



Partnering for Smarter and More Efficient Purchasing

It doesn't matter how innovative your campus wants to be. If you can't get the products and services when they're needed at a price your institution can afford, those innovations will remain nothing more than good ideas.



Alton Campbell
Vice President, Higher Education
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COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PURCHASING ISN'T necessarily the first place you might think to look for proof of big change in higher education. Yet, the signals are there. Aside from the obvious investment in personal protection equipment (PPE), we're witnessing dramatic growth in three other categories that the pandemic has definitely accelerated:

- Information technology
- Air filtration
- Furniture

On the IT front, we're getting more calls from procurement offices for solutions to support virtual learning in general and specifically, cloud storage and cybersecurity.

Air filtration, another category where a pandemic uptick makes sense, isn't traditional HVAC. These days, facilities operations are investing in more sophisticated "smart" systems that provide remote monitoring and operations, essential for settings where staff are squeezed for time and remote work is just as probable as on-campus work.

Finally, there's furniture. Because of how students will be interacting with one another, institutions are looking for innovative ways to position learners with physical distancing in mind within the classroom and in common areas. They want furniture that can easily be moved and assembled. They also want pieces with accessibility to power, for those environments where there may not be an electrical outlet on the floor or the wall. Vendors are coming up with creative applications for batteries associated with furniture and workstations.

Another area where we're seeing a lot of activity is outdoor furniture, particularly in those states with warmer

climates. Those schools are looking at their outdoor spaces and asking how they can better use exterior settings to give students more options for studying and congregating in common areas.

2 Speed Bumps: Budget and Staffing

However, *deciding* to buy is sometimes easier than the buying itself. There are processes and procedures with regulations to follow, and nobody understands this better than the procurement office.

Yet, as an outcome of the pandemic, higher ed buying has hit two speed bumps. One is the limited amount of spending allowed. Student enrollment is down; students aren't necessarily on campus, and the related fees they aren't paying – housing, meals, parking, technology fees – is hitting the bottom line, squeezing budgets.

The second area is staffing. Schools have had to lay off people or lost them through employee attrition. This staffing shortage has hit all over campus, including the purchasing department, where a diminishing number of people are handling ever more bids and RFPs and getting the requisite number of quotes, all while managing day-to-day operations.

Fortunately, relief is at hand. Universities can fill the gap by looking to cooperatives and companies like **OMNIA Partners** to exploit the portfolio of contracts we already have.

By leveraging OMNIA Partners' resources, higher ed augments its staff efforts during a time of great need while gaining efficiency in obtaining the products and services required.

The Free, Intelligent Connector

OMNIA Partners, Public Sector uses cooperative contracts to reduce the cost of goods and services by aggregating the purchasing power of public agencies nationwide. That



means a college doesn't negotiate based on the lone savvy of the individuals in its own purchasing division or regional consortium, but based on the collective talent and expertise of state and local government agencies, the largest systems of higher education and the most sizable K-12 districts throughout the country.

The service costs nothing for the institutions that participate. That may be why more than 87,000 agencies have used at least one of our contracts, including – in the last year – nearly 97% of public colleges and universities.

OMNIA Partners serves as the intelligent connector. Our experts work closely with procurement, IT and facilities, to better understand what the goals, needs and issues are for buyers. Then we connect them with suppliers, to help them further hone specific answers to address challenges.

Once customers settle on a solution, they can turn to the contracts in our portfolio, currently numbering more than 350, all of which have been nationally bid and awarded by another public lead agency. We didn't do the solicitation – one of your school's peers did. Our channel partner Vizient, which has an additional 1,200 contracts, addresses purchasing in the healthcare segment, whether for research, student health

centers or laboratories.

In the rare event where a contract doesn't already exist, our business development team will do an evaluation to understand the scope of the need, working with channel partners such as Carahsoft. In cases where demand is sufficiently broad, we'll work with a lead agency on putting out a solicitation on behalf of the category or product.

Even as learning and teaching have been energized in the last two years, other innovations on campus have lagged simply because the process of acquiring goods and services has slowed them down. Let this be a time when procurement rises to the challenge of accelerating the processes of purchasing to meet the needs of people all over campus.

Alton Campbell serves as vice president, higher education for OMNIA Partners, Public Sector. He leads a national team of regional managers who bring strategic contract solutions to colleges and universities. Alton has held roles supporting the University of California System lead agency contracts and managing the OMNIA Partners and Vizient channel partner relationship. Previously, he has worked with Office Depot, Procter & Gamble and Western Union.

OMNIA Partners & Carahsoft

Educational Software Solutions and Services

OMNIA Partners is the nation's largest and most experienced cooperative purchasing organization dedicated to Public Sector procurement.

Carahsoft is The Trusted Public Sector IT Solutions Provider®, supporting Public Sector organizations across Federal, State and Local Government agencies and Education and Healthcare markets.

Together, OMNIA Partners and Carahsoft have teamed up to better support OMNIA Partners' members across the U.S. with the latest IT software and services from Carahsoft's portfolio of leading technology manufacturers and reseller partners.

				
				
				
				
				

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