



# The Promise of Digital Technology to Advance Sustainable Public Procurement



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*“The path has never been clearer for organizations looking to embrace digital solutions to streamline their activities and meet sustainability standards. Procurement technology makes this future possible, by providing access to previously unobtainable data sets, shaping them into something more digestible, as well as driving more complex analysis and better supplier strategies.”*

– Jack MacFarlane (2022),  
CEO of DeepStream

Public purchasing accounts for about \$9.5 trillion annually, or nearly one-fifth of global GDP,<sup>1</sup> making government the largest buyer in most economies.<sup>2</sup> Items procured range from chemicals to electronics to office materials and many other products and services used in public service delivery.

Collectively, these procurements have significant environmental and social impacts, risks, and costs that account for 92% of an organization’s

total greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>3</sup> Government procurement processes worldwide are responsible for nearly 40% of all global greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>4</sup> In the past decade, governments have sought ways to reduce these negative impacts, including adopting a sustainable public procurement (SPP) policy. Today, about one-third of cities across the United States have adopted a wide range of SPP policies.<sup>5</sup> However, only a small fraction of these cities have





As such, both political and organizational leadership are crucial to addressing these challenges to fully realize the promise of technology in advancing sustainable public procurement. To help overcome these challenges, procurement leaders must work with elected officials to make the case for support and the investment of resources in these efforts.

Focusing on “value for money” procurement that includes social and environmental costs will more accurately assess the true cost of acquisitions across their entire lifecycle from production to disposal or reuse.<sup>6</sup> Doing so delivers broader public value by enhancing the public organization’s environmental and social performance while helping it meet its internal sustainability goals.

*The NCMA Sustainable Procurement Community of Practice is a place for contract management and acquisition professionals to discuss and shape practice. Join our community at [www.ncmahq.org/CoP](http://www.ncmahq.org/CoP) or email us at [ncmaspcop@gmail.com](mailto:ncmaspcop@gmail.com) – we would love to hear about your work building a sustainable federal procurement ecosystem!*

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### ENDNOTES

- 1 World Bank. 2017. *Benchmarking Public Procurement 2017*. World Bank Publications.
- 2 OECD. 2017. *Government at a Glance 2017*. Paris: OECD Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1787/gov\\_glance-2017-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/gov_glance-2017-en).
- 3 Carbon Disclosure Project (2021). *Transparency to Transformation: A Chain Reaction. CDP Global Supply Chain Report*. Available at: <https://www.cdp.net/en/research/global-reports/transparency-to-transformation>.
- 4 Labutong, N., Hoen, V. (2018). How can companies address their scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions? *Science-Based Targets*, 18 May. Available at <https://sciencebasedtargets.org/blog/how-can-companies-address-their-scope-3-greenhouse-gas-emissions>.
- 5 Darnall, N., Stritch, J.M., Bretschneider, S., Hsueh, L., Duscha, M., Iles, J., No, W., Suarez, J., Burwell, C. 2017. *Advancing Green Purchasing in Local Governments*. Phoenix: Arizona State University, Center for Organization Research and Design, Sustainable Purchasing Research Initiative. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.13106.50884.
- 6 Swanson J, Darnall N, Stritch JM, Chen Y, Fox A, Adell A, Bres L. 2022. Recommendations and conclusions. *Sustainable Public Procurement: 2022 Global Review, Part I*. Chapter 4, pp. 71-79. Paris: United Nations Environment Programme.