

Elements of Sustainable Purchasing Policy That Relate to Implementation Success

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Sustainable purchasing has become an increasingly salient way by which local governments can decrease their resource consumption, while also addressing broader climate action goals. Successfully implemented sustainable purchasing policies have the potential to reduce overall consumption and waste, expand green purchasing markets, and catalyze spillover benefits such as financial savings. Furthermore, city-level actions have become increasingly significant as the federal government ceases critical climate research and pulls out of collaborative climate deals (i.e. The Paris Climate Accord).

While many United States (US) cities have implemented sustainable purchasing policies (SPP), it is often the case these policies are not implemented fully or effectively. Critical to the success of an SPP is the identification of implementation barriers, as well as the use of best practices to create SPPs, which help cities meet their climate goals.

To address this problem, the Center for Organization Research and Design at Arizona State University conducted a study that examined sustainable purchasing and procurement practices across 459 U.S. cities, including Phoenix. The project collected responses from 791 directors of Finance, Public Works, and Environmental Departments. City directors reported on whether their cities had an SPP. Those that did then reported on whether the implementation of their city's SPP was successful. Nineteen of those cities were selected for this project: those that were most and least successful. Their SPPs were assessed across six elements:

1. Mandatory requirements
2. Accountability
3. Multilevel governance
4. Vendor Requirements
5. Advocacy
6. Continual Improvement

Each of these elements was found to be present in successful SPPs and lacking in unsuccessful SPPs.

By understanding the relationship between these six policy elements and SPP implementation success, the City of Phoenix, as well as other local governments, are better equipped to develop successful sustainable purchasing policies.

Phoenix, AZ is looking to become one of the most sustainable cities in the US. In achieving its goal, Phoenix adopted an environmentally preferable purchasing policy in 2007; however, City directors have not reported significant progress with implementing the policy. Several barriers stand out as having affected the success of the 2007 EPP including, budget constraints, lack of employee and citizen awareness, and lack of buy in from critical departments. The City of Phoenix is currently addressing these barriers through extensive employee outreach and training efforts.

Building upon the six policy elements, corresponding recommendations were developed to better guide cities in how to incorporate the elements into daily practice.

Recommendations for future actions include:

1. Creating a mandatory sustainable purchasing policy
2. Tracking, measuring and reporting on SPP implementation
3. Enhancing collaborative information sharing networks
4. Utilizing vendor requirements in contracts
5. Assigning an SPP advocate
6. Creating a living document

In collaboration with this project, the City of Phoenix revised its purchasing policy in 2017 to include additional policy elements, which are linked to successful implementation. As result of this project and work with the City, the 2017-revised SPP incorporates all six policy elements and has initiated actions prescribed by the recommendations of this project.