COLA Price Collector
mobile app for BlackBerry

What it is, what it is not, *and how it fits into the COLA survey process*

The purpose of this overview is to help you understand how the *COLA Price Collector* mobile app fits into the process for the Retail Price Schedule (COLA) survey. The app currently exists for BlackBerry and is available on the secure Work side of the device.

We *strongly* request that a Management Officer and at least one person who will act as Data Collector sit through the COLA training provided online by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), which has been updated for the new version of *eAllowances*. You can complete both courses in *less than a day*, and they are available at *no charge* to your post. **This is the very best thing you can do to prepare for the COLA survey process**. Here are links to the courses:

- [PA462 – eAllowances: Retail Price Schedule](#)

- [PA463 – Post Allowance: Retail Price Collecting](#)

The mobile app can help you with price collection, but it will make much more sense after you take the FSI-provided training.

What the app does

In short, this mobile app is an extension of the Retail Price Schedule (COLA survey) in *eAllowances*. It provides a faster and more efficient way to collect and record retail prices by using Department-issued BlackBerry smartphones. It's designed to assist Price Collector personnel at post who are tasked with visiting stores, markets, and other outlets (including the commissary, if applicable) to collect price data from local retail outlets. The price data is saved locally to the device and then uploaded back to the main *eAllowances* database when the user is ready to do so.

This will tremendously decrease duplication of effort by eliminating the need to print paper reports, hand-write price information, deliver them back to a data entry clerk, and ask that person to decipher the handwriting and enter the data into the system. With the app, the information goes from live collection into the system without passing through anyone else first.

The prices can be recorded anywhere, regardless of network connection, but the device must have a good connection (either mobile data or WiFi) when downloading survey info and uploading price data back to the system. The app is designed to retain the data even if out of range of a signal, the app is closed, or the phone shuts down or loses power. The price data resides on the secure side of the device until the user is ready to upload it to *eAllowances*. To reiterate, *this means that the phone will need a good signal (mobile or WiFi) when downloading the survey(s) to the phone and uploading price data back to the system*, but the rest of the time the app can be used with complete independence from a network connection.

What the app does *not* do

The app does *not* facilitate Living Pattern Questionnaires (LPQs). The app does *not* support adding users. The app does *not* provide a way for management officers to approve the survey. All of these functions must be performed in the main *eAllowances* web application.

How to download the app

Currently, this app is automatically distributed to all Department-issued BlackBerry devices, so it should already be available to you. If you do not see it on your device, you can download it just like other custom apps for BlackBerry. Everyone with a Department-issued BlackBerry device (running BlackBerry 10 or better), both domestic and overseas, will find the app in the BlackBerry World app store on the secure Work side of the device.

Type of Device

The app was optimized for <u>full-screen</u> devices with on-screen keyboards (*not* hard/physical keyboards). Therefore, you should plan to use it with devices such as the BlackBerry Z10 or Z30. Devices with hard keyboards, such as the Classic, are not recommended.

Help and Instructions

While the app has a rather intuitive design, sometimes there are things that may not appear obvious. The app includes an on-board Help page that explains just about everything you need to know. You can open the help page by going to the app menu and clicking Help.

Prerequisites

Everyone who intends to use the app must have an OpenNet account *and* be granted access to *eAllowances* as either a *Data Collector* role or *Management Officer* role. Otherwise, the user will not be allowed to interact with *eAllowances* via the mobile app.

Since the goal of the app is price collection, not full survey completion, the following must be true before using the app to collect prices:

- Your Living Pattern Survey must be complete
- You must have a Retail Price Schedule (COLA) survey in "Initiated" status
- All Living Pattern Questionnaires data must be completely loaded into the COLA survey (screen 1 of the survey – upper-right)
- All tax data should be complete (screen 2 of the survey)
- All retail Outlets (stores, shops, markets) and service providers should be added into the survey (screen 3 of the survey – left side)
- All of the Outlets must be assigned to price collection categories (screen 3 of the survey – right side)

Office of Allowances Related Apps

A *Per Diem Rates* app also exists that is very handy for finding Per Diem rates on the go. You can find it in the same place you find the *COLA Price Collector* app.

Further Support

Please feel free to reach out with any questions at all. Managers and administrators may contact us at eAllowancesHelp@state.gov. Be sure to include "**COLA Price Collector**" in the subject line of your email. (Policy questions not related to app functions may be directed to AllowancesO@state.gov.)

Please take the FSI training, begin your process, and let us know if you have additional questions.