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CUSTOMER SUCCESS

Joliet Junior College masters supply chain uncertainty with ESM Source

During the pandemic, bidding and solicitation processes continue without interruption



When colleges and universities across the U.S. shuttered in response to the pandemic sweeping the country in the spring of 2020, procurement specialists at Joliet Junior College were more prepared than most.

“With ESM Source, I was able to continue bidding as usual,” said Roxanne Venegas, purchasing manager at JJC. “My counterparts at other community colleges weren’t so fortunate,” she recalled. “They struggled to find a way to keep moving forward with their solicitations.”

In procurement, the bidding process never stops—especially for critical services. “We had important RFPs that needed to be released,” Roxanne said. Those included



Include questions about diversity directly in solicitation materials to alert MBEs

proposals for employee benefits, athletic insurance, and recyclable materials, all of which needed to be renewed to prevent an interruption of service. With ESM Source, bids and solicitations can be handled seamlessly online. “When the college closed for the pandemic, we were able to continue processing those solicitations,” Roxanne said. “And with our bid documents all online, we were able to answer any questions that came up from our vendors,” she added, “even from home.” JJC was also able to reach suppliers more quickly to source products that were hard to find during the pandemic.

Promoting Supplier Diversity

Roxanne recalls the bad old days of performing all of the tasks associated with sourcing events manually. That involved pulling a list of potential vendors from the ERP, creating multiple hard copies of the RFP, and physically mailing those copies to potential vendors. “We were constantly running up against deadlines,” Roxanne said. “And we had no way of knowing whether they wanted to work with us or not,” Roxanne recalls. Even after the college shifted to posting solicitations online, where vendors could look over materials before deciding whether to bid. Still, the process was largely passive and JJC had no way of reaching out to vendors who might be a good fit. When they implemented ESM Source in 2018, all that changed.

“Today we have an aspirational goal to source 20% of our goods and services from diversity vendors,” Roxanne said. ESM Source provides a more direct way to reach vendors who might meet these criteria. Roxanne can include questions about diversity directly in her solicitation materials to alert businesses that may be owned by minorities, women, or veterans. “We’ve also been introduced to new diversity suppliers through ESM’s network,” Roxanne said. “We not where we’d like to be, but we’re getting there.”

Fewer Errors with Automated Processes

With ESM Source, Roxanne’s team has fully automated the sourcing process with a solution that streamlines the bid, quote, and solicitation process. “With ESM Source, I’m able to quickly tabulate everyone’s bids” without having to rely on a spreadsheet.

“Now I can make sure that we’re getting what we asked for and that we’re comparing apples to apples.”

Roxanne Venegas, Purchasing Manager, Joliet Junior College



**Reduce time
responding to
FOIA requests
from half a day
to a few minutes**

“That removes the chance of entering information incorrectly,” she said. “Whatever the supplier has included in the bid is right there in front of me,” she added. Now that she doesn’t spend so much time tabulating bids, Roxanne can spend more time to review, analyze, and evaluate bids. “Now I can make sure that we’re getting what we asked for and that we’re comparing apples to apples,” she said. “It’s been great.”

Improved Supplier Management

ESM Source has also helped JJC improve relations with their suppliers. Now, JJC can “seal” bids electronically so that they can’t be seen until the bidding date and time. But when bids are released, they are immediately available to suppliers who don’t have to go through time-consuming intermediary steps like printing and copying. “Instead they can spend their time focusing on our questions,” Roxanne said.

Through ESM’s supplier network, JJC can open up opportunities to more vendors, especially those who are registered with ESM but have never done business with JJC. “We’re spending taxpayer dollars and we want to promote better pricing and more competition,” she said.

Roxanne encourages anyone interested in improving their bidding and solicitation procedures to consider ESM Source. “The reporting features are easy for me to use—I can design my own reports now without contacting IT,” she said. “FOIA requests that used to take a half day to complete only take a few minutes now,” she added. “And I can review inactive vendors and identify those who probably should be removed from the system.”

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Roxanne Venegas, Purchasing Manager, Joliet Junior College

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Ready to learn more about how to make your sourcing efforts more strategic?

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