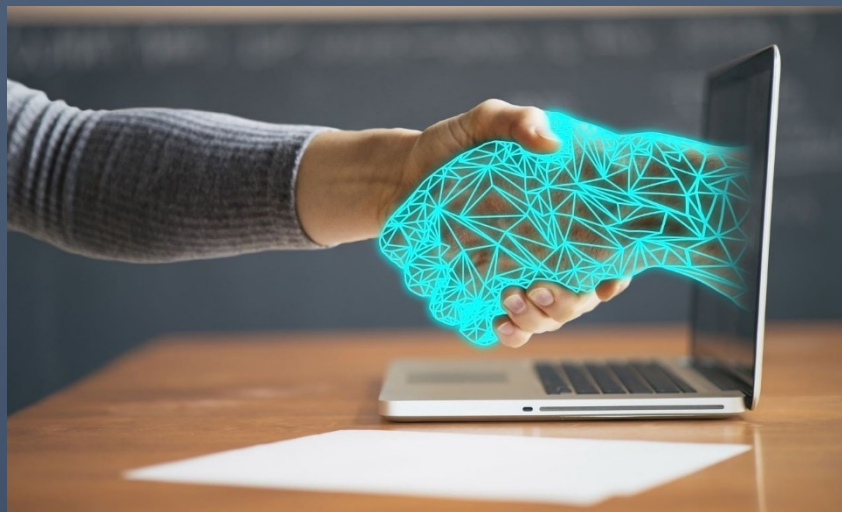


CAPSTONE PROJECT

The Age of Electronic Invoice Processes in Government:

A comparison of eSettlements and Ohio|Buys



Ohio Fiscal Academy

“INVOICE CHOICE”

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Executive Summary

In an effort for the State of Ohio to create a streamlined process that enables suppliers and agency end-users to work together in a concerted effort for goods and services to be received and paid for in a timely fashion, a choice between two distinctive platforms will need to be made: Ohio|Buys or eSettlements.

Research indicates that procurement is an essential part of State government. In most governments, personnel services (salaries) represent the largest share of expenditures but following close behind are expenditures to the private sector for purchases of goods and services, both the volume in number of transactions and total dollar amount is huge (Watt).

The State of Ohio has been innovative in the area of procurement and invoicing by leveraging technology to increase efficiency, transparency and lower costs. Electronic Procure-to-Pay solutions enable users to optimize the settlement process, approvals, payments, and address email notifications. Paper processing can be costly, time-consuming, and prone to errors. Team Invoice Choice has been tasked with making a recommendation as to which platform is better suited for the State of Ohio.

Within this project we explore the background of each platform in its start-up phase. There is also brief overview of the functionality of each platform and what it has to offer to both the supplier and the end-user. A comparative analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, and user-satisfaction will be presented. We have also interviewed various subject matter experts and users/vendors of each platform. Based on our findings, we offer a recommendation as to which of the systems will be the most efficient and effective for both the supplier and State of Ohio end-user.

Introduction

Government agencies across the United States are vastly taking advantage of utilizing technology within procurement and invoicing in order to find smart and efficient ways to connect to their suppliers. Agencies are careful to ensure that old techniques that led to unflattering headlines and costly mistakes were curtailed while initiating processes that allows agencies to view the “bigger picture” when it comes to purchasing and invoicing. Although improved technological advances have been slow to catch on in most states (government) those that have introduced advanced processes now see more efficient purchasing in the overall budgeted spend.

As technology continues to grow and advance, electronic procurement and invoicing has earned its place not only in the private sector of the business world, but its importance has overtaken the government realm in a major way. Information technology for both, large and small businesses have astronomically increased the impact when interacting with suppliers and the relationships that are ensued through the process. This advancement is especially prevalent in electronic invoicing within the government sector.

In a survey conducted in 2016 by the Governing Institute, 39 state procurement offices were ranked on factors that included contract management and the utilization of technology in an effective manner. Six states that stood out as top performers included: Georgia, Virginia, Minnesota, and Utah in the top four with **Ohio** and Massachusetts tying for fifth (Farmer).

The commonalities for the states listed above include presenting new technologies and innovative ideas with the full support of high-ranking officials, including the Governor, in order to bring about this new change. For the state of Ohio, Governor Mike DeWine issued an executive order (**Order 2019 – 15D**), “Modernizing Information Technology systems in State Agencies” which, generally states, that the State of Ohio will implement technological advancements which will create a more effective and efficient system using technology to improve customer service, as well as save tax dollars (DeWine).

The use of technology to connect with suppliers is the objective that the state of Ohio would like to accomplish, by introducing eSettlements, sponsored by the Office of Budget and Management (OBM) and the PO Flip to invoice functionality within Ohio|Buys, sponsored by the Department of Administrative Services (DAS). Both solutions offer electronic invoicing to State of Ohio registered suppliers. The goal of this project is to examine and analyze which solution would be the recommended platform for suppliers to use while identifying duplications that exist between the two systems; additionally, analyzing the risk and/or cost that is associated, using both solutions. In our case study, we have conducted interviews with various state subject matter experts for their input, reviewed several videos and desk aids that discuss the subject in detail. Our team also reached out to several vendors who actively use or have had the experience of using one of the platforms, at least once. The responses that were provided, assisted us to conclude on which solution most closely meets the needs and wants of the suppliers, while also keeping State employee end users in mind as well. With research and team collaboration, this project will assist with our recommendation to which platform the State of Ohio should consider moving forward with.

Background

eSettlements

The Supplier Portal is built on the Ohio Digital Experience (ODX) platform- designed to provide suppliers with convenient access to detailed information about their financial interactions with the State of Ohio. The Supplier Portal is user-friendly, accessible across a variety of devices (computers, smartphones, and tablets), and efficiently enables self-service functionality. The eSettlements feature delivers users a secure and private experience in addition to an enhancement of advance fraud detection, prevention, and analytic features (OBM Supplier Portal Navigational Guide).

Introduced in 2017, Ohio Electronic Settlement (eSettlements) is an online self-service invoice solution that streamlines and optimizes the invoicing process. eSettlements optimized the settlement process with electronic invoicing, approval, payments, and email notifications; decreasing the turn-around time between invoicing and payment to suppliers with “due now” pay terms. Ohio vendors were offered the ability to register online to do business with the state of Ohio, creating a complete paperless system while interacting in the invoicing process. The eSettlements management solution will allow for the completion of the payable cycle through submission of online invoices and remittance of payment as direct deposits, rather than a check.

Vendors who currently utilize the eSettlements platform (Shaw):

- Marcus Thomas
- Cleveland Sight Center
- Cincinnati Association for the Blind
- New Vision Media
- Paul Werth Associates
- Ron Foth

Ohio|Buys

Beginning in 2016, Ohio|Buys is the State of Ohio’s online purchasing solution that empowers both, government buyers and interested suppliers. Ohio|Buys leverage innovative technologies to increase efficiency, opportunities, and participation with businesses in Ohio. Currently Ohio|Buys is operated by the Ohio Department of Administrative Services and is available to dozens of state agencies.

The State of Ohio has begun to rollout the Ohio|Buys platform at a pace that will allow agencies to effectively manage the system change. Several agencies jointly collaborated on a means to transform procurement. This strategy includes streamlining the procurement process, focusing on research and analysis, and optimizing suppliers, doing business with the State of Ohio.

As stated, Ohio|Buys is being rolled out in phases. The earlier phasing included twelve early adopter agencies with system functionality being deployed. The final phase stage has continued into 2020, and will include Boards of Commission, non-superintendent agencies, higher education institutions, and local governments with similar functionality that includes:

- Supplier Enablement
- Request-through-Pay
- Catalog Capability
- PO to invoice Flip
- Solicitation/ Bid Management
- Contract Management

- Electronic Signatures
- Data Analytics

Through LeanOhio Kaizen events, and the collaboration of many State Agencies that include DAS, OBM, the Department of Transportation (DOT), and other State Agency ambassadors, the State recognized that changes needed to be made to improve and transform procurement. Three core objectives for the procurement process are 1) streamlining the process 2) research and analysis and 3) optimizing the experience of doing business with the State of Ohio. These are the results of what Ohio|Buys will bring to the State - a Procure to Pay system.

With these objectives in mind, in 2017 the State set forth a Request for Proposal seeking a cloud-based, managed service electronic procurement Solution that met the State's requirements by providing innovation and industry best practices. The State had a strong interest in Software as a Service (SaaS) as a delivery model that could be adaptive to accommodate the different needs of State Agencies and legislative requirements (current and future) governing procurement. The technology solution was envisioned to consist of (and at the end of Release 3, will consist of) the following:

- Single Point of Entry for Buyers and Suppliers
- Catalog Capability
- Procure-to-Pay
- Sourcing/Bid Management
- Contract Management
- Spend/Data Analytics
- Open Marketplace
- Integrations with OAKS, the State's electronic signature solution, and other applicable systems (e.g., ODOT Appropriation Accounting system)

In September 2018, the State awarded a contract to KPMG for the design, testing, and implementation of the Ohio|Buys solution and a contract to Ivalua for the software licenses and enhanced support. Over the past two years, the first two releases of functionality have been deployed to 12 Early Adopter Agencies. The third and final release of functionality is targeted for November 2020, at which time the State will have implemented all modules of the solution that have been contracted for. *Note: the rollout of the functionality to these Early Adopter Agencies remains in progress, and the full suite of functionality has not been completely deployed to these Agencies, at this time.*

Suppliers that have experienced the PO Flip to Invoice function within Ohio|Buys are:

- Approved Components & Systems Inc.
- Catalyst Life Services
- Central Ohio Organization
- Comtech Global Inc.
- Diversatec Resources Inc.
- First Systems Inc.
- Lighthouse Software Systems, LLC
- Net Pac International, LLC
- Patterson Pools
- Recio Supply Co

Processes and Functionalities

eSettlements

eSettlements offers a customer friendly platform that allows vendors to create an account, submit an invoice, and receive quick payment; however, before an Ohio vendor can submit an online invoice with the State of Ohio through a specified agency, they must first have a supplier record in OAKS, through the Ohio Supplier Portal. This procedure includes completing an agreement process in which an email address, supplier role, and origin code would be established to create the routing of the invoices that are submitted for processing within PeopleSoft, to the correct agency, for review and approval.

Every supplier who conducts business through the Ohio Supplier Portal, will be given an OHID number. This ID number, which, is assigned to an individual to allow them access to various state applications, will allow the supplier to navigate through eSettlements, and will allow them (with the proper role), to review purchase orders, invoices, and payments. Once the supplier is in the Supplier Portal, they have an opportunity to review a vast amount of information regarding the status of their organization's purchase orders and invoices overall, and by specific agency, if necessary. This ID account enables users to securely access multiple applications, with a single user ID and password. Once signed into the Ohio Supplier Portal, users can manage transactions, and submit necessary forms, to update the account after completion of a Supplier Administration form. Users access eSettlements via Ohio Supplier Portal. The application was built to automate the inefficient and touch-heavy process, associated with tracking and managing the onboarding of suppliers to eSettlements, which, led to a sustainable and automated onboarding solution (Allen).

The roles consist of the following:

- Supplier Administrator
 - Super-user in the Supplier Portal for the supplier's organization
 - Assigned by Supplier Operations team
- Supplier User
 - View-Only Supplier Portal Profile access
 - Role assigned to user by Supplier Administrator
- Agency Buyer
 - Assigned by agency's security team in OAKS
 - Typically, the person that receives the good/services
 - Role reviews and releases the invoice, which, will become a voucher, then routes through the agency's existing voucher approval workflow process

The dashboard within the Supplier Portal contains an analytical overview of the supplier's purchase order balance by year and agency, very similar to the PO activity report generated by COGNOS except, the supplier will have access to this information, and not just the agency. The dashboard can also provide a view of pending invoices, PO's, and the remaining balances and pending payments.

Before an Ohio vendor can submit an online invoice with the State of Ohio through a specified agency, they must first have a Supplier record in OAKS; this includes the following:

- Have an OHID - Register and obtain an 8-digit user ID to register and do business with the State of Ohio

- Have a Supplier Administrator/User - Assign an administrative role to one or more vendor associates who are capable of maintaining the account, as well as provide all pertinent information in OAKS for payment; or as the User, you are able to view the portal, only without any changes to the actual documents
- Provide EFT payment information, in order to facilitate payment in less than Net 30 pay terms

After this information has been provided, the vendor is then ready to submit invoices through the eSettlements portal for payment.

- Agency Buyer will receive the invoice from the supplier, review, then the invoice will be released for processing through the OAKS overnight batch processing to create a voucher
- Depending on the agency and their voucher approval process, the steps will remain the same through eSettlements, if nothing has changed, the voucher will be approved for payment.

Ohio|Buys

Ohio|Buys is a Procure-to-Pay platform created, so, that buyers and suppliers would have one system to work from, versus multiple platforms, to purchase a good or service that has been identified by State Agency end users. Once Ohio|Buys takes on more of a presence in State Agencies, it is the goal to have one platform that will be more efficient while streamlining processes. With that being said, this section will only explain one small functionality that Ohio|Buys will have to offer, hence, the Supplier PO Flip to Invoice function within Ohio|Buys.

It will be assumed that the Supplier has been established as a State of Ohio Supplier (Supplier ID has been established). At this point, the State has done business with this Supplier in the past, or plans to do business with, and an Ohio|Buys PO has been executed for a service or good.

Once a supplier has fulfilled their delivery requirements on the purchase order, whether it be a service or good, the Supplier will have the ability to flip the PO created in Ohio|Buys, instantly into an invoice. A step by step guide for suppliers to follow when flipping a PO to an invoice has been created to assist when needed ([How to Create an Invoice from a Purchase Order](#)).

Once the supplier has flipped the Ohio|Buys PO into an invoice, the person that has the authority to approve the invoice within Ohio|Buys (person that requested the purchase/PO also known in the system as the Requester), will then approve the invoice to be processed. Procedures have been to explain how invoices are approved by the Requester in Ohio|Buys ([How to Approve an Invoice](#)).

Exception to this process. If a PO was created with the requirement of receiving, receipt of good or service will have to be acknowledged or if a receipt needs to be created, this must occur prior to approval of the invoice for processing within Ohio|Buys by the Requester. Instructions have been written for an Ohio|Buys end user (Requester) on how to create a receipt within Ohio|Buys ([How to Create and Manage a Receipt](#)).

After the invoice has been approved for payment by the Requester in Ohio|Buys, the invoice information will be sent to OAKS for processing. Currently any attachments and comments

created in Ohio|Buys would not interface into OAKS. OBM would be required to review back up documentation to process an invoice by logging into Ohio|Buys to review. From this point, all accounts payable functions will continue in OAKS, as processed in its current state, for payment to be issued to the Supplier.

Payment processing information and voucher data is captured in Ohio|Buys so that it can be viewed on the PO level by the agency end user if needed.

Highlights for each platform use

eSettlements

eSettlement is a PeopleSoft automated invoice presentation and payment solution, providing a platform for electronic invoicing, streamlined approval, rapid payment and immediate email notifications. eSettlement simplifies processing, saves time, and reduces costs, by reducing cumbersome paper-based processes dependent upon State resources, rekeying invoice data, and delivers a streamlined, online experience for suppliers to submit invoices directly to the agency that received the product or service. eSettlement invoices are paid with due-now pay-terms (Allen).

Leveraging eSettlement technologies increases efficiency, and participation with business in Ohio. "Not only does eSettlement reduce or eliminate costs and serve to standardize processes; it could also help governments adapt to conditions where personal contact is limited" (Kavanagh and Casey, pp.38-9).

Benefits in the utilization of eSettlements include:

- Paperless transactions reduce costs:
 - Eliminates storage, handling, and processing paper checks
 - Reduce time spent on reconciliation
 - Eliminates occurrence of lost or stolen checks and costs of reissuance
 - Reduce security risks
 - Improve the tracking of payments through enterprise planning systems and integration with banking technologies
 - Enhances internal controls (<https://www.naco.org/articles/best-practice-government-finance-officers-association-electronic-payments>)
 - Enhances Green Initiatives
- Accelerated invoice presentment, approval, and payment
- One single portal that allows you to perform inquiries, submit billing files, and update your supplier profile information (<http://procurement.umich.edu/supplier-resources/supplier-portal/electronic-settlements>)

"The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) has best practices for electronic payments and electronic signatures and, encourage using features available in modern financial systems to cut back on unnecessary processing of paper". E-Settlement can help eliminate low or no-value tasks (Kavanagh and Casey, pp. 38-9).

Ohio|Buys

The Ohio|Buys platform is a very robust system that will assist the State's procurement process to be more efficient and streamlined by trimming down the number of currently existing systems and incorporating them into this one platform. Included in this platform is the PO flip to Invoice function, which, will have a positive impact to State Agency end users and Suppliers.

With the ability for Suppliers to flip a PO created in Ohio|Buys to an invoice, the State will:

- Reduce costs for both the State and Suppliers – the State can potentially save where paper-based is associated (cost in the use of paper, manpower to scan documents, postage etc.); Suppliers will also save time and costs with eliminating the process of printing, storing and mailing paper copies of invoices when having the ability to invoice electronically through Ohio|Buys
- Transparency - ensuring procurement policies are followed, data is centralized and could be made available to management, stakeholders and potentially to the public in some cases if made available. Additionally, data will be easier to access, including invoices and other supporting documents when a payment is made to a Supplier
- Increased Productivity – once the system has been in place, this will standardize templates being used for better consistencies, and ease use of the system, which, in turn increase productivity time
- Paperless – use of paper will be minimal, if at all. Records will now be easier to obtain. Storage space that was used to keep records, will no longer be required, and the purchase of records retention supplies will be decreased with the ability to store procurement documents electronically; including back up documents for the PO flip to Invoice functionality
- Metrics – ability to track and gauge different aspects of a process within the system
- Payment Cycles – efficiencies will increase as the supplier will create the invoice in Ohio|Buys and will not have to mail paper invoices, causing delays in payment. The supplier will receive payment quicker than the traditional method of mailing or scanning/emailing invoices to the State
- Supplier Engagement and training has increased to make Suppliers aware of Ohio|Buys and its functions
- System is easily configurable to accommodate business processes

Challenges for each platform use:

eSettlements

ESettlements is a straightforward solution but its functional dependency on other systems can be a barrier to adoption. Systemic issues and challenges lie within the States core supplier record set-up in OAKS yielding a confusing, disjointed experience to complete the supplier

record within the Supplier Portal. E-Settlement sustainability is highly contingent on its file upload and system integration (XML solutions). With these solutions a supplier may submit batch invoicing at once (Allen).

Vendors who prefer not to use electronic or computer invoicing

- Must be registered as an eSupplier user to use the system. Must have an agreement in place to participate
- Impact to Ohio Shared Services and the number of invoices processed by their team
- Onboarding can be challenging because it can involve personal one-on-one training and would require an agency point person. In its current state, eSettlements is ideal for individual contractors and “mom-n-pop” vendors (Berry).

Ohio|Buys

Currently with the minimized functionality of the PO Flip to Invoice function with Ohio|Buys, the disadvantages that were found are as follows:

- Suppliers currently do not have sight of payment status
- Requesters, individuals who enter a purchase request in Ohio|Buys, currently, are the only users who can approve invoices in Ohio|Buys. In some cases, the Requester may not necessarily be the person that should approve an invoice for payment
- If receiving is a required process prior to approving an invoice, this could be problematic; as the Requester may not be the person who would receive the products, or the service provided
- Smaller companies that do not have access to a Wi-Fi network or use of a computer will not be able to do business with the State
- Attachments uploaded for invoicing is not interfaced into OAKS
- Current functions of Ohio|Buys are still not at its fullest potential, as the system has not been fully implemented and is still in the design and release phases

Research Strategy

The overall focus of this project is to assess the effectiveness of both eSettlements and Ohio|Buys in order to determine if the general purpose of the platform is meeting the expectations of both, the supplier and the State, to conclude which platform is best. We asked a series of questions to State of Ohio subject matter experts (SME's), and various suppliers, who used each of these platforms in order to determine which platform received the most encouraging responses.

State of Ohio subject matter experts (SME's) were asked the following questions, in order to provide a concise understanding of each platform, and the possibilities it can provide. The consensus is as follows:

Please define what the platform is:

<i>eSettlements</i>	<i>Ohio Buys</i>
eSettlements is an online self-service invoice and payment solution that streamlines and optimizes the settlement process.	Ohio Buys is the State of Ohio's online purchasing solution that empowers both, government buyers, and interested suppliers. Ohio Buys leverages innovative technologies to increase efficiency, opportunities, and participation with businesses in Ohio. Operated by the Ohio Department of Administrative Services, Ohio Buys is currently available to a dozen State agencies. Ohio Buys will continue to grow, expanding to include other State agencies, local governments, and higher education institutions.

Why did the state decide to pilot each system?

<i>eSettlements</i>	<i>Ohio Buys</i>
eSettlements (AP) and Ohio Buys (Purchasing) were new ways of processing for the State. eSettlements was a way for the state to create additional efficiencies in processing, along with transitioning to more of a paperless approach. During the pilot phase, eSettlements instituted more of a gradual roll- on period for agencies for AP setup, as we have primarily focused on the smaller suppliers with less complex transactions. It was also designed to create efficiencies as suppliers have the capabilities to submit invoices electronically, at their own pace. Once the agency approves the invoice,	The State is not piloting Ohio Buys, but the project has embraced an onboarding plan that allows agencies to rollout the solution at a pace that works for them (although the team is beginning to discuss strategies to compel Early Adopter Agencies to increase adoption). This strategy of working with agencies to onboard at a pace that makes sense for them, was chosen so agencies could be positioned to manage the change more effectively.

it automatically builds into a voucher for payment; essentially, cutting out the middle-man for processing. As a result, suppliers can process their own invoices, and were able to get reimbursed quicker.	
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What benefits do the state hope to gain by using each platform?

<i>eSettlements</i>	<i>Ohio Buys</i>
The idea is to create a one-stop shop for accounts payable (eSettlements) and purchasing processes (Ohio Buys). Speaking more on the eSettlements side, it creates efficiencies as suppliers have the capabilities to submit invoices electronically, at their own pace. Once the agency approves the invoice, it automatically builds into a voucher for payment; essentially, cutting out the middleman for processing. At the time eSettlements launched, it also allowed the supplier to automatically be paid, due-now, instead of the Net 30 pay terms.	Ohio Buys wants to focus on streamlining the procurement process, allowing agencies to focus on sound fiscal practices through research and analysis, that will create an environment that optimizes the buyer supplier relationship.

What significance does the onboarding procedure have in the overall platform process?

<i>eSettlements</i>	<i>Ohio Buys</i>
Onboarding is crucial for eSettlements to be a complete success. Not only is the buy-in important from a supplier standpoint, but state agencies must be open to utilizing the full functionality of what eSettlements can do.	The onboarding procedure for agencies has been flexible and allowed them to onboard at a pace that makes sense for them. The project team has made supplier enablement, a focus throughout the project, and it continues to be an area of emphasis. The enablement of agency and suppliers is critical, in order for the objectives outlined above, to be realized. It may be best to do a follow-up conversation on this to make sure we are able to fully answer this question – it is a little difficult to understand what this question is asking.

What is the risk/cost associated with using each platform?

<i>eSettlements</i>	<i>Ohio Buys</i>
Not sure of too many risks. If there were any, perhaps there could be some risk in the initial setup of the supplier for the roles and to be sure they are setup correctly. However, we have created a system for approving these roles for both the supplier and agency.	Aside from changes in how agencies/suppliers conduct their procurement transactions, and the risks associated with changing to a new process, there are no other notable risks that the project team is aware of. For example, there are risks that suppliers will miss opportunities to do business with the State that are posted and awarded through Ohio Buys, if they have not set up their accounts. While long-term funding strategies are still under evaluation, funding for Ohio Buys is currently provided by DAS' existing revenue mechanisms (e.g., revenue share fees paid by suppliers, membership fees paid by cooperative purchasing members, rates, etc.). There is no specific charge to agencies or suppliers for using Ohio Buys.

How does each platform capture data to inform agencies of waste, compliance or spending or does it have this capability?

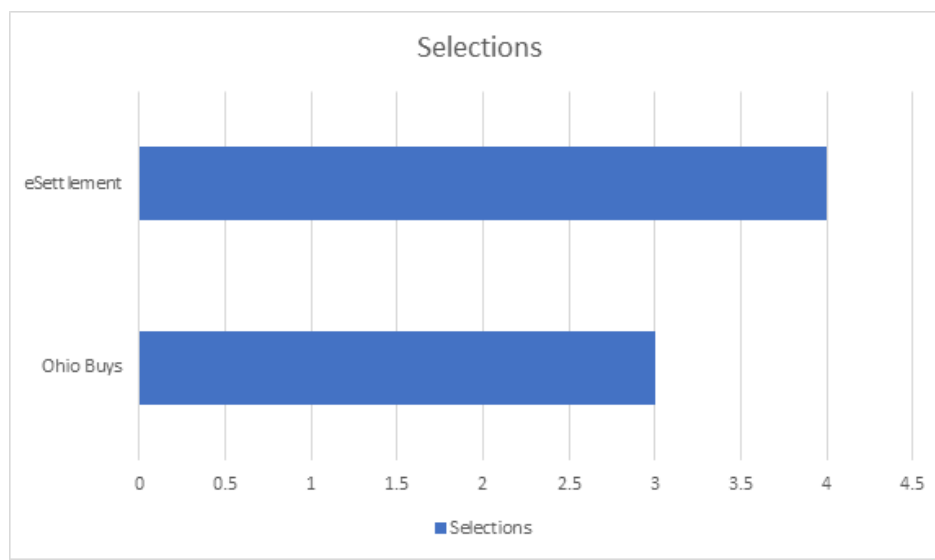
<i>eSettlements</i>	<i>Ohio Buys</i>
With eSettlements a part of OAKS FIN, we have reports that we can generate that will still capture all this data. Essentially, once the invoice builds into a voucher, it is no different than any other voucher in OAKS FIN all the way through payment.	Bidding and purchasing can be monitored within the program. Since Ohio Buys is still being built upon, there is a possibility that reports, of some sort, could be incorporated as a capability to ensure compliance, since one point of Ohio Buys is to collect data on purchasing.

Findings

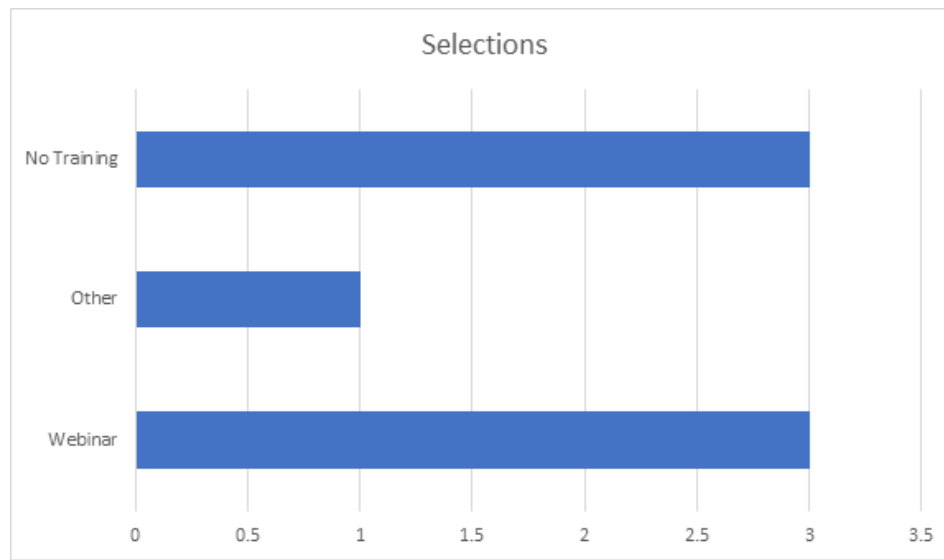
Team Invoice Choice initially surveyed both Ohio | Buys and eSettlement users to gather a better understanding of their experience with the use of the platform. The questions that were asked was to determine the users understanding of the platform, the ease of use, if the experience has been favorable and what the State can do to enhance the experience. Data collected from this survey also allowed us to gain a better understanding of the user's ability to utilize their respective platform and if there were any opportunities for the State regarding the functionality the platform offers.

It is important to note that a total of seven vendors responded to this survey. While seven is not a large number, the initial numbers can help us gauge in the preliminary development of both Ohio|Buys and eSettlements in regard to which process may be most useful moving forward. Survey Results:

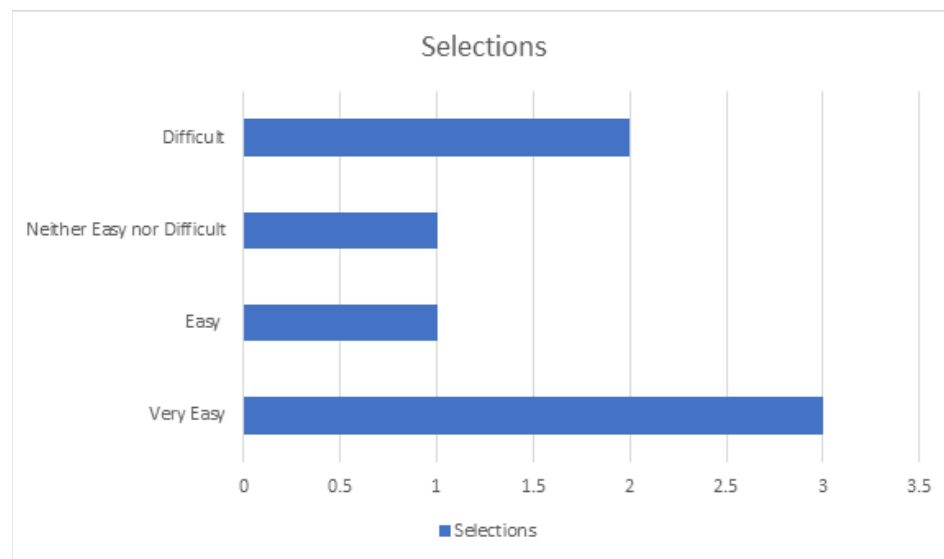
What system are you currently using to process electronic invoices?



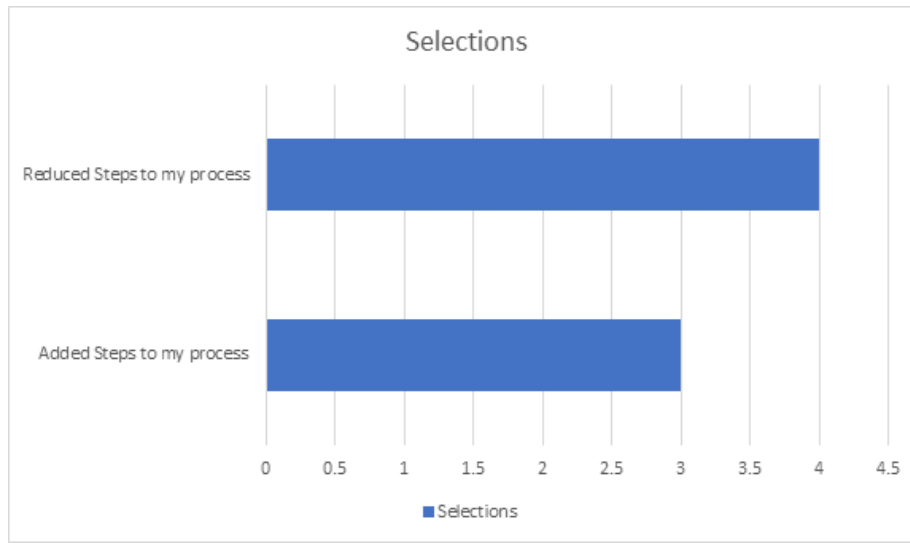
How have you received training from the State of Ohio in order to process electronic invoices via eSettlements or Ohio | Buys?



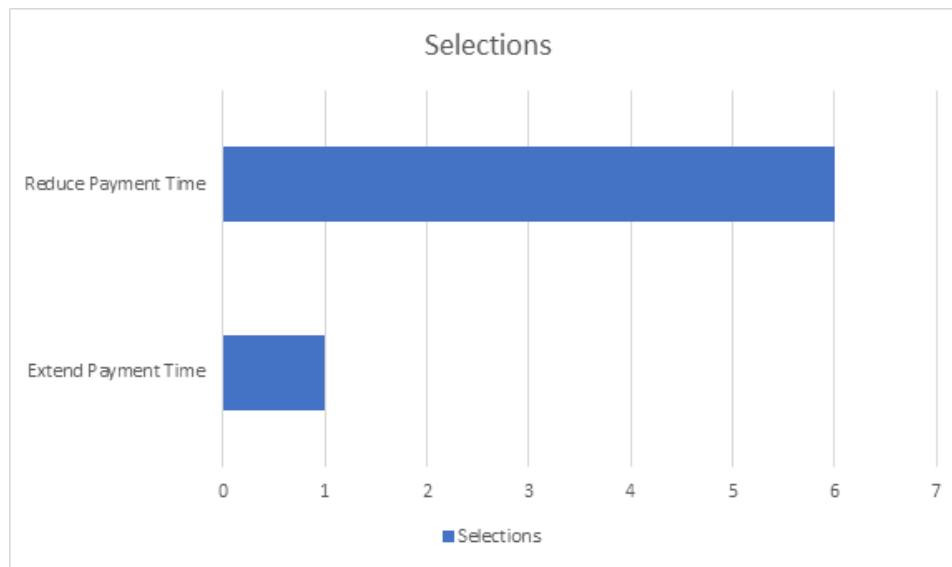
Please rate the ease of using the system.



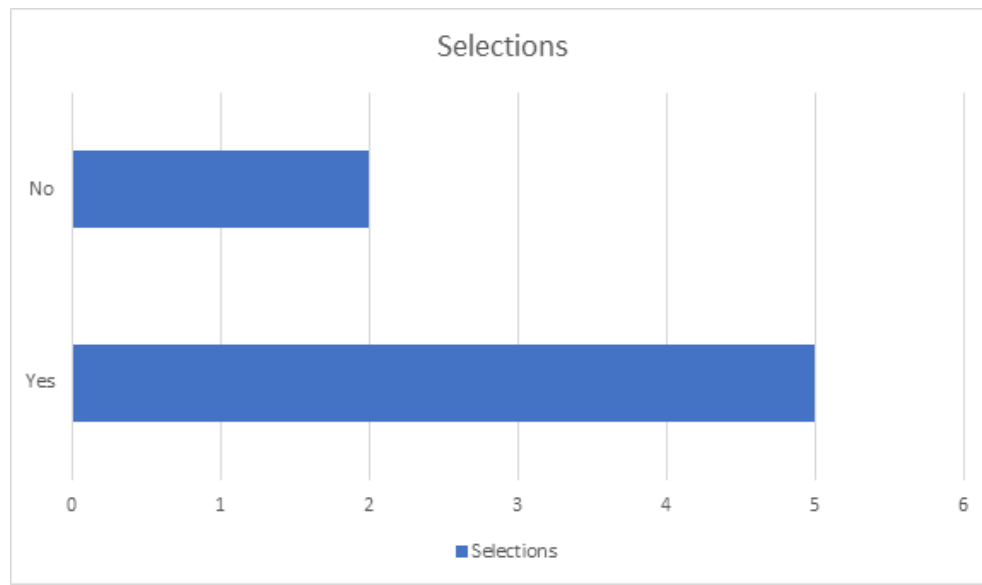
When processing invoices through either platform, are there any added steps to your processes or has being on either of these platforms reduced the amount of time to process an invoice?



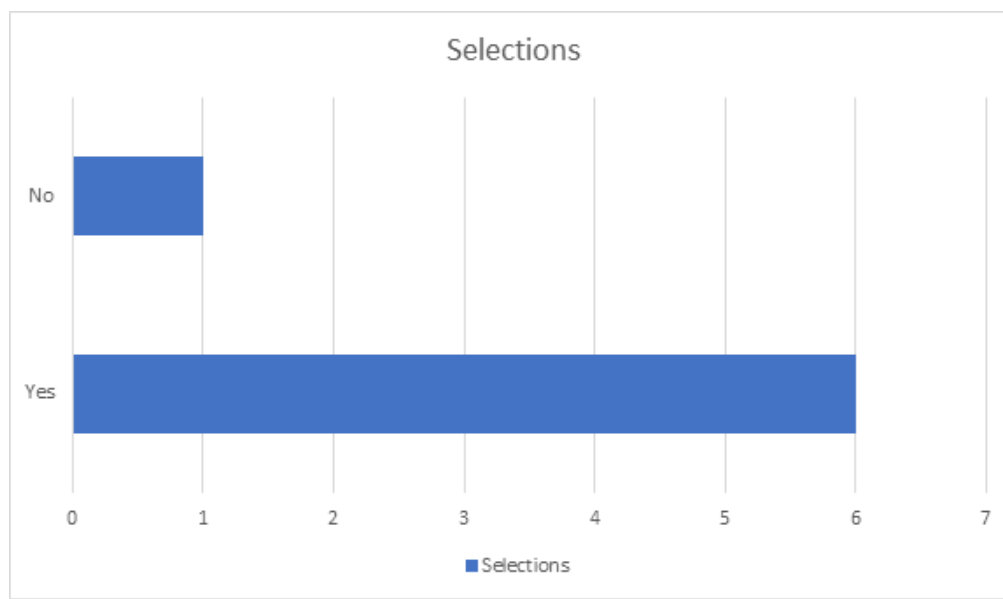
Does being on the eSettlements or Ohio | Buys platform reduce or extend the amount of time that you receive your payment?



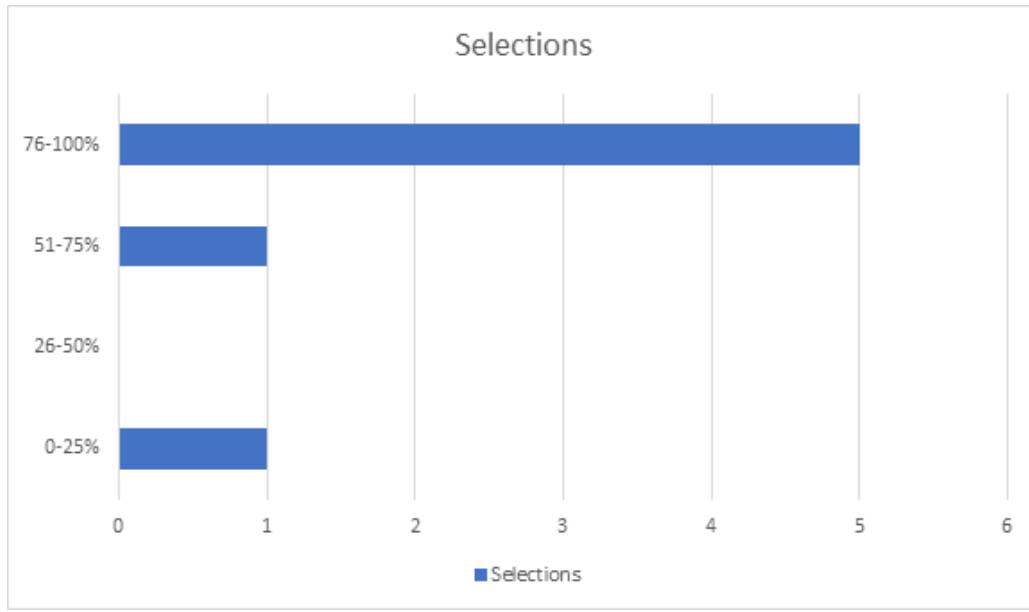
Do you have the ability to track the status of your payment in eSettlements or Ohio | Buys?



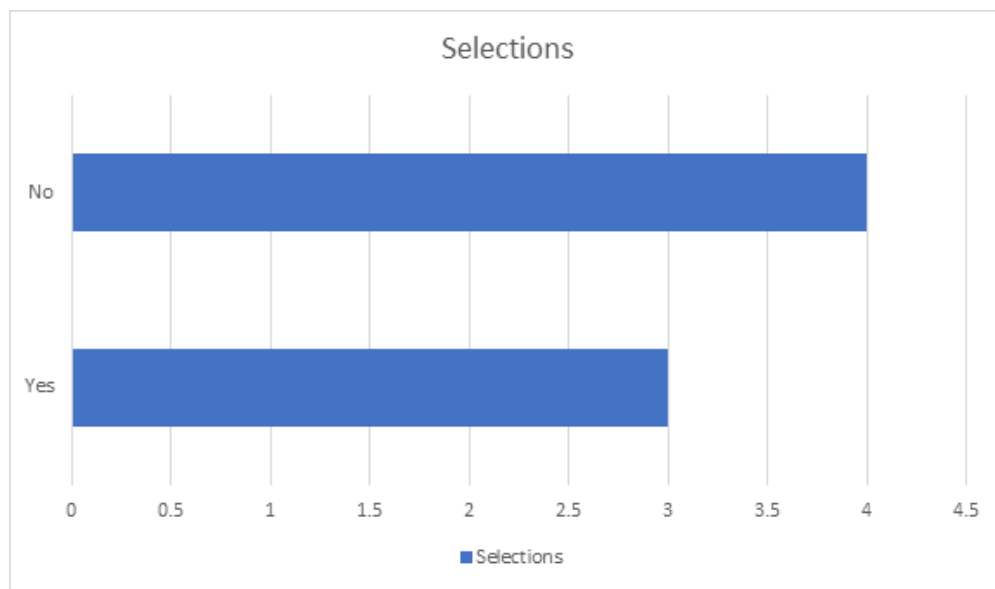
When an issue arises, are you able to contact someone for assistance without any roadblocks?



What percentage of invoices do you submit utilizing the online platform?



Was the supplier portal registration process user-friendly?



Please provide feedback regarding how being on this platform has added value to your organization.

The only response to this question was, *"The idea of Ohio Buys is great. But it seems like since we have been using it there were a number of glitches encountered not just be us, but by our customers at the State. It's getting better though."*

Analysis

There are numerous takeaways we obtain from the survey information provided. First, the sample size is small. Systems are both in beginning production, which, is not ideal for surveys currently, but can be a major learning tool in identifying issues early.

Second, the customer satisfaction, early on, is roughly 50/50. Through further vendor feedback, we can possibly identify which platform (Ohio|Buys or eSettlement) may be a better recommendation for future use.

Third, how do we actively monitor future vendors entering the system? More surveys? Contact via phone or email?

Next, at what point in time is a decision made to discontinue one platform and transfer all efforts towards one selection? Deadline?

Additionally, how do we ensure customer service is effective and timely?

Finally, majority rules minority rights. An unbiased decision will need to be formulated, while keeping in mind, the vendors currently using a certain platform.

Conclusion

Our finding has led us to have a much broader and deeper understanding of the processes involved in introducing a new interactive system that not only involves the state, but suppliers, vendors, and stake holders, equally. Both, eSettlements and Ohio|Buys are state-of-the-art platforms, that offer users the capability to follow the accounting process of their goods and services from receipt; then invoicing, and final payment. If used to its fullest potential, both platforms will inevitably cut down costs and save processing time for both, the State, and Suppliers to the State, which, would provide a win-win situation.

Each platform currently has limited functionality in performance because both, DAS and OBM are still waiting for a firm confirmation as to if the platform will be considered for state-wide agency usage. An understanding of the performance strategy is needed, prior to dollars being spent, to enhance the solutions any further.

Also, widespread agency participation is still minimal, for both platforms. In most cases, the introduction of the platforms has been intentionally withheld because of the questionable future of the platform.

In conclusion, it is our recommendation based on our team's findings, interviews, surveys, and research, to utilize the Ohio|Buys PO Flip to Invoice function. As noted, many times, it is the goal of the State to minimize the number of systems and/or platforms being used across the board. With the ability of Ohio|Buys to begin the Procurement process, working with Suppliers, and their ability to also respond directly in this system; with functions such as, reviewing and acknowledging purchase orders, viewing and responding to solicitations, and managing advanced shipment notices; it only made sense to continue the mission with having the ability for Suppliers to invoice electronically in Ohio|Buys; rather than using a separate platform such as e-Settlements for invoicing when this function is available in Ohio|Buys.

It would have been a preferable scenario for our team to have a better comparison if Ohio|Buys was fully functioning, to compare it to the e-Settlements system. However, with the information provided, and knowing that there is room for improvement, if needed, with the Ohio|Buys platform, using one system for processing, would be the best case for business processes for both, Suppliers, and State end users.

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