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The “Buy Quiet (BQ) Program”, initiated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through cooperative agreements with the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP) and the National League of Cities (NLC), was a program through which the purchasing power of U.S. public organizations was successfully leveraged to help address one sustainability issue, quiet communities, through market-based, incentive driven procurement. The Buy Quiet Program was part of a broader effort by EPA’s Office of Noise Abatement and Control’s (ONAC) to promote quiet communities through non-regulatory means.

Buy Quiet demonstrated the potential viability of what two ONAC staff members believed to be a more effective and less costly alternative to EPA’s national product noise source regulations. Between 1979 and 1982, EPA worked with NIGP, NLC, and other organizations to develop and grow a market for quiet products. In 1982, a new Presidential Administration essentially defunded all of ONAC’s activities. This defunding occurred just as manufacturers were responding to a demand signal in the market for quiet products that the Buy Quiet program was establishing.

This market was characterized by the participation of more than ninety public entities formally committed to buying quieter and competitively priced products in ten different categories. Twenty-seven known individual buy quiet purchases were made by these entities. Many more procurements were planned or in process. An article which has been submitted to a scholarly journal for publication, presents the bids received by four state and local entities that used the Buy Quiet methodology to award competitively-bid purchases of trash compactor trucks, gasoline-powered lawnmowers, gasoline-powered chainsaws, and portable air compressors. The authors of the article chose these four examples because they illustrated the results of the application of the Buy Quiet methodology and details were readily available to them. The bid response data show that the products purchased were substantially quieter than regulated levels and most others that were generally available on the open market at the time, and that they were procured at prices comparable to, and sometimes lower than, those of previously purchased products.

The Buy Quiet methodology used a general approach described by the authors as a “Social Entrepreneurship.” This methodology, as applied in Buy Quiet, uniquely combined individual procurement incentives with a marketing and market transformation strategy. In each procurement, a non-traditional open-ended noise reduction incentive was coupled with a low-price incentive in the bidding process. The marketing and market transformation strategy altered market behavior by overcoming various barriers to implementation, and then spread that behavior to other organizations and industries. In this way, the Buy Quiet program strategically leveraged the market power of individual governmental entities to incentivize industry to continually lower product noise levels below previously offered levels while maintaining competitive pricing.

Today’s public procurement laws provide officials more flexibility to achieve sustainable outcomes through procurement than those that existed during the Buy Quiet Program. In particular, the wide use of “best value” procurement enables government buying entities to award contracts based on how well

competing offerors' proposals correspond to various evaluation factors such as responsiveness to need, qualifications, past performance, risk mitigation, and cost.

This overview of the Buy Quiet Program has been written to provide context for the Buy Quiet Repository that NIGP has placed in its Library. The documents in the repository are those for which internet links are not provided in the aforementioned article.

[View the Buy Quiet documents](#)