

DNSSAB / NDHC Purchasing Policy #CORP-01

PURCHASING POLICY AMENDMENT HISTORY

Date	Details	Board Resolution
April 16, 2013	Purchasing Policy FIN/ADM 08 replaced Purchasing Policy FIN/ADM 01	2013-73
February 20, 2018	Purchasing Policy #CORP-01 to replace Purchasing Policy FIN/ADM 08	2018-19
December 19, 2018	Updated Purchasing Policy #CORP-01 (to include NDHC)	2018-116
February 24, 2021	Updates to Purchasing Policy	2021-02

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AUTHORITY

Procedural By-law 2020-01

INTENT OF POLICY

It is the policy of the DNSSAB and NDHC to:

1. Purchase Goods, Services and Construction in an efficient and cost effective manner;
2. Consider the Total Acquisition Cost as opposed to only the lowest invoice price;
3. Eliminate redundant and low value added activities throughout the procurement cycle;
4. Reduce risk and potential conflicts internally and externally;
5. Maximize openness, accountability and transparency in all purchasing decisions;
6. Make procurement decisions defensible when facing public criticism, trade or legal challenges;
7. Establish inclusive, consistent processes related to selecting and working with suppliers that will enhance mutual trust and working relationships;
8. To promote and maintain the integrity of the procurement process and the controls necessary for a public institution and the associated Supply Chain Guidelines hereto attached as Appendix 2. While not applicable to the DNSSAB or NDHC*, this policy shall consider the Broader Public Sector Procurement Directive issued by the Management Board of Cabinet July 2011 as applicable. (**The Broader Public Sector Accountability Act, 2010 and Ontario Regulation 219/11 made under the Act exclude some entities from the definition of publicly funded organizations. This includes district social services administration boards established under the District Social Services Administration Boards Act.*)
9. Work to continuously improve procurement procedures.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1) DNSSAB and NDHC Board responsibilities:
 - a) Approve corporate policies and a Supply Chain Code of Ethics governing procurement (see Attachment 1).
 - b) Approve governance policies related to delegated authority to ensure the efficient operation of the organization.
 - c) All acquisitions or disposal of Real Property shall be presented to the Board for consideration and supported by a formal Board resolution, *regardless of delegated approval authority limits.*
 - d) Board approval shall be required where:
 - i) A Contract's Total Acquisition Cost is greater than **both** CAO/CEO's Approval Authority **and** the Board approved Budget;
 - ii) a Contract amendment would cause that Contract to exceed **both** the CAO/CEO's Approval Authority **and** the Board approved Budget;
 - iii) The Total Acquisition Cost of a Direct Negotiation Good, Service or Construction exceeds the CAO/CEO's Approval Authority.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Delegation of Authority and Procurement Method

The Approval Authority and Procurement Method hereto attached as Schedule A outlines both the delegated authorities that may be authorized to commit the DNSSAB and NDHC to any procurement and the method of procurement that must be utilized at each approval limit.

Prior to commencement, any procurement of Goods, Services or Construction must be approved in accordance with Schedule A.

Direct Negotiation

The Direct Negotiation hereto attached as Schedule B outlines the circumstances under which Direct Negotiation shall be authorized. Direct Negotiation shall include single or sole sourcing options. For all instances where Direct Negotiation is pursued, a Direct Negotiation form must be completed by the Requisitioning Department, approved at the CAO/CEO level, and a copy kept on file by the Contract & Purchasing Specialist.

Excluded Goods and Services

Items that are exempt from the requirements of the Purchasing Policy because they are recurring or non-competitive expenditures are listed in Schedule C – Excluded Goods and Services.

Procurement in Emergencies

If an Emergency exists requiring the immediate procurement of Goods, Services or Construction, the CAO/CEO or a Director may requisition the required Goods, Services or Construction by the most expedient and economical means available, notwithstanding any other provision of this policy.

For all Emergency purchases, an information report outlining the circumstances of the procurement must be submitted by the requisitioning Department Director to the Board at its next scheduled meeting.

Note: Failure to plan and allow sufficient time for a competitive procurement process does not constitute an emergency. However, if the Ministry directs funding to DNSSAB to be expended within a timeline that prohibits the use of a Public Procurement Method, then an Emergency situation shall apply and the above process shall be followed.

Co-operative Purchasing

The DNSSAB and NDHC shall participate with other government agencies or public authorities in co-operative purchasing where it is in the best interest of the DNSSAB

and/or NDHC to do so. The decision to participate in co-operative purchasing agreements will be made by the appropriate Approval Authority as established in Schedule A.

Transfer Payments

In some instances, the Ministry provides funding through Transfer Payments which must be directed to a particular group or under prescribed circumstances. Some examples include:

- Funding received for Child Care Providers;
- Funding received to retrofit apartment complexes;
- Ontario Works client benefits

Because the funding is prescribed by the Ministry's regulations, it will not be possible to pursue a Public Procurement Process.

Contractual Agreement and Administration

All Goods, Services and calls for Construction being purchased through a Public Procurement Process shall be approved by the CAO/CEO or their Designate prior to being released publicly, and prior to Bid Award.

DNSSAB Contracts shall be reviewed by the Contract & Purchasing Specialist prior to being signed by the CAO or their Designate. NDHC contracts shall be reviewed by the Corporate Assets Supervisor prior to being signed by the CEO or their Designate.

Prior to Contract signing, Directors are required to initial every page of their respective Contracts. Directors are responsible for determining that:

1. The requirements identified within this Policy have been met;
2. The document is routed appropriately for review;
3. The document is consistent with the current DNSSAB/NDHC strategic plan, business plan, Budget, collective agreement, employment contracts, and mandated outcomes.

All Contracts, including Transfer Payment Agreements, must be signed by the CAO/CEO or their Designate. The CAO/CEO shall have the authority to sign Transfer Payment Agreements on behalf of the DNSSAB/NDHC in accordance with Ministry guidelines even if such Transfer Payment Agreements exceed the CAO/CEO's Approval Authority.

Prior to the provision of Goods, Services or Construction and for the entire duration of a Contract, the Authorized Person shall ensure that the Supplier has provided the required evidence of insurance, and any required security and/or a Certificate of Clearance from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board ("WSIB") as the Contract requires.

Unsolicited Quotations or Proposals

All unsolicited quotations or proposals submitted to the DNSSAB shall be addressed by the Unsolicited Quotations and Proposals Policy, FIN/ADM 07.

Surplus and Obsolete Goods

All surplus and obsolete goods shall be addressed by the Disposal of Assets Policy CORP-02.

PROHIBITIONS

The following shall be considered **prohibited actions** under the Purchasing Policy:

1. Under no circumstances will DNSSAB or NDHC acquire Goods, Services or Construction from any DNSSAB or NDHC Board member, or Employees at or above the level of Supervisor.
2. No procurement of Goods and Services or any arrangements with respect to the procurement shall be made where quantity or delivery is divided or in any other manner arranged so that the price or value of Goods and Services to be acquired or the individual estimated value of Goods to be disposed is artificially reduced. Without limiting the foregoing, where Goods and Services of the same kind or type are required in connection with one project, all of those Goods and Services shall be included in determining the price or value for the purposes of this policy.
3. No preferences shall be shown or taken into account in acquiring Goods, Services or Construction on behalf of the DNSSAB or NDHC.
 - a. *Exception:* DNSSAB and NDHC recognize that in order to best serve its citizens within its unique geographic district, its procurement practices may occasionally warrant circumstances under which minor preferences may be given. A preference may be geographical, cultural, linguistic, social, etc. in nature. Those circumstances must be for the sole purpose of best meeting the interests of our citizens (not the interests of DNSSAB and/or NDHC). Additionally,
 - i. The preference and justification must be clearly stated in the competitive procurement process documents (e.g. Request for Quotation, Request for Proposal, etc.); and
 - ii. The weight assigned to a preference must be included in the evaluation section; and
 - iii. The weight assigned to the preference must not exceed 15% of the total evaluation score; and
 - iv. Preferences shall not be considered post-evaluation.

4. Employees shall abide by the DNSSAB Conduct and Behaviour Policy and Employees and Board members shall not engage in any activity deemed to be a Conflict of Interest, especially throughout the procurement process.

DISCIPLINE

Breaches of this policy by employees may be subject to the disciplinary action in accordance with principles and practices of the DNSSAB/NDHC.

SCHEDULES & APPENDICES

1. Schedule A - Approval Authority and Procurement Method
2. Schedule B - Direct Negotiation
3. Schedule C – Excluded Goods and Services
4. Appendix 1 - Definitions
5. Appendix 2 – Supply Chain Code of Ethics

SCHEDULE A: APPROVAL AUTHORITY AND PROCUREMENT METHOD

INTENT OF SCHEDULE

To establish the approval authorities, monetary limits and their corresponding required procurement methods for DNSSAB and NDHC.

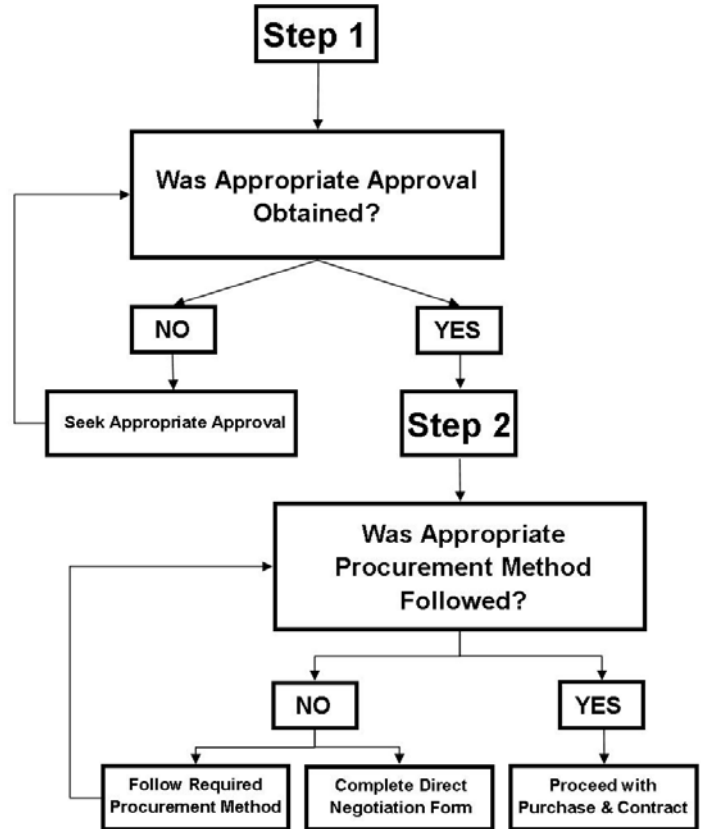
Process

The Purchasing Policy requires a two-step process before any purchases can be made.

Step 1 is the Approval Authority which indicates who the purchasing authority is, based on a total procurement amount (see Table 1, a & b).

After the appropriate authority level has been sought, Step 2 is the Procurement Method. This indicates the type of procurement method required at the total procurement amount (see Table 2).

Both Step 1 and Step 2 must be completed before a purchase can be made. A decision tree is included on the right to guide decision making for staff. Any questions about the appropriate procurement process to follow should be directed to the Contract & Purchasing Specialist.



APPROVAL AUTHORITY SCHEDULE

Table 1 a) Approval Limits (All Departments except Housing Operations)

Approval Authority Schedule Purchase of Goods, Services, Construction and Transfer Payments	
Delegated Purchasing Authority Level	Approval Authority
Supervisors	\$2,000
Managers	\$25,000
Directors	\$75,000
Chief Administrative Officer	\$300,000
Board	> \$300,000

Table 1 b) Housing Operations-Specific Approval Limits

Approval Authority Schedule for Housing Operations Purchase of Goods, Services, Construction and Transfer Payments	
Delegated Purchasing Authority Level	Approval Authority
Maintenance Officer/Capital Works Officer	\$2,500
Supervisors	\$10,000
Managers	\$25,000
Directors	\$75,000
Chief Executive Officer	\$300,000
NDHC Board	> \$300,000

METHOD OF PROCUREMENT

Table 2 Method of Procurement

Method of Procurement Purchase of Goods, Services and Construction	
Total Acquisition Cost	Procurement Method
\$0 - \$4,999	Purchase may be carried out by the requisitioning department in accordance with a commitment to obtaining best value for the organization corporate Purchasing Card.
\$5,000-\$24,999	Minimum of one quote. Competitive quotes are at the discretion of the requisitioning Department but are not required. The contract award will be made to the lowest compliant quotation when multiple quotes are requested.
\$25,000-\$99,999	Requisitioning Department shall solicit a minimum of three written quotes.
> \$100,000	Contract & Purchasing Specialist, in consultation with the requisitioning Department shall coordinate an open Request for Proposal or Request for Tender. Public advertising required.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Temporary Assignment of Delegated Authority

An Employee can temporarily assign their delegated authority level to another Employee within the organization, subject to the CAO/CEO approval. Such assignments shall be made with the understanding that when Approval Authority is temporarily assigned, the Employee to whom the purchase is delegated bears responsibility for that purchase.

Multi-Year Commitments

All Goods, Services, Construction or Transfer Payments which shall be for a duration of greater than one (1) year shall be approved at the threshold specified above for the entire cost over the duration of the Goods, Services, Construction or Transfer Payments. For example, a three (3) year purchase at \$40,000/year would need to be approved at the \$120,000 approval level.

SCHEDULE B: DIRECT NEGOTIATION

INTENT OF SCHEDULE

To establish the circumstances under which direct negotiation (sole sourcing or single sourcing) shall be authorized.

STANDARDS OF APPLICATION

A Direct Negotiation procurement process shall only be used in particular circumstances. In general, the procurement methods outlined in the Purchasing Policy and Schedule A – Approval Authority and Procurement Method shall be the primary method of purchasing Goods, Services and Construction.

Direct Negotiation may be used if one or more of the following conditions apply.

1. Single Sourcing

- a. An attempt to purchase the required Goods and Services has been made in good faith using a method other than Direct Negotiation (i.e. Request for Proposal, Request for Tender, etc.) which has failed to identify a successful supplier and it is not reasonable or desirable that a further attempt to purchase the Goods or Services be made using a method other than Direct Negotiation.
- b. The Goods and Services are required as a result of an Emergency, which would not reasonably permit the use of a method other than Direct Negotiation.
- c. The required Goods and Services are to be supplied by a particular vendor or supplier having special knowledge, skills, expertise or experience, which others do not have.
- d. The standardization or compatibility of a purchase with existing equipment, technology, product standards, facilities or service is a paramount consideration.
- e. Where Goods or Services regarding matters of a confidential or privileged nature are to be purchased and the disclosure of those matters through a competitive procurement process could reasonably be expected to compromise DNSSAB and/or NDHC confidentiality, cause economic disruption or otherwise be contrary to the public interest.
- f. Where a Contract is to be awarded under a cooperation agreement that is financed, in whole or in part, by an international cooperation organization,

only to the extent that the agreement between the entity and the organization includes rules for awarding Contracts that differ from the obligations set out in the Purchasing Policy.

- g. Where construction materials are to be purchased and it can be demonstrated that transportation costs or technical considerations impose geographic limits on the available supply base, specifically in the case of sand, stone, gravel, asphalt, compound and pre-mixed concrete for use in the construction or repair of roads.
- h. Where compliance with the competitive procurement provisions set out in the Purchasing Policy would interfere with the DNSSAB's and/or the NDHC's ability to maintain security or order or to protect human, animal or plant life or health.

2. Sole Sourcing

- a. The required Goods and Services are reasonably available from only one source by reason of one or more of the following:
 - i. Scarcity of supply in the market;
 - ii. A statutory or market based monopoly;
 - iii. Existence of exclusive rights held by any supplier (patent, copyright, license);
 - iv. The need for compatibility with Goods and Services previously acquired and there are no reasonable alternatives, substitutes or accommodations;
 - v. A need to avoid violating warranties and guarantees where service is required.
- b. The required Goods and Services will be additional to similar Goods and Services being supplied under an existing contract.
- c. Where there is an absence of competition for technical reasons and the Goods or Services can be supplied only by a particular supplier and no alternative or substitute exists.
- d. For the purchase of Goods on a commodity market.
- e. For work to be performed on or about a leased building or portions thereof that may be performed only by the lessor.
- f. For work to be performed on property by a contractor according to provisions of a warranty or guarantee held in respect of the property or the original work.
- g. For a contract to be awarded to the winner of a design contest.
- h. For the procurement of a prototype of a first Good or Service to be developed in the course of and for a particular contract for research,

experiment, study or original development, but not for any subsequent purchases.

- i. For the purchase of Goods under exceptionally advantageous circumstances such as bankruptcy or receivership but not for routine purchases.
- j. For the procurement of original works of art.
- k. For the procurement of subscriptions to newspapers, magazines or other periodicals
- l. For the procurement of real property.

In such instances where Single or Sole Sourcing is pursued, a Direct Negotiation Form is to be completed by the requisitioning Department outlining the reasons for pursuing Direct Negotiation. The onus shall be on the requisitioning Department to substantiate their reasoning in compliance with the allowable Direct Negotiation circumstances as outlined in Schedule B – Direct Negotiation.

Any Direct Negotiation Form must be signed by the Authorized Person, and the CAO. For Direct Negotiation items at a total dollar value greater than the CAO's Approval Authority, Board approval shall be required in the form of a resolution and the Board Chair must sign the Direct Negotiation Form.

The fully executed Direct Negotiation Form shall be kept on file by the Contract & Purchasing Specialist and shall accompany the Contract where possible. Any time Direct Negotiation is pursued, the requisitioning Department must negotiate to obtain the best value in the circumstances for NDHC and the DNSSAB.

SCHEDULE C: EXCLUDED GOODS AND SERVICES

INTENT OF SCHEDULE

To list items that are exempt from the full requirements of the Purchasing Policy because they are recurring or non-competitive expenditures.

STANDARDS OF APPLICATION

The following purchases of Goods and Services are excluded from the Procurement Method portion of the Purchasing Policy. Please note that the appropriate Approval Authority must still be sought before a purchase can be made.

1. Training and Education including:
 - a. Conferences, conventions, workshops, courses and seminars;
 - b. Newspaper or magazine subscriptions, periodicals;
 - c. Memberships, association fees.
2. Refundable Employee expenses including:
 - a. Meal allowance
 - b. Travel expenses & accommodations
3. Employer's general expenses including:
 - a. Payroll deduction remittances
 - b. Medical documentation/forms
 - c. Insurance premiums
 - d. Tax remittances
 - e. Refunds and overpayments
4. Licenses, certificates and other approvals required.
5. Ongoing costs, including maintenance, for existing computer hardware and software.
6. Professional and Special Services including:
 - a. Special tax, accounting and audit services, and advice from Board approved auditor
 - b. Insurance and insurance brokers
 - c. Legal services on individual files
 - d. Legal services on individual files where the Board contracted solicitor is unavailable, in a conflict of interest situation or does not possess the expertise required
 - e. Medical, clinical and laboratory services
 - f. Confidential items (e.g. investigations, forensic audits)
 - g. Witness fees
 - h. Counseling fees
 - i. Group benefit plans
7. Professional and special services

- a. Committee fees
- b. Honorariums
- 8. Utilities including:
 - a. Water
 - b. Sewer
 - c. Natural Gas
 - d. Electricity
 - e. Postal
 - f. Communication Infrastructure Services
- 9. Real property interest
 - a. All real estate transactions including lease or sale of property
 - b. Appraisal fees
- 10. Advertising which shall include but not be limited to radio, television, newsprint or online media
- 11. Entertainers or public speakers for special events
- 12. Banking services including but not limited to investments

APPENDIX 1 – DEFINITIONS

Definitions

The words and phrases listed below when used in this policy shall have the following meanings ascribed to them:

“Annual Acquisition Cost” means that portion of the Total Acquisition Cost that relates to the current year;

“Approval Authority” means the dollar value at which an Authorized Person is authorized to make a purchase, as outlined in Schedule A.

“Authorized Person” means an Employee to whom purchasing authority up to a certain dollar amount has been delegated pursuant to Schedule A.

“Award” means authorization to proceed with purchase of Goods, Services and/or Construction from a chosen supplier.

“Bid” means an offer or submission from a supplier or proponent in response to a Bid Request.

“Bid Request” means a formal solicitation by DNSSAB or NDHC for Bids that is not done through a Public Procurement Process due to its low dollar threshold in accordance with the appropriate Procurement Method as outlined in Schedule A, or is an excluded Goods, Service or Construction as noted in Schedule C.

“Board” means the Board of Directors of the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board or the Nipissing District Housing Corporation, as the context may require.

“Budget” means the Board approved Department budget(s) including authorized revisions.

“Chief Administrative Officer” or **“CAO”** means the head of operations at the DNSSAB, their designate or any successor position thereto.

“Chief Executive Officer” or **“CEO”** means the head of operations at the NDHC, their designate or any successor position thereto.

“Conflicts of Interest” Employees and Board members shall not engage in any business or transaction or have a financial or personal interest, direct or indirect, which is incompatible with the proper discharge of their duties, or which would impair their judgement or action as a DNSSAB Employee or DNSSAB/NDHC Board member. Refer to the Conduct & Behaviour Policy for details

“Construction” means a construction, reconstruction, demolition, repair or renovation of a building, structure or other civil engineering or architectural work and includes site preparation, excavation, drilling, seismic investigation, soil investigation, the supply of products and materials and the supply of equipment and machinery if they are included in and incidental to the construction, and the installation and repair of fixtures of a building,

structure or other civil engineering design or architectural work, but does not include professional services related to the construction Contract unless they are included in the specifications for the procurement.

“**Contract**” means any binding agreement signed by the CAO/CEO or their Designate that creates an obligation to provide Goods, perform Services, complete Construction work or enter into a Transfer Payment Agreement as authorized in accordance with this policy. Basic elements required in a Contract include: mutual assent expressed by a valid offer and acceptance, adequate consideration, capacity, and legality.

“**Department**” refers to the following organizational units led by a member of senior management: Employment and Social Services, Emergency Medical Services, Children’s Services, Housing Services, Housing Operations and Corporate Services.

“**Designate**” means a person authorized by the CAO or CEO or respective Director to act on their behalf, for the purpose of this policy;

“**Direct Negotiation**” means a non-competitive procurement process, in the form of sole sourcing or single sourcing, which shall only occur under special circumstances as outlined in the attached Schedule B.

“**Director**” refers to the position title who has responsibility and authority over a Department.

“**DNSSAB**” refers to the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board.

“**Emergency**” means a situation, or threat of an impending situation, which may affect the environment, life, safety, health and/or welfare of the general public, the Board, volunteer or an employee while acting on the DNSSAB’s or NDHC’s behalf, or to prevent serious damage, disruption of work, or to restore or to maintain essential service to a minimum level, or where funding has been directed by the Ministry to be expended within a timeline that prohibits the use of a Public Procurement Method.

“**Employee**” means a person employed by the DNSSAB, to do work for the DNSSAB and/or NDHC.

“**Goods**” means raw materials, products, equipment and other physical objects of every kind and description or moveable property including the cost of installing, operating and maintaining or manufacturing such moveable property or intangible Goods such as software.

“**Housing Operations**” means the department responsible for NDHC property management and tenant services.

“**In House Bid**” means a bid made by one or more internal staff or affiliates to compete with external entities for procurement opportunities by formally providing a submission in response to a public bid solicitation.

“**Ministry**” means a governmental organization of Canada, headed by a minister that manages a specific sector of public administration.

“Multi-Year Commitment” means a Contract for Goods, Services or Construction which has a duration longer than one year.

“NDHC” refers to the Nipissing District Housing Corporation.

“Procurement Method” means the type of procurement method required at a specified procurement amount, which shall be in accordance with Schedule A.

“Purchase Order” means a written confirmation, provided by the Finance Department, between DNSSAB or NDHC and the supplier to supply specific Goods, Services or a specific type of Construction defined by such things as cost, time period and location(s).

“Purchasing Card” means a credit card issued to purchase Goods and Services of a low dollar value in accordance with the limits set out in Schedule A.

“Professional Services” means persons having a specialized knowledge or skill for a defined Service requirement including:

- a) Architects, surveyors, appraisers, accountants, engineers, designers, management and financial consultants; and
- b) Firms or individuals having specialized competence in environmental, planning or other disciplines.

“Public Procurement Process” means the process of acquiring goods, services, or works from an external source using a competitive bidding process which is advertised, or publicly posted, such as Request for Proposal, Request for Tender or Expression of Interest.

“Real Property” means land and any buildings or structures attached directly to it.

“Services” means services of all kinds, including but not limited to labour, Construction, maintenance, professional and consulting services save and except those services to be delivered by an officer or employee of DNSSAB in accordance with the terms of employment.

“Total Acquisition Cost” means an evaluation of quality and service in the assessment of a bid and the sum of all costs including purchase price, all taxes, warranties, local service costs, life cycle costs, time of completion or delivery, inventory carrying costs, staff training, operating, licensing and disposal costs for determining the lowest compliant bid.

“Transfer Payment” means one-way funding from a government to an individual, an organization or another government for which the government making the transfer does not:

- a) Receive any goods or services directly in return, as would occur in a purchase/sale or other exchange transaction;
- b) Expect to be repaid in the future, as would be expected in a loan; or
- c) Expect a direct financial return, as would be expected in an investment.

APPENDIX 2 – SUPPLY CHAIN CODE OF ETHICS

INTENT OF APPENDIX

To ensure an ethical, professional and accountable Supply Chain (procurement process).

STANDARDS OF APPLICATION

1. Personal Integrity and Professionalism

All employees of the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board involved with purchasing or other supply chain-related activities must act, and be seen to act, with integrity and professionalism. Honesty, care and due diligence must be integral to all supply chain activities within and between the DNSSAB and NDHC, suppliers and other stakeholders. Respect must be demonstrated for each other and for the environment. Confidential information must be safeguarded. All employees must not engage in any activity that may create, or appear to create, a conflict of interest, such as accepting gifts or favours, providing preferential treatment, or publicly endorsing suppliers or products.

2. Accountability and Transparency

Supply chain activities must be open and accountable. In particular, contracting and purchasing activities must be fair, transparent and conducted with a view to obtaining the best value for public money. All employees must ensure that public sector resources are used in a responsible, efficient and effective manner.

3. Compliance and Continuous Improvement

All employees involved in purchasing or other supply chain-related activities must comply with this Code of Ethics and the laws of Canada and Ontario. All employees should continuously work to improve supply chain policies and procedures, to improve their supply chain knowledge and skill levels, and to share leading practices.