

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW · Q3 2026

Before You Renew

The numbers that moved this quarter, and what they mean for your contracts.

Dr. Lenora Sevillian, Executive Director, Community Engagement · **Nate Termaat**, Director, Category Engagement

The theme of the third quarter was not scarcity, which the profession has managed before. It was the unreliability of the reference points the profession plans against. In category after category, a figure or a belief carried comfortably did not survive contact with its source. A budget indexed to the wrong measure of inflation is wrong in the supplier's favor. A plan written against a demographic peak that already passed misjudges its own timing. The quarter rewarded institutions willing to check the reference, and procurement is where that discipline is exercised.

3.7%

Consumer inflation, 12 months to Sept 2026: the measure most budgets are built on

6.3%

Producer-price inflation over the same window, on the side institutions actually buy

2.6 pts

The gap between the two, wider than the prior month

WHAT THIS REPORT RECOMMENDS

- **Index to the measure that matches the purchase.** Evaluate supplier escalation against the relevant producer series, not headline consumer inflation, and prefer substantiation requirements to fixed-percentage ceilings.
- **Plan against the demographic reality, not the forecast.** The traditional pipeline peaked in 2025; prioritize retention and the stopped-out population now, while the window is open.
- **Bring procurement in early.** The quarter's risks were generated elsewhere and arrived as obligations; procurement is where they are governed rather than absorbed.

What the evidence shows

The divergence between consumer and producer prices is the clearest instance and the one with broadest reach. Consumer inflation ran 3.7 percent over the twelve months ending September 2026, with core at 2.6

percent. Over the identical period producer prices for final demand rose 6.3 percent, their steepest advance since December 2022, and the producer core measure rose 5.0 percent, nearly double the consumer core.

Institutions purchase contracted labor, mechanical services, energy, logistics, and equipment, all of which sit on the producer side of that divide. The report resists the temptation to overstate the point: no published source supports a fixed education-specific premium, and this report does not claim one. The defensible statement is narrower and still consequential.

Beyond price, the demographic peak that planning documents still describe as approaching arrived in 2025, and the federal environment has grown less predictable with one significant outcome running in the institution's favor. In each case the institution is not short of information. It is working from a reference point that has moved.

The role of E&I Cooperative Services

Read this way, cooperative sourcing is a layer of governance and risk reduction rather than another buying channel. Demand-aggregated, competitively solicited contracts absorb the volatility an individual institution cannot, and restore leverage when suppliers consolidate. E&I's [competitively solicited contracts](#) carry pre-negotiated terms an institution can adopt and tailor rather than negotiate alone. A member can begin with its [E&I sourcing consultant](#).

The standing question for the coming quarter is whether members are checking the reference points they plan against, or carrying the ones that have quietly moved. This report is written to help them check. The companion one-page “90 Days, No New Budget” checklists, in Higher Education and K-12 editions, turn its recommendations into actions that need no new budget.

Signals at a glance

Category	Dominant signal this quarter	What it means for procurement
Information Technology	Adoption near universal; a majority of use occurring outside sanctioned tools; return unmeasured at most institutions	Measure unsanctioned use; prohibit training on institutional data in writing; keep terms short and review after award
Facilities	Backlog at 156 dollars per gross square foot and rising; building performance deadlines now carry penalties	Treat compliance as recurring services, not a capital project; report the reinvestment gap in dollars
Research and Scientific	Financing obstacle removed; general efficacy evidence for immersive learning weakened under methodological filtering	Scope purchases to a named competency and assessment; model the balance sheet effect before committing
Finance and Admissions	Coaching alone produced no measurable enrollment effect; the combination with tuition relief nearly doubled re-enrollment	Buy the components the evidence supports; write performance terms around completion rather than enrollment

Cross-category member signals, Q3 2026. Source: E&I category engagement and the external evidence cited in the full report.

The series

Each brief stands alone and takes about five minutes to read. All eight, the full report, and the 90-day checklists are at [\[LANDING PAGE LINK\]](#).

00 Executive Overview

This document: the quarter at a glance.

01 The Quarter in Focus

Prices, demographics, federal support, and the EU AI Act.

02 Information Technology

AI adoption, unsanctioned tools, and governed contracts.

03 Facilities

Building performance standards and the renewal backlog.

04 Research & Scientific

What the evidence says about immersive learning.

05 Enrollment Services

What actually brings stopped-out students to completion.

06 Contracts & Suppliers

The provisions that hold when reference points move.

07 Forecast Record

How our June forecasts held up, and what comes next.

Want help acting on this?

Your E&I sourcing consultant can point you to the contract that fits. The Executive Overview, full report, and 90-day checklists: [\[LANDING PAGE LINK\]](#)

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