CITY OF SPRINGFIELD
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NIGP INNOVATIONS AWARD APPLICATION

Summary of the Program describing innovation:

As an integral part of public procurement, public entities serve a variety of stakeholders including but not limited to citizens, suppliers, internal department managers, end users, other governments, and auditors. Most of what we do is a matter of public record and subject not only to the rules of our independent purchasing departments but also to retention and document management statutes and regulations. The Federal Freedom of Information Act obliges entities to provide documentation considered a public record in a timely manner upon request. Documentation must be current, logically and consistently indexed, retrievable and secure. For smaller entities such as Springfield, compliance can be extremely challenging. Without increasing human resources, the City has implemented a new and more transparent document management process allowing us to electronically image, track, and record procurements.

Contributing to public procurement practice or profession:

Beyond the legal requirement, the City of Springfield is committed to providing a fair, open, competitive, and transparent process. Like most public agencies, staff time is a valuable commodity. Thus, we continue to look for innovative ways to serve our stakeholders efficiently, without duplication of efforts and with resources limited not only by the current economy but due to our size. In that effort, Springfield recently implemented a document management program to include electronic recordkeeping for City pCard transactions, solicitations and contracts. When stored, most public documents can be reviewed on the City's website by anyone having internet access and without making a formal request. To view more sensitive elements of the permanent file, selected internal users are issued a secure login and password.

Recognizing the Need:

Procurements at the City have traditionally been mostly decentralized. Until just a few years ago the City dedicated only .5FTE specific to the purchasing function. In a part time capacity that employee served a staff of approximately 450 working for a community population of just over 58,000. Approximately three years ago the City's Finance Director prioritized the need for better procurement oversight, improved resources for end users, and improved recordkeeping. With a new hire the position was upgraded to full time. Increased responsibility would include growing and managing the City's pCard program, drafting a city procurement regulation, developing a policy and procedure manual, identifying elements of and establishing a centralized permanent file, while providing ongoing support and training for end users.

Depending upon the monetary value of the procurement recordkeeping was most frequently maintained at the department level. Inconsistencies as to what should be maintained in the permanent file prevailed. Project management was sometimes difficult and documents were not readily available for comparison of like procurements across departments. We had outgrown our traditional practices. Design and implementation of an updated process would require a great deal of collaboration with departments and critically, the support of the Executive Management Team. By fall 2008 the City adopted a City Regulation to supplement the Springfield Municipal Code, setting forth guidelines and authority for all City procurements. In spring 2009 city staff completed design and implemented a customized electronic document management process to permanently and publically record City procurements.

Electronic Document Management - How it works and how it increases procurement's value to the organization:

Implementation was in two phases (first the pCard and then the Contracts application). When a cardholder transacts the City is notified electronically. At implementation of the pCard program, the vendor helped us to customize appropriately in compliance with our authorization policies and then to build an interface to our financials software. The document management project took this functionality one step further.

All original receipts are delivered to the Finance Department, reviewed, and then approved by the program administrator in the pCard software. An Excel file is downloaded and sent to the imaging server. The imaging software includes functionality referenced as "quick fields" that automates template completion and storage thus decreasing staff time necessary for data entry, increasing productivity, and reducing the potential for data entry error. After scanning the documents to a Work in Progress file, the scan operator enters the last five (5) of a 10-digit transaction number. A series of 'quick fields' sessions look to the imaging server database and the financials database in order to automatically populate the remaining eighteen (18) template fields. As part of that process a hyperlink is activated in the financials software that allows end users to immediately retrieve a copy of the actual documentation related to each payable entry without toggling between or opening additional software applications. Sensitive information is redacted prior to the third and final quick field session and then the transactions are sorted and linked automatically to the appropriate folder on the City's Internet website.

Except in rare instances, the City does not use purchase orders and therefore the Contracts implementation required development of a centralized database. The database has two primary document types, solicitations and contracts, each requiring a unique identifier. When a department is about to initiate a solicitation, either by phone or email, a control number is requested from Purchasing. Before issuing the number the entry person identifies the Department/Division/Section, type of solicitation (Informal quote, Formal Quote, Request for Proposal, Invitation to Bid, etc.), project number (Public Works Projects) or solicitation title, and department contact name. When the control number is electronically issued the system retrieves related data from the financials database to consistently populate related procurement database fields. Upon award, the contract is given a unique control integer and is tied to the original solicitation. The procurement database is further defined to record event transactions and to monitor the progress of related documents through the approval process (i.e. approved by purchasing on this date, forwarded to legal another date, certificate of insurance to expire on date, etc.)

The final version of each document is scanned or snapshot into Work in Progress and then through a series of quick field sessions filed electronically as either a public or private document. The distinction of private is applied to those documents we prefer to deliver in hard copy format upon request or those that are confidential by nature. Private documents require secure logins to view or retrieve. Public documents are filed electronically by year, department, and then vendor name and can be viewed on the City's Internet website. Search capacity allows stakeholder's to lookup by any of twenty-one (21) template fields. OCR functionality allows text search in most cases. The system allows for automated archiving based on retention schedules imposed.

How innovation demonstrates procurement collaboration with stakeholders to create solutions:

We are a lean organization with little hope of increased FTE. As such, collectively we continually strive for rapid process improvements. We recognize how difficult it is to develop, adopt, and then enforce a 'one size fits all' application. By collaborating across departments and with the support of our executive managers, we have defined a more centralized process, one that allows us ready access to procurement documents, uses technology to accommodate time restraints and to reduce potential data entry errors, encourages departments to own their procurements, and provides increased process transparency. The system will serve not only our constituents but the supplier community. New businesses will be able to view previous solicitations, submittals and resulting contracts. They will be able to research our process at their convenience and consequently better understand how to do business with the City of Springfield. Internal users will be able to share examples across departments. New employees will get up to speed more quickly by accessing procurement histories. The frequency of Freedom of Information requests will decrease because documents can be easily accessed electronically from the City's website.

How innovation redefines the manner in which public procurement operates:

With this innovation, procurement documents at the City of Springfield will be consistently and readily available to staff and the community. End users will no longer need to request or wait for hardcopies to be delivered by Finance/Purchasing, many of which were located at off site locations. Internal users will be less inclined to produce multiple or duplicate copies 'in case' they may need a copy in the future thus reducing the redundancy of effort and the real costs associated with printing and paper. Fewer paper copies means less filing and fewer file cabinets, thus freeing floor space in an otherwise limited physical environment. We will not only be able to provide public information more completely and quickly but, we will be able to do so as we grow without additional human capital being dedicated to procurement file management.