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Centrally Managed Administrative Furniture Program assists Army Transformation

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The way Army installations buy administrative furniture for their buildings is changing and the U.S. Army Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville, is the central manager for that change.

The Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management (OACSIM) and Installation Management Command (IMCOM) instituted the Centrally Managed Administrative Furniture program in Fiscal Year 2006 and designated Huntsville Center as the program management support, procurement and delivery and agent for this important task.

“IMCOM was very impressed with the success of Huntsville Center’s management of the Unaccompanied Personnel Housing furniture program,” said Bill Sugg, chief of the Engineer Branch, Public Works Division at Headquarters IMCOM. “Huntsville’s record of customer service, on-time delivery, cost savings through competitive procurement and centralized tracking and management convinced us that Huntsville Center should manage the administrative furniture program, too. We anticipate additional synergies and saving through combining both programs.”

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The relationship between the team members requires close coordination. OACSIM is responsible for policy and programming of funding. IMCOM receives Army funding, sets priorities and disperses funding to Huntsville Center. Huntsville Center is responsible for program and procurement support, including data collection and historical analysis, overseeing the collection of furniture requirements, procurement management, and execution and delivery of furnishings.

While the focus of the OACSIM, IMCOM and Corps of Engineers initiative is administrative furniture, the mission is still about supporting Army personnel.

“Ensuring Army Soldiers and Civilians have quality furniture that arrives on-time is critical to the success of Army Transformation,” said Alicia Allen, Huntsville Center’s Furniture Program Manager. “In addition to ensuring quality, centralizing administrative furniture procurement also standardizes furniture to ensure the same quality of life is maintained at all Army installations. Cost is also an important factor in that we will standardize the design to ensure quality, but, whenever practical, furniture will be procured through competition to get the best prices available for that level of quality.”

Education is important to the success of the program, according to Scott Wick, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proponent for furniture at Headquarters.

“This is a big change, and personnel may not understand how centralized management works and why it was necessary to implement this program,” Wick said.

Instead of funding each installation separately for the procurement of administrative furnishings, IMCOM now sends funding to Huntsville Center and the Center will use customer requirements to make the procurement.

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“We make sure they get what they need and get the best value,” said Stephen Evans, Huntsville Center project manager for administrative furniture. “Our role is to help the installation in every way we can.”

According to Evans, the challenge for Army personnel is shifting from proprietary to performance-based thinking and acquisition. Like standardization, performance-based thinking is another Army initiative that installations and personnel will enjoy once they start seeing the benefits.

“It has only been 19 months since Centrally Managed Administrative Furniture was first conceived by the OACSIM,” Evans said. “We received the final go ahead from Corps Headquarters in late January, so we still have a lot of work to do to make this system fully operational, but we are making good progress.”

The Centrally Managed Administrative Furniture Program is being modeled after the success of the Unaccompanied Personnel Barracks Furniture Program, which is also managed by Huntsville Center for OASCIM and IMCOM. The UPH Furniture Program is a partnership with OACSIM, IMCOM, Garrisons (or Installations), Corps Districts and the General Services Administration (GSA) vendor community. The UPH Furniture Program regularly produces on time deliveries at least 98 percent of the time, realizes significant programmatic savings, and has increased the expected life of the UPH furnishings by as much as 50 percent, according to Allen.

“We’ve had 12 years to develop the barracks furniture program, but we have a much shorter time frame to get the Administrative Furniture program running smoothly,” she said.

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According to Allen and Evans, establishing standard procurement methods is the first step. Eventually, standardized designs for standardized facilities are envisioned.

“Standardized designs will meet the functional demands of the customer,” Allen said, “and must complement the facility designs.”

The program must also use the most efficient procurement process, which can best be done by competition, usually through the GSA schedules whenever practical, Evans said. To the maximum extent possible, the use of Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPAs) will be used to provide the furniture.

“The competition will be done up front,” Allen said.

Allen said the interior design function remains a critical part of the furnishings process.

“Even Centers of Standardization facilities may require design changes, although they may not be drastic modifications,” Allen said.

Although centrally funded furniture funds will improve the ability to provide furniture when needed, the amount of funding will still be limited. So IMCOM is ensuring that furniture procurement is being made the right way and prioritized correctly, Allen said.

“We are also developing a strategy to ensure small business goals are met,” Allen said. “Whether this is through the vendor, rather than the manufacturer, has yet to be finalized. But we know we can fulfill many of our small business goals through GSA procurements, as we have done with our UPH Barracks Furniture program.”

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The Administrative Furniture program had its first challenge at the end of fiscal year 2006. Funding was received in August 2006. Within six weeks, 79 furniture designs were completed, and 127 building procurements were made.

“This is a great example of a team effort and getting the job done,” Allen said. “A Product Delivery Team (PDT) was developed that consisted of OACSIM and IMCOM Centrally Managed Administrative Furniture personnel, Huntsville Center’s administrative furniture team, installation customers and Corps District representatives who all worked together with many long hours to ensure the furniture would be on its way. To make it happen, and to assess the best features of a number of types of methods, the PDT utilized a variety of contracting methods. The Corps’ Baltimore District also played significant role – they took the lead in awarding the bulk of the contracts.”

The experience and data gained from this initial design and procurement effort is being used to develop the final program process and structure.

“We plan that by centrally managing the administrative furniture program, we can assist OACSIM and IMCOM by developing a data base detailing the type and amount of furniture purchased,” Evans said. “By having all the administrative furniture data in one location, it will be much easier to program and prioritize the replacement of furniture. Prioritizing procurements will become easier as we implement the program.”

Allen and Evans are also optimistic that customers will be pleased with the quality and service resulting from central management.

“The design standards and procurement methods are a good guarantee that the furniture will have its promised life span, or beyond,” Allen said.

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Evans summarized the administrative furniture mission as “‘getting the best value for the customer,’ and best value means a standard for quality, competition for cost and timely delivery and service.”

“The Corps stresses the four ‘Rs’ (Relevant, Ready, Responsive, and Reliable), and Lt. Gen. (Carl A.) Strock (Chief of Engineers) has emphasized how these four elements are connected,” Evans said. “Our joint OACSIM, IMCOM and Corps of Engineers program incorporates the four Rs – we are doing the right thing in the right way, and when we say we can do something, we do it!”