25, with additional webinars planned for FY26. The goal of these webinars is to share an overview of school food procurement and introduce producers to school districts as potential revenue streams for their operations. Producers in attendance receive a basic overview of school food procurement and entering the school food marketplace. They gain practical knowledge about meeting procurement regulations and requirements, learn about food safety in schools and the importance of developing a food safety plan, and better understand what to expect when working with school districts during the procurement process. It is worth noting that registration for these webinars has increased steadily after each webinar.

Confirmed Webinars for Local Producers 2025:

1. Seattle Public Schools and the Tilth Alliance
 - a. April 30, 2025
 - b. 40 registrants
2. Waukee School District and the Practical Farmers of Iowa
 - a. June 30, 2025
 - b. 36 registrants
3. Northeast Organic Farmers Association of New York
 - a. September 17, 2025
 - b. 71 registrants



Project Challenges:

In the fall of FY25, USFA met with the Hmong Farmers to discuss the possibility of co-hosting a webinar. Based on the discussions, it was identified that an in-person meeting would be preferable for the Hmong community, and the USFA has noted this for future webinar development. This project has faced challenges in receiving feedback from producers after the webinars. This has been noted in the planning process, and USFA shifted the planning to include real-time feedback at the end of webinars, aiming to increase the number of responses from attendees. Following the identification of the need to collect real-time feedback during webinars, USFA collected feedback during the last webinar of FY25, with additional webinars planned for FY26. Additionally, it is important to note for future planning that most producers are busiest from May to September, which can impact their availability to participate in webinars and respond to feedback if it is not incorporated into the live webinar. The following is the general feedback collected from producers and school districts that attended the webinars. All attendees who left feedback noted that the webinar helped them understand school food procurement.

Common themes in feedback:

- *I wasn't selling to schools before this webinar; however, now I am considering it.*
- *I understand the basic concepts of procurement now and have a plan to proceed.*

Multiple producers requested additional training and webinars on the following topics:

- *How can we expand our market to private schools, in addition to district schools?*

- *How to connect to schools?*
- *What are the requirements for each district?*
- *Could use additional training.*
- *How to help producers get connected to the schools?*
- *Training on school nutrition service budgets and possible ways to make it easier for schools to purchase locally. It seems like the cost differential between DOD and local is the main barrier to the schools producers are working with.*

Feedback from School Districts:

- *More webinars on farm-to-school procurement.*
- *I would like to hear a farmer's perspective on what is useful for them when developing a buying relationship with schools.*
- *I wasn't buying from local farmers/producers before this webinar; however, now I am considering it.*
- *I want to learn more from other districts about how they managed to increase local procurement.*

IX. PHASE THREE

9.1 PROCUREMENT DISTRICT PILOTS¹³

In Q4, FY25, USFA began the final phase of the Cooperative Agreement, “Piloting Change.” During Q4, after USDA approval, 5 districts were selected to participate in the Procurement Pilot Project. This project will test new approaches in school food procurement, ultimately contributing to a proposal to reinvent the business model of the school meal marketplace. The process of developing the Pilots took place throughout Q3 and Q4 of FY25. Working closely with PPG, the project was mapped out, and forms were created to facilitate the launch of the Procurement Pilot Project.

In June 2025, the pilot selection process began with the development and launch of interest forms. Using Microsoft Forms, the USFA and PPG teams collected key information from districts nationwide. The interest forms focused on three key areas: the district’s top priorities related to school food procurement, stories about past reform efforts in the school food space, and evidence of team buy-in across the district.

Interest form responses then allowed the USFA and PPG teams to put together a pre-assessment for each candidate district. The pre-assessment highlighted strengths and flags directly from the application as well as information readily available online, such as posted solicitations, Administrative Review summaries from state agency websites, and school board policies. Seven finalist districts were invited to attend interviews with the USFA and PPG teams, with all potential project team members represented. Interview conversations offered additional insights into each district’s commitment to and creativity around school food procurement. Based on pre-assessment work and interview notes, USFA and PPG ultimately evaluated districts in five key areas: district buy-in, team support and collaboration, innovation experience, industry experience, and access to systems and tools for data collection and analysis. In making the final selections, USFA and PPG prioritized working across districts of different

¹³ To view pilot brochures, please visit Appendix V.

sizes, urbanities, and operational models to ensure the pilots reflect the complexity of school food systems across the country.

Now underway, the pilots are structured around three interconnected components: district team innovations, a cohort community of practice, and building pathways for sharing ideas and scaling. Throughout the pilots, USFA and PPG are co-designing a work plan with each district team to identify what they would like to test during the 2025-2026 school year. As part of this project, there will be regular communication with each pilot district to support their work plan. Monthly cohort community of practice meetings will create space for shared learning and the exchange of ideas. Districts will rotate facilitation, with each month's host sharing proven best practices from their district in a case study format. As the district pilots progress, these case studies will contribute to a repository of resources that can eventually be shared more widely.

Ultimately, USFA will seek to share findings from each team's innovations, along with the case studies developed through the cohort community of practice. Across all five districts, USFA will identify lessons and approaches that can be implemented more broadly, to share resources nationally and reach as many school districts as possible.

9.2 FY26 PROCUREMENT RESEARCH PLAN¹⁴

During FY26, USFA and PPG will complete the final research needed in the Cooperative Agreement. This research will build on the first round of school food procurement research, which resulted in the report [Feeding the Nation's Children: Challenges and Opportunities Related to School Food Procurement Regulations](#). As with the first phase of research, this research will include scanning websites to understand what school food procurement looks like and researching what rules and regulations at the federal, state, and local levels are challenging the industry to engage in school food procurement and inhibiting districts from working with a broader pool of producers and processors. This project will also include collecting information on the procurement methods being used and identifying available procurement training.

- States to be included (29)
 - Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming
- Local-level research to be conducted:
 - Districts to be organized by [U.S. Census Bureau](#) region (West, Midwest, Northeast, South), and three districts will be selected per region (12 total)
 - Methodology for selection:
 - Districts will be randomly selected across regions, while considering urbanicity and size

Once completed, research findings will be translated to deliverables that may include, but will not be limited to:

- Online articles;
- Infographics; and

¹⁴ Contributed in collaboration with PPG and USFA.

- Quick-reference one-pagers.

Building on the first report, the research questions that will guide the review of the remaining states are:

- In what ways do state-level requirements governing school food procurement most commonly differ from federal requirements?
- How do state-level requirements governing school food procurement vary across the United States?
- Do any state-level requirements reduce SFAs’ ability to engage with a broader pool of suppliers, especially small or local businesses?
- What information do state agencies provide as guidance on their websites around school food purchasing?
 - Do state agencies tend to recommend certain procurement methods?
 - Do state agencies describe procurement methods in different ways?
 - Do state agencies provide training related to school food procurement? On what topics?

The research questions that will guide the review of SFA policies are:

- In what ways do local-level requirements governing school food procurement most commonly differ from federal requirements? State requirements?
- How do local-level requirements governing school food procurement vary across the United States?
- Do any local-level requirements reduce SFAs’ ability to engage with a broader pool of suppliers, especially small or local businesses?

Project plan:

State-level and Local-level Research		
Time	Task	Status
Aug. 2025	Outline a plan for the remaining research.	Complete
Sep. – Nov. 2025	Complete the scan of remaining state agencies to identify state-specific procurement rules, recommendations, and training resources.	In Progress
Dec. 2025	Complete local-level research, mirroring the state-level methodology.	
Jan. 2026	Prepare and present initial research findings to the USFA team. Prepare content for the Feb. Advisory Procurement Work Group meeting.	
Feb. 2026	Close any gaps in research based on feedback from the USFA team, Advisory Procurement Work Group, etc.	
Mar. – May 2026	Draft key deliverables and share with the USFA team.	

X. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

As FY25 comes to a close, USFA looks forward to the project deliverables scheduled for this project’s final year. The primary focus of FY26 will be the continued development of the bid template content, Pilot Procurement Projects with PPG and selected school districts, Final Advisory Procurement Workgroup In-person meeting, TeamUp trainings, Webinars for Local Producers, and Final Procurement Research. Additionally, to accommodate the changes in project timelines due to approvals and the Pilot

Project development, USFA is considering submitting a six-month extension request to the USDA for the Cooperative Agreement. This request would provide ample time for the USDA to review reports developed and approve publications associated with the final year of this Cooperative Agreement, and finalize the results of the Pilot Procurement Project.

Upcoming Project Deliverables for FY26:

- October 2025, Procurement Pilot Projects launch
- October 6, 2025, Webinars for Local Producers, Maryland Department of Education, and Future Harvest and the Mid Atlantic Black Farmers Caucus
- October 28, 2025, TeamUp Georgia
- November 6, 2025, TeamUp Idaho
- November 18, 2025, Webinars for Local Producers, Ogallala Commons
- Sourcing Locally Toolkit published after USDA approval
- School Food Needs Assessment Survey Report published after USDA approval
- Identifying a training consultant to develop training – from year 2, delayed until USDA approves the survey for publication.
- Contractor to develop training manual/how-to guide for developing a solicitation using the electronic bid template materials
- Procurement Research Plan to be completed by PPG

Contributors

The following is a list of contributors for this Technical Report and their respective areas of work for the Cooperative Agreement:

- Dr. Katie Wilson, Executive Director, Urban School Food Alliance
- Jill Kidd, Director of Procurement and Business Innovation Initiatives, Urban School Food Alliance
- Jeremy West, CFO, Urban School Food Alliance
- Dottie Arnold, Cooperative Agreement Administrator, Urban School Food Alliance

Advisory Procurement Workgroup Coordinator and Contractor

- Jo Dawson

Harvard Kennedy School, Government Performance Lab:

- Laura Merryfield
- Pamela Portocarrero
- Elena Hoffnagle

Partners For Public Good

- Pamela Portocarrero

- Sybelle VanAntwerp
- Elena Hoffnagle

Universal Bid Template Contractor

- Keri Warnick, Coordinator, Multi-Region Cooperative, TX

TeamUp Coordinator Contractor

- Donna S. Martin, EdS, RDN, SNS, FAND

Three Strands Media – Graphic Design

- Melissa Mayer
- Matt Mayer



Appendix I.

Advisory Procurement Work Group

Member	Affiliation	Representing
Mike Birkmeyer	Maryland State Department of Education	State Agency/Great Customer Service
Laura Bruno, RD, SNS	Buena Vista Foods	Vendor: K12, USDA Foods Processing, Commercial
Deborah Cameron	Colorado Department of Human Services	ACDA
Darin Crawford	Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District	ASBO
Moss Crutchfield, CEC, SNS	Epping School District, New Hampshire	School Food Authority/Small school district NH/Universal Free Meals
Christopher Derico, SNS	Barbour County Schools, West Virginia	School Food Authority/School Nutrition Association President
Alex Dinovo	DNO Produce	Product Industry
Becky Garrison	National Association of State Departments of Agriculture	US State Departments of Agriculture
Vanessa Hayes	Valdosta City Schools	School Food Authority, medium size
Brian Hofmeier	JTM Food Group	Vendor: K12, USDA Foods Processing, Commercial
Lynelle Johnson, LRD, SNS	N. Dakota Department of Public Instruction	State Agency/small, rural schools
Steven Jones	Mid Atlantic Black Farmers Caucus	Working with small producers
Glennis Kitzrow	IFD Foodservice Distributor	Regional Distributor/regional/medium
Everett Kuglar	Rich Chicks	Vendor: K12, USDA Foods Processing, Commercial
Sunil Kumar	The Amazing Chickpea	Small vendor/Getting into the School Procurement System
Cliff Meyers	ClearVu	GPO: Commercial and USDA Foods
Nicole Nicoloff	Sysco	Distribution: Large/National
Josh Nunnally	Tennessee Department of Education	State Agency/Procurement
Braeanne Porter	Nett Lake Elementary School	School Food Authority/Tribal
Sasha Pouliot	Hillsdale Public Schools	ASBO
Rob Rosado	International Dairy Foods Association	Dairy Industry
Manish Singh	LA Unified School District	School Food Authority, large; USFA
Bertrand Weber	Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnesota	School Food Authority, medium/en-gaged in local procurement
Professor Weslyne Ashton	Illinois Institute of Technology	Procurement and Food Systems Research

Appendix II.

Advisory Procurement Workgroup Virtual Meeting Attendance

September 18, 2025

Meeting Attendance:

APWG Members

Alex Dinovo
Bertrand Weber
Brian Hofmeier
Christopher Derico
Cliff Meyers
Darin Crawford
Deborah Cameron
Everett Kuglar
Glennis Kitzrow
Laura Bruno
Manish Singh
Moss Crutchfield
Nicole Nicoloff
Rob Rosado
Sasha Pouliot
Steven Jones
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Katie Wilson
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Lev Tmanov
Abigail Okiji
Jo Dawson

USDA

Megan Mack
Janna DePorter

PPG

Sybelle VanAntwerp
Elena Hoffnagle
Pamela Portocarrero

Appendix III.

Team Up For School Nutrition Success Brochure

TEAM UP
FOR SCHOOL NUTRITION SUCCESS

URBAN SCHOOL FOOD ALLIANCE This is a free training brought to you by the Urban School Food Alliance (USFA) USDA Cooperative Agreement on Improving School Food Procurement.

Participants attending this training will:

- Understand how procurement in school food service is a process that takes time and commitment.
- Identify 12 steps of procurement that are essential to being successful.
- Practice a variety of procurement steps to better understand why they are critical to good procurement practices.
- Discuss the idea of developing solicitations awarding vendors based on service to deliver rather than lowest price point.
- Understand the value of an RFP in developing strong, committed partnerships.

UrbanSchoolFoodAlliance.org

TEAM UP
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- Understand the value of an RFP in developing strong, committed partnerships.

UrbanSchoolFoodAlliance.org

Host Responsibilities

Host organization responsibilities for a Procurement Team Up:

- Select date and venue for training and confirm with Urban School Food Alliance.
 - Communicate name and address of training facility
 - Confirm payment for the venue for training (note USFA has funding in the USDA Cooperative Agreement, if needed).
- Choose and confirm topic for Team Up session. Possible topics:
 - Putting the Puzzle Pieces of Procurement Together: The 12 Basic Steps
 - Value-Based Procurement
 - Different Topic: USFA is open to other specific topics as needed
- Identify three school nutrition directors, emailing in the topic selected, to serve on the School Nutrition Director expert panel and share contact information. These three panelists should include a representative from a small, medium, and large district.
- Provide hotel recommendations close to the venue for USFA staff.
- Confirm with USFA speaker availability for training.
- Arrange catering for continental breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack (note: USFA has grant funding for catering if needed).
- Confirm training room has screen and projector for Powerpoint presentations, microphones and podium, microphones for audience if available, and round tables for participants (for more than 12 people, and the ability for participants to move around the room).
- Conduct all advertising for event and inviting of participants.
- Handle registration process of attendees
 - Registration and check-in on day of event
 - Maintain registration list and share participant numbers to USFA 2 weeks prior to training (note: USFA does not limit the number of participants).
 - Provide name tags for all participants (note: USFA has adhesive tags if needed).
- Invitation to give 3-5 minute opening remarks and can work with USFA to teach any section of the training that is specific to their state.

USFA responsibilities for a Procurement Team Up:

All trainings are held from 8:30am to 4:00pm

- USFA will facilitate on the day of the training including speaker introductions, moderating of panels, handling exercises, breaks, concluding remarks and any other tasks necessary.
- USFA will select the three speakers for the expert panel, meet with them, get them ready for their panel presentations, and help with their PowerPoints.
- USFA will meet with the School Nutrition Director speakers to help prepare and assist with their Powerpoint presentations.
- USFA will prepare the agenda for the training.
- USFA will prepare the master PowerPoint with all presentations for the training and share it to all relevant parties.
- USFA will supply all handouts and materials for the training.
- USFA will connect with panelists and handle logistics information including registration of presentations, sharing participant information for the audience location, meeting room number as applicable, time of the training session, and required arrival time to the session location.
- USFA will facilitate the session, keep panelists to assigned time limits and encourage participation in the activities and question/answer periods of the training.
- USFA will discuss stipend availability for panelists if needed.
- USFA will conduct an evaluation with participants of the training, sharing the evaluation summary with the host organization.

TEAM UP
FOR SCHOOL NUTRITION SUCCESS

Interested in hosting a Procurement Team Up in your state?

SEND US AN EMAIL
info@UrbanSchoolFoodAlliance.org

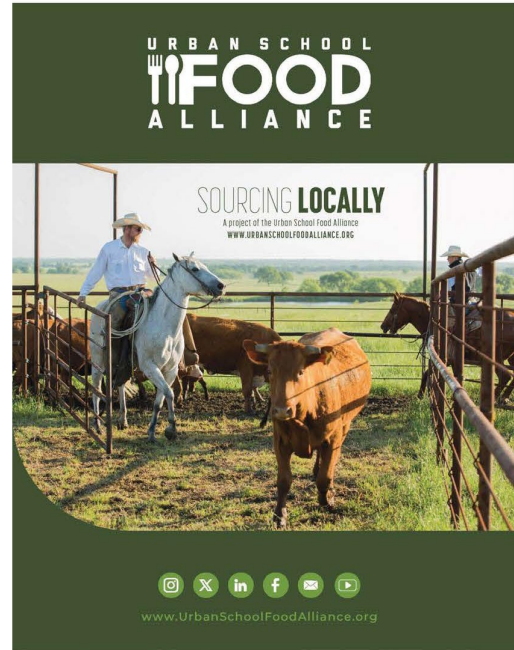
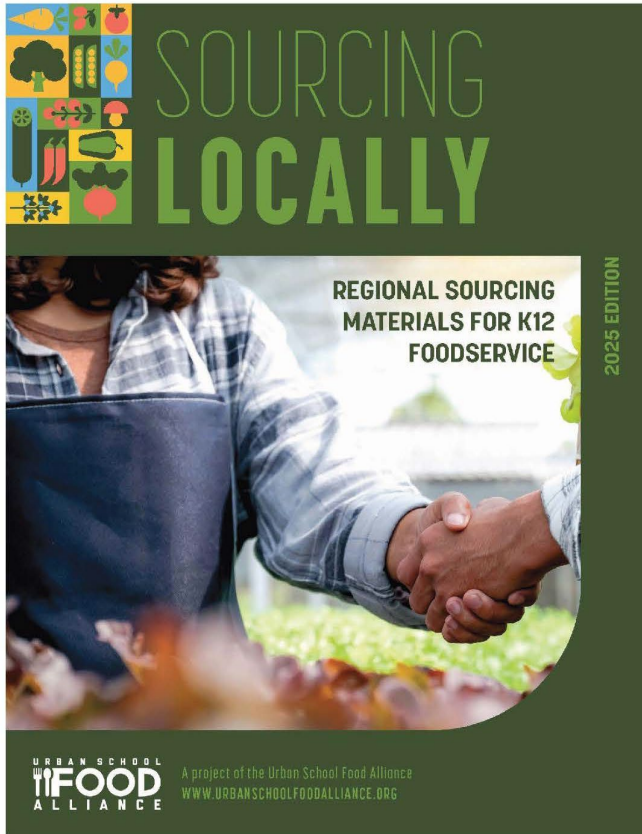
URBAN SCHOOL FOOD ALLIANCE

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Learn more about the Urban School Food Alliance by visiting UrbanSchoolFoodAlliance.org

Appendix IV.

Sourcing Locally: Regional Sourcing Materials for K12 Foodservice



15 Final Sourcing Locally Toolkit to be released to the public once approved by the USDA.

Appendix V.

District Pilot Project Informational Materials

URBAN SCHOOL FOOD ALLIANCE
Partners for Public Good

Procurement Practices in School Meals:
Making Real Change Work for Healthier Meals
DISTRICT PILOT PROJECT

URBAN SCHOOL FOOD ALLIANCE
Partners for Public Good

Procurement Practices in School Meals:
Making Real Change Work for Healthier Meals
DISTRICT PILOT PROJECT

PROJECT OVERVIEW:

The Urban School Food Alliance (USFA) is beginning phase three of the USDA Cooperative Agreement: piloting on-the-ground school food procurement improvements to build a more cohesive, efficient procurement system. This project, in collaboration with Partners for Public Good (PPG), is building from information gathered in phases one and two around procurement challenges and opportunities.

During this pilot, five selected school districts will test school food procurement initiatives to develop a more strategic and efficient procurement system. School districts will receive no-cost, customized technical assistance from procurement experts to identify and tackle common challenges over one school year (2025-26). Long-term, the goal of this project is to identify new approaches that can be deployed and scaled across school districts nationwide.

POTENTIAL FOCUS AREAS:

Districts will work closely with USFA and PPG to diagnose current procurement challenges they face and design a pilot that addresses those procurement challenges, focusing on one or more of the following areas:

- Procurement rule challenges
- Process improvements
- Revamping documents/templates
- Procurement training

POTENTIAL PILOT TIMELINE:

Discovery & Design (Sept-Oct '25):

- In-person site visits
- Stakeholder meetings
- Data collection
- Procurement process mapping
- Identify district pilot opportunities and interests

Implementation (Nov '25-June '26):

- Implement district pilot ideas
- Data Collection

Evaluation (June-Sept '26):

- Data analysis
- Publish final report

PROJECT FUNDING:

This pilot project is part of a cooperative agreement between USDA and the Urban School Food Alliance, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. USFA and PPG staff who will provide technical assistance are also funded through the agreement.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Making Real Change Work for Healthier Meals District Pilot Project

SELECTED SCHOOL DISTRICTS:

Epping School District (SAU14) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Epping, NH <1,000 Enrollment 2 School Sites Rural, Fringe 	School District of Holmen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holmen, WI 4,000 Enrollment 6 School Sites Suburban, Small 	Meriden Public Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meriden, CT 9,000 Enrollment 13 School Sites Suburban, Large
Hamilton County Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chattanooga, TN 44,000 Enrollment 68 School Sites City, Midsize 	Orange County Public Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orlando, FL 225,000 Enrollment 214 School Sites Suburban, Large 	

DISTRICT GRANT FUNDING:

Because pilots will require extra work and resources, districts selected to participate will receive a total of \$50,000 in grant funding from USFA for pilot-related activities, to be disbursed after the completion of specific milestones throughout the pilot.

DATA COLLECTION, EVALUATION, AND REPORTING OUT:

An integral part of the pilot will be collecting and analyzing school district procurement data to diagnose and prioritize their current food procurement challenges, build a targeted solution plan, and evaluate the plan's effectiveness in solving or reducing the impact of the challenge.

At the completion of the pilot, PPG and USFA will produce a public-facing report that shares lessons and recommendations for both school districts and state agencies. The report will also include information about activities and piloted solutions, the results, and evaluation findings.

URBAN SCHOOL FOOD ALLIANCE
UrbanSchoolFoodAlliance.org

USFA is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization created by school food service professionals in 2012 to address the unique needs of the nation's largest school districts.

PPG is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that helps states and local governments use key operational levers—procurement, workforce, digital infrastructure, and budgeting—to drive public impact.

"School districts are on the front lines of feeding our nation's students, and efficient procurement is key to ensuring those meals are healthy and sustainable. Through this pilot, we're not just identifying problems—we're building real, actionable change that can be replicated across the country."

Dr. Katie Wilson,
Executive Director, Urban School Food Alliance

Procurement Practices in School Meals:
Making Real Change Work for Healthier Meals
DISTRICT PILOT PROJECT



"Helping children across the United States access nutritious meals each day is one of the most critical roles of government. Yet, current procurement practices and regulations make sourcing food difficult and time consuming. Partners for Public Good is thrilled to bring our expertise in improving public procurement to this project and to work alongside school districts to design innovative solutions for healthier meals."

Elena Hoffnagle,
Vice President, Partners for Public Good

Procurement Practices in School Meals:
Making Real Change Work for Healthier Meals
DISTRICT PILOT PROJECT



Procurement Practices in School Meals:
Making Real Change Work for Healthier Meals
DISTRICT PILOT PROJECT



Let's Meet the Selected School Districts! →




 **EPPING SCHOOL DISTRICT**
Food & Nutrition Services
Epping, NH




We are representing small, rural schools around the country.


Our District was Selected to Participate in a Pilot Project for a \$50,000 Grant!

Visit UrbanSchoolFoodAlliance.org to learn more.

Procurement Practices in School Meals:
Making Real Change Work for Healthier Meals
DISTRICT PILOT PROJECT




 **HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOLS**
School Nutrition Department
Chattanooga, TN






We are representing mid-sized city schools around the country.

Our District was Selected to Participate in a Pilot Project for a \$50,000 Grant!

Visit UrbanSchoolFoodAlliance.org to learn more.

Procurement Practices in School Meals:
Making Real Change Work for Healthier Meals
DISTRICT PILOT PROJECT

 **School District of Holmen**
Nutrition Services
Holmen, WI





We are representing small, suburban schools around the country.

Our District was Selected to Participate in a Pilot Project for a \$50,000 Grant!

Visit UrbanSchoolFoodAlliance.org to learn more.

Procurement Practices in School Meals:
Making Real Change Work for Healthier Meals
DISTRICT PILOT PROJECT

 **MERIDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**
Food & Nutrition Services
Meriden, CT



We are representing large, suburban schools around the country.

Our District was Selected to Participate in a Pilot Project for a \$50,000 Grant!

Visit UrbanSchoolFoodAlliance.org to learn more.

Procurement Practices in School Meals:
Making Real Change Work for Healthier Meals
DISTRICT PILOT PROJECT




 **Orange County Public Schools**
Food & Nutrition Services
Orlando, FL



We are representing large, urban schools around the country.

Our District was Selected to Participate in a Pilot Project for a \$50,000 Grant!

Visit UrbanSchoolFoodAlliance.org to learn more.

Procurement Practices in School Meals:
Making Real Change Work for Healthier Meals
DISTRICT PILOT PROJECT






URBAN SCHOOL
FOOD
ALLIANCE



www.UrbanSchoolFoodAlliance.org

