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USING GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT TO ADVANCE RACIAL EQUITY



HARVARD Kennedy School
Government Performance Lab

INTRODUCTION



Introduction

Nearly every important government activity combines the efforts of government employees with goods and services acquired from the private sector. This is true of building roads, collecting and recycling trash, and providing job training to the unemployed. Local governments spend between one-third and one-half of their budgets on contracted goods and services¹ and by doing so provide an important source of revenue for many private firms and nonprofits that do business with cities, counties, and states.

We know that this government spending is not distributed equitably. Exclusionary barriers have historically prevented organizations led by people of color from receiving their fair share of government contracting dollars while simultaneously making it easier for white-owned businesses to win contracts. These barriers include explicit discrimination, non-discriminatory barriers such as large project sizes and excessive bonding requirements, and pervasive barriers such as limited access to capital and social networks.² Because it is easier to get a government contract once you have already done business with the government, this cycle of barriers for some vendors and privileges for others, uninterrupted, will continue to favor white-led businesses over those led by people of color. Disrupting this cycle requires governments to take action.

Governments can use procurement and contracting to make progress on racial equity in two important ways:

1. **Vendor Diversity:** Invest more in firms led or owned by people of color, by allocating more contracts and more contracted dollars to these organizations.
2. **Delivering Services More Equitably:** Design and manage contracts to improve racially inequitable service outcomes.

In our work with governments across the country, we've seen the commitment that cities, states, and counties are making to procurement equity efforts. We at the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (GPL) also feel a sense of urgency to help governments make progress on equity.

1. OECD, Government at a Glance, 2019 estimates that 30 percent of spending across all levels of government happens via procurement. Studies of U.S. cities typically find that approximately one-half of their spending occurs through contracts. See Hanna Azemati and Jeffrey Liebman, "How Cities Can Improve Their Procurement of Goods and Services" in Retooling Metropolis, Manhattan Institute, 2016 and Larry Eichel and Jason Hachodorian, "What Philadelphia Spends on Outside Contracts," Pew, March 14, 2019.

2. U.S. Department of Commerce Minority Business Development Agency, A Review of Existing Disparity Studies, December 2016.



We've created this publication to offer governments a catalog of strategies drawn from innovators across the country who are using procurement and contracting to advance racial equity.

In doing this work with governments, we've found that some jurisdictions hold off on efforts to pursue procurement equity because they have not yet run a disparity study or are not legally able to make race-conscious reforms. The majority of strategies in this publication are designed to be applicable to all governments, regardless of their legal context. That said, there are no easy fixes or one-size-fits-all solutions; making real progress on vendor diversity and equity in service delivery requires more than simply setting goals and issuing executive orders. It requires real resources and real, sometimes difficult, changes to business-as-usual processes. But governments across the country are making these investments and changes, as we show in the case studies in the following pages -- from investing millions in supporting businesses led by people of color in Buffalo, NY to staffing full-time employees on vendor outreach in Long Beach, CA. We hope that governments will find the strategies in the following pages to be helpful, either as a starting point in addressing procurement equity or as a way to examine, adjust, and redouble previous efforts that haven't resulted in the desired change.³

We are also excited to invite you -- governments, organizations, and individuals who are thinking about how to use procurement to advance equity -- to shape our thinking and be part of this dialogue together. Please [connect with us](#) to share your experiences with and thoughts on these strategies and procurement equity issues more broadly. We anticipate updating this publication from time to time with new strategies and new case studies.

Finally, thank you to all of the government leaders whom we have had the honor of working with on these issues. We are so excited to share what we've created together with others. Specifically, we'd like to thank the following governments where we have learned about and launched equity strategies in our projects together: Alameda County, CA; Boston, MA; Boulder, CO; Buffalo, NY; Columbus, OH; the State of Connecticut; Gilbert, AZ; Lansing, MI; Long Beach, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Syracuse, NY, and Tulsa, OK.

3. While the focus of this publication is racial equity, many of the strategies we describe can also be used to provide greater opportunity more broadly, including to small businesses, local businesses, and women-owned businesses.

PART 1: VENDOR DIVERSITY



Part 1: Vendor Diversity

Leveraging procurement to invest more in firms led by people of color

We have found that many governments state an intention to do more business with firms owned by people of color, and sometimes set up specific programs to do so (such as subcontracting goals or set-aside programs), but still struggle to meaningfully move the needle on the amount of contracts and dollars going to such firms. While many jurisdictions have performed disparity studies over the last few years, few, if any, are spending proportionate to the availability of firms led by people of color.^{4,5} If this sounds like the situation in your jurisdiction, you might wonder why firms led by people of color aren't bidding on your contracts, or whether such businesses even exist for the kinds of goods and services you're trying to buy.

In Part 1, we explore three barriers to vendor diversity and strategies to address each:

1. Government procurement processes are difficult to navigate and government is hard to do business with.
2. It's unclear what opportunities exist to do business with the government and the government hasn't designed opportunities with small and diverse firms in mind.
3. Historical underinvestment in firms led by people of color still impacts access to contracting opportunities today.

4. A [2016 review of 100 disparity studies](#) found that 65% of disparity ratios reported across 100 disparity studies were statistically significant and, of those, 99% are less than 0.8 and represent "substantial disparity."

5. A 2007 [Urban Institute Analysis](#) found that "minority-owned firms received only 57 cents for every dollar they would be expected to receive."



Barrier: Government procurement processes are difficult to navigate and government is hard to do business with.

For organizations who want to do business with government, there are significant and immediate barriers to getting started. First, they need to find opportunities, then prepare documentation to bid, and finally submit their bid or proposal. Each of these steps can be confusing at best and impossible at worst, but organizations who have won contracts in the past and larger organizations with more resources are better positioned to overcome these challenges. For example, the process to submit bids or proposals may require navigating confusing websites, submitting complicated documentation such as notarized forms or insurance and bonding requirements, and wading through procurement documents that are tens or even hundreds of pages long. Incumbent or larger organizations are more familiar with these processes and are more likely to have dedicated staff to review legal requirements and respond to requests for proposals (RFPs).

Even after obtaining a contract, vendors have to deal with lengthy payment timelines, which can cause financial stress -- in some cases resulting in vendors deciding not to bid on government work again or even being forced to shut down. Larger or incumbent organizations are more likely to be able to absorb these payment delays. We've often heard that even when businesses call a help line, they'll get a different answer about what to do depending on whom they talk to or when they call. Established firms that have worked with government before may have go-to contacts to ask for help in addition to prior experience navigating the process.

What we've heard from vendors

“ Although I would like to apply for opportunities, the **process seems to be too difficult**, and I sometimes am not sure what information is asked for.

“ The **time it takes to be paid** for invoices is quite long (over 3 months) -- we have had times when it has affected our liquidity.



Strategies: Improve overall procurement systems to make it easier for small and diverse vendors to do business with the government.

- **Streamline procurement and certification processes** by conducting user research (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups, user journey mapping) to understand vendor pain points and enacting process or policy changes to lower those barriers.
- **Offer clear and centralized process guidance and procurement forecasts for vendors**, such as on a well-designed website or by providing government staff to help vendors navigate the process and answer questions, so that small and minority-led firms can easily understand how to find good-fit opportunities and submit bids.
- **Implement prompt payment programs** to reduce the amount of time it takes for payments to go out the door, such as by replacing physical checks with electronic fund transfers across the board for all vendors, by guaranteeing shorter payment timelines for smaller contracts or smaller vendors, and by ensuring prime contractors promptly pay subcontractors.
- **Reduce bonding, insurance, or other onerous requirements that shift risk onto vendors by** using alternative risk management strategies for low-risk projects.
- **Raise formal solicitation thresholds for** small and minority-led firms to create more opportunities for governments to use small and minority-led firms for small contracts, helping these businesses get a foot in the door.
- **Communicate commitment and effort to improve vendor diversity to vendors** to encourage participation from those who might be discouraged by past experience pursuing public contracts.



Case Study: Simplifying solicitations and hosting webinars to increase vendor participation in Tulsa, OK

The City of Tulsa's procurement process was long, bureaucratic, and inefficient, and as a result the City saw the same few firms bidding on and winning its contracts. In fiscal year 2020, about one of every five contracts received only a single bid, and almost 85% of vendors who received contracts had worked with the City previously. To lower barriers to bidding, Tulsa worked with the GPL to redesign its solicitation templates to reduce administrative burden for vendors, such as by requiring fewer affidavits and signatures and putting key information up front rather than buried in the middle of the document. In addition, the City and the GPL hosted webinars for vendors about how to bid on city work, including how to read and respond to solicitations and live Q&A with Purchasing staff. Over one hundred businesses participated in these webinars, afterward noting that the training increased their confidence in the bidding process and would help them pursue future RFPs. The City is excited to see these efforts translate into increased participation on city contracting opportunities in Tulsa.



Barrier: It's unclear what opportunities exist to do business with the government and the government hasn't designed opportunities with small and diverse firms in mind.

It can be hard for firms led by people of color to find out what opportunities exist to do business with the government; for example, RFPs may be advertised only to businesses that are registered in government vendor portals under certain industry codes, or news of opportunities may spread through professional and trade networks where firms led by people of color are underrepresented. Even if an opportunity in the right sector comes up, vendors may not bid on it because they don't believe the government is interested in doing business with anyone new, or it may be written or scoped in such a way that prevents small firms from bidding on it -- for example, with a scope of work that is too large to take on, or with requirements that are too hard to meet.

What we've heard from vendors

“

I don't believe that small businesses have much of a chance on most bid opportunities. It's incredibly difficult to bid as a small firm.

“

Enforcement of subcontracting is non-existent. I have been a subcontract member of two bid teams that were awarded a bid, and in both cases received no work or opportunity to participate in the contract post-award.



Strategies: Conduct outreach and design RFPs with small and minority-led firms in mind.

- **Conduct targeted outreach and market research ahead of releasing contracting opportunities** to identify specific firms that might be available, qualified, and interested in an opportunity, and encourage those identified firms to apply.
- **Unbundle large contracts into smaller, more manageable opportunities, or develop lists of pre-qualified vendors able to take on as-needed work** to increase access to government contracts for smaller firms who may not find it feasible to bid as prime contractors on large projects.
- **Write clearer RFPs that are easier for vendors to understand and respond to** by limiting page length, writing in simple language, standardizing RFP format across departments, and providing proposal response templates that can reduce bias among evaluators when reviewing proposals.
- **Use pre-bid or pre-proposal meetings strategically to share additional information and demystify the procurement process and specific contracting opportunities**, especially for newer firms who may need additional information about an opportunity or the chance to ask questions.
- **Assist prime contractors in bringing on subcontractors led by people of color** by holding matching events at pre-bid meetings, identifying distinct work elements in the RFP that could be easily subcontracted, and/or providing lists of qualified, certified businesses. These efforts are best paired with capacity-building and mentoring to help small subcontractors increase their capability to take on a prime contractor role in the future.
- **For new programs and services, double down on outreach and engagement since new businesses may have a greater chance of winning a contract when there is not an incumbent.** Make outreach to firms a core, staffed function of your procurement office.



Case Study: Dedicating resources and staff to full-time vendor outreach in Long Beach, CA

The City of Long Beach recognized that in order to attract new vendors to bid on its contracts and help them through the procurement process, the City needed to put dedicated resources into outreach. The City hired a Vendor Outreach Coordinator to do this work full time in the Purchasing Division. The Coordinator is responsible for advertising solicitations through the most relevant media outlets and business organizations and by direct email and phone outreach to organizations who could bid on these opportunities.

Working closely with local business associations, the Coordinator educates vendors on the City's procurement processes and is also available by phone and email when vendors have questions about doing business with the City or need assistance applying for an opportunity. Further demonstrating its desire to engage with and be responsive to the vendor community, in October 2021 the City launched a survey that asked over 30,000 vendors for feedback on what else the City can do to ensure procurement is competitive, equitable, and transparent and expects to make more adjustments to its processes as a result.



We really wanted to dedicate time and energy to going out in the community. We created an outreach coordinator position, and he actually goes out to community events, talks to business owners, emails, calls -- communicates with them in all sorts of ways. His entire job is making sure that everyone is informed, and to help remove barriers from participating in the procurement process.

- Michelle Wilson, Purchasing Agent,
City of Long Beach, CA



Barrier: Historical underinvestment in firms led by people of color still impacts access to contracting opportunities today.

Structural racism creates the same barriers for business as it does for individuals: it reduces access for some and perpetuates privileges for others. Because of this, firms led by people of color are less likely than their white counterparts to get startup loans or acquire real estate and have historically been excluded from career-advancing opportunities like apprenticeships and professional networks. Furthermore, even when firms led by people of color do win government contracts, these structural disadvantages may mean that they have trouble delivering and may not be renewed or considered for future opportunities, reinforcing this exclusionary cycle.

What we've heard from vendors

“As a small business we feel separated from real opportunities. Meet and greets are not enough. We want mentorships...but we need to make the relationships before the proposals come out.



Strategy: Build vendor capacity.

- **Invest in resource centers** that provide tools and opportunities to small and minority-led firms, such as bonding and capital access services, to get them ready for government contracting.
- **Invest in firms led by people of color** by offering up-front capital through grants, loan programs, and other opportunities to secure funding directly from the government.
- **Offer coaching and mentor-protégé** programs for firms to gain experience and familiarity with government contracting and grow their businesses more generally.
- **Host vendor fairs, workshops, and networking events** for vendors to introduce themselves to governments, learn about upcoming procurements, ask questions about contracting processes and requirements, and connect with other vendors and supports.
- **Work with department or agency staff who are using vendors owned by people of color**, especially for the first time, both to help these vendors up the learning curve (e.g., submitting invoices in the right format and on time) and to help government staff communicate and problem-solve effectively and proactively with these vendors in order to set the vendor, the government, and the program or service up for success.
- **Offer feedback to unsuccessful bidders** in order to help them be more successful the next time they apply for a government contract, and encourage them to do so.



Case Study: Funding Supports for Minority-Led Businesses in Buffalo, NY

In Buffalo, the City is dedicating \$3.5 million of American Rescue Plan funding to increase economic opportunity for vendors, particularly focused on supporting start-ups and existing businesses in the Black community, through services provided by an existing local organization, the Beverly Gray Business Exchange Center, that provides free small business resources for underserved and BIPOC entrepreneurs in Buffalo. These resources include providing financial and technical assistance, helping businesses become certified as minority-owned, and attracting and incubating new businesses led by people of color. By providing more funding for these supports through an organization that is already working with businesses led by people of color and understands their needs, the City hopes to create more economic growth, wealth, and prosperity for its residents.

Read more about this project [here](#).



We want to see our spending in the City of Buffalo representative of our residents and giving back to the community what they need in terms of mentorship, capacity building, and funding... From the outside, government is scary -- it's a labyrinth -- and it's easy to get lost in the shuffle... But the confidence that it builds when people know they can pick up the phone and talk to somebody and be walked through a new process... when they know they have help, that really makes all the difference.

- Shatorah Donovan, Former Chief Diversity Officer,
City of Buffalo, NY

PART 2: DELIVERING SERVICES EQUITABLY



Part 2: Delivering Services Equitably

Using procurement to improve racially inequitable service outcomes

Equity in government procurement isn't just about which businesses receive government contracts; it's also about which residents are disproportionately benefitting or not benefitting from contracted services and programs, regardless of what vendor delivers those services. Disparities may exist in the provision or distribution of government services across neighborhoods, regions, or populations. For example, potholes may be filled first and most quickly in areas of a city where residents have more political capital or power and are more likely to report that a pothole needs to be fixed. Services may be more accessible to residents who have time and resources to sign up, as opposed to those with the greatest need. Most concerning, government services may not be planned with the real needs of residents in mind, leaving it virtually impossible to solve social problems the government is responsible for addressing. If these issues sound familiar or similar to ones in your jurisdiction, there are a few ways that problems with contracting and procurement might be standing in the way of your government achieving more equitable outcomes for its residents.

In Part 2, we explore four barriers to equitable service delivery and strategies to address these barriers:

1. RFPs and resulting contracts do not focus vendors or providers on improving outcomes for intended target populations.
2. Once contracts are signed, the performance of vendors isn't monitored or isn't focused on improving outcomes.
3. The historical approach to investments in government projects and services often reinforces, rather than addresses, disparities and inequities.
4. Contracted services and programs are often planned and designed without engaging people who have experience with or are the intended recipients of those services.



Barrier: RFPs and resulting contracts do not focus vendors or providers on improving outcomes for intended target populations.

Many government procurements lack clearly-defined outcome goals, focusing vendors instead on activities to check off rather than on desired results. RFPs often don't specify the groups of residents or geographic areas that should be prioritized or targeted for service delivery, which may lead vendors or providers to target those individuals or neighborhoods that they perceive as easier to serve, rather than those who could most benefit. Finally, RFPs and resulting contracts frequently lack performance standards, metrics, or benchmarks that measure outcomes by priority population or area, leaving government and vendors in the dark about whether programs are having the desired effect and reach.

Strategies: Structure procurements and contracts to hold providers accountable for performance by population or geographic area.

- **Include outcome goals related to equitable service delivery in procurements and contracts** to focus vendors and providers on the problem.
- **Specify target populations or geographies in procurements and contracts** to help vendors and providers prioritize getting services to the right people and places.
- **Include an evaluation criterion that assesses proposers on their focus on equity**, within their project approach and/or within the firm itself in order to assess their competency and cultural humility in providing services to the contract's anticipated target population (e.g., whether the proposer hires diverse staff that mirror the demographic groups to be served).
- **Define performance metrics in procurements and contracts and require data by subgroup** so that it's clear when services aren't being delivered equitably and improvement or intervention is needed.



Case Study: Holding contractors accountable for performance across neighborhoods in Boulder, CO

The City of Boulder is embarking on a community broadband project to construct 65 miles of fiber optic backbone to provide its residents with access to faster, more reliable, and more affordable high-speed internet. In contracting for fiber construction services, the City not only wanted to award the work to small and minority-owned firms, but it also wanted to uphold equity in construction standards and practices across neighborhoods. Specifically, the City wanted contractors to do the work in a timely manner and maintain high standards of site clean-up for all neighborhoods, making sure historically underserved areas of the City did not disproportionately experience negative effects from construction. Boulder released a results-driven Request for Bids (RFB) that articulated explicit outcome goals and performance expectations, including around timeliness and cleanup, and laid out a plan for collecting data on these performance standards to ensure that all communities received a high level of service.

Read more about this project [here](#).



Barrier: Once contracts are signed, the performance of vendors isn't monitored or isn't focused on improving outcomes.

After what could be months of planning and procedure to get contracts into place, governments often do not adequately manage performance once the contract is signed. Contract management is not usually well resourced; it may be just one part of a busy government employee's job, or it is too focused on compliance rather than on results and outcomes. When performance data is reported or reviewed, it tends to be in aggregate, hiding important disparities that may exist along lines of race, geography, income, or among other subgroups.

Strategies: Work with providers collaboratively over the course of the contract to improve outcomes for specific groups.

- **Collect and review real-time performance data by subgroup** from each vendor or provider on at least a monthly basis.
- **Meet regularly with vendors** to have collaborative conversations about performance trends in service delivery and outcomes by subgroup.
- **Take action to improve equity** in service delivery after looking at data; don't stop at "that's interesting" or "that's a problem."



Case Study: Measuring outcomes by demographic group to better target program interventions and improve postsecondary savings in Lansing, MI

In Lansing, the City contracts with two community partners to administer a children's savings program to help Lansing School District students save for post-secondary education and training. In order to make sure the program doesn't disproportionately benefit higher-income students who are more likely to have support in generating savings, the City takes an active and equity-centered approach to contract management. Every quarter, Lansing meets with its program partners to review key program data, including average account balances broken down by school, race, grade, and gender. Partners then make adjustments to their programs to work toward greater equity across account balances, particularly for low-income and minority students, in addition to increasing the average balance across accounts.

Read more about this project [here](#).



If you're going to instill equity in your contract management process it's going to take longer; it's going to require more work. That's no reason not to do it. What that means is active contract management -- if we're not looking at the numbers quarterly, then we cannot manage the equity part of the process.

- Amber Paxton, Director, Office of Financial Empowerment,
City of Lansing, MI



Barrier: The historical approach to investments in government projects and services often reinforces, rather than addresses, disparities and inequities.

Because power and access to decision-making processes is often distributed inequitably, resulting resource allocations may also be inequitable. For example, when calls to 311 lines are used to allocate services, groups that historically have not used 311 or had trust in government may receive less services. To avoid reproducing unjust historical patterns, explicit attention to equity needs to be incorporated into resource allocation decisions.

Strategies: Make equity an explicit factor in planning government investments.

- **Include key equity variables, such as poverty rates and neighborhood demographics, in decision-making** about which government projects to prioritize and fund.
- **Develop racial equity toolkits** and frameworks to guide city decision-making across departments and initiatives. A racial equity tool is a set of questions or steps that are used to make sure equity is considered in designing policies, setting up programs, and making budget decisions.⁶
- **Recruit external experts** who can provide equity-oriented expertise to RFP evaluation committees.

6. Government Alliance on Race and Equity, *Racial Equity Toolkit*, 2016: "Racial equity tools are designed to integrate explicit consideration of racial equity in decisions, including policies, practices, programs, and budgets. It is both a product and a process. Use of a racial equity tool can help to develop strategies and actions that reduce racial inequities and improve success for all groups." (p. 3)



Case Study: Including equity in planning and allocation to invest more in historically marginalized communities in Asheville, NC

In many cities, decisions like which streets to pave or which sidewalks to repair are made based on factors such as volume of traffic or number of complaints. This approach perpetuates inequity among neighborhoods, as these metrics disadvantage communities that are less likely to make complaints or aren't regarded as high-traffic destinations. With help from the GPL, the City of Asheville created a new framework for prioritizing capital projects, for the first time intentionally incorporating economic and racial equity as selection criteria, in addition to other factors like connectivity, safety, and the built environment. The new framework prioritizes projects in areas that have been historically marginalized or disinvested in, or in neighborhoods with a high proportion of low-income and/or people of color. As a result of this approach, the Capital Projects Department is making different decisions about which sidewalks and streets projects to complete and has also used a similar method to examine where to make investments in public Wi-Fi. By bringing equity into the planning and allocation process, the City hopes to provide higher-quality infrastructure for historically marginalized communities.

Read more about this project [here](#).



Barrier: Contracted services and programs are often planned and designed without engaging people who have experience with or are the intended recipients of those services.

Procurement processes are often rushed, with government staff realizing a contract is about to expire just in time to issue an extension or renewal. This lack of upfront planning limits time for strategy and needs assessment, often leading to the same services being procured and delivered year after year. When there is an opportunity to offer a new service, government staff may lean on their own working knowledge of residents' needs or procure the services or programs that solve the problem as they see it. This is business as usual, and is part of the reason why so many government programs are under-enrolled, experience high dropout rates, and don't make enough progress on persistent social problems. Services are supposed to help meet residents' needs, but without clearly defining and understanding that need in a user-centric way, programs are set up to fail.

Strategies: Bring resident voice into program design.

- **Engage residents with lived experience** in the procurement planning process, such as in deciding what services to procure, what investments to make, and what changes need to occur in services or in service delivery.
- **Allow vendors who are closest to residents to weigh in** on how to best deliver services and improve outcomes, e.g. by conducting RFIs, writing problem-based and non-restrictive RFPs, and allowing selected vendors to co-design programs or services with the government.
- **Use RFIs to solicit input** from providers, community organizations, and subject matter experts on how to best deliver services to recipients.



Case Study: Engaging families in the design of home visiting services in Connecticut

In Connecticut, the State's Office of Early Childhood (OEC) was preparing to re-procure home visiting services to strengthen its array of family support programming. In order to find out what services families need and how to best deliver them, OEC leveraged federal dollars to embark on a robust community engagement strategy starting a year in advance of releasing the RFP, including 12 focus groups and 10 listening sessions throughout the state that engaged hundreds of families and over 230 surveys distributed directly to home visiting providers. Through this process, OEC gathered key insights from families, including that the current referral system and service array was confusing, that families wanted to be able to self-select into services rather than relying solely on referrals, and that families wanted to access services even before reaching a point of crisis. OEC was then able to articulate these new priorities in the RFP to respond to families' feedback, such as more coordination in the referral process, and to prioritize upstream enrollment of families who experience particularly high barriers to accessing services, such as Black, Puerto Rican, and teenage caregivers. As a result, newly contracted providers are working much more collaboratively to ensure cohesive services in their regions, redoubling their efforts to enroll prioritized populations, and using data to inform service delivery.

CONCLUSION AND GETTING STARTED



Conclusion and Getting Started

Procurement decisions impact the lives of people every day. When viewed as a strategic tool that can direct substantial resources and services to historically marginalized communities, procurement can help governments close the distance between their equity goals and the outcomes experienced by their residents. Understanding this opportunity is the first step. By highlighting innovative procurement practices across the country that are actually helping governments make progress on racial equity, this publication seeks to help more practitioners take the next step towards implementation and spur many more lessons and innovations that can support a growing number of governments in the years ahead.

We hope that reading through these strategies spurs new ideas for things your jurisdiction can implement, or helps to re-ignite previous efforts that have stalled. On the other hand, if you're struggling with where to start, we've found the following three steps helpful in getting governments started on this work:

1. **Make a “quick win” improvement to reduce barriers to bidding.** Chances are you have an idea about an aspect of your government's procurement process that is preventing firms led or owned by people of color from doing business with your government, or making it harder for them to do so. We've found that starting in on a quick win or relatively low-lift improvement is often helpful to generate internal momentum for this work and enthusiasm from the vendor community. For example, consider whether there are opportunities in your jurisdiction to make PDF forms fillable online, reduce signatures or affidavits, etc.
2. **Listen to vendors to prioritize further improvements.** Conduct user research to understand the biggest pain points organizations experience in doing business with your government. This could take the form of a vendor survey distributed widely to vendor communities, paired with follow-up interviews or focus groups with a smaller selection of vendors to get more detailed feedback. Aim to capture a spectrum of vendor voices – from those who regularly do business with the government to those who don't. Once you collect this data, distill and analyze it to understand the biggest barriers that need to be addressed.
3. **Look at data to identify opportunities for making government investments, services, and programs more equitable.** Review data on your government's investments and services, disaggregated by demographics and geographic areas, to determine the biggest opportunities to advance equity. This could be for a specific service, like which streets are repaved most or which streetlights are changed fastest. You might also look at outcomes data by neighborhood or population, such as wellness indicators, and map related city investments or programs against those data.



More about the GPL and our work

The Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (GPL), based in the School's Taubman Center for State and Local Government, supports state and local governments across the country in designing and implementing solutions to pressing social problems. Over the last ten years, the GPL has conducted more than 200 projects in 89 jurisdictions across 35 states, helping innovative government leaders improve the results they achieve for their residents. An important part of the GPL's research model involves capturing the insights, tools and practices that are gained through these hands-on projects and sharing them with government leaders across the country.

Results-Driven Contracting (RDC) is a set of strategies designed by the GPL to help state and local governments use procurement and contracting to achieve better outcomes for residents, businesses, and community stakeholders. Results-Driven Contracting aids governments to:

1. Transform the procurement process to be efficient, inviting, and transparent;
2. Improve the outcomes of contracted programs, products, and services;
3. Invest in equity to improve economic mobility and achieve better outcomes for historically marginalized populations; and
4. Elevate and resource procurement as a strategic function.

Read more about how agencies are implementing RDC strategies to improve outcomes of their high-priority procurements in our [Results-Driven Contracting Solutions Book](#).

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