



**Region 4 Education Service Center (ESC)  
The Cooperative Purchasing Network (TCPN) Program  
Overview and FQA's**



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## **Overview**

**The Cooperative Purchasing Network (TCPN)** is administrated by Region 4 Education Service Center. *Region 4 is a local government agency authorized by Chapter 8, of the Texas Education Code.*

The **TCPN** program is available for use by public and private schools, colleges, universities, cities, counties, and other government entities.

Participation in the program is not required of government entities. However, participation by government entities can provide the legally required competition for contracts for commonly purchased items thereby saving the individual entity the cost of going through the competitive process.

Vendors with TCPN awarded contracts have agreed to provide the best pricing, terms and conditions available to similar customers. Vendors and participating entities both benefit. If a vendor is successful at competing for a TCPN contract, the vendor can avoid the time and expense of going through the competitive process for each individual participating entity. The participating entity also avoids the cost and time of going through the competitive process.

### **The Purpose of the TCPN program is to:**

Provide school districts and other government entities opportunities for greater efficiency and economy in acquiring goods and services.

- Take advantage of state-of-the-art purchasing procedures to insure the most competitive contracts.
- Provide competitive price solicitation and bulk purchasing for multiple government entities that yields economic benefits unobtainable by individual entities.
- Provide quick and efficient delivery of goods and services by contracting with "high performance" vendors.
- Equalize purchasing power for smaller entities that are not able to command the best contracts for themselves.
- Maintain credibility and confidence in business procedures by maintaining open competition for purchases and by complying with purchasing laws and ethical business practices.
- Assist entities in maintaining the essential controls for budget and accounting purposes.

### **Financing of the TCPN program**

The total cost of the TCPN program is funded through a fee paid by the participating vendors that is based on actual sales. TCPN does not charge any membership fees to participating entities. Any sales made to participating entities without the participation fee do not qualify as competitive contracts issued by TCPN, therefore, the participating entity must take competitive bids or proposals for these contracts, as required by law.



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## Frequently Asked Questions and Answers (FAQ's)

### What is The Cooperative Purchasing Network (TCPN)?

The Cooperative Purchasing Network (TCPN) is a purchasing program started in 1997 by Region 4 ESC in Houston, Texas to provide quality contracts to its Texas members. Subsequently, agencies in other states began to ask for access. TCPN then began to offer selected contracts nationally.

### What makes TCPN contracts legal?

Region 4 ESC is a local government agency established through Chapter 8 of the Texas Education Code. This statute authorizes ESC's to provide services that promote economy and efficiency to school districts and other agencies. The TCPN program is required to bid and award contracts based on state procurement statutes. Most states have statutes authorizing the use of cooperatives based within the state and also out of state. In the "About TCPN" section, we list many of these statutes.

### Why should I join and use the program?

The law encourages participation in cooperatives to eliminate duplication of efforts, thereby saving taxpayers' dollars. The TCPN program can often provide a contract that offers price levels that a single agency cannot achieve on their own.

### What are some other advantages?

1. All contracts are awarded on an annual basis. For the term of each contract, entities may purchase goods and services from awarded vendors whenever the need arises.
2. All contracts are annually renewable for a three to five year period.
3. The TCPN program will try to resolve any disputes between a vendor and a member agency. Being a government agency the TCPN program owns and manages the contracts directly.
4. The TCPN program is always an advocate for its members.

### Do all goods available through these contracts include freight charges?

Most contracts are awarded FOB delivered unless otherwise stated. Please check closely for freight terms.

### Who is eligible to join the program?

Any state or local government agency mandated to follow procurement laws and regulations or federal agencies that do not have policies or regulations barring participation. Private and parochial schools, colleges, universities and non-profits are welcome.

### What do I have to do to become a member?

Go to the member section of our website ([www.tcpn.org](http://www.tcpn.org)) and download the appropriate form. Fill it out, get the proper authorizations, and fax or mail it to TCPN.

### Is there any cost involved in becoming a member?

No. All participation fees are paid by the vendors, which are based on invoiced sales.

### How do I get pricing?

The quickest method is to call the vendor and request TCPN pricing for whatever product or service you wish to purchase. You may then contact TCPN for verification. Some vendors operate e-commerce sites with TCPN pricing available.

### Do vendors increase their prices to customers in order to pay the fees to the TCPN program?



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The fee paid by vendors is minimal to the cost of responding to hundreds of bids from participating entities. Most vendors consider the fee a cost of doing business.

**Are any tax dollars involved in funding this program?**

No. This program is totally self-sustaining.

**Will the TCPN program eliminate purchasing departments or purchasing personnel?**

No. There will always be a need for a strong local purchasing effort. TCPN should be used as a resource in conjunction with the local purchasing effort, thereby allowing the local purchasing department the time to work with pressing local issues by providing better customer service.

**Is this program trying to replace local regional cooperatives?**

No. The program is configured to enhance and support each region's individual purchasing effort to the benefit of participating entities.

**How do vendors find out about TCPN's Request for Proposals (RFP's)?**

Vendors may request, fill out and return a Prospective Vendor Application, indicating the commodity category for which the vendor would like to compete. The Prospective Vendor Application may also be downloaded from the TCPN web site. TCPN advertises all solicitations in accordance with various state bid laws. RFB's and RFP's are advertised in newspapers in various major cities. All RFP openings are held at the TCPN Program office and are open to the public.

**What process does TCPN use to establish contracts?**

Contracts are awarded based on competitive, sealed proposals or competitive sealed bids. Responses are opened publicly and evaluated by TCPN Evaluation Committees. Proposals are evaluated by the following criteria:

1. Quality of product line.
2. Quantity of line items available that are used by participating entities.
3. Customer support.
4. Suppliers demonstrated ability to perform under a cooperative purchasing contract.
5. Pricing

**Does TCPN award multiple vendors? Which may I use?**

TCPN reserves the right to multiple award vendors when it is in the best interest of the participating entities. The choice of which vendor to use is entirely up to the participating entity.

**Where do I send PO's? May I send them directly to the vendor?**

Please fax or mail PO's directly to the TCPN office (fax 800-458-0099). All PO's received before 3:00pm will be logged and forwarded to the appropriate vendor on the same day received. TCPN also has "automated contracts" available which allow for PO's to be sent directly to the vendor. Each Vendor Information Sheet will spell out which method to use.

**To whom do I make out my PO? From whom will I receive an invoice?**

PO's should be made out to the appropriate vendor. All PO's must reference "Per TCPN contract." The vendor will invoice the purchasing entity directly. Payment should then be made directly to the vendor.