

POTS

Purchasing Online Tracking System



“NIH’s mission is to seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce the burdens of illness and disability.”

To meet the NIH’s mission, our staff must efficiently procure supplies and services while maximizing research dollars. A collaborative team of NINDS scientists and administrators developed POTS (Purchasing Online Tracking System), a web-based requisitioning and tracking system, to replace an archaic and cumbersome paper process that was time consuming, inefficient, and riddled with administrative burdens. Our scientists are now able to request, track and receive their supplies in real-time, and administrators can better manage staff work load, staff performance, budget spending, and strategic planning. A recent integration with the NIH Business System (NBS) has resulted in a yearly savings of \$1.2 million in labor costs. Those funds can now be applied directly to research and the NIH mission. POTS, first released within NINDS, has now been adopted by 26 NIH Institutes and Centers.

POTS contains the following key features which make it distinctive from other innovations:

Communication: The system provides better communication (e.g. via email notification and real-time status updates) to end users, by allowing electronic order submission, approval, processing and receiving.

Collaboration: POTS is supported by a strong user community spanning 26 NIH institutes and Centers, where we share our best practices and experiences; it is simultaneously a grass-roots system designed by and for its users.

Transparency: POTS documents purchase details, allowing management to review orders for compliance and accountability; the procurement data can also be used for reverse auctions, volume purchases, spending trends analysis and funds control.

Accountability: Every action performed is recorded in the order history for accountability, performance metrics, and workload evaluation. It is also worth

noting that every computer and equipment purchase is tracked and accounted for in POTS, thereby aiding in our assets management.

Efficiency and Cost Saving: POTS streamlines the procurement process and allows purchasing staff to send requisitions directly into NBS without requiring double entry, thereby enhancing productivity and efficiency. Over 20,000 orders are sent each month, saving at least \$1.2 million a year in labor costs. This greater efficiency has also allowed many ICs to process more orders with less staff and to funnel their savings into research rather than administration to better support the NIH mission.

Compliance: The system has built-in business rules for mandatory sources, green purchases and Section 508 compliance checks to meet federal procurement regulations and policies. It is also a “green” system which stores complete electronic records of every NIH purchase.

In summary, POTS has eclipsed all other procurement systems and become an indispensable tool for the way in which the NIH does business. After having been proven successful in a diverse organization like NIH, imagine the benefit HHS might gain from this innovation! Please contact Dr. Yang Fann (email: fann@mail.nih.gov) for any inquiry.

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