

Potential Purchaser (Member) FAQ's

How do we register our organization to become a COSTARS Member?

Provided your organization meets the statutory eligibility requirements, you may register your local public procurement unit (LPPU) or state-affiliated entity as a COSTARS member by completing the [online registration form](#) or by calling the COSTARS team at 1-866-768-7827. Only LPPUs and state-affiliated entities who have registered with the DGS may participate in the COSTARS purchasing program.

What if we're unsure whether our group is eligible as a local public procurement unit under the law?

If you are unsure of your organization's eligibility, contact DGS's COSTARS team by e-mail to gs-pacostars@pa.gov, or simply fill out the [online registration](#) and submit the form. In either case, DGS will evaluate your organization and get back to you concerning your status.

Is there a fee involved in registration?

No, the only fees connected with the COSTARS Program are charged to COSTARS contract suppliers.

How long does it take for COSTARS registration to be effective?

Within one week of your application, DGS will either confirm your organization's eligibility or request additional information from you to determine its eligibility.

What if our organization is interested in contracting with a supplier that doesn't hold a COSTARS or statewide contract with the Commonwealth?

Each COSTARS member is free to obtain goods and services through its regular procurement procedures. Participation in any COSTARS purchasing is completely voluntary. However, there are certain statewide contracts (for instance, the Road Salt Contract) that may require additional information from LPPUs before the contract is bid to determine estimated contract amounts. In those instances, where the contract calls for local participants who choose to provide the requested information to participate in the final contract, your organization would be obligated to purchase from that contract.

For statewide contracts, how do we know if a supplier has agreed to sell to COSTARS purchasers?

Each [Commonwealth contract](#) will specify whether the supplier has agreed to sell to COSTARS members.

Do we order supplies/services through DGS?

No. After you review the specific statewide or COSTARS-exclusive contract in which your organization is interested, you should deal directly with the awarded supplier of your choice to review products and pricing in detail and to place any order. You should, however, state the contract number on your purchase order to the supplier.

Do we need to notify DGS of orders from statewide and/or COSTARS contracts?

No. The supplier is required to report all purchases to DGS on a periodic basis.

Must a local government entity first solicit competitive bids if it wants to purchase through the COSTARS program?

No. Because the Commonwealth has awarded COSTARS-exclusive contracts and statewide contracts through its own competitive bidding process, COSTARS procurements meet the cooperative purchasing requirements for local government purchasing under 62 Pa.C.S. § 1902. However, when purchasing from a [COSTARS-exclusive contract](#), DGS suggests that you review prices and product information on the COSTARS website and contact several suppliers to receive the best value for your purchase. You should also be aware that COSTARS-exclusive contracts permit contracted suppliers to reduce pricing below the specified COSTARS contract rates for purchasers.

If the COSTARS contract fulfills the competitive procurement requirements for local government entities, authorities, and commissions, does that mean these groups would have no other obligations with regard to placing the COSTARS purchase?

The COSTARS contract fulfills the cooperative purchasing requirements in Chapter 19 of the [Commonwealth Procurement Code](#) for governmental purchasing. However, other statutory provisions, including without limitation the requirement for prevailing wage determination in certain circumstances, may apply to specific purchase orders by particular types of entities. Local government purchasers should consult their solicitors for guidance on specific purchases.

Does purchasing from a COSTARS-exclusive or statewide contract fulfill procurement requirements for private entities such as nonprofit health or education organizations or fire, ambulance, and rescue companies?

DGS suggests that private purchasers refer to their charters, by-laws, or other policies and/or consult with their boards of directors or legal counsel for guidance. Purchasing policies for private organizations are set by the organization, not by law.

If the specifications for the item do not match what our organization is looking for, may we make additions, deletions or other changes to the contract terms?

When ordering from a statewide or COSTARS-exclusive contract, a purchaser may not change any contract items, options, or specifications for the purchase to be considered a contract purchase; the purchaser must order the items exactly as specified on the awarded contract to be within the contract terms, unless the procurement specifically permits customization of a contract item. Any other change is considered a change in the terms of the procurement and would therefore result in a purchase that does not meet the competitive bidding requirements of the COSTARS program and the [Commonwealth Procurement Code](#). Going forward with any changes may place your organization in violation of applicable procurement law.

May we purchase from a supplier who is not under contract with the Commonwealth if the supplier offers the same price as the COSTARS-exclusive or statewide contract offers for the items we want?

If you purchase items from any business other than a contracted COSTARS supplier, you must comply with your organization's normal requirements to procure the supply or service. Failure to do so may place your organization in violation of applicable procurement law.

Does the COSTARS Program offer used equipment for purchase?

The COSTARS program currently does not have any contracts offering used equipment. However, the Commonwealth has a Surplus Property Program offering state-owned equipment and supplies that the Commonwealth no longer requires for sale to the general public. The Federal Government also has a Surplus Property Program available to many LPPUs, where the US Government donates used equipment and supplies to eligible entities. If you are interested in more information on the State or Federal Surplus Property Programs, contact the DGS Bureau of Supplies and Surplus Operations at 717-787-6159 or visit the [Surplus Supplies & Equipment](#) website.