

COSTARS Connection

The Commonwealth's Cooperative Purchasing Program
Passport to Business Opportunity and Procurement Savings



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Tom Wolf, Governor
Curt Topper, Secretary

Teleworking - The Good, The Bad and The Funny!

By Kimberly Bullivant, COSTARS Marketing Manager

"Why do they call it rush hour if no one moves?" ~Robin Williams

Ah yes, I remember those days, a mere five months ago, waking up at 6 a.m. to begin my work day by frantically racing for the next hour and a half, to shower, beautify my hair, make one or more costume changes, take the dog out, whip up a lunch, brew the coffee, take the dog out again, get in the car, run back in the house for the forgotten coffee, return to the car, start driving... wait....did I remember to close the garage door? Drive back only to see that yes, I did in fact, close the garage door. Then while commencing my trek once again, realizing my fuel tank is almost on empty. UGH! I was going to fill the tank last night, but figured I'd leave early this morning and stop at the gas station - too late now, that will have to wait. Resume driving....ah, that's a good song, I'm on my way now! And...what is this?...Noooo! Stand-still traffic! Wonderful...please, don't run out of gas! Finally, I arrive at the office with a few minutes to spare! Ah...so happy to finally be here...out of breath, flat hair and all! Yes, what memories!

Back then, the idea of teleworking was so foreign and seemed like an impossible feat. Now after perfecting the art of working from home, I've come to learn to adjust to some of the drawbacks, (my new coworker, Coconut, barking at the most inappropriate times, power outages, and random computer-related issues), as well as appreciate the benefits, (reduced interruptions, unlimited coffee, my choice of background music, etc.). But most importantly, no traffic! Many of you may relate to some or most of my personal morning rush fiasco, and how I've adjusted to the "new normal" and you may have some interesting stories of your own!

So, you might be wondering how the rest of the COSTARS team has adjusted to this sudden shift in reality. You're in luck! Read on for some thoughts and experiences from our team members.

Commodity Specialist Kathy Garman

After five months of teleworking:

~I am surprised that I am working from home after 38 years of going into the office; that I have to translate Chinese to English when searching for PPE; and that we can still process COSTARS bids successfully.

~The biggest challenges I have faced are not being around people and my coworkers; my dogs barking during meetings/Skype calls; and the aches and pains of sitting on a kitchen chair for many months!

~I am proud that I was able to adapt and am still very productive at home.

~Through this experience, I've learned all the different PPE specifications, but most importantly, how much my team means to me!

~I'm happy to say after four months, I found a new/used desk so I feel that I am at work; and a much more comfortable chair!



Commodity Specialist Stacey Logan-Kent

After five months of teleworking:

~I am surprised about how much I miss getting dressed, going into the office, and being around others.

~My biggest challenge is trying not to become lax in physical activity/exercise.

~I am proud that I am to assist in procuring PPE for healthcare workers as they fight the pandemic in the great Commonwealth of PA!!!!

~I am very proud to be a part of the COSTARS Team as we have shown that when the going gets tough, we know how to come together as a team and get the job done! Also, I never thought I'd become so well-versed in the PPE/Gown world!



Continued on page 5



COSTARS and Procurated Team Up for NIGP Virtual Forum

Recently, COSTARS Marketing Manager Kim Bullivant collaborated with the Procurated team to record an educational session for the upcoming NIGP: The Institute for Public Procurement Virtual Forum, being held from Aug. 24-28.

The session will illustrate how the COSTARS Program saves its members valuable time and money, while providing the opportunity for suppliers large and small to compete for Pennsylvania's local public procurement unit business. Learn how COSTARS member "Fred" uses the program to save his township's taxpayer dollars and how he solved his supplier selection dilemma by using the Procurated online tool.

The Procurated team will identify how consumer technology tools like Yelp and Glassdoor help us make more informed decisions in our daily lives by evaluating reviews of millions of our peers, and how that same technology is helping COSTARS members and public procurement professionals across the country learn more about the suppliers they may want to work with. To register for the Forum and this session, visit <https://nsite.nigp.org/2020annualforum/registration/register-forum-2020>.



Top Row: Becca Moran, Procurated
David Yarkin, Procurated
Bottom Row: Kim Bullivant, COSTARS
Genna Gold, Procurated

An Interview With DGS Secretary Topper



Secretary Topper and David Yarkin

In July, Procurated's Founder and CEO, David Yarkin conducted a series of interviews with Secretary of the Department of General Services Curt Topper.

In Yarkin's most recent interview, Secretary Topper discusses the success of the COSTARS Program and how its collaboration with Procurated has helped local governments find highly rated suppliers through peer reviews on the Procurated platform.

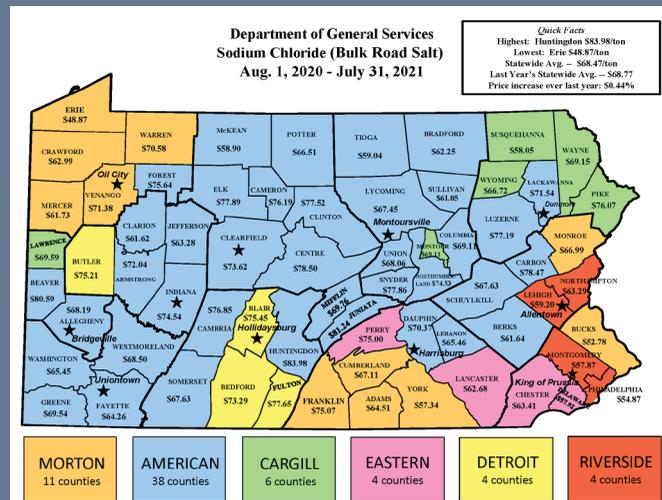
To watch this interview, go to: <https://youtu.be/1JR4GX5p1R0>.

2020-2021 Sodium Chloride Contract

The 2020-2021 Sodium Chloride (Road Salt) Contract has been awarded and posted on eMarketplace, as well as the **Newsflash** section of the Members Area page on the COSTARS website.

If your organization submitted a Road Salt Participation Agreement during the registration season (Jan. - March 2020), you may now begin placing your road salt orders for the 2020-2021 season.

To view the contract, list of participating members, and a county map with awarded suppliers and price per ton for your county, visit the COSTARS Members Area page at <https://www.dgs.pa.gov/COSTARS>, select the **Member Information** button, the **Members Area** button, and then select the 2020-2021 Sodium Chloride (Bulk Road Salt) Contract link under the **NEWSFLASH/CURRENT NEWS** headings.



Update Your COSTARS Profile

As roles change in your organization, always remember to keep your COSTARS profile up to date! Don't miss important COSTARS program and contract alerts

Need step-by-step instructions on how to update your profile?

Members: Visit the COSTARS Member Training Center at <https://www.dgs.pa.gov/COSTARS>, select the **Member Information** button, the **Members Area** button, **Training Center** link and then select the **Update COSTARS Member Profile** link: <https://tinyurl.com/memprofile>.

Suppliers: Visit the COSTARS Supplier Training Center at <https://www.dgs.pa.gov/COSTARS/Supplier-Information/Pages/TrainingCenter.aspx> and select the **Update COSTARS Supplier Information** link: <https://tinyurl.com/supptraining>





The lyrics written by the late David Bowie - “Turn and face the strange ch-ch-changes” seems to be the anthem of the year 2020. We have watched the seasons change from chilly winter to hot summer from the safety and security of our homes. Many parents became the educator to their school-aged children. Greetings of handshakes morphed into the art of “smizing” (smiling with your eyes) while mouths were concealed in masks. And murder hornets???!!!

Through this year’s abundance of change, it is apparent that humans are both resilient and creative. Essential business owners creatively used shower curtain barriers to protect employees when hard plastic barriers were difficult to locate. Distilleries and other businesses redirected their production to support the commonwealth’s need of alcohol hand sanitizer and other PPE products to give the standard supply chain time to catch up to demand. When official PPE masks were scarce, citizens utilized bandanas, scarves and homemade masks for protection. As time passed, masks became “fashionable” with the offer of fun prints and even the birth of a new bathing suit option – the trikini (bikini with matching face mask).

Changes continue within our workplace and schools. Some businesses have seen that working remotely had little to no negative effect on their businesses, so have opted for on-going remote work opportunities for their employees. Other businesses have opted for a mix of alternating in-office and remote work structures. Schools spent the spring & summer working with the PA Department of Education’s [Guidance and Resources for School Communities](#) online resources to create their plan for the 2020-2021 school year. These resources helped them to determine their ability to provide in-classroom instruction in the Fall within CDC guidelines and facility parameters.

Organizations and school districts interested in reinventing their work and education location strategies may need to upgrade some technology and processes to optimize their new vision. Leadership and educators will need to focus on technology upgrades in hardware, cyber-security and more innovative collaboration technology as well as find new ways to create team/student cohesion and engagement in remote or blended work and learning environments. Employees, students, and parents must also be diligent in self-discipline, accountability and being sure they commit a dedicated workspace for success in these reimagined productivity concepts.

As our “new normal” continues to progress, COSTARS contracts can provide many products and services that may not have been typical needs in your past procurement. Whether you are now in need of electronic document management (COSTARS-1), IT Hardware & Security upgrades (COSTARS-3

and #4400004480), collaborative technology (COSTARS-34) for remote work/learning, transparent barriers (i.e. plexiglass) for on-site protection (COSTARS-8 and #4400010450) or Pest Control (COSTARS-21) (remember the murder hornets?)... COSTARS is your one-stop-shop and will continue to evolve with your ever-ch-ch-changing needs.

K-12 EDUCATION DATA:

In-classroom education is the optimal format for primary and secondary education. However, we learned during the 2019-20 school year that it is imperative that schools plan for the ability to provide remote education during unforeseen and lengthy circumstances like a global pandemic.

Data from the 2017-18 *School Survey on Crime and Safety*¹, which polled a national sample of 4,800 K-12 public schools showed that only 46% of schools at that time had a written plan to be performed in the event of a pandemic disease. This same question was asked in the 2009-10 survey; at that time 69 percent of schools had a written plan for “pandemic flu.” During this timeframe, the novel influenza A (H1N1) pandemic virus occurred in the U.S. and across the world, so schools reacted with a heightened awareness of a need for a plan.

According to the *Student Access to Digital Learning Resources Outside of the Classroom*² report from the National Center for Education Statistics for the U.S. Department of Education, as of 2015, 94 percent of K-12 students had access to a computer, tablet or smart phone at home.

Highlights from the Student Access to Digital Learning Report:

- Approximately 85 percent live in households with access to a desktop, laptop, netbook or notebook.
- Income was a factor in the use of Internet by school-aged children in the home.
 - As high as 92 percent of families with incomes over \$100,000 used the Internet at home.
 - In families with incomes under \$50,000, percentages dropped between 86 percent to as low as 66 percent (these numbers are reflective of all forms of Internet access including mobile service/data plan.)
- Reasons families reported no access to Internet are: expense; don’t see the need; lacked adequate computer for Internet use; Internet service not available in the area; access available elsewhere; and online privacy, security and personal safety concerns.
- Pennsylvania’s rankings show that 85 percent of households have computer access and 77 percent have Internet access (both rankings skew slightly lower than the U.S. average).

Investments in technology and internet access for school-aged citizens are by no means just a “back-up” plan for things like a pandemic. The ability to educate remotely would open the door for school districts to continue to teach during school facility closures from weather or facility-related incidents.

Additionally, classrooms equipped with videotelephony allow students who are homebound due to illness or injury to continue to engage in class lessons digitally.

¹ <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020054>

² <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017098/guide.asp>

The Reporter - July

Montgomery County Commissioners agreement with CDW Government, of Chicago, will supply 35 laptops for the Montgomery County Planning Commission, according to the contract description. The equipment became available via a contract from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Cooperative Purchasing Program.

Williamsport Sun-Gazette - July

Lycoming County commissioners approved the purchase of two commercial mowers from Cub Cadet for the county landfill through the state COSTARS program.

Butler Eagle Town Crier - July

Middlesex Township supervisors approved the purchase of a dash camera for a municipal vehicle via COSTARS, the state's cooperative purchasing program.

Butler Eagle - July

Mars Area School Board is buying and installing a new high school chiller unit and a new high school gymnasium air conditioning unit via COSTARS, the state's cooperative purchasing program.

Standard Speaker - July

Earlier this year, Wright Township received a \$25,000 grant from the state Department of Community and Natural Resources to upgrade its aging playground equipment. The grant has a \$25,000 local match. Township secretary/treasurer Pam Heard said the township's consultant on the project has sent out a request for proposals through COSTARS (the state's cooperative purchasing program) to furnish and install new equipment.

Allied News - June

Grove City Area School District board members approved the Chromebook initiative, which would ensure each student has a computer for school use. Funding is available through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The district has sent out a request for proposals through COSTARS, the state's cooperative purchasing program.

The Tribune-Democrat - June

Conemaugh Township School District will welcome students this fall with a rejuvenated high school auditorium. The auditorium's seating is being replaced with chairs purchased through the COSTARS cooperative purchasing program in Pennsylvania.

Waste Today Magazine - May

When Lycoming County Resource Management Services needs to supplement its fleet, it turns to its local Volvo dealer based out of Harrisburg, Pa. Highway Equipment & Supply. Brian Hoffman, territory sales manager for Highway Equipment & Supply, has guided Lycoming County through multiple machine purchases using governmental buying contracts.

"We are obligated to follow certain buying regulations," Jason Yorks, director at Lycoming County Resource Management Services, says. "If we go out to a straight bid, there's a good chance that while we may save a few thousand dollars, in the long run, it is not cheaper if the equipment does not give you the value, service and life you expect. We are particular. We want a loader that will last a long time with good fuel efficiency. That is why we used the COSTARS cooperative purchasing program to buy the L350.

Through COSTARS we can select from a list of equipment with pre-negotiated pricing through a state contracting system."

The Mercury - April

Montgomery County Commissioners authorized a contract to maintain the county's VMware virtual desktop platform. The service is provided by Hebron, Ky.-based business Pomeroy through COSTARS, Pennsylvania's cooperative purchasing program, according to a contract description.



Information and photo provided courtesy of Volvo Construction Equipment.

Leader Times - March

Leechburg Area School District school directors voted to enter into a contract for installation of artificial turf on the district's football field as well as construction of a new track under COSTARS, the commonwealth's cooperative purchasing program.

"This will make a beautiful facility in Leechburg for the school," School Board President Neill Brady said. District business Manager Brad Walker said because of the uncertainty involved with the coronavirus situation, it is not known when work on the field will begin.

Republican Herald - March

The Pine Grove Area School Board approved a contract with NRG Controls North, a COSTARS supplier, to supply and install new IP (internet protocol) surveillance cameras. NRG North will provide all associated equipment and labor necessary for a new operational surveillance system for the high school interior and exterior. This project is Phase I of the district's surveillance camera replacement initiative and will be fully funded by the district's approval of the crime and delinquency grant and will be purchased through COSTARS.

The Tribune-Democrat - March

Council approved the purchase of a 2020 Dodge Durango equipped with lights, sirens, cameras and Windber Police lettering for the Windber Police Department from Tri Star Motors through Pennsylvania's Cooperative Purchasing COSTARS Program.

The COSTARS Team is always looking for stories in the news about COSTARS members who are saving money by purchasing through the COSTARS Program. Tell us about your successful money-saving purchases and we will be sure to include them in our next edition of the COSTARS Connection newsletter!

Email your success story to us at GS-PACostars@pa.gov, or connect with us via our social media accounts (see links on the last page of the newsletter).

Teleworking - The Good, The Bad and The Funny!, *cont.*

Commodity Specialist Tera Akpan

~ "I love working from home I feel relaxed and more productive with my workload and I am also proud of how our team adjusted to working from home. We were able to conform our office work and processes to our home environment and work space and still got the job done from home! It proves that Telework can be accomplished!"

~ "One thing that I find humorous is that I'm working in gym clothes!"



Commodity Specialist Dave Gibson

~ "I'm surprised at how easily I've adapted to seeing no one all day long, although I miss seeing my teammates very much."

~ "My biggest teleworking challenge is preventing myself from drinking too much coffee!"

~ "My greatest accomplishment so far was when I sent my first remotely reviewed COSTARS bid for legal review! It's now a virtual electronic process!"

~ "Through this experience, I've learned how easily I could become a recluse; shut myself in, order food and supplies online, and rarely leave the property! However, the team hasn't changed at all, which is a great thing. The COSTARS team is still like a well-oiled machine. I know I can rely on everyone."



Dave's COVID-19 basement bunker workspace

Through it all, it is inspiring to see how quickly the entire COSTARS team has adapted to this sudden and unexpected change! While setting up our home offices, many of us were also searching fervently for personal protective equipment (PPE), while others maintained routine program operations, ensuring COSTARS members and suppliers needs were satisfied. If asked, I believe we would all agree that we are a close-knit group. Whether we are checking in on each other, sharing our stay-at-home/summer experiences, introducing our new coworkers (see image below), or laughing with each other during our weekly virtual staff meetings; knowing that we can rely on each other helps us all make it through this crazy and unprecedented adventure!



The COSTARS team meeting three new members.

Tweet courtesy of Huff Post

COSTARS On The Road

COSTARS Marketing Managers make it their mission to spread the message about the COSTARS Program, recruit new members and suppliers, and provide training about the program. Marketing Managers Kim Bullivant and Felicia Campbell travel throughout the commonwealth speaking at conferences, workshops and seminars sponsored by associations, suppliers, universities, legislators, chambers of commerce and others.

Recent Events

June 2	COSTARS- Energize Your Bottom Line Webinar
July 21	COSTARS - Get Into Gear! Webinar
Aug. 11	COSTARS - We Connect Suppliers with Buyers! Webinar

Upcoming Events

Sept. 18	Senator Santarsiero Webinar
Sept. 22	COSTARS - Equipped to Serve Webinar
Oct. 6	COSTARS - Purchasing and Fleet Card Programs; Forge Ahead with Discounts Webinar
Oct. 29	Tech Council Virtual Procurement Session
Nov. 4	COSTARS - Effective and Efficient Procurement Webinar

To submit a request for a COSTARS representative to speak or conduct a training session for members or suppliers at an upcoming event, please contact Kim or Felicia at toll free telephone number 1-866-768-7827 or email to GS-PaCostars@pa.gov. The COSTARS Marketing Team's Calendar of Events is also available on the COSTARS website on the COSTARS Program Resources page.



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Further information on the COSTARS program is available by phone at 1-866-768-7827 or by visiting the COSTARS website at www.dgs.pa.gov/COSTARS.

At DGS, our mission is to help government operate more efficiently, effectively, and safely - delivering exceptional value for all Pennsylvanians.