

# A Strategic Plan for Copy Paper: Buying Less and Buying Better

In its role delivering critical services to the community, Alameda County uses a lot of copy paper. So for many years, we've been implementing efforts that reduce paper use and promote higher recycled content in the paper that we do use. As a result of our efforts, we've reduced paper use by 17% since 2010, and now purchase exclusively 100% post-consumer recycled (PCR) content paper. To further leverage these efforts, we actively promote piggybacking on our paper contract to local public agencies. This contract is held by an Alameda County business certified by our County Small, Local and Emerging Business program.

Goals	Strategies	Results
Reduce overall paper use	Engage a cross-agency team to design campaign and leverage technology solutions	17% Reduction in copy paper use since 2010
Procure high recycled content paper	Exclusively bid 100% PCR consumer recycled copy paper	Excellent pricing achieved
Enable local agencies to piggyback on contract to benefit from low prices	Included piggybacking as a goal in the bid process	Fewer agencies than expected have signed up, but those that have note the benefit

## Goals

Alameda County has set goals to support paper recycling collection markets; reduce the environmental, social and economic impacts associated with virgin wood fiber use; and address the climate impacts of our day-to-day operations. To achieve these goals, we are implementing the following strategic activities:

### Reduce Our Use

In 2010, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors identified paper use reduction as one of 80 strategies for reducing climate impacts through the adoption of the County's Climate Action Plan for Government Services and Operations Resolution (R-2010-170). This action formalized the County's commitment to reducing the climate impact of the County's paper use.

### Buy Better Paper

Alameda County has long supported buying recycled content products, an effort that was formalized in 2011 with the adoption of our Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy (R-2011-108). Here, our Board made a policy statement in support of procuring products with the highest percentage of post-consumer recycled content available in the marketplace.

### Leverage Our Efforts to Advance Green Purchasing Efforts Locally

As a large purchaser of copy paper, we understand that the County can often obtain better pricing compared to smaller local government agencies in our County. So in order to advance green purchasing efforts regionally, we promoted piggybacking on the County's contract through our County-led Green Purchasing Roundtable project.

In addition, we have a goal to build local business capacity by requiring that vendors be certified by Alameda County as a Small, Local and Emerging Business. This program was developed to promote and foster inclusiveness, diversity and economic development within Alameda County by providing enhanced contracting and procurement opportunities for small, local and emerging businesses that meet specific criteria.

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Submitted by Karen Cook, Sustainability Project Manager, Alameda County General Services Agency

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## Strategies

Each County department plays a key role in the County's effort to reduce paper use. However, two departments provide critical support functions for these efforts: the Sustainability Program, which supports policy actions and convenes Countywide stakeholders; and the Information Technology Department, which promotes and supports technology solutions to reduce paper use across all agencies. Specific strategies used to reduce paper use include:

- Education and behavior change campaigns to empower individuals to make smarter printing choices (Figure 1)
- Technology infrastructure changes to default printing and copying to double-sided
- Policy solutions to empower department managers to promote paper use reduction efforts to staff
- Contracts for technology solutions to enable business process improvements, such as secure online file storage and electronic signature software
- Contract for paper setting a minimum recycled content level of 100% PCR for standard copy paper
- Resources and promotional events for local public agencies to encourage and support piggybacking on the County's paper contract.



Figure 1: Poster Developed for Behavior Change Campaign Using Norming Strategy

## Results

Alameda County's strategic efforts to meet our paper use goals have realized significant environmental benefits and reduced cost for our own organization, as well as several of our regional public agency partners.

### Reducing Our Use

The County has reduced its annual copy paper use from our peak use year in 2009 by 4,000 cases. This reduction, in combination with our significant transition towards using primarily 100% PCR paper (transition to be complete in 2015), has resulted in a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to removing 86 passenger cars from the road annually<sup>1</sup>. In 2014, these efforts resulted in a net cost savings of approximately \$120,000<sup>2</sup>. See figure 2 for a summary of Alameda County's copy paper use (volume and recycled content level) from 2004 to 2014.

<sup>1</sup> Environmental impact estimates were made using the Environmental Paper Network Paper Calculator Version 3.2. For more information visit [www.papercalculator.org](http://www.papercalculator.org).

<sup>2</sup> Cost savings estimated by multiplying paper use avoided (4,000) cases by the 2014 contract price for copy paper, less increase cost of 100% PCR paper.

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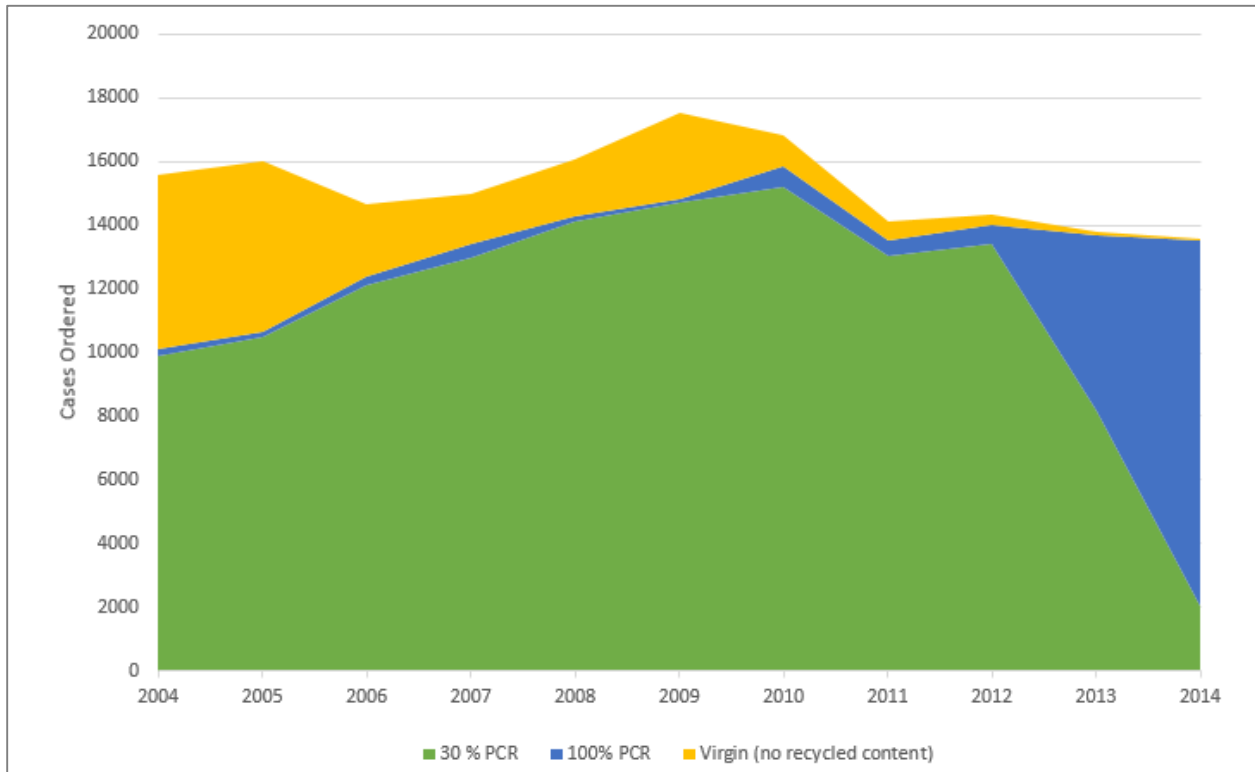


Figure 2: Alameda County copy paper use with recycled content, 2004-2014 (paper type: 8.5 x 11, 20 lbs. white)

### Buying Better Paper

By setting a minimum recycled content level of 100% PCR in our 2014 paper contract, we ensured bidders were incentivized to give us their best price possible for this product. This strategy realized a per-case cost reduction of more than \$3.00 over our previous contract price for this high recycled content product.

### Advancing Green Purchasing Regionally

To date, three local public agencies have been able to transition to 100% PCR paper at the County's price by piggybacking on this contract. By piggybacking, they are able to receive our volume discount pricing and also achieve operational efficiencies by eliminating their need to run a competitive procurement process.

In addition, by opening the bid to only those businesses currently certified by Alameda County as a Small, Local and Emerging Business, we were able to provide enhanced contracting opportunities for qualified vendors and promote local business economic opportunities.

### **Changes to Policy**

In 2010, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors adopted the County's Climate Action Plan for Government Services and Operations Resolution ([R-2010-170](#)). This plan requires the County to develop and implement paper waste reduction and set specific targets. A 20% paper use reduction target was set by the cross-agency team working on paper reduction guidelines (described further in the process section of this case study).

In 2012, our Board furthered its commitment to paper use reduction by adopting the Climate Principles Resolution ([R-2012-368](#)), which included a requirement to double-side all printing and copying unless there is a true business need to single side, increase the use of electronic records and services, and develop strategies to remove barriers to online business solutions, such as implementing electronic signatures.

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## Changes to Purchasing Practices

These climate protection policy statements, as well as our Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Policy (*R-2011-108*), provide support for changes in contracting efforts meant to help institutionalize better paper choices. In 2014, Alameda County awarded a new contract for office paper that requires all 8.5 x 11, 20lbs white copy paper to contain 100% post-consumer recycled content.

In addition, several other technology-based contracts have recently been put in place that support paper use reduction efforts, including:

- Multi-Function Device Lease contract that requires equipment to be installed with default settings for printing and copying as duplex
- FileNet file storage software contract that provides users a secure solution for storing, retrieving, and sharing records without printing
- DocuSign electronic-signatures contract that enables a paperless legal signature to streamline business processes
- E-Procurement enterprise software that allows the County's contracting process to occur online

## Unexpected Results

### Amplifying Impacts of Diverse Projects

Taking a strategic approach, both within our organization and externally, has allowed us to overcome the intra- and inter-governmental silos that can limit the opportunity for mutually beneficial collaboration. For instance, by identifying common barriers to paperless business process solutions across many agencies, we were able to build management support for Countywide action, and amplify opportunities for adoption by promoting these efforts under the common theme of paper use reduction efforts.

### Better than Expected Contract Pricing

Alameda County received lower than expected pricing for 100% PCR copy paper in our 2014 contract. We attribute this to setting a minimum recycled content level for all regular 8.5 x11 standard white copy paper at 100% PCR, thus ensuring bidders would provide their most competitive pricing possible for this product. The County's contract price for 100% PCR paper dropped \$3.80 per case in the new contract to \$37.50 per case.

### Lower than Expected Uptake of Piggybacking Opportunity by Local Agencies

With this excellent pricing, the County partnered with its contract vendor to encourage other local public agencies to piggyback on this contract. Even though the contract pricing we received was comparable, and sometimes lower, than other agencies current paper prices, only a small number of agencies have switched to the County's contract. While there may be many reasons for this, we believe that one contributing factor might be lingering concerns about the quality of 100% PCR paper. Overcoming these concerns within an agency can require significant work by a sustainability champion who may not have the time or resources to prioritize this effort in order to overcome this barrier to high recycled content papers.

## Lessons Learned

In engaging with staff over many years on this topic, we've learned that many people are personally invested in their current paper use habits. Paper use is often dictated by job functions and business processes, fluctuates with work load, and helps people manage and interact with work duties on a daily basis. Paper use reduction is not a one-time project, but an ongoing search for how to engage employees in learning new habits and skills that will allow them to adapt to business processes that use less paper.

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## Benefits

### Internal

- Reduced cost to County by reducing paper use and lowering contract pricing for high recycled content copy paper.
- Increased productivity due to streamlined business processes made possible with electronic records software and e-signature solutions.
- Streamline Countywide adoption of Board mandated paper policies by implementing default duplexing through multi-function device contract implementation and moving all contract purchases to 100% PCR paper.

### External

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions in supply chain equivalent to removing 86 vehicles from the road annually due to lower overall paper use and procuring 100% PCR paper (2009 to 2014).
- Additional benefits related to reducing pollution and conserving resources and habitat that occur as a result of paper made from 100% post-consumer fibers rather than virgin wood fibers.
- Support of recycling markets by purchasing paper made with recycled content.
- Access by local public agencies to financial and environment benefits when piggybacking on County paper contract.

## Developing and Implementing the Strategic Plan

### Background

Alameda County has a long history of promoting sustainable paper use beginning in the 1990's with early efforts focused on reducing paper use by the County for administrative functions. These included moving the employee directory online, switching from a paper-based to an electronically-delivered employee newsletter, and transitioning to an online payroll system. And in 2006, Alameda County entered into a contract for office paper that ensured all copy paper purchases had at least 30% PCR content.

While these efforts were a positive step towards reducing the impact of our paper use, we knew that we could make an even bigger impact by reducing individual paper use related to County business operations, and moving towards 100% PCR content for the paper that we do buy. So we began developing a strategy to do just that in preparation for our next contract several years down the road.

### Step 1: Understanding Our Impacts

In order to build the business case for our sustainable paper use strategy, the Sustainability Program, housed in the County's General Services Agency (GSA), partnered with the GSA Purchasing department to develop data sources and analyze metrics related to our paper use.

- First we compiled paper use data by analyzing contractually required vendor reports from as far back as 2004 in order to get a baseline for the amount and type of paper purchased by each agency in the County. This data showed that regular copy paper use had increased from 2004 to 2009, but that the proportion of total copy paper containing recycled content was also increasing. (See Figure 2, above)
- Then, using environmental benefits calculators, including the ReCon Tool<sup>3</sup> from U.S. EPA and the Paper Calculator from the Environmental Paper Network<sup>4</sup>, we estimated the environmental benefits possible through strategies to reduce use and increase the percentage of post-consumer recycled content in the paper we do buy.
- Finally, we analyzed paper cost trends for copy paper with various levels of recycled content. What we found was that 100% PCR copy paper had a 17% cost premium (~\$6/case) over the County's minimum standard paper with 30% PCR, set in our 2006 paper contract.

<sup>3</sup> [http://epa.gov/epawaste/conserves/tools/warm/ReCon\\_home.html](http://epa.gov/epawaste/conserves/tools/warm/ReCon_home.html)

<sup>4</sup> <http://c.environmentalpaper.org/home>

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With this critical baseline data, we determined that in order to minimize fiscal impacts and increase the likelihood of executive buy-in for shifting all copy paper purchases to 100% PCR, we needed to focus on paper use reduction before proposing the purchase of higher recycled content paper.

## Step 2: Reducing Countywide Paper Use

In order to minimize resource use and reduce cost associated with the its paper use, the County's Sustainability Program initiated and coordinated a variety of efforts meant to engage all agencies in efforts to reduce paper use.

### Developing Strategic Policy Support

To build political support for our sustainable paper use strategies, we ensured relevant policy efforts included actions that directly supported the goals of this effort.

The **Climate Action Plan for Government Services and Operations (R-2010-170)**, Figure 3), formally adopted by our Board of Supervisors in 2010, was developed by the General Services Agency with input from over 400 individuals in diverse agencies across Alameda County government. While this Plan is much broader in scope than just paper use, it requires the County to set paper reduction goals, and authorizes the formation of a cross-agency Climate Executive Committee to manage and promote Countywide climate action to ensure coordinated and effective adoption of 80 initiatives identified in the plan.

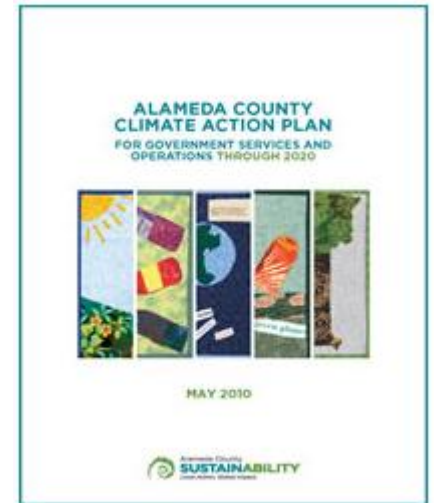


Figure 3: Alameda County's Climate Action Plan for Government Services

This Executive Committee, led by the County's top executive, the County Administrator, provides high-level policy and implementation guidance, and sponsors specific initiatives targeted at achieving climate goals that require broad adoption by employees and departments Countywide. This committee structure has been key to implementing coordinated actions across all County agencies as described later in this case study.

The **Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Resolution (R-2011-108)**, adopted by our Board in 2011, establishes support for procuring products made with the greatest amount of post-consumer recycled content available in the marketplace. This policy was brought forward by the County's General Services Agency through extensive collaboration between the Sustainability Program and Purchasing Division.

### Forming the Team

With policy support established, the Climate Executive Committee selected paper use reduction as one of five Countywide climate initiatives that began in 2011. The goal of these cross-agency teams was to develop policy and implementation guidelines that would be effective across the diverse job functions of the County's 20 agencies. To address paper use specifically, a team was convened that included staff from six different agencies representing a cross-section of users within County government operations. Administrative support for the team was provided by the Sustainability Program staff, including logistical support, identifying major milestones, and arranging opportunities for presenting work to the executive committee in coordination with the other four climate initiatives.



Figure 4: Members of the cross-agency climate team focused on paper use reduction

### Developing the Policy Targets and Implementation Guidelines

The cross-agency paper use reduction team set a Countywide target to reduce paper use by 20% by 2020. To accomplish this goal, the team identified best practices and developed County-specific paper use guidelines that considered the diverse job functions across County government operations. The guidelines developed address three levels of barriers identified by the team:

1. Institutional barriers, such as printing equipment incapable of duplex printing and lack of default settings for duplexing

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2. Business process barriers, such as requiring wet signature for signed documents
3. Individual behaviors, such as habits related to how paper is used to perform daily job functions

These guidelines were formally recognized by our Board of Supervisors within the broader Climate Principles Resolution (R-2012-368) adopted by the Board in 2012.

#### Engaging Agencies through Paper Use Liaisons

To promote the guidelines, encourage their adoption Countywide, and identify other programs and projects within agencies that impact paper use, the cross-agency paper use reduction team developed a reporting structure for County agencies to identify actions they intend to take to reduce their paper use. Each agency is responsible for assigning a staff liaison, known as paper liaisons, to assess agency efforts towards achieving the project goals. The information collected in these reports is used to compile success stories, identify opportunities for collaboration between agencies, and cross-promote strategic Countywide opportunities to reduce paper use.

#### Implementing Countywide Infrastructure Changes to Support Paper Use Reduction by Agencies

Certain strategies identified by the paper use reduction guidelines are better implemented through strategic countywide actions led by one department. One such example is setting requirements for new printing and copying equipment to be set to default to duplex at the time of installation. To implement this action, the County's Sustainability Program staff coordinated with the Purchasing Division to ensure the contract language in the 2013 Countywide multi-function device leasing contract required the vendor to install all equipment with the default print and copy setting to duplex.

Other examples include several technology based solutions that were initiated and implemented by the County's Information Technology Department to support business process improvement strategies and reduce paper use. These technology solutions include enterprise electronic storage solutions (FileNet) and e-signature capabilities (DocuSign). By including these efforts in the broader paper use project efforts, we provided a comprehensive campaign that could address multiple barriers faced by agencies and individuals in reducing their paper use.

#### Measuring and Reporting Progress

Throughout these efforts, we tracked paper use for each County agency by requiring our vendors to provide annual usage data. We reported this information to each agency at the executive level through our Climate Executive Committee and at the staff level through our paper liaisons. In addition, we calculated and presented the environmental and cost benefits of these reductions to connect the effort to values commonly held by our employees. In doing this, we built broad support for taking the next step towards reducing the impact of the County's paper purchases, moving towards 100% PCR content paper.

### **3. Buying Better Paper**

When it was time for the County to competitively bid its office paper contract in 2014, we were able to present transitioning to higher cost 100% PCR copy paper as a cost neutral program because we had successfully reduced our paper use by almost 4,000 cases (since 2009). Here is how we built support for the transition.

#### Addressing Quality Concerns of High Recycled Content Papers

Some users expressed concern about the quality of high recycled content papers, a concern likely formed by experiences with lower quality products of the past. However, by presenting usage data, and engaging in rigorous product testing, we confirmed that the quality of this product today is on par with other copy paper types of similar specifications (weight, brightness, etc.). We took the following steps to ensure confidence with 100% PCR paper.

- We analyzed usage data and found six of 20 agencies had consistently used 100% PCR paper over the last 5 years. This indicated a level of satisfaction with the product for those departments.
- We engaged in pilot testing with our largest agency, the Social Services Agency. They found no substantial difference between the 100% and 30% PCR paper, and as a result of this product testing, transitioned to 100% PCR paper in the spring of 2013, almost one year before our new contract was in place.

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- We presented our plan to go out for bid exclusively for 100% PCR copy paper to our paper liaisons so that we could address additional concerns that certain agencies might have that are unique to their business processes. Through this process, the County's Information Technology Department expressed concerns that using the paper in their high volume copy machines would increase paper jams and reduce productivity. To address this concern, copy paper product testing was performed with the high-volume copy machine vendor present. No significant difference was found between the 100% PCR paper tested, and the 30% PCR paper commonly used at the time, and the department agreed to move ahead with the transition.

**Bid Strategy to Optimize Price and Local Business Opportunities**

In order to optimize price, the County bid exclusively for 100% PCR for regular 8.5 x 11, 20 lbs. white copy paper. While this bid included approximately 60 other office paper products of different sizes, weights, and colors, regular copy paper accounted for approximately 85% of total contract value. This strategy ensured bidders provide the County the lowest price available for this product in order to remain competitive for the bid award. In addition, this bid was only open to local businesses currently certified by Alameda County under our Small, Local and Emerging Business program, in order to ensure enhanced contracting opportunities for those businesses.

**Step 4: Advancing Green Purchasing Regionally by Promoting Piggybacking**

As the largest public agency purchaser in Alameda County, we realize we have access to economies of scale not readily available to other smaller agencies. In order to leverage our effort and experience, and advance green purchasing regionally, we proactively promoted piggybacking on this contract to other local public agencies.

**What is Piggybacking**

Piggybacking is when a public agency uses an existing public contract as a template to form their own contract directly with the vendor to purchase on the same or similar terms. The piggybacking agency does not become a signatory to, or participate in, the original contract, but instead negotiates a new contract with the vendor based on the initial public entity's contract. Alameda County developed a tip sheet to help other agency staff, from purchasers to green purchasing advocates, understand what it means to piggyback on a contract.

**Engaging the Vendor**

While piggybacking is a legal and widely accepted method of contracting for public agencies, it is important to remember that the vendor has the right to agree or not agree to enter into a contract with additional public agencies under the terms of the original agreement. Therefore, Alameda County ensured that the vendor was aware of our intention to promote the contract to additional agencies early on in the contracting process by stating it explicitly in the bid. This allowed vendors to consider this possibility as part of the bidding process. Below is an excerpt of the language included in the introductory section of the bid, one of two places we indicated that we expected to promote this contract for piggybacking. Find a longer excerpt of the relevant environmental performance specifications for this bid at our website at [www.acsustain.org](http://www.acsustain.org).

**Office Paper Contract Excerpt (2014 Bid)**

*“It is also the County’s intent to encourage local public agencies in Alameda County to piggyback on any contract executed as a result of this RFQ. The County intends to distribute relevant documents, including pricing sheets, to interested public agencies. There is no guarantee that other agencies will participate in piggybacking on any contract that results from this RFQ.”*

**Promoting Piggybacking to Local Public Agencies**

Once the contract was in place, Alameda County initiated a series of meetings with the vendor to establish whether or not the vendor was agreeable to piggybacking by other public agencies. Through these meetings, we established a commitment that our vendor intended to honor requests from agencies who wished to piggyback on our contract, and that they would not add additional limitations, such as minimum order size.

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With this commitment in place, Alameda County organized and hosted a one hour webinar promoting the contract to other public agencies in the County. Three speakers addressed the following topics:

- Environmental benefits and performance of high recycled content copy paper
- What is piggybacking, and how does it work
- What to expect from the vendor if you choose to piggyback

Following the webinar, Alameda County posted the webinar presentations and distributed relevant contracting documents to our full green purchasing email distribution (approximately 70 staff from 30 agencies) in order to help them understand and evaluate our contracting process. We also provided technical support to agencies interested in piggybacking. However, only a small number of agencies have reached out to the vendor to piggyback on our contract. While there are likely many reasons for this, we believe that one contributing factor might be ongoing concerns about the quality of 100% PCR paper. Overcoming these concerns within an agency can require significant work by a sustainability champion who may not have the time or resources to prioritize this effort in order to overcome this barrier to using high recycled content papers.

### Lessons Learned

Price does not always drive adoption of sustainable purchasing practices. Concerns regarding performance, whether real or perceived, can influence the acceptance of environmentally preferable products. In order to overcome these types of concerns around 100% PCR paper, we encouraged our local agencies to conduct blind performance tests where they substitute the higher recycled content product for their current papers in order to assess if there are actual increases in paper performance complaints, such as printer jams.

## Financial Impact

Alameda County pays about \$2.20 more per case for our 100% PCR copy paper that we buy today than we did on our previous contract for 30%, or approximately \$30,000 annually Countywide. This reflects the higher cost of 100% PCR paper. However, due to our efforts to reduce paper use, we have avoided approximately \$150,000 in annual expenses we would have otherwise spent for copy paper we no longer use. The net result of decreasing total use, and increased cost for higher recycled content paper is an annual savings of approximately \$120,000.

## Leadership

This project exemplifies many of the Council's Principles for Leadership and Sustainable Purchasing.

- **Understanding** our impact through annual tracking of paper use data
- **Committing** to comprehensive actions that address the environmental impact of our paper use
- **Delivering** on our commitment indicated by net positive environmental outcomes and reduced cost
- **Innovating** through promotional activities to encourage piggybacking by local public agencies

In addition, this multi-year, comprehensive program is consistent with the Strategy Planning process as promoted by the Council in their Guidance for Leadership in Sustainable Purchasing, Version 1.0. These actions, along with our comprehensive recycling programs (not featured in case study), exemplify leadership as defined by the Council in the Purchasing Category Guidance for Paper.