



British Columbia
Social Procurement Initiative

Are the dollars you spend supporting your community?

What is social procurement?

Every purchase has an economic, social, cultural, and environmental impact, whether intentional or not. Social procurement is an emerging best practice being used by governments and other public purchasers. It is a strategic approach to spending that can create additional social and sustainable value to help address a wide range of community challenges, while still ensuring best value for money and quality of service.

Local governments spend billions of dollars annually through procurement, the process of purchasing goods, services, and building infrastructure. Implementing social procurement practices within this existing spending helps ensure these dollars go further by creating the opportunity for additional social, environmental, and cultural value that aligns with governments' strategic goals and objectives. Social procurement supports things like:

- Creating healthy and resilient local economies
- Contributing to climate and sustainability objectives
- Creating employment, training, and apprenticeship opportunities
- Creating social and sustainable value in the supply chain
- Supporting vulnerable populations
- Contributing to equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Enhancing engagement with local First Nations

What is the British Columbia Social Procurement Initiative (BCSPI)?

In 2016, a group of elected officials looked at the billions of dollars being spent across the province, and asked, "Is this spending creating the best value and outcomes for our communities?". They were interested in exploring how an emerging, strategic approach called social procurement could help mobilize their existing financial resources to support their social, environmental, and cultural goals, while still delivering best value and high-quality services.

Two years of later, with support from the Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET), the Coastal Communities Social Procurement Initiative (CCSPI) was launched with six member governments as a 2-year shared learning pilot for the Vancouver Island and the Coast region. The Initiative was designed to provide training, expert support and other resources to help governments develop, pilot, and implement social procurement best practices through a collaborative learning model.

From 2019-2021, CCSPI grew from its initial six members to over 20 local governments, creating [significant local impact](#). In 2021, the Government of British Columbia, through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, recognized the work and impact of the initiative and [provided funding](#) to expand access to CCSPI to all governments across the province.

From 2021-2024, BCSPI has [continued to grow](#) and now comprises over 35 member organizations including municipalities, regional districts, institutional purchasers, and Crown Corporations. To-date, BCSPI members have mobilized over \$350 million of local government spending through projects that have included social and sustainable value. The initiative has trained over 200 staff and elected officials, adding significant capacity and knowledge to the municipal workforce.

In 2024, BCSPI is maintaining momentum and impact through a transition in project management from Scale Collaborative to Buy Social Canada under a fee-for-service model. BCSPI continues to be available to local governments and institutions across BC to support social procurement success.

How is BCSPI governed?

BCSPI is an initiative lead by Buy Social Canada, a national social enterprise and social procurement leader. BCSPI has an executive committee made up of representatives from the different member types: municipal governments, regional districts, institutional purchasers, and Crown Corporations. The executive committee meets four times per year to provide advice and recommendations for BCSPI. BCSPI is made possible through a combination of funding and membership fees. Membership fees are based on community population size for local governments, or annual spend for institutional purchasers.

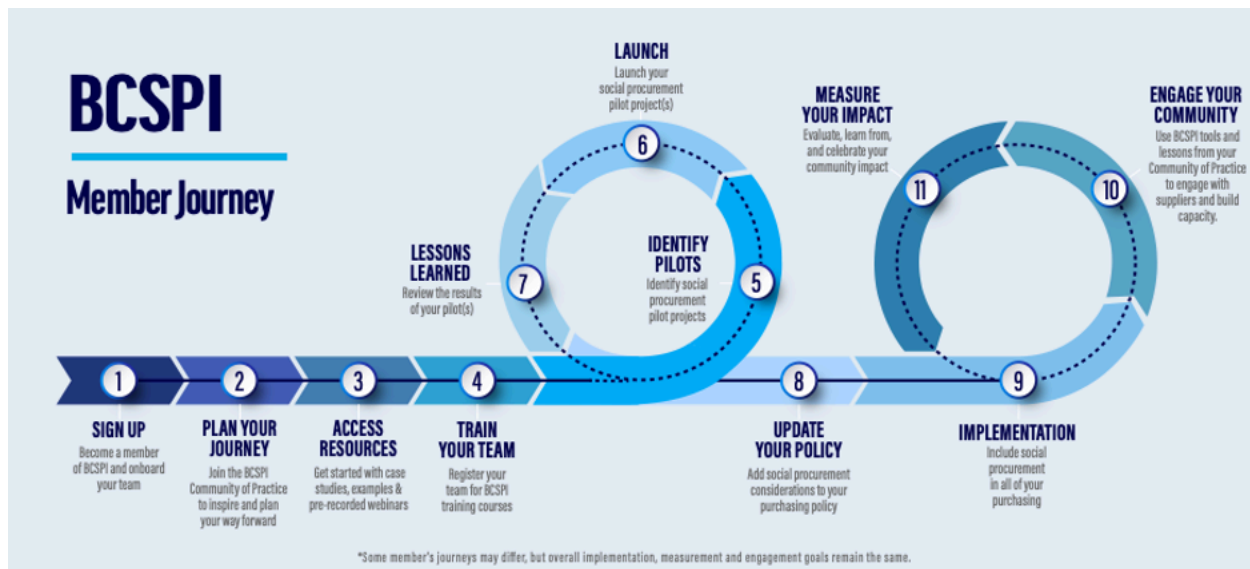
Services for members are contracted to and delivered in partnership by Scale Collaborative, Buy Social Canada, and the Vancouver Island Construction Association. The combined industry experience and expertise of these organizations ensures that BCSPI members receive the best possible support for social procurement implementation.

How does BCSPI membership support the goals of municipal governments?

BCSPI membership supports the social, environmental, and cultural goals of governments by providing the capacity building, skills and knowledge needed to unlock additional social value from their existing spending. This strategic approach to public spending helps provide the “best value” for every dollar spent while still ensuring the best price and quality for public purchasing.

BCSPI provides capacity building resources such as tools, resources, and community expertise for teams to implement social procurement across all levels of purchasing. From smaller, discretionary spending like corporate credit card purchasing, to contracting for goods and services, to integrating social value into multi-stage construction and infrastructure projects.

What happens when you become a member?



BCSPI supports municipalities and institutions of all sizes, with solutions for both centralized and decentralized purchasing models. Members start by getting their teams on the BCSPI platform and accessing the BCSPI resources to create a customized plan for their social procurement implementation journey. This reflects the unique needs of their community or region, their existing purchasing practices, and their resource capacity. Members' social procurement objectives are connected to their existing strategic goals and policies for economic development, inclusion, diversity, reconciliation, poverty reduction, and climate action.

BCSPI guides members through the steps of their social procurement implementation journey. Each step is supported by professional development and training, optional expert consulting and advice, a rich library of resources, tools and templates, and a thriving Community of Practice. The initiative provides resources for all levels of government, from elected officials to senior team members to departmental and purchasing staff. There is no limit to the number of staff who can participate, and additional staff members can be added as required.

BCSPI also provides supplier engagement resources and communication tools to help members communicate change both internally and externally, and impact measurement support through access to a common measurement framework and measurement tools aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Why should we become a member of BCSPI?

- Ensure your spending is strategic, and that every dollar spent can go further
 - Mobilize existing financial resources to address economic, social, and environmental challenges
 - Professional development opportunity for staff
 - Adds capacity to existing resources through access to support, tools, and resources
- Collaboration with other municipalities around best practices

Recommendations for Elected Officials

- **If you're not already a member of BCSPi:**
 - Explore BCSPi membership for your community
 - Invite the BCSPi team to present to your Council/Board to learn more
 - Encourage staff to explore and endorse BCSPi membership and social procurement practices.

- **If you are a currently a member of BCSPi:**
 - Understand how social procurement aligns with your community's strategic priorities and your organization's impact to-date
 - Champion staff capacity to move forward, track and achieve social procurement goals and outcomes
 - Communicate the benefits and outcomes to members of the community (please refer to the key messages section of this document).

Social Procurement Myths and Facts:

Myth: Trade agreements don't allow for social procurement.

Fact: Trade agreements have parameters to work within, but they do allow social value outcomes.

Additional Information:

- A procurement process that meets trade agreement thresholds cannot limit who can bid
- Procurement processes that meet trade agreement thresholds cannot give preference to local bidders, but can seek social value outcomes from all bidders
- There are exceptions within the trade agreements for direct purchasing from non-profits and other groups.
- For more information about local preferences, refer to Buy Social Canada's [Trade Agreements Local Briefing Note](#).

Myth: Social procurement costs more.

Fact: There is no evidence to support that claim.

Additional information:

- In some cases, social procurement can reduce costs, for example when contractors utilize local social value supply chains as opposed to bringing in outside resources
- Cost does not always have to be the deciding factor when “best value” includes social, environmental and cultural benefits to the community
- “There were no known cost implications associated with the social procurement concepts that were included in the RFP.” - Scott Hainsworth, Comox Valley Regional District – Water Treatment Project, 2020

Myth: Social procurement means lower quality.

Fact: There is no evidence to support that claim.

Additional information:

- While a social value weighting is added to the RFx process, the weighting factors and percentages are still determined based on the needs of the buyer for the goods or services. Price and quality/technical criteria remain important considerations.

Myth: The social procurement journey is straightforward and linear.

Fact: The social procurement journey is complex and iterative.

Additional Information:

- The journey will require changes in policy, practice and culture and can have incredible impact in communities – it's worth it!
- BCSPi is here to support and make this journey simpler, with trainings, resources, templates and guides, and learnings from peers to support best practices. We have done the heavy lifting and taken most of the testing and risk out of the process.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is social procurement?

Every purchase has a social, economic, cultural, and environmental impact. Social procurement is about using your existing purchasing strategically, to capture those impacts to achieve overarching institutional, governmental, or individual goals that help shape inclusive, vibrant, and healthy communities. It is a shift from requiring 'lowest price' to achieving 'best value'.

What is BCSPi?

BCSPi is here to foster social, environmental, cultural, and economic impact across British Columbia. Our team of experts support local governments and institutional purchasers to make the money you spend do more for your community. Through the initiative, BCSPi members can build capacity through training, consulting, resources, and support to implement purchasing that achieves community goals.

Why is social procurement important?

Local governments spend millions of dollars annually. There is an opportunity for local governments to look at the potential for their spending to support local employment, economic and community benefits. For smaller communities and those in economic transition, local government spending can be a significant lever to generate positive local and community impacts.

What are the goals of social procurement?

Each community will set their goals depending to their needs and opportunities. Social procurement includes social value as part of the procurement bidding and evaluation process. The information and questions centre around employment, training and apprenticeships, supply chain and/or community engagement. Bidders will be asked to describe their current practices, and what community benefits they can provide should they be the successful proponent.

Is it legal for governments to use social procurement? Don't we have trade agreements to comply with?

Yes, governments must comply with trade agreements. You cannot restrict competition, but you can seek social value outcomes from all bidders. The important part is making the process competitive and transparent for all bidders.

Does social procurement mean buying from local businesses?

No, social procurement is not about 'buying local'- this is not allowed under trade agreements. Instead, social procurement looks for ways to structure procurement to make it more possible for local businesses to bid and demonstrate the value they provide to the community. They still need to compete in a fair and transparent process. It is also a way to ask businesses from outside the community how they are going to provide local benefits to the communities where they do business.

Does social procurement cost taxpayers more?

In terms of proposals received, so far there has not been an increase in costs. In fact, by unbundling projects (breaking large contracts into smaller, clearly separate parts), there has even been significant cost savings that result from goods and services being delivered by local businesses. However, depending on what the goals might be, a decision could be made to pay more for greater value.

Key Messages

The following key messages are intended to communicate the benefits of social procurement, and can be used in written or oral communications, at events or formal or informal meetings, in presentation slides, for press and media, on your website, on social media, and in briefing notes. They are split into two categories: messages for community members, and messages for vendors and businesses.

Please note: These messages are intended to provide only baseline language. Please review each accordingly to ensure the specific content is accurate to what your jurisdiction is doing and update as required.

Messages for community members

- We work hard to ensure every purchase delivers on community priorities. That's why we're implementing social procurement, a practice that leverages our supply chain and purchasing to amplify benefits to our community and our environment.
- We're committed to making the money we spend go further by working towards social, environmental and community outcomes.
- How we purchase matters. We're working to align our purchasing to achieve social, environmental, and community outcomes.
- Purchasing decisions enable the re-circulation of money in the local economy to create a cascading effect of impact. Learn more about how we're amplifying benefits in our community.
- We're working to deliver impact through our purchasing decisions. Implementing social procurement helps us benefit people, planet, and community.
- Social purchasing is a critical tool to reach our goals.

Messages for vendors and businesses

- Purchasing decisions enable the re-circulation of money in the local economy to create a cascading effect of impact. That's why we're implementing social procurement to create more opportunities for small businesses, social enterprises, and diverse-owned businesses in our community.
- We want to hear from you. Help us purchase with social value in a way that is accessible and beneficial to our local community.
- We know that a purchase in the local economy is an investment into local business, local employment, affordability, community vibrancy and resilience. That's why we're implementing social procurement to leverage our supply chains and purchasing.
- There are many ways for the local vendor community to get involved and benefit from social procurement (list them or add relevant CTA).

- We want to create more opportunities to do business with small businesses, social enterprises, and diverse-owned businesses in our community. We're using our purchasing power to create best value and amplify social and environmental benefits.
- Social procurement has a proven track record of creating thriving businesses and resilient local economies (provide BCSPI Case Study or another example).

Explore other ways to engage vendors in the [BCSPI Vendor Outreach Guide](#).