



COSTARS™ CONNECTION



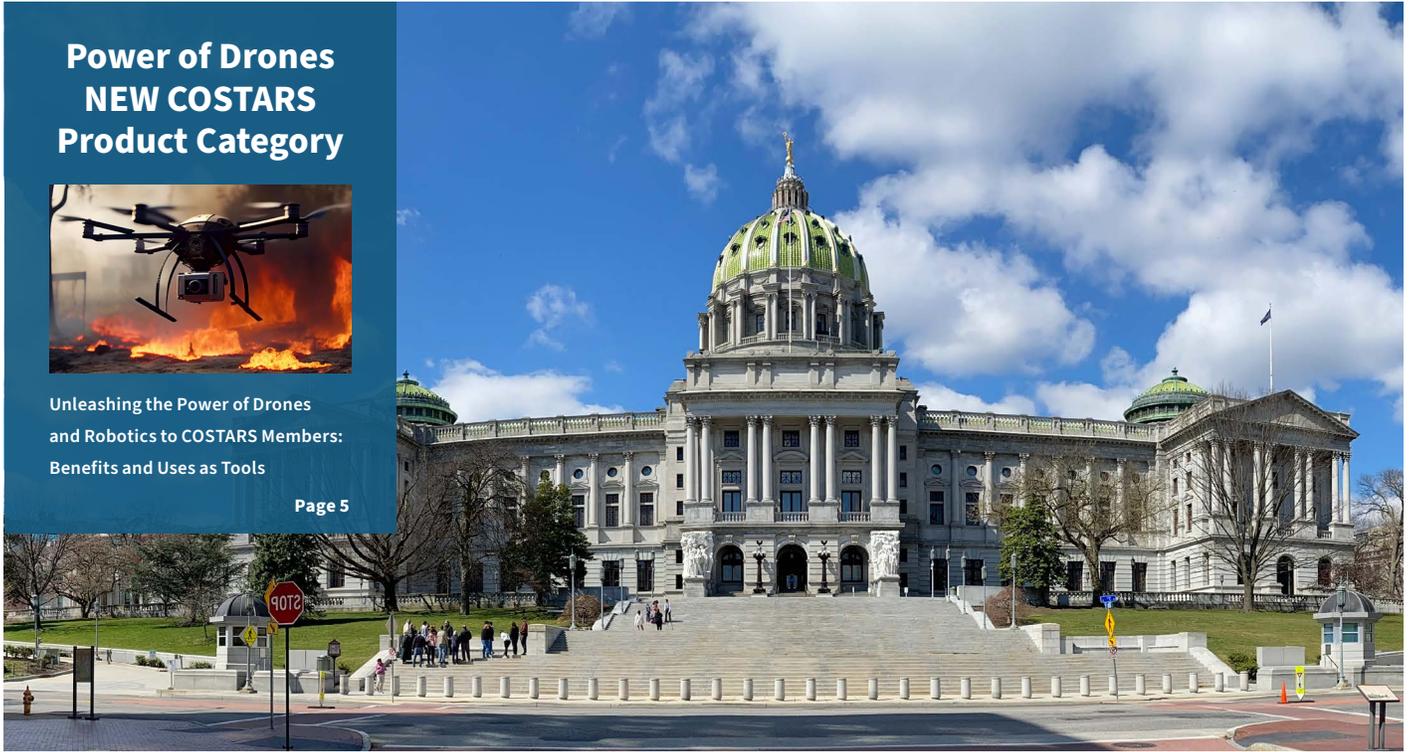
The Commonwealth's Cooperative Purchasing Program

Power of Drones NEW COSTARS Product Category



Unleashing the Power of Drones
and Robotics to COSTARS Members:
Benefits and Uses as Tools

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Governor Signs Executive Order - Opening Up New Opportunities for Small and Small Diverse Businesses and Improved State Procurement Practices

On Sept. 5, Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro signed Executive Order 2023-18 to enhance opportunities for small and small diverse businesses to compete for state contracts, simplify the procurement process, and facilitate the growth of these businesses to create better-paying jobs. The order aligns with Gov. Shapiro and Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis' campaign promise to support small businesses and small diverse businesses, fostering economic growth and wealth creation.



Gov. Shapiro stressed the need to assist small and small diverse businesses in accessing state funding, recognizing this as a means to promote economic development and improve the quality of services for all Pennsylvanians.

Lt. Gov. Davis highlighted the pivotal role that businesses owned by women and individuals from Black and brown communities play in Pennsylvania's social fabric, serving as job creators, innovation hubs, and community gathering spots.

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Pennsylvania Solar for Schools

Jarod Ganci, Strategic Planning Manager
Department of General Services
Bureau of Procurement

A proposed bill (HB1032) in the Pennsylvania state legislature aims to facilitate the adoption of renewable energy sources, particularly solar power, in schools across the state. Known as the “Solar for Schools” bill, it passed the House with bipartisan support and is currently awaiting a vote in the Senate.

Under this initiative, the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) would have the authority to establish a grant program for schools. This program would enable schools to apply for federal climate funding to cover up to half of the costs associated with installing solar panels. The state would also provide technical support to assist schools in navigating the installation process.

Representative Elizabeth Fiedler, the bill’s sponsor, emphasized that schools often face high energy bills, and many administrators lack the resources to navigate the complexities of solar energy contracts. However, schools that have successfully installed solar panels have experienced substantial savings. For example, the Mid-West School District in Middleburg reduced its annual \$420,000 electric bill by approximately \$145,000 after installing solar panels on its property in 2020.

Fiedler believes the program would allow communities to witness the benefits of renewable energy firsthand, making it more tangible and accessible. Additionally, Solar for Schools could lay the foundation for schools to serve as resilience hubs during climate change-related weather disasters, providing shelter and support to their communities.

The COSTARS Program offers a variety of options to support the Solar for Schools initiative. The COSTARS-28 Energy Conservation Management Supplies contract offers solar thermal and electric kits, replacement parts and accessories. Also, a variety of energy consulting services are available under the COSTARS-30 Energy Consulting Services contract. Schools are encouraged to leverage this contract to explore opportunities for reducing their electric bills. These services can provide valuable insights and strategies for optimizing energy usage, enhancing sustainability, and ultimately, achieving cost savings while promoting environmentally responsible practices.

SBA 8(a) Program Update

U.S. Small Business Administration

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has issued interim guidance for the 8(a) Business Development Program in response to a United States District Court ruling in the case of Ultima Services Corporation v. U.S. Department of Agriculture. This ruling impacts the program’s determination of social disadvantage. The SBA, along with the Department of Justice, is providing federal agencies with detailed interim guidance on how they can continue to issue 8(a) contract awards during the critical acquisitions period at the end of the fiscal year.

The 8(a) Program, which has a 50-year track record, aims to make government contracting more accessible for small businesses owned by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.



U.S. Small Business
Administration

The program offers a nine-year initiative providing training and technical assistance to eligible firms. Despite a temporary suspension of new applications to the 8(a) program to comply with the court’s decision, the SBA and the Biden-Harris Administration express commitment to supporting the program. In 2021, President Biden set a goal of awarding 15% of federal prime contracting to small disadvantaged businesses by fiscal year 2025, with the 8(a) program playing a significant role in achieving this objective. The SBA is working with the Department of Justice to review the court’s ruling and determine the next steps.

Meet our New leader: Brian Esposito Deputy Secretary for Procurement

Brian Esposito has served as the Deputy Secretary of Procurement since September 2023. In this role, Brian leads the efforts of the Department of General Services’ (DGS) bureaus of procurement, vehicle management, and supplies and surplus.

Brian joined the DGS in January 2023 as Chief Procurement Officer after more than thirteen years in public sector procurement with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of New York (MTA). Brian has held staff and management positions including Customer Service Specialist, Special Duty Supervisor, Senior Process Specialist, Associate Staff Analyst, Purchasing Supervisor, Manager-Capital Construction/Program Management, and Assistant Director of Material Management, gaining exposure to and experience with all aspects of supply chain and procurement. Prior to joining the MTA, Brian enjoyed a short stint with American Lawyer Media and multi-year experience working the other side of the desk as an account executive for Ricoh Business Solutions, providing a different perspective for purchasing, negotiation and contract structure.



Brian holds a bachelor’s degree in Corporate Communications from the College of Staten Island (part of the City University of New York system), and enjoys spending time with his wife and three daughters.

The COSTARS Team is happy to welcome Brian to his new role.



GreenGov Council News



Leading the Sustainability Charge in Allegheny County

In Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, the GreenGov Council is leading the way in promoting sustainable practices and environmental stewardship. A prime example of their impact is the Western Region Parks and Forests project, a collaborative effort with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) that epitomizes the fusion of eco-consciousness and economic viability.

The DCNR's \$5.5 million Guaranteed Energy Savings Act project encompasses diverse upgrades to lighting, building envelopes, and mechanical systems within state parks in the western part of the state, including significant work in Allegheny County. This localized connection underscores Allegheny's contribution to a greener Pennsylvania.

The project's outcomes are impressive on multiple fronts. Anticipated annual savings of \$375,182 emphasize the financial benefits of sustainability, aligning economic prudence with ecological responsibility. Furthermore, the projected reduction of 2,247 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MMTCO_{2e}) showcases the potential of proactive environmental endeavors in addressing climate change.

Central to this achievement is the DCNR's partnership with the GreenGov Council, amplifying their shared commitment to conservation. By collaboratively leveraging expertise, they've created a model project that resonates locally and reverberates nationally.

The Western Region Parks and Forests project is not just a success story, it is an inspiration for others to embrace sustainability. By showcasing that green initiatives yield both environmental and financial dividends, this project encourages emulation and the pursuit of a more sustainable future.

In essence, the GreenGov Council's work in Allegheny County, epitomized by the Western Region Parks and Forests project, signifies the fusion of eco-awareness and pragmatic progress. As the nation navigates toward a greener horizon, the GreenGov Council's role remains pivotal, guiding a transformation that transcends boundaries and paves the way to a brighter, more sustainable world.



PennDOT's Municipal Liquid Fuels Tax Program

Kristen Sims, Audit Manager
PennDOT | Center for Program Development and Management
Financial and Contract Services Division | Financial Consulting Section

Municipalities in Pennsylvania are responsible for the maintenance and repair of approximately 78,000 miles of roadways and 6,850 bridges. Each year, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) provides money to municipalities for these purposes through the distribution of a portion of the Oil Company Franchise Tax collected on gas. This program is known as the Municipal Liquid Fuels Tax Fund.

Starting on March 1 each year, Municipal Liquid Fuels Tax Funds are distributed to municipalities in Pennsylvania based on population and municipal-owned mileage. In 2023, the total allocated funds were \$470,202,682. To receive their share, municipalities must submit annual reports by specific deadlines, including PennDOT's Actual User Report of State Funds (MS-965) and the Department of Community and Economic Development's reports. The funds are intended for maintaining, repairing, and constructing municipal-owned public roads.



Municipalities must also address any findings from audits by the Auditor General or Monitoring Reviews by PennDOT's Financial Consultants. Eligible expenditures outlined in PennDOT's guidelines include road crew salaries, traffic signs, PennDOT-approved materials, and winter maintenance. Many approved materials are available through the COSTARS Program, providing cost-effective options such as aggregates, guard rails, highway support vehicles, sodium chloride, etc.

PennDOT offers resources to assist municipalities with Liquid Fuels Tax Funds. Financial Consultants help with financial and reporting aspects, while Municipal Services Representatives handle technical matters. Municipalities can contact these resources for support, audit preparation, report submission, and training on dotGrants, PennDOT's online reporting website.

For more information on Municipal Liquid Fuels Tax Funds, municipalities can visit PennDOT's website or contact Kristen Sims at 717.214.6161 or krsims@pa.gov.



Governor Signs Executive Order - Opening Up New Opportunities for Small and Small Diverse Businesses and Improved State Procurement Practices

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The executive order aims to cut through bureaucratic red tape and encourage these businesses to actively compete for government contracts.

The order builds upon previous efforts to increase the Commonwealth's spending on contracts with small diverse businesses, which grew from 4.9 percent in 2015 to 11.3 percent in 2022. Gov. Shapiro is committed to expanding these efforts, instructing agencies to prioritize support for small diverse businesses.

Under the leadership of Secretary Reggie McNeil, the Department of General Services (DGS) will lead the charge, coordinating efforts to increase operational spend and participation in the Small Business Reserve (SBR) program. DGS will provide transparency by posting data on agency spending for SBR procurements.

The executive order establishes the Pennsylvania Advisory Council for Inclusive Procurement (PACIP) to advise agencies on making state contracting opportunities more inclusive, with Lt. Gov. Davis as the chair.

DGS will develop a new methodology to determine the revenue limit for small businesses, expanding the number of qualifying businesses by raising



the revenue limit from \$38.5 million to \$47 million.

DGS and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) will collaborate to create an inclusive and accessible contracting environment, increasing small and small diverse business spending. They will also work with the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to connect businesses with resources and financing options.

The COSTARS team is dedicated to supporting small and small diverse businesses in Pennsylvania. They actively engage with these businesses through events, workshops, and online communications to encourage them to compete for opportunities with Pennsylvania Local Public Procurement Units. Additionally, the COSTARS program reduces its annual administrative fee from \$1,500 to \$500 for small businesses and to \$166 for small diverse and veteran-owned businesses.

Department Of General Services Hosts First Summit To Educate Pennsylvania Small And Small Diverse Businesses On Contracting With The Commonwealth

On Oct. 5, the Pennsylvania Department of General Services (DGS) hosted its inaugural Small Business Empowerment Summit, a two-day conference aimed at connecting small, small diverse, and veteran-owned businesses with state contracting opportunities in the Commonwealth. The inaugural summit featured remarks from Gov. Shapiro and Lt. Gov. Davis, panel discussions led by industry professionals, and networking with Commonwealth procurement professionals.

Building on Gov. Shapiro's Executive Order to improve state procurement practices and create more opportunities for small and small diverse businesses, the summit connected Pennsylvania businesses with state contracting opportunities in the Commonwealth.



Reggie McNeil, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of General Services addresses the summit participants

Small and small diverse businesses learned about Commonwealth procurement opportunities, available capital resources, and how the Shapiro-Davis Administration is working to make state contracting easier for them.

This is the latest step the Administration and DGS are taking to support the Governor's initiative. Additionally, DGS has reduced the time it takes to certify a small business in the Commonwealth by 33 percent and implemented a prompt pay policy to ensure small diverse business and veteran-owned business subcontractors receive faster payment for goods and services provided to the Commonwealth under state contracts.

The COSTARS Program collaborates closely with the Bureau of Diversity, Inclusion & Small Business Opportunities (BDISBO) to support small and small diverse businesses. At the summit, the COSTARS team had the opportunity to share details about the COSTARS Program, provide resources and answer questions from summit participants.

The full Small Business Empowerment Summit press release can be found at the following URL:

https://www.media.pa.gov/Pages/DGS_details.aspx?newsid=177



Kimberly Bullivant, Chief of the Supplier Development and Support Division in the Bureau of Procurement answering questions about COSTARS from summit participants.



Unleashing the Power of Drones and Robotics to COSTARS Members: Benefits and Uses as Tools

Dave Gibson, COSTARS Commodity Specialist

Opportunities for COSTARS Suppliers to sell, and members to purchase drones and robotic products and services now exist on the COSTARS-8 Maintenance, Repair & Operation (MRO) Equipment, Supplies and Services contract. In the fast-paced landscape of technological advancement, drones and robotics have emerged as versatile and indispensable tools across a multitude of industries. These cutting-edge innovations have transcended from being mere novelties to becoming essential components in various sectors, revolutionizing the way tasks are accomplished. From precision agriculture to search and rescue missions, drones and robotics are transforming industries and driving efficiency, accuracy, and safety to unprecedented heights.

Infrastructure Inspection: Ensuring Safety and Reliability



Traditionally hazardous tasks like inspecting bridges, power lines, and industrial installations are now being performed by robots equipped with sensors and cameras. These robotic inspectors can navigate hard-to-reach places, identify structural weaknesses, and detect maintenance issues without exposing humans to potential dangers. This application reduces downtime, cuts costs, and improves overall infrastructure safety.

Environmental Monitoring: Safeguarding Ecosystems

Monitoring and preserving fragile ecosystems have become more achievable with the help of drones and robotics. Researchers and conservationists can deploy drones to gather data on wildlife populations, track deforestation, and monitor changes in landscapes. This data aids in making informed decisions to protect biodiversity and manage natural resources more effectively.



Search and Rescue: Saving Lives in Critical Situations

Drones equipped with thermal cameras and advanced sensors have become invaluable tools in search and rescue operations. They can cover large areas in a short time, locate missing individuals or disaster survivors, and even deliver crucial supplies to remote or inaccessible locations. These capabilities drastically enhance the speed and efficiency of rescue missions, increasing the chances of saving lives.



Disaster Response: Rapid Assessment and Assistance



During natural disasters, drones and robotics can rapidly assess the extent of damage, map affected areas, and aid in coordinating response efforts. These technologies provide real-time data to emergency responders, allowing them to make informed decisions and allocate resources more effectively.

The benefits and uses of drones and robotics as tools to COSTARS Members are boundless and continue to expand with each technological advancement. From their applications in infrastructure to healthcare and education, search and rescue, and fire fighting, these flying, crawling, and swimming technologies are redefining the way we approach various tasks, making them safer, more efficient, and more accurate.

Education and Research: Inspiring Innovation

Drones and robotics serve as engaging educational tools that spark interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Educational institutions utilize these technologies to provide hands-on learning experiences, nurturing the next generation of engineers and innovators who will continue to push the boundaries of what is possible.



If you have any questions regarding the drone and robotics products available under COSTARS-8, contact Dave Gibson at davgibson@pa.gov for further information.



We Hear You!

Purchasing through COSTARS is a great way to maximize the use of taxpayer dollars. However, navigating the website and locating contracts and suppliers can sometimes be a challenge. We here at COSTARS are always looking for ways to make the member experience more efficient

and enjoyable. As of late, one of the most frequent calls we have received is from members who want to learn how to search the various contracts we offer. To aid in your contract search, below are some simple instructions.

Searching COSTARS Contracts

1. www.dgs.pa.gov/COSTARS
2. Select I'm a Buyer button.
3. Select Members Area button.
4. Search Contracts – last on the left side.
5. Select COSTARS Contracts

Searching Statewide COSTARS-participating Contracts

You can also search statewide contracts at the link below. Suppliers with a “Yes” in the COSTARS column are available for use by COSTARS members.

<http://www.emarketplace.state.pa.us/BidContracts.aspx>

Contact Us

Contact COSTARS by phone at
1-866-768-7827

or e-mail

GS-PaCostars@pa.gov.

You can find us on the Web at the following URL:

www.dgs.pa.gov/COSTARS

Do you want **COSTARS** to present at your upcoming event?

Contact COSTARS at 1-866-768-7827
or email GS-PaCostars@pa.gov.

View our full event calendar at www.dgs.pa.gov/COSTARS >
Program Resources.

At DGS, our Mission is
to Help Government
Operate more Efficiently,
Effectively, and Safely,
Delivering Exceptional
Value for All
Pennsylvanians.



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A New Member of the COSTARS family!

Angelina Maria Bills or Angie as we call her, surprised her mom Priscila Bills, COSTARS Commodity Specialist, by arriving nine days earlier



than her due date, she was born on May 4. Now she is a happy four-month-old baby, 14 pounds of cuteness overload. She loves her crinkle books, her bunny toy and afternoon stroller walks. She is known for her smile and curiosity, even though she does not have any teeth or eat solids yet, she is very curious about food. Angie is so excited to be the first COSTARS baby, she cannot wait to meet the whole team!



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