

EXAMINING THE CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FOR OPTIMIZING PROCUREMENT PROCESSES

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to address the challenges encountered by the Bids and Awards Committee and the stakeholders in the procurement processes of a state college in Northern Mindanao, Philippines. The study also identified the gaps in understanding and implementing the procurement rules and regulations prescribed by RA 9184 and its procurement processes to enhance efficiency, minimize delays, and ensure compliance with the prescribed legal framework. The interview was used to identify the challenges encountered by the committee. The findings of this study have proven that the lack of knowledge of RA 9184 and the lack of personnel assigned to do the clerical work were significant factors of the delays, which are greatly supported by the available rigorous literature. The results suggest that interventions such as training RA 9184 and coming up with a prototype procurement process flow, hiring personnel in the procurement office, and conducting benchmarking activities that provide an opportunity for the key persons to learn from the best procurement practices from state colleges and universities are necessary to address the challenges of the procurement processes of the college.

KEYWORDS: Procurement, Procurement Challenges, Government Procurement Policy Board, State College, Northern Mindanao.

INTRODUCTION

The Government Procurement Reform Act has prescribed the necessary rules and regulations for the modernization, standardization, and regulation of the procurement activities of the Government of the Philippines (GoP). To systematize the procurement process, avoid confusion, and ensure transparency, the Government Procurement Policy Board (GPPB) shall pursue the development and approval of generic procurement manuals, standard Bidding Documents, and forms, including those to be used for major procurements like drugs and textbooks (Updated 2016 revised IRR of RA No. 9184 as of 13 October 2022).

According to the 2016 Revised Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 9184, procurement refers to acquiring goods, consulting services, and contracting for infrastructure projects by the Procuring Entity. In case of projects involving mixed procurements, the nature of the procurement, i.e., Goods, Infrastructure Projects, or Consulting Services, shall be determined based on the primary purpose of the contract. Procurement shall also include the lease of goods and real

estate. With respect to real property, its procurement shall be governed by the provisions of R.A. 10752 and other applicable laws, rules, and regulations.

This new state college in Northern Mindanao recently transitioned from a local community college to a state college funded through the national budget. As a result of this transition, the college's procurement activities are now governed by RA No. 9184, marking a significant shift from previous procurement processes. Since its first procurement activity in October 2021, the Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) at NBSC, which consists of faculty and administrative staff, has faced several challenges in fully understanding and complying with the complex regulations of the Government Procurement Reform Act. The procurement process has experienced delays, with difficulty prioritizing unit budgets, preparing the Project Procurement Management Plan (PPMP), conducting pre-procurement activities, and performing proper bid evaluations. Since most members were new to the task, there were difficulties encountered in procuring supplies for the college, resulting in the delay of the procurement. Most members call for the need to be aptly acquainted with proceedings that have to be undertaken in the purchase of goods and services. There were concerns as to the clarity of the necessary rules and regulations for modernization, standardization, and regulation of procurement activities.

The study involves the people responsible for the procurement processes for the institution from preparation to completion of payment to suppliers. This includes not only the procurement officer but also the members of the Bids and Awards Committee, Finance Officer, Accounting Officer, Budget Officer, Supply Officer and Cashier. These people vary in the specific roles they play, each contributing to the accomplishment of the entire procurement activity. The result of this study is beneficial to the entire college since this will give the direction and process as to how to procure goods & services and infrastructure based on RA 9184 of the Philippine government effectively and efficiently. Other government agencies may also use the findings of the study since this presents a process flow that will guide government agencies in conducting procurement activities easily. Given the importance of timely procurement for the efficient delivery of services and the avoidance of unutilized budgets that are reverted to the national treasury, it is essential to evaluate the causes of these delays and inefficiencies.

This research aims to systematically explore the challenges faced by the state colleges in Northern Mindanao in procurement processes and its solutions, identify gaps in understanding and implementation, and propose practical strategies to streamline and improve the institution's procurement activities. The researchers had a consultative discussion with all the people responsible for the entire procurement activity. A series of interactive conversations was conducted to vividly determine the possible causes of the delay in the procurement processes. Concerns involving prioritization of unit budget; preparation of Project Procurement Management Plan; conduct of pre-procurement process, pre-bid conferences, bid opening, bid evaluation, post qualification; up to release of recommendation for Notice of Award and Notice to Proceed were all reviewed. All these were taken into consideration as the researchers planned for ways to better improve the processes. Hence, the researchers look into the prevailing reasons for the institution's procurement activity and propose initiatives to enhance the processes of purchasing goods and services since in the government, if the budget intended for the year is not utilized, it will be reverted to the treasury.

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research design was utilized in the study to get a profound understanding of the research question and get in-depth details of the problem based on the primary data from the respondents. It involves narrative, non-numerical data, which may include text, photos, videos, interviews, and observations. Qualitative approaches can provide deep and nuanced insight into a topic, recurring themes and ideas. Common analyses include content analysis, thematic analysis, and discourse analysis (Heffernan, 2025). The data will be taken from interviews conducted by the researchers. A total of 50 respondents were included in the study, comprising the non-teaching personnel from the different offices and the faculty members of the Northern Bukidnon State College for the Academic Year 2024-2025. Since the study focused on reviewing and revising an existing tool, the researchers sought permission from the Office of the Vice-President for Administration and Finance and the College President. A focus group discussion with 4 people in a group was conducted by the researchers. Each group took five (30) to ten (45) minutes to answer the interview. It was also conducted face-to-face and held in the designated venue identified by each participating end user. The responses were into themes and the basis for interpretation and analysis of data.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This study covered the respondents' profiles of 50 respondents, the teaching personnel and the non-teaching personnel from the different departments and offices, and the responses to the different questions presented during the focus group discussion.

On respondents' profile

The respondents' profile covered the gender and the department. The majority of the respondents are female, 76%, and males, 24%. This implies that there are more female employees who want to join and be hired by the college compared to male employees. Further, the majority of the respondents come from non-teaching personnel with 80% and the teaching personnel with 20%. This implies that the non-teaching personnel are once directly involved in the processing of documents for any request for procurement of needs in the office. The faculty members will just make the request of the needs, and the staff in the office will be doing the preparation of documents like Project Procurement Management Plan (PPMP), Purchase Request (PR), and other documents needed prior to any procurement activities.

On the challenges faced by the Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) and other stakeholders in NBSC during the procurement process.

Theme 1: Level of awareness in the procurement process

Based on the focus group discussion, the majority of the respondents, comprising 42% shared that, based on their experience, there is a delay in the procurement process because the bids and awards committee members and procurement personnel have limited knowledge of the procurement process of the Philippine government. Most end-users have no formal orientation on the procurement processes. This is because the college has just transitioned into a state college and prior to its conversion, the BAC members were under the local government unit where the procurement activity was done in the General Services Unit of the municipality. This claim was supported by Navarro and Tanghal (2017), who stated that one of the reasons for the delay of the procurement process is

inadequate training of the procurement personnel. Riswandi and Yudoko (2023) added that the delay affects the processes of other departments and customer satisfaction.

Theme 2: Multiple roles of the members of the Bids and Awards Committee in the college

As mentioned in the focus group discussion, 26% of the respondents shared that only five members of the Bids and Awards Committee and one secretariat attended to the request while at the same time processing all the documents such as the annual procurement plan, project procurement management plan, purchase, BAC resolutions, abstract of quotations, notice of awards, notice to proceed and other procurement document needed for the project. Besides, the bids and awards committee member designation is just an add-on to the organic functions of the members, thus, the BAC members had difficulty in attending to all the requests of the end users since they have to attend also to their organic functions in the institution. This statement is supported by the research by Navarro and Tanghal (2017), as cited by Nisnisan and Salapa (2024), who stated that Six (6) % responded that a lack of manpower resulted in a delay in the procurement process. It is difficult to perform the tasks of different functions at the same time, considering the urgency of the tasks and the need to deal with equal importance at a given period of time

Theme 3. Unavailability of clear standard procurement procedures

As stated in the focus group discussion, 32% of the respondents responded that there are no standard procurement procedures in place, which contributed to the delay in the procurement process. The process is based on RA 9184, and there is no concrete procurement process flow crafted as the basis for the procurement activity. There were no clear and specific assigned personnel who would be doing the task since those who were available would be the ones to prepare the documents. This happened because the BAC members were also very busy performing their organic tasks so those who were available were the ones preparing for the procurement documents. As shared during the discussion, the bids and awards committee members presented the initial process flow chart; however, it was not followed due to a lack of personnel to perform the tasks. These statements were supported by the mandate of Government Procurement Policy Board that to systematize the procurement process, avoid confusion, and ensure transparency, the Government Procurement Policy Board (GPPB) shall pursue the development and approval of generic procurement manuals, standard Bidding Documents, and forms, including those to be used for major procurements like drugs and textbooks (Updated 2016 revised IRR of RA No. 9184 as of 13 October 2022).

On gaps in understanding and implementing the procurement rules and regulations prescribed by RA No. 9184

Procurement plays a vital role in delivering all the Philippine government's priorities in all government agencies. The passage in January 2003 of the Government Procurement Reform Act (GPRA) or Republic Act No. 9184 (RA 9184) rationalized and harmonized the Philippine procurement system with international standards and best practices. The RA 9184 advocated the principles of transparency, competitiveness, and accountability. It also mandates the application of streamlined procurement processes and the monitoring of government procurement activities by the public (Updated 2016 revised IRR of RA No. 9184 as of 13 October 2022). In the focus group discussion, it emphasized the gaps in adherence to RA9184. The law mandated that government institutions apply the principles of transparency, competitiveness, and accountability. However, it is difficult to implement if there are insufficient personnel who will perform the specific tasks in the procurement

office. The personnel who are assigned to post the documents in the PhilGEPS, canvassers who will serve the request for quotations, and personnel who will do the encoding of documents like abstracts of quotations, BAC resolutions, and other documents. The number of days shall be followed for public bidding and the correct procedure for procuring the small value procurement. If there is an error in the process, this results in a delay in the procurement, considering the number of days to follow. This claim was supported by the study of Gurgun et al (2024), who stated that the challenge is usually conducive to errors in the procurement procedure, including mistakes made in orders and mistakes made in delivery, resulting in delays in the procurement.

Another gap on RA 9184 is the ability to implement the law since the bids and awards committee members, and the procurement staff have limited knowledge about RA 9184. There is a significant deficit in training programs aimed at equipping procurement professionals with the necessary skills to procure goods & services, and infrastructure projects (Celestin & Sujatha, 2024). The procurement process cannot proceed fast since the BAC members are not certain if the procedure is not violative to the law. With this, the Government Procurement Policy Board - Technical Support Office (GPPB-TSO) continues to demonstrate its commitment to the professionalization of government procurement practitioners through specialized training and capacity-building programs. Additionally, lack of training and seminars on RA 9184 contributed to the slow procurement process (Dagohoy, et al., 2023)

Interventions to address the challenges in the procurement process.

Based on the focus group discussion, the respondents have identified interventions to improve the procurement processes of a state college in Northern Mindanao. If the budget is not fully utilized, it will be returned to the national treasury, and it will definitely affect the college's next budget. It was mentioned that in order to fast-track the procurement process, there is a need to strengthen the procurement office that is responsible for the procurement of goods and services. The office is tasked with the preparation of the documents and other related procurement tasks. When the office is created, qualified personnel need to be hired to work on the preparation of all needed procurement documents. Hiring of additional personnel allows for a more efficient and faster conduct of transactions since there is now an absolute person to man the operation of the specific office. The tasks will also be expedited as more people are in place to work on the preparation and processing of documents and other related things to be done. The bids and awards committee members, together with the technical working group and the procurement office personnel shall conduct a series of benchmarking activities to state universities and colleges with best procurement practices. The conduct of benchmarking activities provides an opportunity for the key persons to learn from the best procurement practices of the other existing and well-established state colleges and universities. Not only learning from them, but it can also build networks that will help manage concerns and queries whenever they arise.

As part of the intervention, as mentioned during the discussion, five members of the bids and awards committee were sent to an intensive three-level public procurement specialist training by the Government Procurement Policy Board (GPPB) at the University of the Philippines – Los Baños. Sending members of the committee helps in strengthening the procedures and conduct of different procurement activities. Besides, the end users of the college, including the directors and head of offices, were also able to undergo the intensive level I public procurement specialist training organized by the latter. As stated, some BAC members are not oriented to procurement, and thus, participation

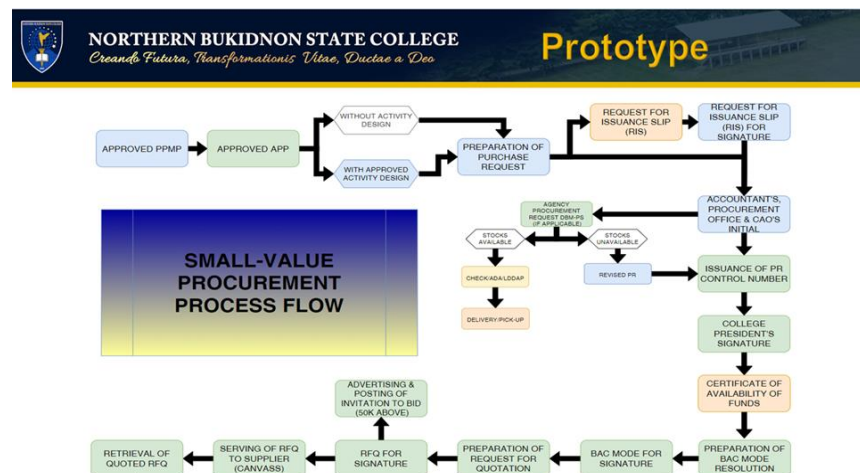
in intensive training allows them to be fully equipped with the implementing rules and guidelines for the procurement of goods, supplies, materials, infrastructures, consulting services, and others.

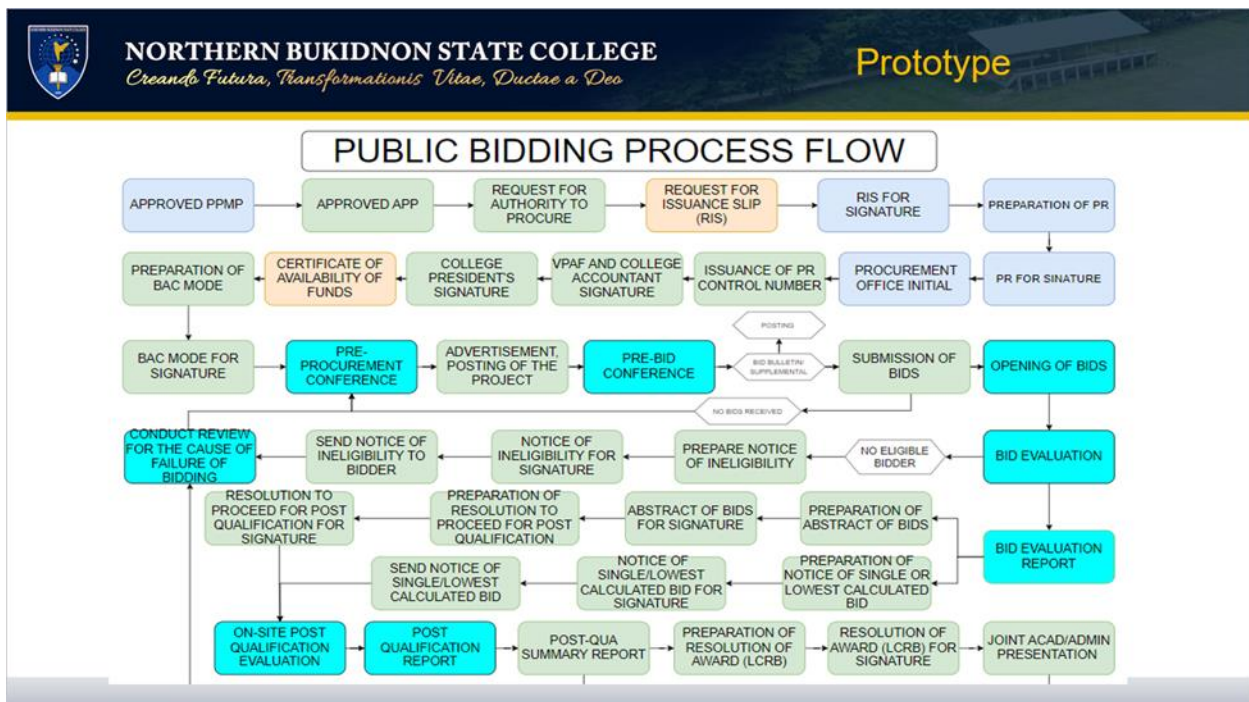
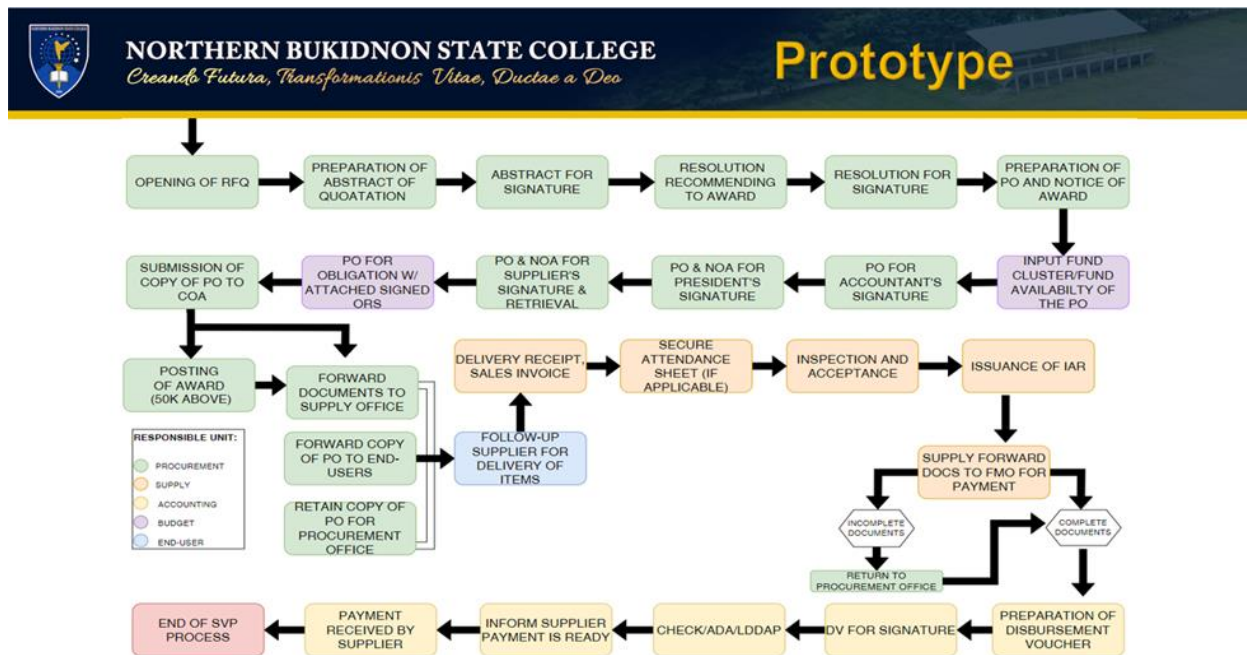
Another invention is to conduct an orientation write-shop to both academic and administrative heads on the crafting of a project procurement management plan per unit. As mentioned in the empathize stage, some unit heads are not so familiar with the preparation and creation of the project procurement management plan of their individual office, thus, the conduct of orientation-workshop capacitates them in competing for the tasks with correctness and accuracy. The clarity of the unit's PPMP contributes to the clarity of the conduct of procurement of goods and supplies. Further, the creation of a citizen's charter on the different services of the units, including the varied procurement procedures. Citizen's Charter allows for a more efficient and effective operation of each unit as it provides information on the unit's frontline services, step-by-step procedures, processing time, and fees for requesting services or other transactions. This serves as a guide to all activities involving procurement.

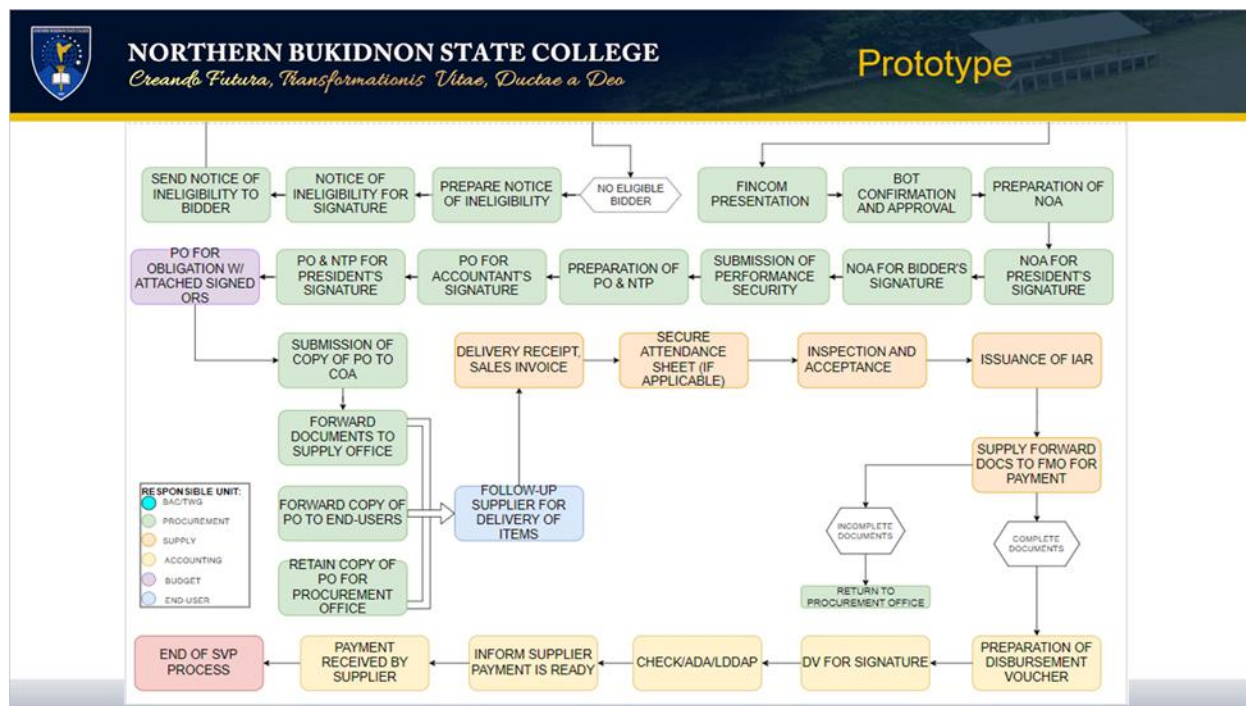
Procurement processes at NBSC be improved to enhance efficiency, minimize delays, and ensure compliance with the prescribed legal framework

To address the slow procurement, as part of the intervention as stipulated during the focus group discussion, the members of the bids and awards committee thought of proposing this flow chart for the institution's procurement processes. This proposal aims to simplify and clarify the flow of procurement activity, indicating the unit or office responsible for a specific task. This also helps the different academic and administrative units and personnel to be fully guided on what needs to be prepared, what needs to be accomplished, and what needs to be done for the procurement to be successful (.Nisnisan, C. A., & Salapa, A. C. (2024).

PROTOTYPE







This proposal aims to simplify and clarify the flow of procurement activity, indicating the unit or office responsible for a specific task. This also helps the different academic and administrative units and personnel to be fully guided on what needs to be prepared, what needs to be accomplished, and what needs to be done for the procurement to be successful. Further, the creation of a tracking system that monitors procurement/project/activity status also helps to expedite the procurement process of the college. The document tracking system formulated by the information management office headed by its director, is created to monitor the status of the procurement document. It presents the pacing of documents in offices involved, including the specific period. With this, anybody can monitor the flow of the processes as to the delay and the status of running papers.

CONCLUSION

The challenges of the slow procurement of a state college in Northern Mindanao focus on many factors as revealed during the focus group discussion. These factors include minimal awareness of RA 9184, lack of personnel to handle the preparation of procurement documents and process, multiple designations of personnel to handle the process, and no standard procurement procedures in place. There are solutions identified to combat the challenges. These are proper training of RA 9184 to make certain that no violations will be committed in the procurement, provide appropriate personnel in the procurement office to handle the tasks in the office, and relieve the multiple add-ons of the bids and awards committee members to have time for procurement activities. Another is to come up with the standard process flow of procurement as the basis for the procurement activities. Monitor the success or failure of the process in every unit involved and come up with possible alternatives or solutions to combat the identified problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings the following recommendations are presented:

6. Implement fully the prototype flow process chart to ensure its effective and efficient procurement process.
7. Continue updating with the new procurement laws, especially RA 12009, which supersede RA 9184, through formal training, capacity building, and benchmarking activities
8. Strengthen the procurement process to ensure that goods and services and infrastructure projects are fully procured to meet the college's 100% budget utilization rate.
9. Hire professionals with the necessary skills to operate the procurement office and perform the tasks assigned to them.

Abbreviations:

PPMP – Project Procurement Management Plan
APP – Annual procurement Plan
PR – Purchase Request
PO – Purchase order

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