

Virginia Institute of Marine Science Achieves \$76,000 in Savings with Specialty Underwriters and E&I

The Situation

The Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), a prestigious research organization and graduate school within the College of William & Mary, is dedicated to advancing marine science through research, education, and advisory service. With an extensive array of specialized equipment integral to its research, VIMS faced mounting maintenance and repair costs and required a reliable, streamlined solution to manage these expenses effectively. Traditional Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) often met the institute's quality expectations but presented challenges in terms of cost and responsiveness. VIMS sought a more versatile approach to procurement, aiming to centralize equipment maintenance, reduce administrative burden, and introduce potential revenue-generating elements to the procurement process. Balancing its status as a state agency, VIMS needed to maximize operational efficiency and manage costs while maintaining its high standards for research support.

The Actions

Recognizing the potential benefits of E&I Cooperative's partnership with Specialty Underwriters (SU), VIMS embarked on a collaborative journey to transform its equipment maintenance program. E&I connected VIMS with SU, a service provider with over 40 years of experience in equipment maintenance management. SU offers educational institutions a single point of contact for all maintenance and repair services, helping members like VIMS streamline operations, monitor service reliability, and identify areas for significant cost savings.



The Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) is a premier coastal and marine sciences research institute. VIMS conducts research on pressing issues facing our rivers, estuaries, coasts and oceans.



The Actions, continued

Through E&I's SU contract, VIMS centralized its maintenance requests, ensuring a seamless, efficient management process while preserving departments' ability to influence their service experiences. David Zoll, Director of Procurement and Supply at VIMS, played a pivotal role in this initiative, assessing VIMS' maintenance needs, streamlining service coordination, and focusing on transparency in vendor management. Zoll reflected on the initial goals, saying, "We were looking for cost savings with no drop-in service. And from a billing standpoint, efficiency too."

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Central to SU's value was its flexible, customizable approach, which allowed VIMS to maintain comprehensive records of each piece of equipment, including past service experiences and technician performance. This information provided valuable insights, helping VIMS maintain a high-quality service experience. SU's approach of actively collecting and acting upon feedback—such as preferences for specific technicians or avoidance of others—enabled VIMS to balance vendor performance with research needs. "We ask if they have any issues with current technicians. Sometimes they prefer to stick with a specific technician or avoid others," Zoll noted.

The collaborative nature of this partnership extended to contract modifications, allowing VIMS to request customized contract language. This capability was instrumental in addressing concerns unique to VIMS. Zoll praised SU's adaptability, commenting, "They've been very accommodating." In addition to meeting VIMS' functional needs, SU's model presented a competitive advantage in cost. By allowing VIMS to compare quotes and select providers based on value rather than defaulting to OEM service contracts, SU opened the door for significant budget optimization.

The Results

The shift to E&I and SU's streamlined contract model yielded substantial savings for VIMS, enabling the institute to record over \$76,000 in savings on service and maintenance contracts within just six months. These savings were achieved without compromising service quality or placing an additional burden on research teams. The centralized, single-point-of-contact model allowed VIMS procurement staff to simplify workflows, gather actionable data, and reduce the time researchers spent handling administrative tasks related to maintenance requests.

The Results, continued

One of the most tangible outcomes for VIMS was the increase in operational efficiency. Before engaging with SU, equipment maintenance was managed directly by the end-user departments, often leading to higher costs and limited price competition. The SU contract introduced a centralized point of access for maintenance needs, enabling VIMS to reduce procurement workload on research departments. Zoll emphasized, “The centralized approach lets us focus our researchers back on teaching, learning, and advancing their work. Instead of handling administration, we let finance manage those details.”

Further, the collaborative relationship with SU and E&I afforded VIMS increased control over maintenance outcomes, including a streamlined approach for resolving issues quickly. Zoll noted, “If I ask a question or have a change, I usually get feedback the same day or the next business day. SU has been absolutely excellent...they get things done fast.” This responsiveness was especially valuable for VIMS, where unexpected equipment failures could delay research.

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Beyond cost and time savings, the partnership allowed VIMS to take advantage of E&I’s patronage rebate program, a unique feature that generates additional revenue. As an E&I member, VIMS benefits from rebates on select contract spends, reinvesting these funds into its research initiatives. The combined result of cost reductions, increased revenue, and enhanced support reaffirmed VIMS’ decision to leverage E&I’s cooperative contract with SU, creating a full-circle value that empowers its research mission.

This collaboration also paved the way for VIMS to adopt new procurement strategies, such as strategic spend assessments provided by E&I. With ongoing support from E&I representatives, VIMS continually evaluates its procurement processes, fine-tuning approaches to maximize efficiency and align spending with institutional goals. These efforts have yielded tangible benefits, including data-backed contract recommendations that streamline spending while furthering VIMS’ mission.

Through the E&I and SU partnership, VIMS not only met its immediate cost-saving goals but also built a more resilient, adaptable procurement process that empowers researchers to focus on innovation. Zoll summarized the impact, stating, “We were able to take into finance those aspects that used to be a burden on departments. SU and E&I helped us achieve a real shift in how we handle procurement—making it more about supporting research and less about administration.”

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