

eVA Connections

April 2009

Virginia's Total e-Procurement Solution

www.eva.virginia.gov

Virginia Institute Of Procurement: Sowing Seeds For Buyer Growth And Development

The Virginia Institute of Procurement (VIP), the training unit of the Division of Purchases and Supply (DPS), part of the Department of General Services (DGS) of Virginia offers education and certification in public procurement to state and local procurement personnel. Beginning with the Virginia Contracting Officer program in 1990, and continuing with the Virginia Contracting Associate program in 2006, over 1,300 procurement professionals in the Commonwealth have achieved professional designation from VIP for demonstrating their knowledge of Virginia procurement regulations, policies and procedures.

VIP bases its certification curriculum on the Virginia Public Procurement Act (VPPA), a law that defines acceptable ethics and fair practices in public procurement. More information on VPPA is available at: <http://www.eva.state.va.us/dps/Manuals/docs/vppa.htm>.

Additional training information is drawn from the Agency Procurement and Surplus Property Manual (APSPM). The APSPM serves as the primary reference for state purchasers and further interprets the VPPA. More information on the APSPM is available at: <http://www.eva.virginia.gov/aspm-manual/aspm-manual.htm>.

According to Linda Morris, Learning and Development Manager, DPS, plans are underway at VIP for the



development of a third-level certification program in public procurement, called the Virginia Contracting Master (VCM) program. "Where the VCA and VCO programs focus on tactical skills needed to perform as a buyer in Virginia, the VCM will focus on strategic skills needed for managing procurement at a senior level," said Morris.

A career in public procurement carries a big responsibility, beyond simply being familiar with public procurement law. State and local public procurement professionals face ongoing challenges to maximize the value they obtain with their constituent dollars. They must also be efficient and knowledgeable with fair contracting methods.



Morris talks about why professional certification and training are even more critical during rough economic times. "Certification training for procurement officers and procurement support staff is essential during a recession because of the direct impact procurement professionals

have on the way scarce budget dollars are expended," she explained.

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What do you get when you apply hundreds of years of collective procurement experience to the task of developing and delivering training programs?

The Virginia Institute of Procurement links expertise of in-house staff to the learning needs of emerging procurement professionals. Tapping into the vast knowledge and experience of DPS staff members who serve as both content subject matter experts and instructors, VIP structures cost-effective programs to deliver timely and relevant course content that is directly applicable to the jobs of procurement officers.

Students thrive on the mentoring and peer interaction of small group exercises focused on actual procurement scenarios and issues. In addition, they make valuable contacts with other buyers around the Commonwealth and the procurement professionals at DPS. It is a win-win situation strengthening procurement in Virginia and developing individual procurement professionals.

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VIP: Sowing Seeds For Buyer Growth And Development *(Continued from Page One)*



Keith Gagnon, Procurement Management Account Executive, DPS, leads a session during VCO training. Reviewing material in the form of a game is a fun way to help VCO candidates learn how to keep themselves out of "Jeopardy."

"Maintaining expertise in effective contract management saves more money in the long run than cutting back on training in uncertain times," Morris added.

VIP classes are professionally designed to meet the needs and learning style of adult learners. Classes are interactive, with scenario based exercises, and hands-on activities that model real work situations.

The goal is for students to take away knowledge and skills they can apply immediately to their jobs. VIP staff members understand that learning by doing is much more effective than learning by lecture - students learn more when they also are having fun.

Certification Blog Watch

The value of certification training is reinforced in a recent posting by Jason Busch, Editor, on Spend Matters, the leading procurement and supply chain blog and research hub. He writes:

"The cost and risk reduction skills that procurement training and certification can teach represent a smart investment in the current economic downturn. Procurement certifications can represent not only excellent value from both time and cost investment perspectives for existing members of the profession, they can be invaluable springboards for those just getting into the procurement field."

Hear What VIP Participants Are Saying...

"The ability to meet other procurement staff and interact; hearing real-life examples; practice tests are very helpful; Jeopardy was fun!"

"Excellent use of interactive training strategies to keep students engaged and doing exercises that helped reinforce the concepts."

"I'm new in the state and I feel after this I'm more prepared than ever."

"[I] really liked the pre-test and the electronic answering method; the hands on projects; practice tests and quizzes; having different teachers at different times."



VIP participants work in teams to tackle complex procurement case studies that prepare them for real-world experience.

Cultivating Buyer Expertise At The Annual DPS Procurement FORUM

Maintaining Virginia's standard of excellence in procurement and a level playing field for all Virginia businesses depends upon sharing best practices through training and events like the annual Public Procurement Forum, hosted by the DPS. VIP is responsible for designing the workshops for the Forum and organizing the entire conference.

Forum 2008 marked the twentieth year for this conference of state and local procurement professionals featuring workshops on over 45 topics and the largest supplier products and services Expo in Forum history. You will not want to miss Forum 2009 in Hampton. Look for the website to open around mid-April and register early to secure your place. <http://dps.dgs.virginia.gov/forum2009>

eVA Customer Care: The Heartbeat Of e-Procurement

WHAT'S YOUR IDEA OF A GREAT HELP DESK EXPERIENCE?

Expertise?
Responsiveness?
Live answer?
Patience?

How about all of the above?

With so many every day activities being conducted online, chances are we've all needed the help desk at one time or another. Whether we're looking for information or need a problem solved, we all want the same thing—for someone to really listen to our concerns.

If you've ever called eVA Customer Care, then you've experienced this team's unique brand of customer service. Managing a high volume of calls and emails, the team maintains a live call answer rate of over 70% for incoming telephone calls.

Each customer is sent a survey, allowing customers to rate their eVA Customer Care experience and leave comments. This customer satisfaction rating routinely exceeds the industry standard of 90%.

Karen Barber, eVA Customer Care Manager, talks about the important blend of technical and customer service skills and good temperament that are necessary in the help desk arena.

"It's not simply about having the knowledge to provide answers. Working a help desk requires patience, listening skills, the ability to switch gears at a moment's notice—and all with a smile that can be heard on the other end of the phone," she explained.

Generally, the primary function of any help desk is maintaining a good relationship with users about the company or product. The help desk can be geographically far away from the actual customer, but must create a very personal exchange—and one



that cements customer loyalty.

However, eVA Customer Care does much more than maintain user appreciation. When technology is involved, the help desk specialist becomes teacher and troubleshooter. On a daily basis, eVA Customer Care deals with complex issues such as browser and computer settings, eVA functionality and software compatibility.

eVA users are both buyers and vendors. Newcomers and old timers. From all over the Commonwealth and around the United States, Canada and overseas. Typical vendor issues include password resets, assistance with accessing and responding to solicitations through Quick Quotes and Virginia Business Opportunities (VBO), and help accessing and responding to eVA purchase orders. Vendors also seek help with accessing and updating their eVA vendor account information, such as commodity codes and user contacts.

eVA Customer Care Activity January 2009

1,895--The total number of non-billing telephone calls that came to the direct number of 866-289-7367 and pressed "option 9" for "Live Help."

1,384 of those calls were answered live, for an average live-answer rate of 73%.

156 callers left a voice mail.

355 abandoned the call and hopefully called back at a later time.

In addition, this month eVA Customer Care received **1,310** emails.

eVA Customer Care also helps buyers with password resets, creating, sending or changing solicitations, and creating eVA purchase orders. Buyers also contact eVA Customer Care for help understanding eVA's online

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The eVA Customer Care Motto: Protect The Procurement

eVA Customer Care Manager, Karen Barber, talks about how eVA users communicate with eVA Customer Care.

"Approximately 50% of all issues come to eVA Customer Care by email," explained Barber. "We juggle our resources minute by minute to focus on live calls and email requests."

Currently we are a staff of 11 and we closed about 35,000 issues last year. Since the purpose of eVA is electronic procurement, the help desk's primary objective each day is to maintain continuity in the procurement process.

Buyers issue thousands of bid requests and purchase orders each day. Vendors are on the other side of the e-procurement process, responding to bid invitations and accepting and fulfilling purchase orders—activities that are all deadline driven.

"We have a critical mission of making sure the procurement process flows without interruption," explains Barber. "We don't want buyers experiencing delays or broken communication with the vendor side. And we need vendors to remain connected to the buy side. Any missteps on either side costs everyone time and money," Barber explained.

eVA Customer Care: The Heartbeat Of e-Procurement

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shopping area, known as the e-Mall, identifying SWaM vendors, and learning how to use eVA's reports to analyze and manage order activities.

Every day presents both familiar and new scenarios.

Along with the daily technical complexities and challenges, eVA Customer Care faces tremendous volume. As the largest e-procurement system of its kind, anywhere in the world, eVA is home to more than 50,000 potential users. On average, there are about 1000 orders placed each business day.

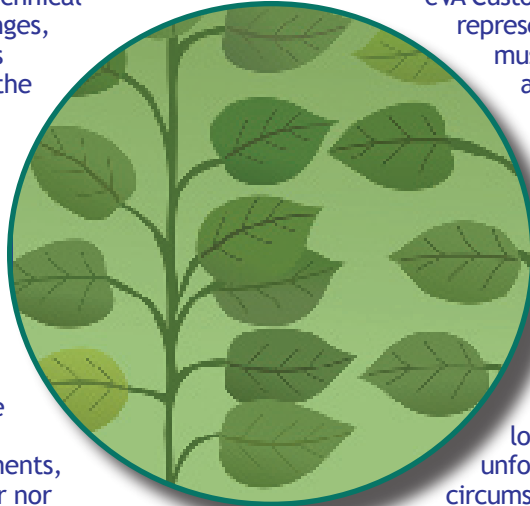
eVA Customer Care structures their response and assistance, with top priority on live procurements, so that neither the buyer nor the vendor lose valuable time in these transactions. This places those on the help desk under continuous deadline pressure.

Hiring eVA Customer Care representatives involves careful screening.

"We look for people with prior help desk experience and great communication skills," explains Karen Barber, eVA Customer Care Manager. "But that's

just the beginning," she added.

"Our representatives need to be comfortable with a fast pace, must be graceful under pressure, and maintain a friendly, positive attitude with eVA users," she added.



eVA Customer Care representatives must also be adaptable, ready to adjust their tasks according to fluctuating call or email loads or unforeseen circumstances, like staff levels.

"We work really hard at understanding what the user's problem is first, then we get to resolution as quickly as we can, because there's always someone else waiting in the queue," she added.

Measuring customer satisfaction is an ongoing priority.

"When we've resolved the user's is-

sue, our job's only half done. We survey every user we help and ask how we did," she added. "I, personally, receive a copy of every survey response and use this feedback for training and professional development."

Barber likes to recognize good performance by sharing positive survey feedback with the entire team.

eVA Customer Care also takes very seriously, any negative feedback.

"In the rare instance that a customer survey comes back negative, we immediately treat this as a new issue, assign the task "High Priority," and get back in touch with the customer to acknowl-

"Specialists emphasize complete customer satisfaction for every customer, knowing there are other callers in our queue."

Karen Barber, Manager
eVA Customer Care

edge their feedback, and seek more dialogue on their experience with us. This two-way communication is critical for maintaining our high standard of customer service," Barber explained.

Barber talks about how she prepares her small staff for the rigors of the eVA help desk.

"Our Lead Specialists play an important role in training new hires," Barber explained.

Angela Fox-Meade is an eVA Lead Specialist, who has been with the team almost three years.

"I enjoy coaching the new specialists," said Fox-Meade. "But even when we've been around a while, we stay in a constant learning mode with each other. It's a great team environment," said Fox-Meade.

Ray Harris is another eVA Lead Specialist, and has also been with the team almost three years.

"The Lead Specialist closely monitors new specialists for about six months. We also coach them through difficult or unfamiliar questions," explained Harris.

Vendors contact eVA Customer Care for help with a variety of issues. Here are just a few examples:

Registration assistance, eVA Account Maintenance, especially updating eVA commodity codes

Password reset and login information

Assistance troubleshooting browser and other computer issues

Technical assistance with using eVA site and online tools

Establishing or re-establishing an Ariba account

Accessing and responding to Quick Quotes or Virginia Business Opportunity (VBO) solicitations

Examples of buyer issues:

Password reset and login information

Creating, changing, canceling purchase orders.

Creating Quick Quotes or Virginia Business Opportunity (VBO) solicitations

Assistance locating SWaM vendors

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Meet The eVA Customer Care Team

HEAR WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS ARE SAYING

Janne Erbe
Analyst

Festival Lover, Dry Humor, Creative

Ray Harris
Lead Specialist

1976 Chrysler, Outdoors, Eagles' Football

Angela Fox-Meade
Lead Specialist

Family Gatherings, Challenges, Sky Diver To Be

Tiffany Carey
Specialist

Speaks Fashion Fluently, Retail Therapy

Kaneik Tune
Specialist

American Idol Singer, Comedian

Jessica Cheatham
Specialist

Art to 4 Wheeling, Try About Anything Once

Pam Munford
Specialist

Yoga Master, Reading, Travel

Edward Parham
Specialist

*Lakers' Basketball, Eagles' Football,
Family Time*

Gloria Reid
Specialist

*Political News Junkie, Howard University,
Old School Music*

Natasha Roberts
Specialist

Student, Wants To Make A Difference, Travel

Karen Barber
Manager

Anything Adventure, Ski, Sail, Motorcycles

"I couldn't believe you went the extra yard. Thanks."

"Very professional and polite, helped to resolve my issue almost instantly."

"Was taken care of on phone call that I made - Needed order cancelled quickly and I got that done. Thanks"

"Clear direction on how to use the eVA system and benefits."

"Pleasant demeanor. Easy to understand directions."

"Was handled quickly and professionally was great, easy to work with, very pleasant experience."

"Consistently friendly, knowledgeable and timely in response."

"I contacted seven states with this same issue, and Virginia was the only one that was completely helpful."

eVA Customer Care: Data Collection And Analysis Is Key

Ongoing collection and analysis of eVA Customer Care help desk activity is key to maintaining the team's high standards for customer service.

Janne Erbe, eVA Analyst, has been part of eVA Customer Care since January 2006. The eVA Analyst is a Knowledge Base expert and is responsible for analyzing and sharing of information.

"Each issue reported to eVA Customer Care by telephone or email is recorded in a special call tracking system," explained Erbe. "The data is sorted and examined continuously," she added.

eVA Customer Care Manager, Karen Barber talks about how important data analysis is for day-to-day management.

"We use the information to increase efficiency and build on training for new specialists," Barber explained. "We also monitor the data on customer interaction to identify trends, hot issues, common solutions, and many other types of information," said Barber.

"eVA Customer Care data is also regularly reported to upper management to help them determine if their objectives are being met for supporting the program," Barber explained.

eVA Customer Care Depends On Valued Partners For Support

eVA Customer Care Specialists are available to respond to technical and eVA application issues, but they are not trained buyers.

When certain issues are presented, users are referred to the proper partner for assistance.

Here are some examples:

What if I have a question about a specific Quick Quote or VBO Solicitation?

Bid or policy questions from vendors about a Quick Quote or Virginia Business Opportunity (VBO) solicitation will be referred to the issuing buyer. If the buyer can not be reached, eVA Customer Care will refer vendors to the Procurement Director for that agency or locality. The Commonwealth Agency Procurement Directory is also posted on the eVA Home page.

What if I have questions about state procurement policy?

Buyer policy questions should be directed to their agency Procurement Director or their DPS Account Executive.

Vendors can access general information about procurement regulations in the electronic versions of the Vendors' Manual and Agency Manual (APSPM), located on the eVA Home Page under the Vendor and Buyer tabs. Vendors should also contact the

issuing buyer for information or questions about a specific bid or solicitation.

What if I have an eVA Billing question?

Please call 866-289-7367 and press 2 to reach the Billing Department. The eVA Home Page also has a link to FAQs and other billing information on the eVA Home Page under the Billing Portal tab.

What if I have a question about getting certified as a Small, Woman or Minority-Owned (SWaM) business?

Please contact the Department of Minority Business Enterprise (DMBE) for help with SWaM Certification and information about the Commonwealth's SWaM Initiative, at www.dmb.e.virginia.gov or 804-786-6585.

What if I have general questions about starting or running a business in the Commonwealth?

Please contact the Virginia Department of Business Assistance (VDBA) for help with general information about setting up a business in the Commonwealth of Virginia at www.vdba.virginia.gov.



When can I get help from eVA Customer Care?

Live technical support is offered Monday - Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (EST), except major holidays.

Voice mail and email issues can be submitted anytime.

Phone :
(866) 289-7367 or
804-371-2525
(outside the US)

E-Mail :
eVACustomerCare@dgs.virginia.gov

Best Times To Call

Generally, call volume is lighter Monday mornings, all day Fridays, and between 8-10:30 and 2:30-5 Tuesday through Thursday.

If you have any questions or comments about our customer service, please contact eVA Customer Care Manager Karen Barber at karen.barber@dgs.virginia.gov or 804-371-2413.

Top Guard Security Keeps Watch On Growing eVA Business

THE DISPOSITION SHOULD BE EQUABLE AND KIND, RESOLUTE AND COURAGEOUS (NOT VICIOUS OR AGGRESSIVE), AND Demeanor SHOULD BE PACIFIC AND DIGNIFIED.

How the American Kennel Club (AKC) defines the ideal temperament of a purebred bull dog:--from AKC website, www.akc.org

For Top Guard Security, the bull dog is not just a stalwart symbol of the security profession. The company mascot mirrors the corporate spirit of one of Virginia's largest woman-owned businesses.

"We instill in our employees a family-like atmosphere, where we hold high expectations, we reward good performance, and we value and respect everyone's contributions," said Nicole Stuart, President. "It is this corporate personality that makes up the winning force of security professionals at Top Guard."

Equable And Kind

EQUABLE: Free from many changes or variations; uniform; an equable climate; an equable temperament

--from www.dictionary.com

KIND: Speaks for itself.

Top Guard maintains a passionate, supportive relationship with its employees. Their own job security contributes to their character on the job, in the provision of reliable security services for Top Guard clients.

"Our employees carry their pride in our firm and themselves into their assignments," said Chris Stuart, Vice-President, Client Relations and Business Development.

"We instill in our employees a family-like atmosphere, where we hold high expectations, we reward good performance, and we value and respect everyone's contributions."

Nicole Stuart
President
Top Guard Security

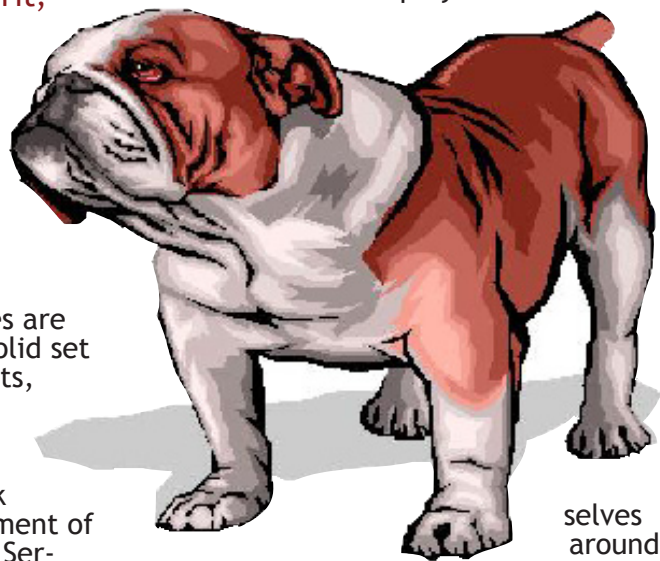
Resolute And Courageous

RESOLUTE: Characterized by firmness and determination, as the temper, spirit, actions, etc.

--from www.dictionary.com

COURAGEOUS: We all know what courageous means.

New employees are screened for a solid set of character traits, through an on-line employee application, and a companion link with the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). DCJS provides comprehensive planning and state-of-the-art technical and support services for the criminal justice system to improve and promote public safety in the Commonwealth. In addition to getting DCJS certified, Top Guard recruits also undergo specialized training and continuing education.



Not Vicious Or Aggressive, But Pacific And Dignified

PACIFIC: as tending to make or conserve peace; conciliatory

--from www.dictionary.com

DIGNIFIED: Speaks for itself.

Whether armed or unarmed, Top Guard employees station them-

selves around their cli-

ents' facilities and institutions, prepared to maintain employee safety in the face of common occurrences such as getting locked out of buildings, broken elevators, or missing car keys. But they also are key in preparing their clients for more uncommon scenarios, such as threats to employee health and safety, or security hazards that might befall the institution itself.

Nicole Stuart talks about Top Guard's core mission. "Our goal is to project the feeling of safety and security for our clients and their employees, while always staying alert to unexpected emergencies. Our staff are trained in a variety of response scenarios from fire alarms to workplace violence threats."

Top Guard Security

(Continued from Page Seven)



Securing Business Through eVA

Top Guard has been a leader in e-procurement since eVA's inception, joining the eVA marketplace in 2001. In business for 13 years, the company has seen the benefit of doing business with the Commonwealth electronically.

"eVA is the way we hear about business opportunities," explains Chris Stuart. "By serving as a one-stop for state and local government buyers, eVA gives businesses one source for information on Commonwealth public sector business opportunities," he added.

Growth And Expansion

Founded in 1996, Top Guard is a second generation family owned business. The firm has been through several growth phases. "We started with 140 employees," said Nicole Stuart, "And currently have more than 525," she added.

"In 2001 we experienced a growth spurt when we opened a Southside branch office. In 2004 the firm grew by 140 security officers in 45 days. In July of 2008 the firm was awarded another major contract, and grew from 450 to 525 security officers in thirty days!"

Top Guard has worked with a number of state and local government agencies, including the cities of Hampton and Norfolk, the Hampton Roads Sanitation Department, Christopher Newport University, Virginia Department of Transportation and Tidewater Community College.



Frank Dunn, Vice President for Administration at Tidewater Community College shares his experience with Top Guard Security.

"It has been a pleasure working with Nicole and Chris Stuart--and the whole Top Guard "family." Their management team is very responsive to our needs as they change over time. They demonstrate a strong commitment to excellence and customer service."

Chris Stuart talks about winning contracts through eVA. "The VDOT Suffolk award in 2001 jump started our vibrant Suffolk division, and the City of Norfolk Award in 2004 comprised a 33% growth with one contract. Tidewater Community College in 2008 has seen a 20% increase in total billing."

"By tying in the myriad purchasing agencies at the local and state level, eVA has simplified the process of ensuring that a business is aware of all possible solicitations with Virginia state and local government. eVA deserves recognition for simplifying access to Virginia's public sector contracting opportunities for businesses,"

added Nicole.

"Generally eVA has represented a smooth platform for both solicitations and payment," said Chris.

The firm has also received recognition with several business and trade awards, and proudly boasts a Seven Seals award from ESGR, the Employers Support for the Guard & Reserve. It is the group's highest honor, and is bestowed on firms showing the utmost commitment to supporting our nation's citizen soldiers.

"By serving as a one-stop for state and local government buyers, eVA gives businesses one source for information on Commonwealth public sector business opportunities."

Chris Stuart
Vice President
Client Relations And Business Development
Top Guard Security

Spotlight On Nicole Stuart, President

B.S. '92, M.P.A. '95 Old Dominion University

Four children: Shelby 4, Chance 2, Brody and Cooper 10 months

Born and raised in Hampton, Virginia

Founding member of the U. S. Women's Chamber of Commerce, Board Member for Transitions, Peninsula Chamber of Commerce Women's Advocate Award 2006

Inside Business' Women's Achievement 2005 and 40 Under Forty Award Winner 2008

What Do These Entities Have In Common?

Arkansas
California
Canada
Florida
Maryland
Metropolitan Washington
Airport Authority
North Carolina
Portugal
Sodexo
Tennessee
Texas
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C.

Find out in the next issue of eVA Connections!

Need Buyer Training?

Richmond Training

Learn how to use Quick Quote, eVA's electronic answer to paper quotes. And become an expert on "Shop Now," eVA's online shopping tool.

From www.eva.virginia.gov, click "eVA Training" on the left hand navigation bar. Look for "Sign Up For A Buyer Training Class."

Register online for these free half-day training classes, offered once a month. Classes are held at DGS headquarters.

Next
Richmond Class
APRIL 16!

Regional Training

Need buyer training in your neighborhood? Let the eVA professionals come to you. eVA will partner with any state or local government to coordinate a regional buyer training class.

Start with a few buyers from your own shop, add a computer lab with internet access, and eVA will recruit other eVA users in the region to fill the class. It's a great way to learn and network with your colleagues in the field.

For information contact shane.caudill@dgs.virginia.gov or 804-786-3855.

Online Training

eVA Buyer Training On Demand. From www.eva.virginia.gov, click "eVA Training." You'll find "virtual" demonstrations of eVA's buyer tools and get instant help with common user issues.



eVA Welcomes New Localities!

City of Norton
Town of Haymarket
County of King George

SIGN UP! Want to join eVA as a buyer for local government or other public body? Go to www.eva.virginia.gov, and click the "Sign Up" tab in the center of the home page.



eVA Connections is published by the e-Procurement Bureau of the Division of Purchases and Supply, Department of General Services. Bringing together the businesses, state and local government buyers, and other public servants, in celebration of the value that e-procurement brings to the Commonwealth. Please submit feedback and story ideas to shane.caudill@dgs.virginia.gov.

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