

CALIFORNIA UNIFORM PUBLIC CONSTRUCTION COST ACCOUNTING ACT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

These FAQs have been compiled to assist agencies that are participating in the California Uniform Public Construction Cost Accounting Act (the Act), as contained in Public Contract Code (PCC) Section 22000, et seq. All references are to PCC, unless otherwise stated.

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

The Act is legislation that was enacted in 1983 to help promote “uniformity of the cost accounting standards and bidding procedures on construction work performed or contracted by public entities in the state” (Section 22001). The Act is a voluntary program available to all public entities in the State, but it applies only to those public agencies that have “opted in” to the provisions set forth by the Act using the processes outlined in the Act. The entirety of the Act is found at Sections 22000-22045.

2. What are some of the key provisions of the Act?

The Act allows for public project work in the amount of \$75,000 or less to be performed by a public agency’s force account using the public agency’s own resources, or by negotiated contract, or by purchase order (Section 22032(a)). Public projects in the amount of \$220,000 or less may use the informal or formal bidding procedures set forth in Section 22032(b), or (c) of the Act. Public projects at a cost of more than \$220,000 must use formal bidding procedures to let the contract pursuant PCC Section 22032(c), except as otherwise provided by statute.

3. What are the benefits of the program?

- Increased force account limit for public agencies;
- Simplified bidding for projects that are \$220,000 or less;
- Reduced number of formal bids based on project size; and
- Expedited contracting for projects under \$220,000.

Many participating agencies appreciate the program because it has given them more leeway in the execution of public works projects under a certain dollar amount; sped up the award process; expedited project delivery; reduced the time, effort, and expense associated with bidding projects under \$220,000; and simplified administration for those projects. Few agencies have experienced challenges with the accounting requirements and overhead provisions. Moreover, adjustments, when required, have been relatively simple; most required procedures were already in place, so there were few, if any, major changes to existing operations. The current Standard Accounting Codes Structure satisfies reporting requirements when used properly.

4. Is the Uniform Public Construction Cost Accounting Act mandatory for public agencies?

No. The Act is a voluntary program requiring a public agency to “opt in” using the process outlined in the Act.

5. How does a public agency become subject to the Act?

The governing body must elect by resolution to become subject to the Act and must file a copy of the approved resolution with the State Controller's Office (Section 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.

6. May a public agency withdraw from the Act?

Yes. An agency may withdraw from the Act by filing with the State Controller's Office an approved resolution of the agency's election to withdraw that was made during a public meeting of the agency's governing body.

7. Must a participating agency "opt in" to the Act annually?

No. Once a participating agency "opts in" to the Act, the agency remains subject to the Act until it "opts out" of the Act.

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

The Commission was created to administer the Act, per Section 22010. It consists of 14 members: 13 members appointed by the State Controller and the License "A" 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.

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

These procedures are to be used for tracking costs for work performed by an Agency's own forces on a "project" as defined by the Act (Section 22002(c)). The procedures do not apply to operations or maintenance work, or any work that meets the criteria listed in Section 22002(d).

These procedures are intended to capture and record all direct and indirect labor, materials, equipment, subcontractors, and supervision costs, as well as the appropriate overhead costs for the public agency associated with each "project" it performs with its own forces. The procedures follow industry-standard accounting methods, and in many cases are not much different from those already in place at most agencies. Sample forms are available in the CUCCAC Cost Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual at http://www.sco.ca.gov/Files-ARD-Local/CUCCAC_Manual.pdf

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

10. Are the cost accounting procedures applicable for agencies whose work forces perform only maintenance tasks as defined in the Act and that contract all of their public projects to third parties?

No. The cost accounting procedures are applicable only for agencies that perform public project work such as construction and alteration by force account or otherwise. As maintenance does not constitute a "project" under the Act, the cost accounting procedures do not apply.

- 11.** When are participating agencies required to advertise if they choose to maintain a list of qualified contractors?

At least once per calendar year, each Public Agency that has elected to become subject to the Act and intends to use the notice provisions outlined in Section 22034(a) must establish a new list or update its existing list of qualified contractors by mailing, faxing, or emailing written notice to all construction trade journals designated for that Agency under Section 22036. The notice must invite all licensed contractors to submit the name of their firms to the Agency for inclusion on the Agency's list of qualified bidders for the following twelve (12) months. Effective January 1, 2016, a participating agency can choose a specific date of their choice in which to renew its list of qualified contractors.

- 12.** May an agency that chooses to maintain a list add a contractor to the list at any time during the year?

Yes.

- 13.** What is meant by the term "qualified contractors" as used in section 22034(a)(1) of the Act?

Qualified contractors are contractors licensed by the State to perform the subject work. The Commission has determined that nothing in the Act prohibits a participating agency from using additional objective pre-qualification standards in the formation and maintenance of their Qualified Contractors Lists if they so desire.

- 14.** How can a contractor get on an agency's list of contractors?

The California Uniform Public Construction Cost Accounting Commission's webpage has a list of agencies that are participating in the California Uniform Public Construction Cost Accounting Act (CUPCCAA). Please contact each agency directly to let them know you would like to be on their list of contractors. For a list of participating agencies, please see the "Participating Agency Lists" header at the following link:

https://www.sco.ca.gov/ard_cuccac.html

More detailed instructions for contractors can be found in Section 1.04.01 of the Cost Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual

- 15.** Can a public agency disqualify or exclude certain contractors from the Qualified Contractors List required in Section 22034(a)(1)?

Agencies may disqualify contractors from Qualified Contractors Lists when the contractors fail to furnish information to meet the minimum criteria as established by the Commission.

- 16.** For agencies that do not maintain an informal bidders list, are they allowed to choose who would get notifications of projects?

No. Section 22034(a)(2) provides for notifications to construction trade journals and exchanges in lieu of sending notifications to contractors on an informal bidders list. An agency may send notices to selected contractors provided it has also met the advertisement requirements of Section 22034(a).

- 17.** What is the difference between “qualifying contractors” under the Act and “prequalification of contractors” by school districts under Section 20101?

Qualifying contractors is a process that allows contractors to register with a public agency for notification of public works opportunities. The prequalification process under Section 20101 is a more complex process that requires a standardized questionnaire and evaluation of contractors using standard scoring criteria. The prequalification process is applicable under the Local Agency Public Construction Act, and does not apply to the Uniform Public Construction Cost Accounting Act.

- 18.** Does a contractor have to be on an agency’s contractor list in order to perform projects less than \$75,000?

No, any public project less than the \$75,000 informal bidding threshold can be performed by employees of the public agency, by negotiated contract, or by purchase order. An agency’s list of contractors is only required to be alerted of projects that surpass the informal bidding threshold.

- 19.** Must a public agency a) notify contractors about public projects if the contractors are believed to not have the skills, credentials, or experience to perform the work required for the public project; and b) consider bids submitted by contractors that the public agency believes do not have the skills, credentials, or experience to perform the work?

a) Yes. If a contractor is on the Qualified Contractors List, the contractor must be notified by the agency of public projects for which he or she is licensed to perform (Section 22034(a)(1)).

b) All bids received must be considered, unless an agency makes appropriate legal findings that a contractor is not legally responsible or his or her bid is not responsive.

- 20.** Does the Act allow flexibility in cases of emergency and when repair or replacements are necessary to permit the continued conduct of a public agency’s operations or services?

Yes. For the purposes of the Public Contract Code, an “emergency” is defined at Section 1102 as “a sudden, unexpected occurrence that poses a clear and imminent danger, requiring immediate action to prevent or mitigate the loss or impairment of life, health, property, or essential public services.”

The Act sets forth in Section 22035(a) how a governing body should proceed in case of emergency repairs or replacements. This section states:

In cases of emergency when repair or replacements are necessary, the governing body may proceed at once to replace or repair any public facility without adopting plans, specifications, strain sheets, or working details, or giving notice for bids to let contracts. The work may be done by day labor under the direction of the governing body, by contractor, or by a combination of the two. Section 22050 et seq., provides the emergency contract procedures to be followed in these cases.

21. Do the alternative bidding procedures apply only to public projects as defined in Section 22002(c)?

The alternative bidding procedures apply only to work that constitutes a “public project” as defined in Section 22002(c) and has a construction cost within the limits described in Section 22032. The alternative bidding procedures are not required for the purchase of goods or materials that are not part of a “public project.”

However, as outlined in Section 22003, a participating agency may also use the alternative bidding procedures when contracting for maintenance or other work that does not fall within the definition of a “public project” if it so chooses.

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

Nothing. There are no membership fees or dues. However, the Commission does accept grants to assist it in carrying out its duties (Section 22015(c)).

23. What are the most common concerns addressed by the Act?

These are:

- Cost accounting policies and procedures;
- Informal bidding procedures; and
- Accounting procedures review.

Cost accounting requirements for the Act follow those common to the construction industry. The informal bidding on public projects up to \$220,000 is seen by agencies as an effective tool to expedite completion of small projects. While an accounting procedures review could potentially hold up a project for a minimum of 45 days pursuant to Section 22043(c)(1), these types of reviews have been rare in the Commission’s history.

24. Must an agency calculate an overhead rate to apply the accounting procedures?

No. Cities with populations of less than 75,000 must assume an overhead rate equal to 20% of the total costs of the public project, including the costs of material, equipment, and labor (Section 22017(b)(1)). Cities with a population of more than 75,000 may either calculate an actual overhead rate or assume an overhead rate of 30% of the total costs of a public project including the costs of materials, equipment, and labor (Section 22017(b)(2)).

25. When a public 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.?

No. The Act supersedes only the bidding procedures used once a public agency has opted into the Act and has notified the Controller. All other contracting requirements of the PCC remain applicable.

26. Can a public agency claim to be exempt from following all of the requirements in Public Contract Code by claiming it only has to follow the language and procedures within the Act?

No. The Act is part of the Public Contract Code; therefore, if the Act is silent on a particular matter, then the Public Contract Code applies on that matter.

27. If public 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. Recent legislative changes have expanded the Commission’s authority to enforce provisions of the Act. The Commission may review complaints filed by interested parties when evidence is provided that:

- The participating agency performed work after rejecting all bids, claiming it could do the work less expensively (Section 22042(a)).
- The work performed exceeded the force account limits (Section 22032(a)).
- The work was improperly classified as maintenance (Section 22042(c)).
- The work has been split or separated into smaller work orders or projects (Section 22033).
- The work has exceeded the limits or otherwise not met the requirements set forth (Section 22032(b) and (c)).
- A public agency did not comply with the informal bidding procedures set forth at Section 22034 (Section 22042.5).

28. Section 20112 specifically requires school districts to advertise twice for a two-week period, while Section 22037 requires advertising once, 14 days in advance of the date of opening of bids. How do participating school districts reconcile this conflict?

When the Act is in conflict with any other section in the Public Contract Code, the Act shall supersede. The Act requires advertising once, 14 days in advance of the date of opening of bids. Districts participating in the Act may choose to maximize their outreach by advertising twice.

29. May a public agency contract separately for like work at the same site at the same time using the under \$75,000 Force Account method?

No. Section 22033 states:

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 be permitted only if the total of all the “like work” is less than \$75,000. If the work is more than \$75,000, it must be advertised and bid according to the provisions of the Act (i.e., bid informally if the total amount is less than \$220,000; bid formally if the total amount exceeds \$220,000).

- 30.** May a public agency bid out two 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 competitively bid. If an agency wishes to use the negotiated or informal bidding processes, it 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 \$75,000 then the informal or formal bid limits apply.

- 31.** Can an agency separately bid out for the materials and supplies on a project to avoid contractor markup and then bid out for the installation labor or perform installation with its own forces?

An agency may separately procure the materials and supplies for a project; however, all costs (materials, supplies, labor) of a project must be included in the project cost estimate to determine whether the project falls within the force account, informal bid, or formal bid thresholds.

In addition, if installation is performed by force account, an overhead rate must be applied to all direct costs of the project and included in the cost estimate. For example, if materials/supplies cost \$50,000 to procure separately and the estimated labor cost to install is \$25,000, the project could not be performed with force account, but would fall within the informal bid threshold because the total cost estimate is \$75,000.

- 32.** Must a value be assigned to the volunteer labor when the California Conservation Corps or another volunteer organization provides labor on a public project?

No. Volunteer labor from volunteer organizations does not need to be included as a cost of a public project for bid limit purposes as long as no costs are associated with the volunteer labor.

- 33.** By opting into the Act, does a public agency automatically bring all of its component divisions or departments into the Act?

Yes. When a public 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 are exempt.

- 34.** When a public agency opts into the Act, does it automatically bring all districts under control of its governing Board into the Act?

No. Special Districts, which are governed by a board of supervisors or city council, are subject only if a separate election is made for each special district.

- 35.** PCC 22034 requires that participating agencies adopt an Informal Bidding Ordinance. What do schools and special districts that cannot adopt Ordinances do to comply?

Agencies that do not have the ability to adopt Ordinances should discuss Section 22034 compliance with their legal counsel.

- 36.** Are change orders allowed by the Act, and if so what is allowable? What if a change order goes over one of the allowed thresholds?

The Act does not address change orders. Please consult with your agency's legal counsel regarding any limitation on change orders that may apply to your agency.

- 37.** Is there any training related to the Act? If so, where can I find a list of where the training is offered?

SCO has information regarding the Act on the SCO/CUCCAC website, including the current Cost Accounting and Procedures Manual. Often, commissioners are willing to provide training, answer questions, and/or give a presentation in order to assist agencies in getting the full benefits of participating in the Act.

- 38.** The Act states that public projects of sixty thousand dollars (\$60,000) or less may be performed by the employees of a public agency by force account, by negotiated contract, or by purchase order. However, the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) states any project over \$1,000 has to pay prevailing wages. How do the Act and DIR guidance work together?

The Act and DIR are completely separate and govern different aspects of public projects. The Act focuses on bidding related to public projects and DIR deals with wages paid by contractors on public projects. However, they may relate in that if prevailing wages are not paid on a public project, that could potentially impact the total cost of a project which would require a different bidding process utilized under the Act.

Additional inquiries and questions may be directed by email to LocalGovPolicy@sco.ca.gov, or by regular mail to:

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Local Government Programs and Services Division
Local Government Policy Section
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