

TAKING THE PULSE OF PROCUREMENT PROFESSIONALS

**THE STATE OF SUPPLIER DIVERSITY IN
HIGHER EDUCATION**



College of Professional Studies

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About the Lab

The Northeastern Lab for Inclusive Entrepreneurship provides technical and managerial assistance to small businesses, focusing on enterprises in socially and economically disadvantaged communities. The lab aims to contribute to economic development by promoting inclusive, equitable innovation and entrepreneurship through life-long learning opportunities, mentorship, networking, and managerial assistance.

Acknowledgment:

The Lab received financial support from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and survey assistance from the National Association of Educational Procurement to conduct this study.



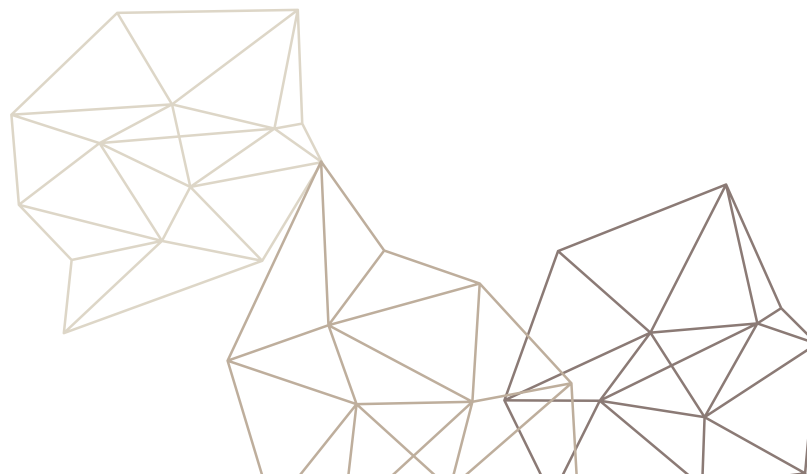
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For procurement professionals in higher education, balancing multiple priorities, often with limited resources, has always been challenging. Add to the mix the goal of promoting supplier diversity! While the institutional commitment to increasing the pool of suppliers is high, the results have been underwhelming. Why is this so?

Our previous research reports explored the aspirations and frustrations of diverse small enterprises interested in doing business with colleges and universities. We learned that the higher education procurement process often seems to them like an impenetrable black box, which discourages suppliers, particularly disadvantaged vendors, from entering the market. One small business owner summed up his experience this way: "It's hard even to know where to start in terms of relationship building and understanding what contracting opportunities might be available."

But what about the other side of the buying equation? What are the perceptions of the professionals responsible for strategic sourcing and making purchasing decisions? It was time to gauge the sentiments of procurement experts from diverse institutions nationwide. By probing their views and experiences through a large survey and focus groups, we aimed to improve our understanding of the institutional purchasing landscape. Is there a gap between the commitment to supplier diversity and the programs required to make it happen? What practical steps can be taken to make significant progress? How can lifelong learning contribute to the promotion of supplier diversity? And what can diverse suppliers do to gain more access to the higher education marketplace?



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The survey was completed by 101 procurement professionals representing a wide range of institutions, private and public, large and small, research-intensive and teaching-oriented. While the respondents were primarily concentrated in New England, the sample was nationwide and included senior managers and more junior buyers. For details about the respondent profile, see the section on research methodology. We followed up the survey with three focus group sessions to drill deeper into the issues that emerged from the survey. The focus groups also included procurement professionals from a range of institutions - public and private universities, large universities, and small colleges - carefully chosen to reflect the diversity within higher education.





COMMITMENT
INITIATIVES
TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES
PROBLEM SOLVING
PROGRESS



What we learned from the survey and the focus groups can be summarized around five themes:

- **Commitment vs Implementation:** Many respondents noted a disparity between the stated commitments to supplier diversity and the actual practices within institutions.
- **Obstacles:** The survey responses and focus group discussions identified a range of obstacles to increased supplier diversity, including resource limitations, identifying qualified diverse suppliers, complex procurement processes, and existing vendor relationships.
- **Strategic Initiatives:** Some institutions are making significant progress in increasing the pool of diverse suppliers by implementing various strategic and tactical approaches.
- **Training Opportunities:** There are significant awareness and training gaps among internal stakeholders, from procurement staff to P-Card holders, on engaging with diverse suppliers more effectively.
- **Capacity Building:** The experience of working with diverse suppliers has been generally very positive, with suggestions on how they can compete for business more effectively.

Supplier diversity in higher education shows overall progress alongside significant challenges. This report explores these obstacles, highlights best practices identified by respondents, and proposes practical strategies to advance supplier diversity within the sector.

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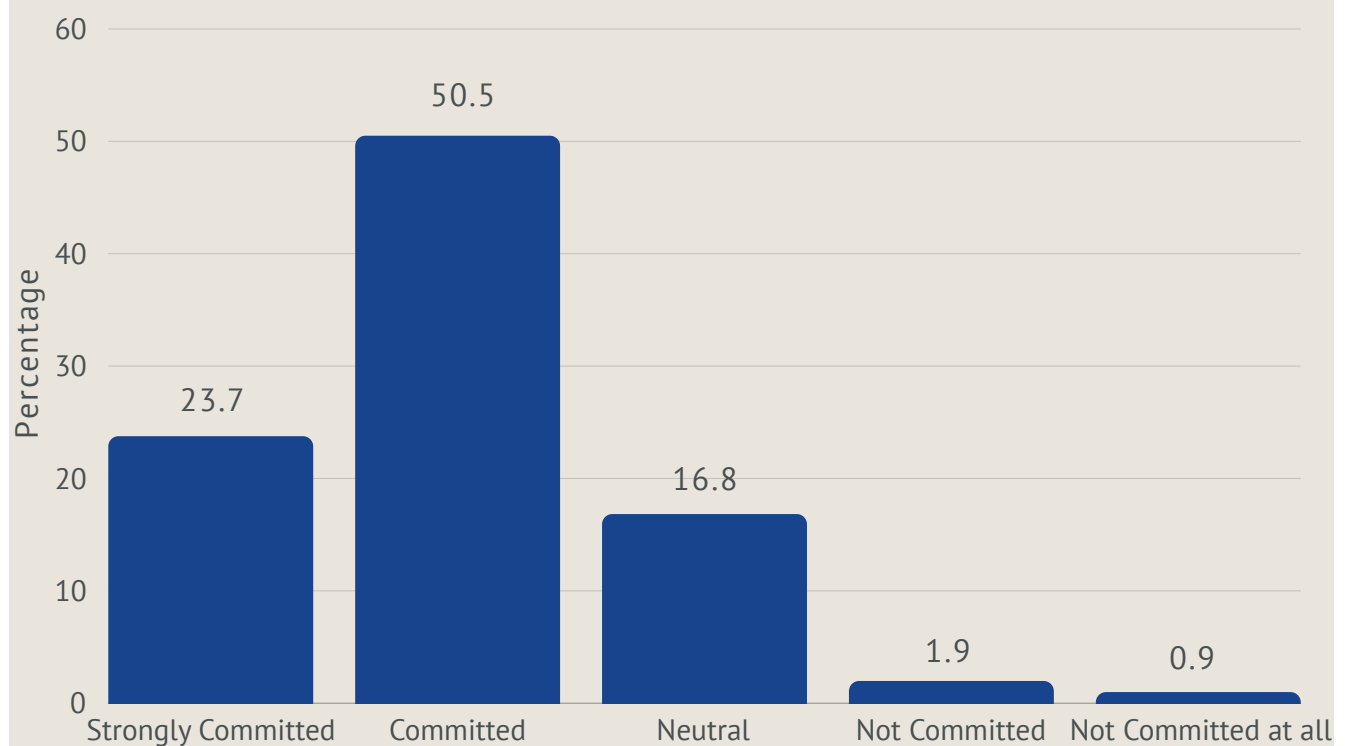
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From Policy to Practice: Bridging the Commitment- Implementation Divide

The survey results clearly show that procurement professionals strongly believe that their institutions are very committed to increasing the pool of diverse suppliers. About 74% of the survey respondents reported a commitment to this strategic objective, and almost a quarter characterized the level of commitment as strong.

Figure 1. Institutional Commitment to Supplier Diversity



Note: These numbers are the percentage based on the total number of respondents (n=101)

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“We have an ongoing conversation around supplier diversity and how it relates to our mission. [By achieving] our supplier diversity goals, we also see an educational access gateway for the students of the families that own those small minority-owned businesses.”

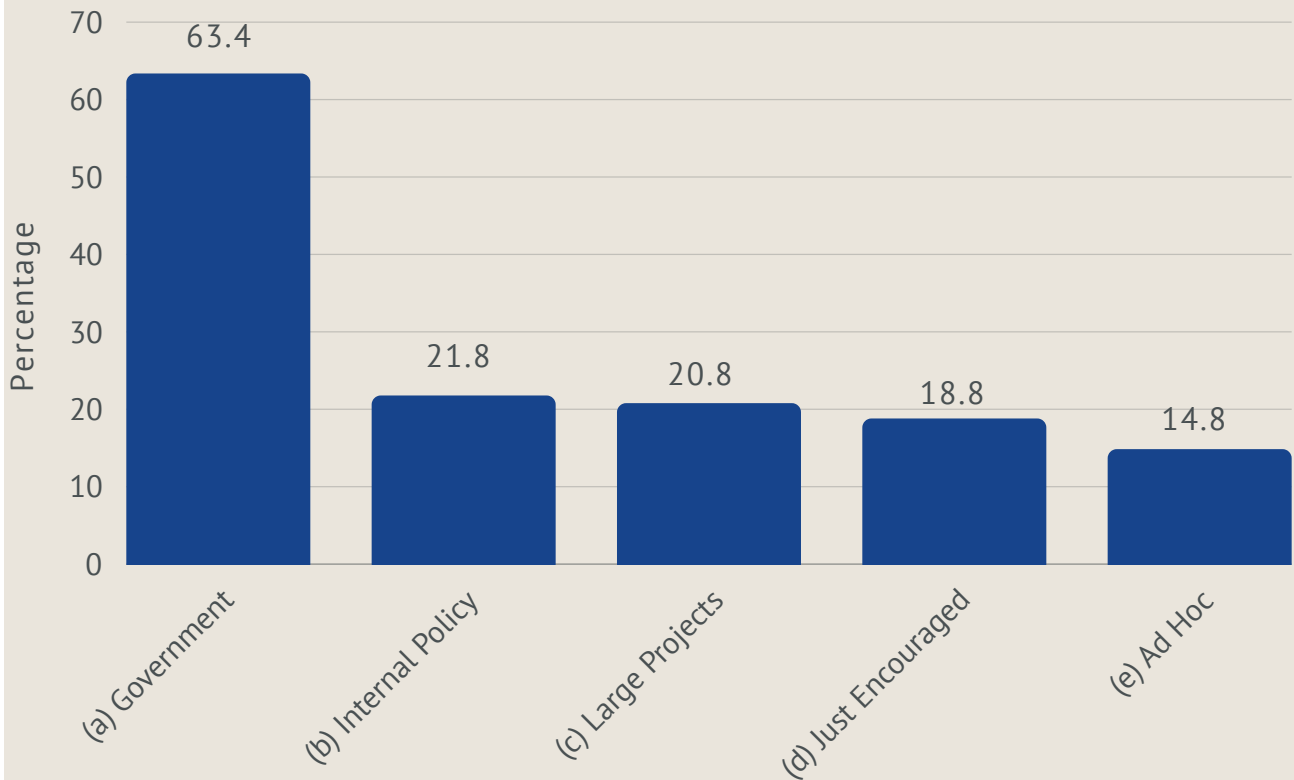


This commitment reflects the recognition that supplier diversity is more than a slogan. Increasing the pool of vendors, especially diverse small businesses, increases competition and innovation. It also contributes to the economic sustainability of local communities and educational opportunities. As one senior manager notes, *“We have an ongoing conversation around supplier diversity and how it relates to our mission. [By achieving] our supplier diversity goals, we also see an educational access gateway for the students of the families that own those small minority-owned businesses.”*

A significant finding from the survey is that 63% of respondents, particularly those affiliated with private institutions, reported that their leadership actively promotes supplier diversity without enforcing mandatory requirements. This approach highlights a strategic commitment to inclusivity, indicating that many higher education institutions acknowledge the substantial benefits of diversity within their procurement operations.

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Figure 2. Institutional Motivation for Supplier Diversity



Note: Respondents were able to select more than one response.

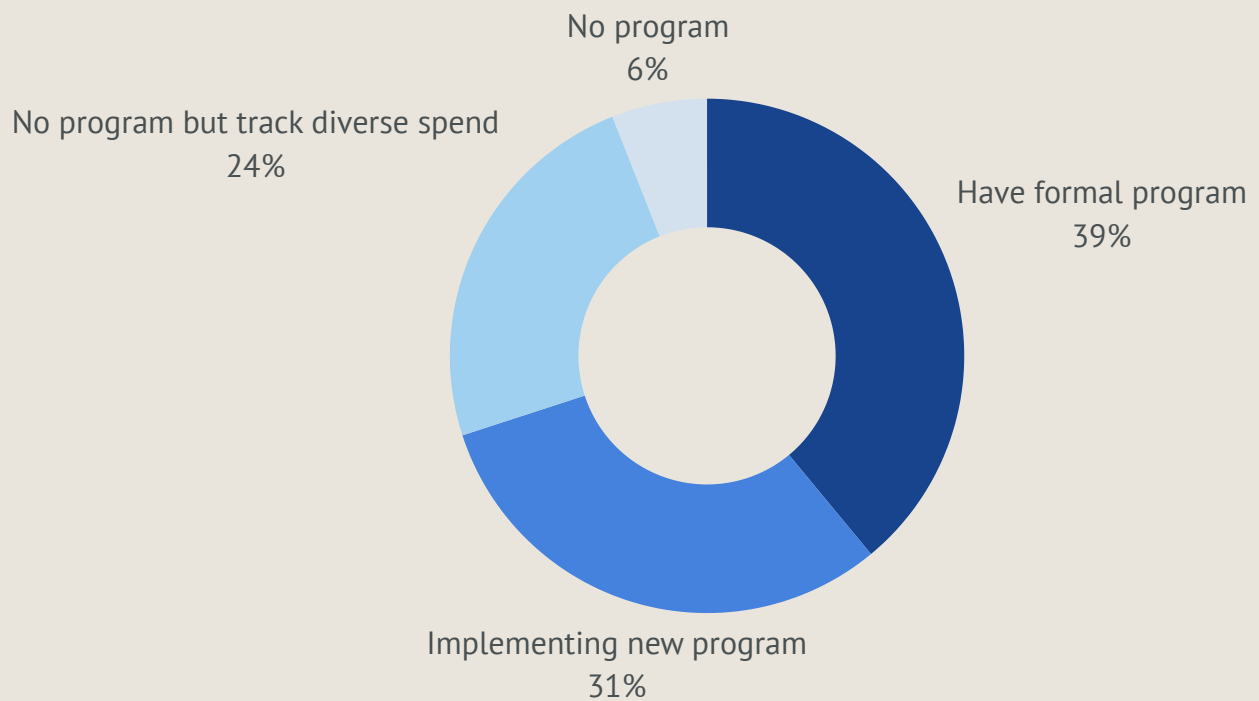
(a) governmental agencies mandate supplier diversity, (b) supplier diversity is required by internal policy, (c) supplier diversity is mandatory for sourcing projects above a certain threshold, (d) supplier diversity is encouraged but not mandated in their institutions, and (e) supplier diversity is considered on an ad hoc basis.

Government policies that promote diversity and inclusion offer procurement professionals at public colleges and universities an accelerated pathway to adopting more inclusive practices. For example, the State of Connecticut outlines set-aside programs for small contractors, minority business enterprises, individuals with disabilities, and non-profit corporations. It also mandates developing an affirmative action plan for contractors with fifty or more employees who secure public works contracts exceeding fifty thousand dollars in a fiscal year. [source: [University of Connecticut](#)].

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Despite a high level of support for supplier diversity, there is a clear gap between words and actions. Only 39% of survey respondents indicated that their institutions have operationalized their commitment to supplier diversity through formal programs that actively engage networks of diverse suppliers. This suggests that a significant portion of institutions are still in the process of fully implementing these initiatives. Encouragingly, an additional 31% reported that their institutions are currently in the process of establishing such initiatives, signaling a growing recognition of the importance of supplier diversity and a proactive effort to enhance inclusivity in procurement practices.

Figure 3. Status of Supplier Diversity Programs in Higher Education Institutions

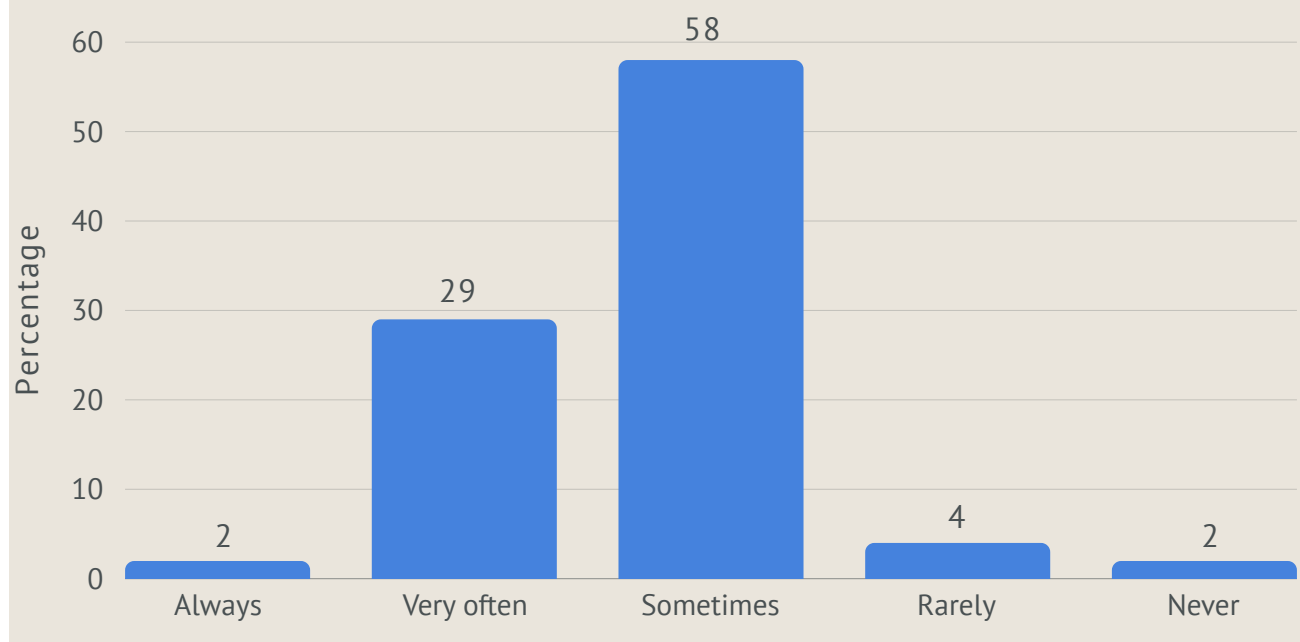


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Navigating the Roadblocks to Increased Supplier Diversity

The survey asked respondents to identify their challenges in promoting supplier diversity. 70% pointed to staffing and budget constraints as major issues: building a formal program is unrealistic without strong champions and adequate resources. As a few focus group participants pointed out, private colleges and universities, and smaller institutions in particular, have very limited in-house procurement resources for supplier diversity programs. They tend to rely heavily on an external purchasing coop or consortium. While some institutions have developed comprehensive in-house programs, the extent of these resources can vary, and there may be reliance on external tools and partnerships to support their supplier diversity initiatives. As one participant commented, *“People love to talk about supplier diversity, but there hasn’t been a lot of action towards it.”*

Figure 4. Use of Purchasing Coop or Consortium by Higher Education Institutions



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“We would love to have a dedicated resource [to implement a formal program] even if it’s a staff person who could spend half their time on supplier diversity activities and half their time on something else. I think the same could be said for other institutions. Supplier diversity is considered important, but there are other institutional priorities like sustainability that are competing for resources.”

The procurement services of institutions often face the challenge of balancing multiple, sometimes conflicting goals, which can hinder efforts to secure sufficient budgetary support for supplier diversity initiatives. Surprisingly, sustainable procurement and supplier diversity initiatives frequently compete for limited resources within institutions, despite their shared goals of promoting ethical practices and inclusivity in procurement processes.

Finding qualified diverse suppliers posed a significant challenge for 69% of the survey respondents. As a respondent said: *“One of the frustrations we have is just finding the right suppliers because if we knew who they were, we’d include them in RFPs and bid processes and so forth, you know, to encourage it.”*

The challenge of locating diverse suppliers is perhaps surprising since our 2023 survey of diverse small businesses showed that, while small vendors aim to do business with colleges and universities, many of them find the barriers difficult to overcome and no clear pathways to the right decision maker.

In the focus groups, we delved deeper into this apparent disconnect. Insufficient resources were frequently identified as a factor. As one participant observed, *“Those of us who have tools like TealBook or Supplier.io are able to locate diverse suppliers for particular jobs. But how do you find potential vendors for schools that don’t have those tools?”*

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According to several respondents, institutional inertia presents a significant obstacle to diversifying supplier relationships. This phenomenon manifests across all procurement levels, from small-scale purchases to large-scale projects. Decision-makers at various levels - from a P-Card holder seeking a catering service to a buyer managing the bid process for a major construction project - have cultivated long-standing partnerships with a limited number of suppliers. These relationships, built over time, create a comfort zone that can be difficult to break out of.

Here is a sample of observations from the focus groups:

- *“Once you've become a supplier, it is difficult to have the department stop using your service or your product. People don't want to switch, people don't want to change, and those are usually your higher spend areas.”*
- *“They're working with vendors they've dealt with for a long time, and they're not looking to change. We're buying tons of lab supplies and research equipment, but very few of them are diverse suppliers.”*
- *“You can kind of nudge [buyers] in the right direction, but most of our procurement activities are decentralized, so it's hard to increase the pool of vendors as an after-the-fact kind of thing. So, it's really just trying to educate them as much as possible. And that's where a dedicated resource can help with that education process.”*

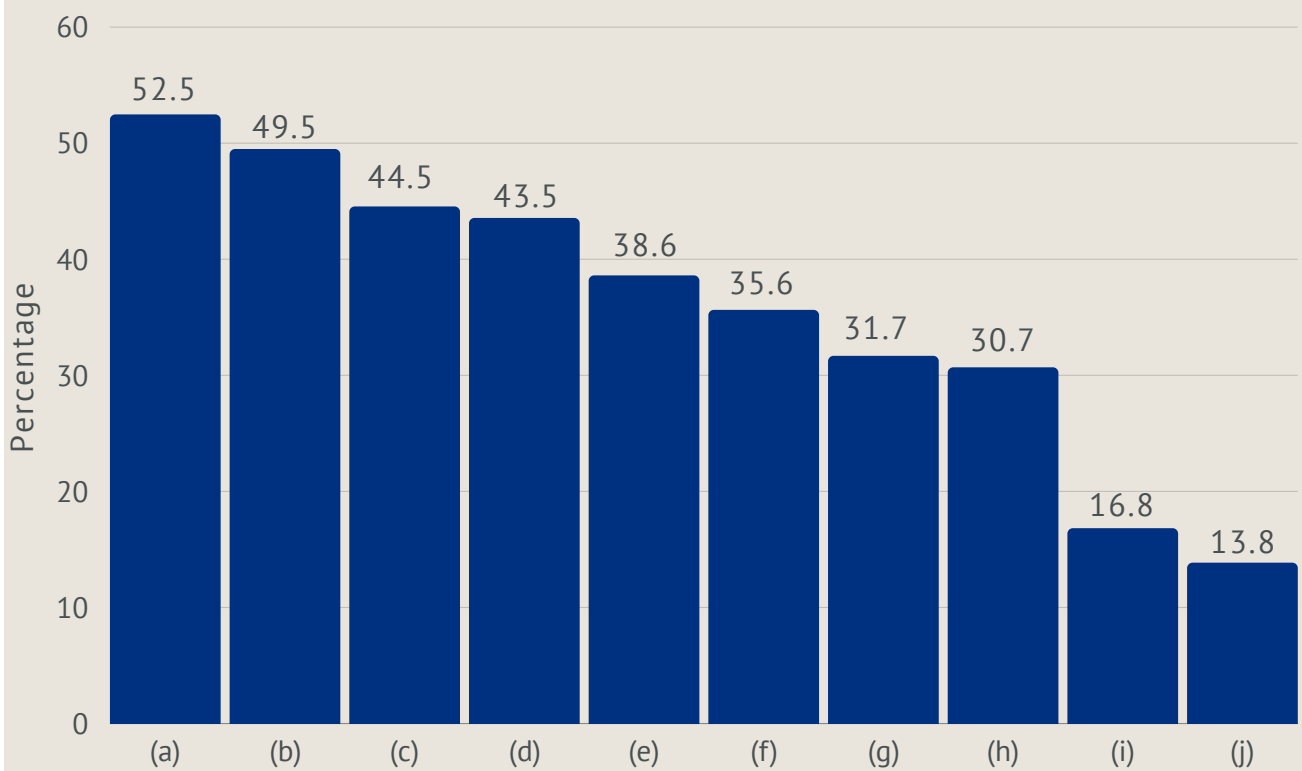


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Blueprints for Effectively Promoting Supplier Diversity

The survey and focus groups revealed both challenges and effective strategies for integrating diverse suppliers, particularly smaller companies, into the higher education procurement ecosystem.

Figure 5. Methods to Increase Diverse Suppliers



Note: Respondents were able to select more than one response. (a) a central point of contact in procurement organization, (b) developing relationships with diverse suppliers, (c) outreach event to bring together diverse suppliers and internal stakeholders, (d) networking with organizations that promote supplier diversity, (e) internal database of certified diverse suppliers, (f) regular check-ins with diverse suppliers, (g) providing greater access to contact opportunities, (h) regular meetings with internal purchasers to promote diverse suppliers options, (i) supplier diversity webpage on institutions website, and (j) training for P-Card holders

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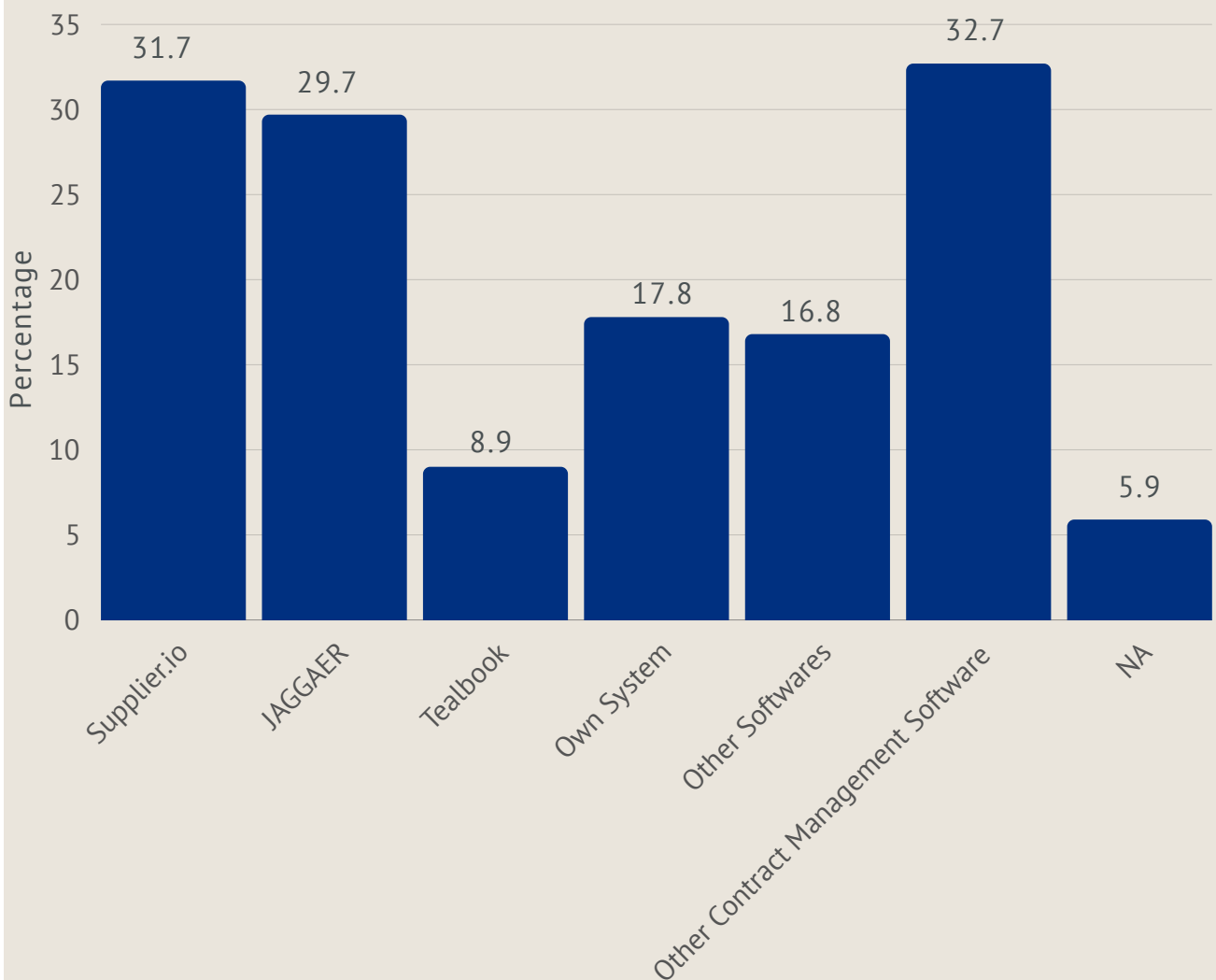
Implementing a centralized supplier diversity program has emerged as a crucial strategy for institutions seeking to enhance their procurement processes. Establishing a central point of contact for supplier diversity initiatives has proven to be a highly effective method, with 39% of surveyed institutions reporting the implementation of such formal programs. This central contact acts as a linchpin for coordinating and streamlining supplier diversity efforts across the institution, educating internal buyers on the benefits of supplier diversity, and helping to overcome institutional inertia. Some of the other methods cited are elements of a formal program and staffing resources dedicated to promoting supplier diversity:

- **Regular check-ins with diverse suppliers**
- **Outreach events to bring together diverse suppliers and internal stakeholders**
- **Developing ongoing relationships with diverse suppliers**
- **Regular meetings with internal purchasers to promote diverse supplier options**
- **Networking with organizations that promote supplier diversity**

We then asked survey respondents how they tracked their diversity spending. Our survey revealed that approximately 70% of respondents utilize specialized software solutions to manage their supplier diversity efforts. The most reported tools include Supplier.io, JAGGAER, and TealBook. These platforms serve multiple crucial functions in the supplier diversity ecosystem, including access to extensive databases of certified diverse businesses, automated matching of supplier capabilities with institutional needs, real-time tracking of expenditures with diverse suppliers, and spending classification by diversity classification (e.g., minority-owned, women-owned, veteran-owned). As one focus group participant noted: "With TealBook, I'll be able to recognize the diverse supplier of the month as part of my signature in my emails to just get the word about and try to get more people buying from our diverse suppliers."

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Figure 6. Platforms or Tools Used for Tracking Spend with Diverse Suppliers



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Building Awareness Among Internal Stakeholders

The survey responses and focus groups underscored the critical role of education and awareness-building for procurement professionals and internal stakeholders involved in purchasing decisions, both large and small.

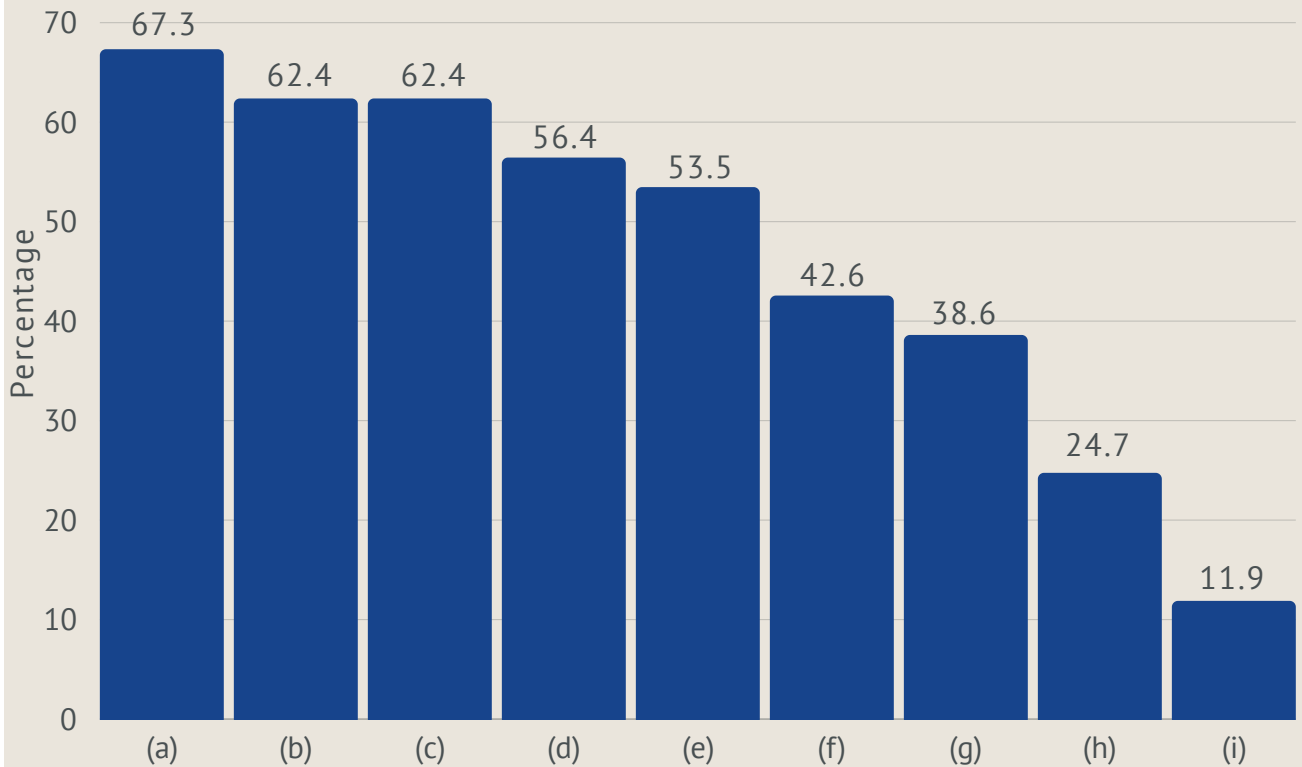
Education initiatives help procurement teams understand the value and benefits of supplier diversity, including innovation, competitive pricing, and community impact. "I feel like we need to educate individuals across campus on seeking out diverse suppliers," commented one survey respondent. Such initiatives can also facilitate peer learning, where procurement professionals can share best practices and lessons learned, as well as mitigate unconscious biases that may inadvertently exclude diverse suppliers.



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On which of the following topics relating to supplier diversity have survey respondents received training?

Figure 7. Training Needs for Procurement Professionals



Note: Respondents were able to select more than one response. (a) Practices on how to include diverse suppliers in sourcing opportunities, (b) Institution’s supplier diversity program and its goals, (c) Education on why diverse suppliers should be included in sourcing activities, (d) Tracking diverse supplier spend, (e) Methods for building relationships with diverse suppliers, (f) How to efficiently access both internal and external sources of pre-qualified diverse supplier lists, (g) Methods for influencing internal stakeholders to consider diverse suppliers, (h) Supplier Diversity training or certification programs offered by third-party organizations, and (i) None.

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More than 50% of survey respondents reported receiving training on these key topics essential for fostering supplier diversity:

- **Best practices for identifying and including diverse suppliers in procurement processes.**
- **Institution's supplier diversity program and its goals.**
- **Education on the importance and benefits of supplier diversity, including innovation, economic impact, and community engagement.**
- **Techniques for accurately tracking expenditures with diverse suppliers.**
- **Methods for building relationships with diverse suppliers.**

Survey respondents identified several areas where additional training is needed to enhance supplier diversity efforts:

- **Accessing Pre-Qualified Diverse Supplier Lists:** Efficient methods for sourcing both internal and external databases of pre-qualified diverse suppliers.
- **Influencing Internal Stakeholders:** Strategies and methods for effectively advocating for the inclusion of diverse suppliers in procurement decisions.
- **Supplier Diversity Training and Certification Programs:** Information on supplier diversity training programs offered by reputable third-party organizations.

By addressing these training deficits, Higher Education institutions can better equip their procurement professionals to identify, engage with, and advocate for diverse suppliers, strengthening their overall supplier diversity programs. Here are some comments from the focus group:

"The focus that we're having is to empower that team to be able to have that conversation with stakeholders, principal investigators, and administrators about the value of diversity as it relates to the goals and the mission of the university system. That is a soft skill that requires training. We have to provide them not only the data, but enough runway to be comfortable presenting that concept to stakeholders that may have never considered it before or may challenge it."

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"Why not create a 15 or 20-minute course on supplier diversity for new employees? And it would probably be targeted only at those who buy as part of their job. And you know you can roll it out to everyone and then all new employees going forward that have bought as part of their job, but why not make them aware of the resource and you know the push for it."

- *"And I think that it would be beneficial for at least in the higher end that people could say we all think of this in this manner, right, like come up with some standards or some common definitions, if you may, so that people could measure things in a little bit more standardized, right."*
- *"There's a need for training again on reporting the classifications, on best practices for engaging people outside of the organization, etc."*
- *"So, on my end, I would probably concentrate on doing that with the procurement team in my area 1st and then have these people deliver the message right to the rest of the community while we are purchasing that happens."*

Some of the procurement professionals discussed the need to include comprehensive training for both new and current employees regarding various processes, particularly related to P cards (procurement cards) and purchasing policies. The training would cover everything employees need to know about these processes, including handling requisitions ("how to do a rec"). As mentioned by a participant:

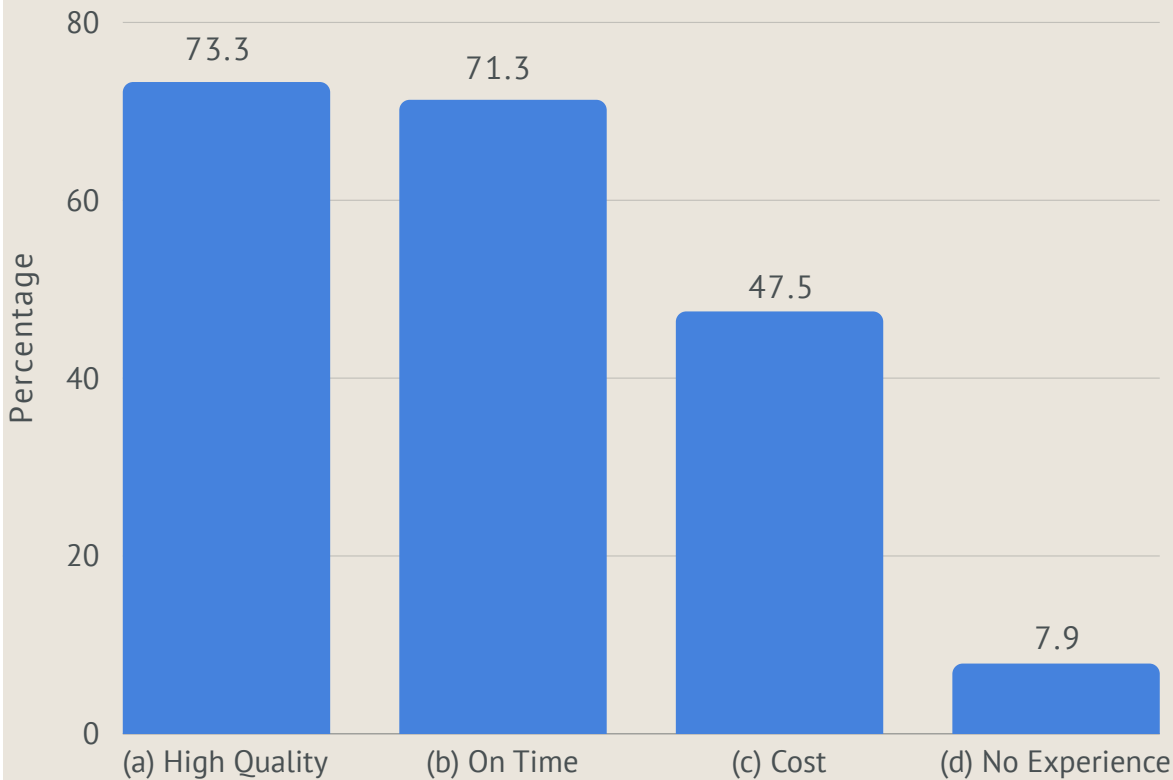
- *"So, any new employees but current employees that have questions on certain processes, you know everything you wanted to know about you know P cards, everything you want to bake into that training will be in those part in those purchasing policies and how to do a rec. When you do this, you know we are committed to diversity and here's where you can go to find things."*

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Reflections on Working with Diverse Suppliers

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents, 92%, have hands-on experience working with diverse suppliers. As highlighted in Figure 8, this experience has been predominantly positive. Over 70% of respondents noted that diverse suppliers consistently provide high-quality products and services on time, while nearly 50% find them cost-competitive as well.

Figure 8. Evaluation of Diverse Suppliers' Performance



Note: Respondents were able to select more than one response. (a) Diverse suppliers are able to deliver high quality products/services, (b) Diverse suppliers are able to deliver products/services on time, (c) Diverse suppliers are cost competitive, and (d) I have no experience working with diverse suppliers.

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A procurement professional at a private university explained their approach to supplier diversity:

“Our approach to supplier diversity is rooted in competition. We do not employ or pursue set-asides or other actions that may result in an award to a lesser qualified firm, regardless of diversity status. Instead, our efforts are focused on identifying diverse firms to participate in and letting them demonstrate they are fully capable of performing the work. Our own data validates that this approach is successful and sustainable.

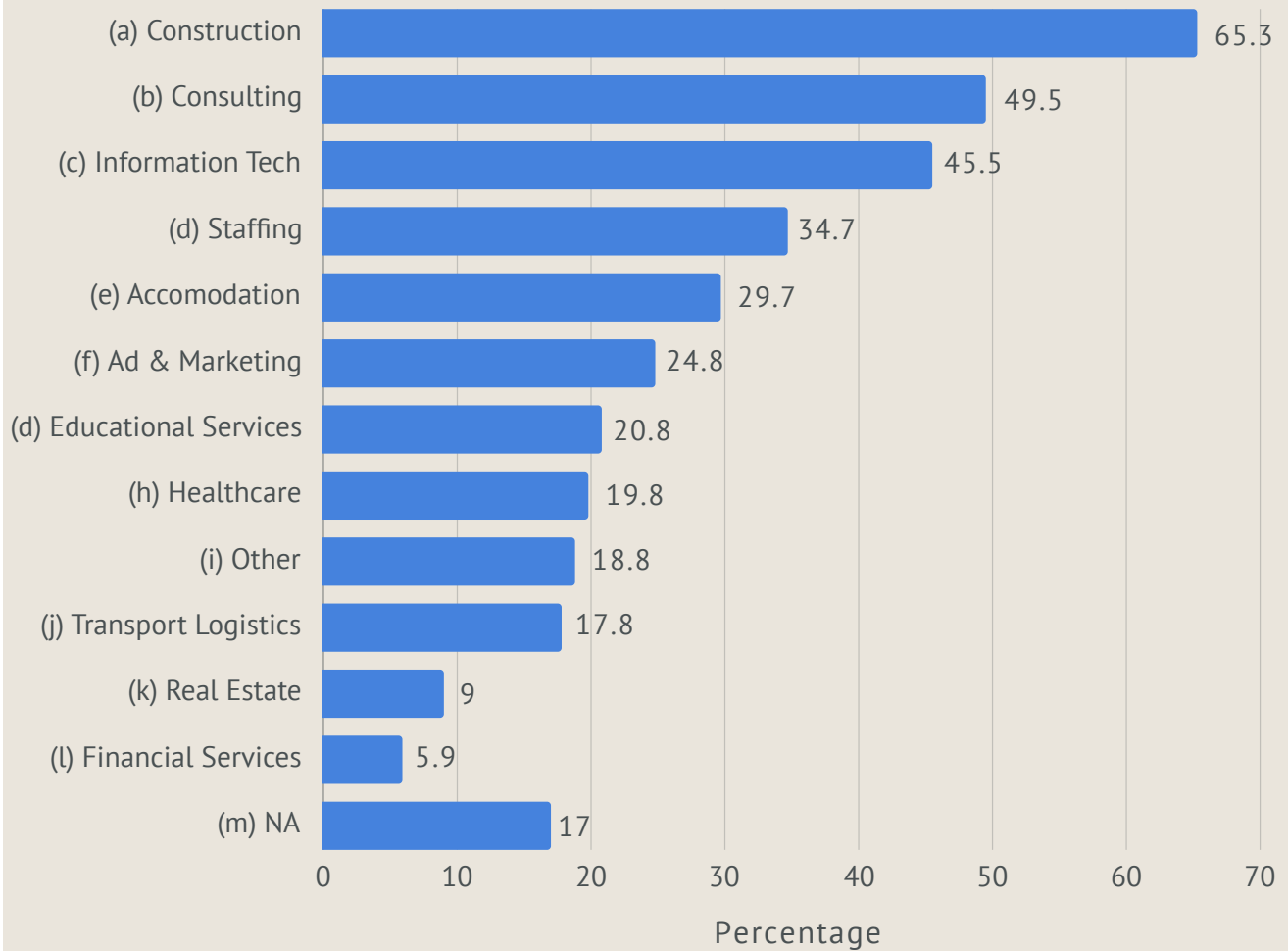
Where we see a need is for more training and development, preparing and delivering RFPs and other competitive bid proposals. When a diverse supplier falls short in the competition, it is usually not attributed to their ability to do the work, but rather to how they navigate the proposal process.”

The survey results reveal a diverse range of spend categories where diverse suppliers are actively engaged with colleges and universities. As Figure 9 shows, the construction category tops the list at 65%, followed by consulting, IT services, and contingent staffing, which may include temporary administrative support, project-based technical roles, and seasonal staffing needs. This suggests opportunities for diverse suppliers in both large-scale construction and smaller maintenance/repair work.



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Figure 9. Institutions' Top Sourcing Categories



Note: (a) Construction, (b) Consulting/Professional Services, (c) Information Technology, (d) Staffing, (e) Accommodation and Food Services, (f) Advertising and Marketing, (g) Educational Services, (h) Healthcare/Medical Products or Services, (i) Other, (j) Transportation and Warehousing, (k) Real Estate Services, (l) Financial Services, (m) NA

While most survey respondents indicated that their institutions could do much more to promote supplier diversity, they also noted that diverse suppliers are often ill-prepared to compete in the higher education marketplace. When asked about the kind of training and skill development that would help diverse suppliers compete more successfully with their organizations, there was a consensus on four key steps potential vendors can take:

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1. Understanding the Higher Education Procurement Process

Many respondents highlighted the need for training diverse suppliers on how to respond to Requests for Proposals (RFPs) effectively. According to one respondent, this includes “understanding how to read RFP documents, preparing competitive bids, and effectively presenting proposals.” Clear guidance on navigating the bidding process and how it varies from institution to institution is crucial for suppliers to compete effectively.

For instance, a respondent at a university where purchasing decisions are decentralized noted that “a lot of diverse suppliers think that by reaching out to the central procurement team they can be added to a centralized list of vendors. We explain to them that they need to reach out directly to purchasing coordinators at the various schools and departments who actually make the buying decisions.

2. The Value of Certification

Diverse supplier certification is a ‘must-have’ requirement to compete for business at most colleges and universities. Certifying organizations, like The Greater New England Minority Supplier Development Council, provide in-depth training that is part of the certification process. Businesses can also register with governmental agencies. As a survey respondent from Texas noted, “It’s important to register and become designated as a diversity supplier with the state of Texas. Additionally, diverse suppliers should sign up for the Central Masters Bidders List (CMBL) with the state.”

3. Business Management Skills

Several respondents indicated the need for general business training, including pricing strategies, communicating their value propositions, and managing client relationships. As one said, “business acumen is vital to getting their foot in the door.” Another commented that “we have found that most of the qualified diverse companies need help with the basics of doing business with public institutions. Starting from the ground up and growing their knowledge and comfort level.”

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4. Sustainability and Social Responsibility

Some responses indicated the importance of understanding sustainability and social responsibility requirements in the procurement process. Training in sustainable procurement practices and how these align with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) efforts could also provide a competitive edge to diverse suppliers looking to align with the ESG priorities of educational institutions.

In summary, while most of the survey respondents acknowledged the institutional barriers to increasing supplier diversity, they also argued for better preparation by potential vendors. Suppliers should engage in capacity-building programs that focus on scaling their operations, improving financial management, and enhancing their ability to deliver large-scale projects. Additional training could be around the specific procurement processes and requirements of higher education institutions, understanding how to navigate complex bidding processes, complying with regulatory requirements, and meeting institutional standards.



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Actionable Insights

Creating organizational alignment

By surveying procurement professionals, we have gained a clearer understanding of the current state of supplier diversity in higher education. While commitment to supplier diversity is high, the results have been modest. However, there are proven strategies to make significant progress and build capabilities on both sides of the purchasing equation. The following recommendations are designed to address identified challenges and leverage opportunities to promote supplier diversity in higher education:

Building awareness of the wide-ranging benefits of supplier diversity

Supplier diversity is much more than a DEI initiative. Doing business with diverse suppliers increases competition, innovation, and contributes to economic sustainability and vitality of local communities. These benefits should be communicated with internal stakeholders. P-Card holders, for instance, have tremendous purchasing power for goods and services that small businesses are well-positioned to supply. Introducing Supplier Diversity Training programs is among the initial proposed solutions. These initiatives involve creating educational programs that encompass essential aspects of supplier diversity, the advantages of inclusive procurement, and actionable strategies for engaging with diverse suppliers. Additionally, Higher Ed institutions should plan frequent workshops and seminars that feature experts from the industry, successful diverse suppliers, and advocates within the organization to maintain an ongoing and dynamic dialogue.

Engaging Champions

Identifying and empowering champions within different university departments is crucial for promoting diversity spending effectively. These champions can be individuals who are passionate about diversity initiatives and can influence their colleagues to prioritize diverse suppliers in their purchasing decisions. They serve as advocates, encouraging their peers to consider diverse suppliers whenever possible and highlighting the positive impacts of supporting diverse businesses within the community.

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Opening the procurement 'window'

As reported in our 2023 study "[Addressing the Supplier Diversity Awareness Deficit: The Role of Higher Education Procurement Websites](#)", very few of the 114 higher education websites in New England had information about the procurement process for diverse suppliers. Every college and university can—and should—create at minimum a webpage that clearly states their commitment to supplier diversity and provides comprehensive guidance, especially for small companies, on how to engage in business with the institution. A dedicated webpage serves as a public declaration of the institution's commitment to supplier diversity, signaling to diverse suppliers that their participation is valued and encouraged. It also provides a single, easily accessible location where diverse suppliers can find all necessary information about doing business with the institution.

Broadening access to the database of diverse suppliers

Locating qualified diverse suppliers is one of the critical challenges for promoting supplier diversity. While large, wealthier institutions can purchase their subscriptions to commercial databases such as [supplier.io](#) and [TealBook](#), small, cash-strapped institutions lack the financial resources to afford it. Small institutions can create their own databases by leveraging publicly available data, library resources, and partnerships with certifying organizations. Government agencies, such as the Small Business Administration and state or local governments, could collaborate to share lists of diverse suppliers who have participated in public procurement.



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Monitoring supplier diversity results

While there are no universally accepted benchmarks for tracking progress around supplier diversity programs, it's important to establish specific metrics that may vary from one institution to the other. Common metrics include the total number of diverse suppliers, the average contract size for diverse suppliers, the turnover rate of diverse suppliers, and the number of diverse suppliers invited to sourcing opportunities.

Addressing the knowledge and skills gap of procurement professionals

The Lab is working to build educational programs to guide higher education institutions through the process of developing and implementing robust supplier diversity programs that promote equitable opportunities for underrepresented businesses. These programs will also address best practices, monitoring strategies, and solutions to common challenges, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and diverse supplier ecosystem.

Addressing the knowledge and skills gap of diverse suppliers

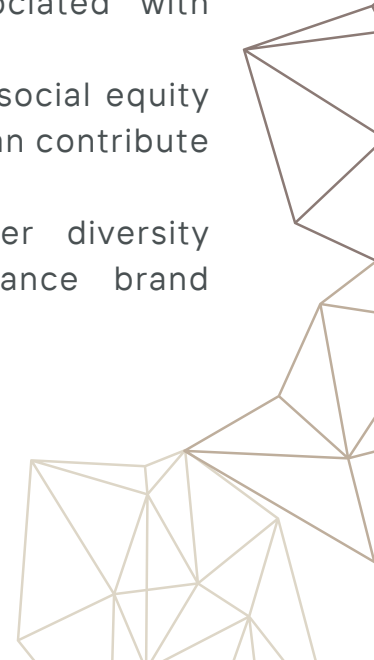
Certification and minority business advocacy groups and government agencies provide a wide range of information and networking opportunities for diverse suppliers. What's missing are educational resources focusing specifically on how to do business with colleges and universities. As a start, the Lab has created an open access, online, on-demand, and interactive module on '[Doing Business with Higher Education](#)' for diverse suppliers with no experience in doing business in this market. Additionally, we have worked with Northeastern University's student teams to develop the prototype of a Diverse Supplier Chatbot that is intended to help small businesses gain a basic understanding of the higher education procurement process and how to approach specific colleges and universities.

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Final Thoughts

Implementing these recommendations will require concerted and coordinated efforts at the individual, institutional, and broader community levels. An effective strategy for implementing supplier diversity programs begins with a shared understanding of their multifaceted benefits:

- **Unique Perspectives:** Diverse suppliers bring fresh ideas and innovative solutions, driving improved business performance and competitive advantage.
- **Enhanced Market Alignment:** A diverse supplier base better reflects and aligns with the needs of local customers, increasing stakeholder satisfaction.
- **Economic Impact:** Supplier diversity programs contribute significantly to economic growth. According to a [McKinsey study](#), doubling spending with minority and women-owned businesses to \$2 trillion could generate \$280 billion in additional income and create four million new jobs.
- **Financial Performance:** According to a study by the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) ([study by the National Minority Supplier Development Council](#)), companies with a more diverse supplier base show a 133% greater return on procurement investments compared to those without a supplier diversity program, generating \$25 for every dollar spent on these programs.
- **Supply Chain Resilience:** Diverse suppliers, often smaller and more agile, enhance supply chain flexibility and mitigate risks associated with disruptions.
- **Social Equity and Sustainability:** These programs promote social equity by providing opportunities to underrepresented groups and can contribute to environmental sustainability goals.
- **Regulatory Compliance and Brand Reputation:** Supplier diversity initiatives help meet regulatory requirements and enhance brand reputation, which is key to nurturing stakeholder relations.

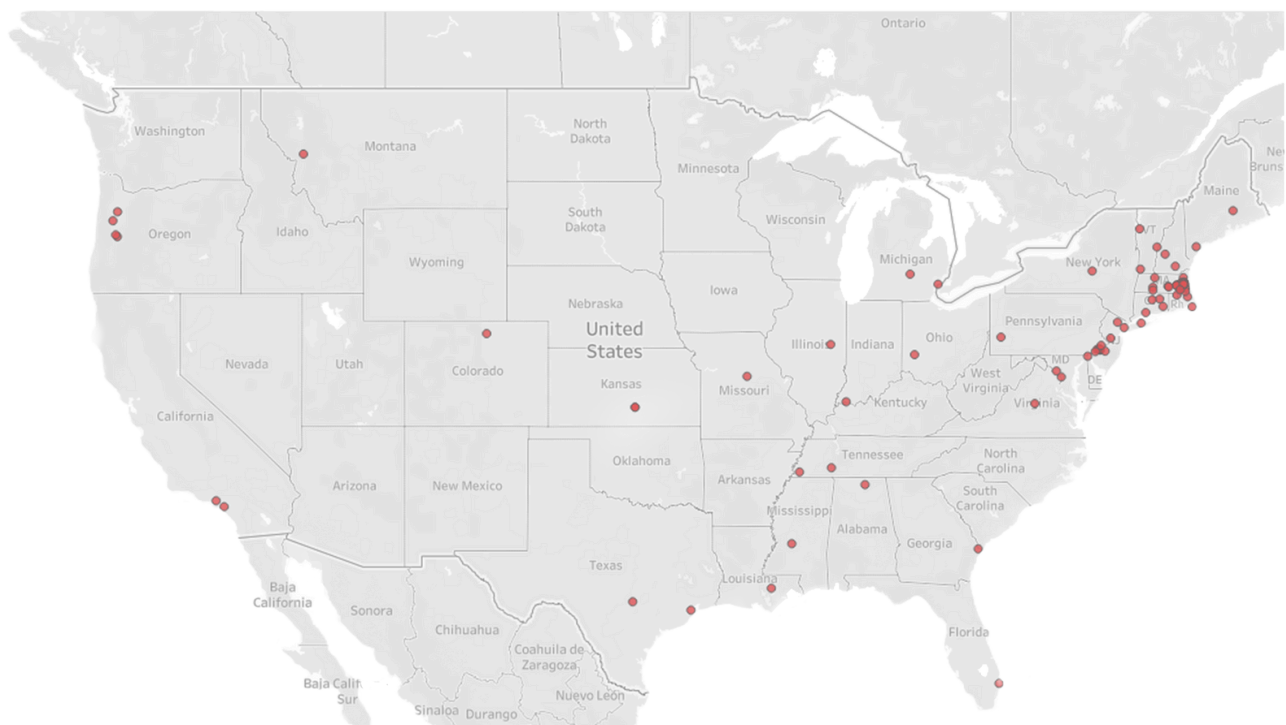


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Appendix: Research Methodology

Our comprehensive survey, conducted from May 19 to September 30, 2023, targeted procurement officials across various higher education institutions in the United States. We received responses from 101 professionals working in both public and private institutions. This survey, primarily distributed via a targeted email list, aimed at capturing insights from individuals at different stages of their procurement careers. We utilized a purposive sampling targeting higher education procurement officials at different role in organizations' procurement. Considering the sampling strategy and our methodology, the survey is not representative of the entire population of procurement professionals. Yet, it provides significant insights into the practice of supplier diversity in higher education institutions. As demonstrates, the respondents primarily work in the northeast region of the United States.

Figure A1. Location of Survey Respondents



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Role and Demographics of Respondents

- Nearly half of the survey participants (46%) boast over 15 years of experience in procurement, showcasing a wealth of knowledge and expertise in the field. Conversely, a smaller fraction (10%) is relatively new, with under five years of experience.
- There is a notable trend of mobility within the sector, with over 40% of respondents reporting less than five years at their current institution, suggesting a dynamic professional landscape ([Figure 3](#)).
- Educational achievements among the participants are high, with nearly half holding graduate degrees. The demographic breakdown reveals a stride towards gender equality, with professionals identifying as female constituting 55% of the survey population. However, the racial diversity among procurement officials highlights a need for improvement, suggesting a potential area for targeted diversity efforts.





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