

CALIFORNIA UNIFORM PUBLIC CONSTRUCTION COST ACCOUNTING ACT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1. What is the Uniform Public Construction Cost Accounting Act?

A program created in 1983 which allows local agencies to perform public project work up to \$45,000 with its own work force if the agency elects to follow the cost accounting procedures set forth in the *Cost Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual* of the California Uniform Construction Cost Accounting Commission (Commission). The Uniform Public Construction Cost Accounting Act (Act) is enacted under Public Contracts Code Section 22000 through 22045 (hereafter abbreviated as PCC 22000-22045).

In addition, the Act provides for alternative bidding procedures when an agency performs public project work by contract.

- a) Public projects of \$45,000 or less may be performed by negotiated contract or by purchase order (PCC 22032(a)).
- b) Public projects of \$175,000 or less may be let to contract by the informal procedures set forth in the Act (PCC 22032(b)).
- c) Public projects of more than \$175,000 shall be let to contract by formal bidding procedures (PCC 22032(c)).

Every five years, the Commission shall consider whether there have been material changes in public construction costs and make recommendations to the State Controller regarding adjustments to the bidding procedure monetary limits (PCC 22020). Adjustments should be effective for the fiscal year that commences not less than 60 days following the State Controller's notification to all participating agencies.

2. What are the benefits of the program?

- a) Increased force account limit
- b) Informal bidding for projects between \$45,001 and \$175,000 which do not require advertising.
- c) Reduces the number of formal bids.
- d) Expedited contracting for small projects.

Many participants laud the program because it gives them more leeway in the execution of public works projects; has speeded up the awards process; has improved timeliness of the project completion; has eliminated considerable red tape and cumbersome paperwork relative to advertising and filing of reports; and has simplified administration. Many agencies have encountered only minimal challenges with the accounting requirements and the overhead portion. Moreover, where required, the adjustment was relatively simple; most of the required procedures were already actually in place, so there was no noticeable change in the existing operations. The Standard Accounting Codes Structure will satisfy the reporting requirements when used properly.

3. Is the Uniform Public Construction Cost Accounting Act mandatory for local agencies?

No. The Act is a voluntary program. However, it is available to all local agencies, counties, and cities, both general law and charter.

4. How does a local agency become subject to the Act?

The governing body must elect by resolution to become subject to the Act and file a copy of the resolution with the State Controller's Office (PCC 22030). Sample documents are available at: http://www.sco.ca.gov/ard_cuccac.html. Once an agency has opted into the Act it will remain a part of the program until it opts out. There is no need for renewal/re-opting in.

5. May a local agency withdraw from the Act?

An agency may withdraw by filing a resolution of the agency's election to withdraw with the State Controller's Office.

6. What is the California Uniform Construction Cost Accounting Commission?

A state commission created under the Act (PCC 22010). It consists of fourteen (14) members: thirteen (13) members are appointed by the State Controller and one is a designated member of the Contractors' State License Board. Seven members represent the public sector (counties, cities, school districts, and special districts). Six members represent the private sector (public works contractors and unions). The Commission members receive no salary, but are eligible for reimbursement of their direct expenses related to the Commission. The Commission is responsible for administration of the Act. The State Controller provides limited staff and other support to the Commission (PCC 22015(a)).

7. What are the Uniform Public Construction Cost Accounting Procedures?

The cost accounting procedures were developed by the Commission. They are to be used to estimate costs for determining if a public project is required to be bid out and to capture and record actual costs when a public project is performed by the agency's own work force. The procedures follow normal accounting in the industry and in many cases are not much different from those already in place at the agency. Sample forms are available in the *CUCCAC Cost Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual*.

School districts may use the Standard Accounting Code Structure to comply with the tracking requirements.

8. Are the cost accounting policies and procedures applicable for agencies whose work force only performs maintenance tasks as defined in the Act and whose public projects are all contracted out?

The cost accounting policies and procedures are only applicable for agencies that perform public project work by force account. This does not exclude from the program agencies whose public projects are all contracted out. In fact, they might want to review the benefits available and elect to participate now in the event conditions change at some time in the future.

9. The Public Contract Code section 22034(a) states “the agency shall maintain a list of qualified contractors¹...”. What is meant by the term “qualified contractors”?

The term “qualified contractors” is intended to define contractors who request to be added to an agencies list for specified types of specialty work and are licensed and otherwise legally qualified to perform that work as licensed contractors. In addition, the Commission has determined that nothing in the Act prohibits a participating agency from, at their discretion, using an objective pre-qualification process in the formation and maintenance of their contractor’s lists. This change will be added to the language on Section 3, page 7, of the *Cost Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual*.

10. Can a local agency disqualify or exclude certain contractors from the Qualified Contractors List required pursuant to PCC 22034(a)?

Agencies may disqualify contractors from the Qualified Contractors List when a contractor fails to furnish information to meet the minimum criteria as established by the Commission pursuant to PCC 22034(a).

11. For agencies that do not maintain an informal bidders list, are they allowed to choose who will get notifications on information projects?

The Act requires that an informal bid project is either advertised and/or notifications are sent to all contractors on the informal bidders list. We have noticed that a very large percentage of signatory local public agencies do not maintain or update an informal bidders list and are sending notices to only one or two contractors.

There is no exemption to maintaining a list of bidders. PCC 22034(a). The public agency shall maintain a list of qualified contractors, identified according to categories of work. Minimum criteria for development and maintenance of the contractors list shall be determined by the commission. If an agency is not maintaining a list or notifying all contractors or trade papers, then they are not in compliance with the Act.

The Public Contract Code states that participating agencies shall adopt an ordinance requiring that a list of all qualified contractors, identified according to categories of work be maintained. It does not require the list to be used however, and allows notifications to the required trade journals and exchanges be used as an alternate if desired. For agencies that elect to use the alternative authorized method of advertising, the purpose of the list is effectively negated.

If an agency is using the contractor's list then they must send the notification to all contractors on the list for that category of work and the list must be maintained in accordance with the Manual.

12. What is the difference between qualifying contractors under UPCCAA and prequalification of contractors under PCC 20101?

Qualification of contractors is a process that allows contractors to register with the agency for notification of public works opportunities. The prequalification process under PCC 20101 is a more complex process that requires a standardized questionnaire and evaluation of contractors using standard scoring criteria.

¹ The term Qualified Contractors is pending legislative change. The proposed term is Registered Contractors.

13. Must a local agency: (1) Notify contractors pursuant to PCC 22034(b) if the contractor is believed not to have the skills, credentials, or experience to perform the work? (2) Consider bids submitted if the agency believes the contractor does not have the skills, credentials, or experience to perform the work?

- a) If a contractor is on the Qualified Contractors List (PCC 22034(b)), the contractor must be notified by the agency of public projects for which he is licensed to perform.
- b) All bids received from qualified contractors must be considered.

14. Does the Act allow flexibility in cases of great emergency and when repair or replacements are necessary to permit the continued conduct of the operations or services of a public agency?

PCC 22035 provides that in cases of great emergency the governing body may, by majority vote, proceed without adopting plans and giving notice to bids to let contracts. In addition, this section provides that the governing body may delegate to the appropriate agency manager the power to declare an emergency and/or proceed with repairs or replacements without approval by the board. PCC 22050 provides contracting procedures without giving notice for bids to let contracts for these emergencies.

15. Do the alternative bidding procedures apply only to public projects as defined in PC 22002(c) or can they be used for the following types of items:

- a) Maintenance work to be performed by contract?
- b) Purchase of heavy equipment?
- c) Purchase of materials?

Pursuant to PCC 22003, a participating agency may use the alternative bidding procedures on maintenance work as defined in PC 22002(d), items 1-5. PCC 22003 is permissive and agencies can continue to exclude maintenance from the alternative bidding procedures. However, if an agency misclassifies a project (\$45,001 or more) as maintenance and therefore, does not use the applicable bidding procedures, a review by the Commission may be conducted pursuant to PCC 22042(c).

The purchase of equipment and supplies fall under PCC 20111; however, when purchased or used as part of a public works project, the costs associated with the purchase or use become part of the project cost and must be considered when applying the bid limits under the Act.

16. What will membership in the Act cost my agency?

At the present, no required membership fees or dues are assessed. However, the Commission has never received direct state funding for a short period of its history. The State has indicated that the participating agencies, contractors, and unions that benefit from the Commission should be responsible for its funding. Therefore, in November 2004, the Commission asked member agencies, contractor's associations, and construction related unions for voluntary donations to support the Commission. There may be additional requests for voluntary support. Any mandatory fees or dues would require legislation and would be for a nominal amount.

17. What are the most common concerns?

There are three leading areas of expressed concern and mostly all are quickly alleviated when addressed properly. These are:

- a) Cost accounting policies and procedures;
- b) Informal bidding procedures;
- c) Accounting review procedures.

The cost accounting requirements follow those common to the construction industry. The informal bidding up to \$175,000 is seen by the agencies as an asset enhancing project completion. Maintenance of a Qualified Contractor Bid List is routine, since interested contractors make it a point to be included on the list. While a review could potentially hold up a project for 30 days pursuant to PCC 22043, formal complaints have been rare in the Commission's history.

18. Does an agency have to calculate an overhead rate in order to apply the accounting procedures?

Cities with populations of less than 75,000 may use an overhead rate of 20% of all direct costs in lieu of the overhead rate calculation specified in Section VI of the Cost Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual. Cities with a population of more than 75,000, counties, special districts, and school districts may use an overhead rate of 30% of all direct costs, in lieu of a calculated rate.

19. When a local entity opts into the Act, does the Act supersede other contracting legal requirements such as statutory requirements for performance bonds, prevailing wages, and certificates of insurance, etc.?

The Act only supersedes the bidding procedures used once a public agency has adopted a resolution and notified the Controller. All other contracting requirements are applicable whether or not a public entity opts into the Act.

The specific mention of bidding procedures emphasizes the omission of other statutory requirements (such as bond payments, prevailing wages, addenda, change orders, etc.) and implies that their applicability is found in specific statutory provisions rather than the Act.

Therefore, the Act does not supersede other contracting requirements for performance bonds, prevailing wages, and certificates of insurance, etc.

20. Can a signatory agency, claim to be to be exempt from requirements in the Public Contract Code (PCC) by claiming they only have to follow the language and procedures within the Act?

No. The Commission has ruled in the past that where the Act is silent, the Public Contract Code applies.

21. If signatory agencies are not following the advertising requirements in the Act, will the Commission address those agencies? Can a complaint be brought to the Commission?

Yes, a complaint can be brought to the Commission. PCC 22042 lists the categories of complaints that the Commission can consider.

22. PCC 20112 specifically requires school districts to advertise twice for a two week period, while PCC 22037 requires advertising once, 14 days in advance of the date of opening of bids. Which code applies to school districts?

PCC 22037. When the Act is in conflict with any other code, the Act shall supersede. Districts may choose to maximize their outreach by continuing to advertise twice.

23. May an agency contract separately for like work at the same site at the same time using the under \$45,000 Force Account method?

Per section 22033 of the Public Contract Code, "It shall be unlawful to split or separate into smaller work orders or projects any project for the purpose of evading the provisions of this article requiring work to be done by contract after competitive bidding". Separating "like work" would only be permitted as long as the total of all the "like work" is less than \$45,000.

Otherwise the work would be required to be advertised and bid according to the provisions of the Act (i.e. bid informally if the total amount is less than \$175,000 and bid formally if the total amount exceeds \$175,000).

24. May an agency bid out 2 separate projects that occur at the same time and site, but are different types of work?

Yes, there is no violation if the work is being competitively bid. If the agency wants to use the negotiated or informal bidding processes, the agency must apply the appropriate limits to each of the projects. Each project must be separate in scope. Projects may not be separated by trade to avoid bidding. If the total of all jobs is greater than \$45,000; the informal or formal bid limit will apply.

25. How does an agency process change orders when the standard code conflicts with the Act?

For contracts below \$45,000, the total cost of the contract may not exceed \$45,000. For informal contracts, under the Act, the limit is \$175,000. If the agency is a school district, there may be additional limits and it is recommended the agency consult with their legal counsel for interpretation of change order limits.

26. Does an agency by opting into the Act, automatically bring

a) all departments of the agency into the Act?

When a local agency elects to become subject to the uniform construction cost accounting procedures, the entire legal entity is considered subject to the Act and no divisions or departments will be exempt.

b) all districts under control of the board into the Act?

Special Districts, which are governed by a board of supervisors or city council, are only subject if a separate election is made for each special district.

27. PCC section 22034 requires that participating agencies adopt an Informal Bidding Ordinance. What do school and special districts that cannot adopt Ordinances do to comply?

For those agencies who cannot legally adopt an Ordinance, a Board Policy / Administrative Regulation or other legally applicable action of the governing board may be substituted. Such substitute shall include the provisions of PCC section 22034 (a) through (f). If an Ordinance is adopted, it does not take effect until 30 days following its second reading. If a substitute to an Ordinance such as Board Policies / Administrative Regulations are utilized which go into effect immediately upon adoption, no 30-day waiting period is required before utilizing the procedures outlined in the Act.

Additional inquiries and questions can be directed to:

State Controller's Office
Division of Accounting and Reporting
Local Government Policy Section
3301 C Street, Suite 740
Sacramento CA, 95816

or

LocalGovPolicy@sco.ca.gov