
Procurement Clerks

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Nature of the Work

Procurement clerks compile requests for materials, prepare purchase orders, keep track of purchases and supplies, and handle inquiries about orders. Usually called *purchasing clerks* or *purchasing technicians*, they perform a variety of tasks related to the ordering of goods and supplies for an organization and make sure that what was purchased arrives on schedule and meets the purchaser's specifications.

Automation is having a profound effect on this occupation. Orders for goods now can be placed electronically when supplies are low. For example, computers integrated with cash registers at stores record purchases and automatically reorder goods when supplies reach a certain target level. However, automation is still years away for many firms, and the role of the procurement clerk is unchanged in many organizations.

Procurement clerks perform a wide range of tasks and also have a wide range of responsibilities. Some clerks act more like buyers, particularly at small to medium-sized companies, while others perform strictly clerical functions. In general, procurement clerks process requests for purchases. They first determine whether there is any of the requested product left in inventory and may go through catalogs or to the Internet to find suppliers. They may prepare invitation-to-bid forms and mail them to suppliers or distribute them for public posting. Once suppliers are found, procurement clerks may interview them to check on prices and specifications and thereby put together spreadsheets with price comparisons and other facts about each supplier. Upon the organization's approval of a supplier, purchase orders are prepared, mailed, and entered into computers. Procurement clerks keep track of orders and determine the causes of any delays. If the supplier has questions, clerks try to answer them and resolve any problems. When the shipment arrives, procurement clerks may reconcile the purchase order with the shipment, making sure that they match; notify the vendors when invoices are not received; and verify that the bills concur with the purchase orders.

Some purchasing departments, particularly in small companies, are responsible for overseeing the organization's inventory control system. At these organizations, procurement clerks monitor in-house inventory movement and complete inventory transfer forms for book-keeping purposes. They may keep inventory spreadsheets and place orders when materials on hand are insufficient.

Employment

In 2002, procurement clerks held about 77,000 jobs. Procurement clerks are found in every industry, including manufacturing, retail and wholesale trade, health care, and government. Nearly 1 in 5 procurement clerks works for the Federal government.

Job Outlook

Employment of procurement clerks is expected to decline through 2012 as a result of increasing automation. The need for procurement clerks will be reduced as the use of computers to place orders directly with suppliers—called electronic data interchange—and as ordering over the Internet—known as “e-procurement”—become more commonplace. In addition, procurement authority for some purchases is now being given to employees in the departments originating the purchase. These departments may be issued procure-



Procurement clerks prepare purchase orders and make sure that the shipment and the bills agree with the order.

ment cards, which are similar to credit cards, that enable a department to charge purchases up to a specified amount.

Although employment in the occupation is expected to decline overall, job opportunities will vary by type of employer. As the manufacturing sector continues to decline, fewer procurement clerks will be needed in that sector. In contrast, procurement clerks will be increasingly employed by companies in the service sector, which are beginning to realize that a centralized procurement department may be more cost effective than units making purchases independently, as many service companies had been doing. However, most job openings will arise out of the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force. Persons with good writing and communication skills, along with computer skills, will have the best opportunities for employment.

Sources of Additional Information

Information on employment opportunities for procurement clerks is available from local offices of the State employment service.

(See the introductory statement on financial clerks for information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings.)