

Best practice

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Laura Winter reveals the many benefits of sustainable procurement

Sustainable procurement involves the purchasing of goods, services and works in the most efficient manner without compromising resources for future generations. Developing and implementing a well-crafted sustainable procurement strategy will not only achieve value for a procuring organisation, it will also take into account the social, economic and environmental impact of the overall process.

The procurement of design and construction for any building project will involve 3 key parties: the client, the consultant and the contractor. It is common for a lead consultant to provide guidance and advice regarding the most appropriate procurement method and design to meet the client's requirements.

As lead consultant, a surveyor must ascertain whether their client has a sustainable procurement policy, and if so, they should familiarise themselves with its strategic goals. The contents will inform them of their client's key sustainable considerations, and in turn influence the advice they provide on the choice of procurement route, appropriate contract selection, design and specification criteria and project management strategy.

Without the surveyor's understanding of sustainable procurement, the client's objectives may not be met, reducing the potential value gained.

Key benefits

Where a robust sustainable procurement strategy is understood and endorsed by a consultant surveyor, the following benefits will be realised for all 3 key parties.

- **Risk reduction:** risks resulting from poorly managed supply chain practices are reduced as a result of heightened due diligence and communication with suppliers and subcontractors. Identifying exploitative, unethical and environmentally harmful behaviours will reduce exposure to reputational, legal and supply risks.
- **Financial betterment:** analysis of existing purchasing and operational practices can highlight inefficiencies and waste, so savings on operational costs can be identified. Whole-life costing can show how higher initial investment could reduce the need for maintenance and lower operational and disposal costs, benefiting the contractor in the short term and the client in the long term.
- **Stakeholder expectation:** stakeholder awareness and education has brought with it increased levels of expectation. Ethical organisations perceived to be actively accountable for their supply chains and in-house procedures and processes win both trust and support from their stakeholders. This in turn contributes to an enhanced reputation and long-term loyalty ? assets valued by all organisations.
- **Market differentiation:** an effective sustainable procurement strategy will set industry leaders apart from their competitors, enabling extra market shares and attracting additional investment. Buildings procured in a sustainable manner are seen to offer increased value for their end users, as well as providing a unique selling point for the key individuals involved.

- **Innovation and improvement:** in striving to achieve sustainable targets, organisations demonstrate proactivity and achieve efficiency. Clear, measurable goals for both procurer and suppliers provide a sustainable benchmark, driving innovation and progress and resulting in safer, greener outputs.

Wider benefits

Outside the project team, sustainable procurement has wide-ranging benefits.

- **Meeting the needs of a growing global population:** resource efficiency means managing natural resources so future generations can benefit.
- **Opportunity and equality:** education, training and employment opportunities are provided, offering fair wages and safe working environments for a diverse and flexible workforce.
- **Locally sourced:** encouraging supplies to be sourced locally reduces the emissions associated with transportation and improves local economies and employment.
- **Better built environment:** occupiers of sustainably procured buildings enjoy improved health and wellbeing.
- **Improved quality of products and services:** sustainable benchmarks promote innovation, improving the quality of our built environment.

In recent years, there has been a perceptible shift in the way business is conducted globally. Organisations are going beyond their legislative and regulatory duties, taking responsibility for their supply chains and using their buying power as a force for positive change.

Barriers to entry do exist, of course, including the time and costs associated with initial implementation. However, sustainable procurement is now widely regarded as best practice, and where appropriate, consultant surveyors should add value by advising clients on the merits of developing such strategies. Projects should be tendered to contractors who show a sustainable ethos and credentials, potentially having developed their own sustainable policies.

With such a diverse range of benefits to be realised, it is worth taking time to build knowledge and understanding of sustainable procurement, and for procuring organisations to invest in securing our collective social, economic and environmental futures.

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Further information

- Related competencies include [Accounting principles and procedures](#) , [Design and specification](#) , [Sustainability](#)
- This feature is taken from the RICS *Building surveying journal* (October/November 2016)
- Related categories: [Partnering and supply chain management](#) ; [Procurement strategies](#) ; [Specifications](#) ; [Sustainable procurement](#)