



# 2025 George Cronin Awards

## Case Study: Florida

### PROACTIVE SUPPLIER ENGAGEMENT

Supplier engagement can be an overlooked subject in the procurement profession. However, one state, Florida, has developed a comprehensive model not only to track performance but also to communicate proactively and avoid performance issues. "We often would only engage with suppliers when there was a problem," said Terri Chason, Bureau Chief of Contract Management for the Division of State Purchasing. "We knew we had to switch from reactive to proactive—from compliance-only to engagement-focused." In response, Florida implemented an innovative supplier engagement model.

#### 'WE REALLY NEED THEM'

Contract management in Florida appeared to be transactional, reactive, and focused almost entirely on compliance. The Division, however, sought a strategic and partnership-driven approach. ***The state manages more than 1,100 supplier agreements across a broad range of industries and service types, but it would only meet with suppliers on occasion.*** Those meetings primarily consisted of document reviews. By 2022, the state was meeting with just five to 10 suppliers per year. Lack of engagement was an issue when contracts encountered problems or failed, a much more common occurrence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This created risks, including missed early warning signs, slower issue resolution, and weakened relationships between suppliers and the state. In some cases, no one from the state had ever visited suppliers who had worked with the state for 20 years. "If you're not engaging with your [suppliers], you're probably not going to learn what kinds of impacts are going on in the industry," Chason said. "And we really need them because they're the subject matter experts."

#### THE STRUCTURE

***The question for Florida became how to structure relationships with suppliers around engagement, not just compliance.*** The Division established onboarding and business review meetings (BRMs) for suppliers, both of which can be held virtually. Additionally, the model includes on-site evaluations, supplier feedback software, and a supplier performance dashboard. Florida's supplier engagement model has five key components:



The five-year goal is for the state to meet at least once each year with every supplier with whom it conducts business. More in-person meetings and evaluations are intended to have several benefits:

- Enhancing compliance framework with proactive monitoring and real-time oversight
- Emphasizing a strategic approach to the contract management process
- Promoting stronger supplier relationships
- Growing industry awareness and operational insight
- Ensuring continuous improvement at the statewide contract level
- Fostering collaborative problem solving
- Encouraging a culture of accountability

A key feature is the documented structure for virtual BRMs and on-site visits with Florida-based suppliers. To ensure that suppliers fully understand the requirements of contracts, the state seeks to meet with them early in the process.

The meetings cover topics like:

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| • Pricing                                | • Key points of contact for communication |
| • Resellers                              | • Contact information                     |
| • eProcurement systems use and reporting | • Compliance requirements                 |
| • Supplier and agency resources          | • Affidavits                              |

The meetings can take place with an individual or a group, with care taken to conceal sensitive information if more than one supplier organization is present. The timing is crucial, as suppliers and the state will have a better mutual understanding of the contract if they meet early in the process.

## PUTTING FACES TO NAMES

The state scaled back on “busy work” to allow more time for such visits. Before scheduling meetings, the Division staff identifies travel locations within the state. After identifying these locations, they select suppliers whose offices are near the area to visit. Priority is given to areas with suppliers who need additional guidance or who fall under a portfolio or industry experiencing supply or cost constraints.

When the meetings began in 2022, the goal was for each supplier to “put a face to a name,” Chason said. While on site, Division staff tour supplier facilities, discuss contracts, and review successes and opportunities. The state uses a supplier ratings and review platform to implement its own online ratings system. These ratings are embedded in the [\*\*state's customer-facing contracts webpage\*\*](#). At meetings, a representative from the ratings platform guides suppliers through the review system, enabling them to better understand how they are being evaluated. Just as importantly, suppliers are encouraged to provide feedback to state staff.

The Division has created several resources that staff can use during meetings and site visits. One template offers an agenda for BRMs, covering details about the meeting environment and participants, discussion topics, spending updates, and industry trends.

Another template can be used at site visits to document training needs, supplier insights and concerns, contract issues, and supplier requests or recommendations. A contract summary form outlines contract details, including:

- Ongoing issues
- Unique contract features
- Reporting period

- Number of renewal years remaining
- Description of the product or service
- People involved in the contract

## RESULTS

Florida's model has transformed the way it interacts with suppliers. The state has dramatically increased engagement. The process has built trust and transparency through consistent, direct communication with suppliers. Overall, the meetings, standardized reporting templates, and compliance documentation have minimized delays, which are often caused by the need to retrieve documentation from suppliers. The number of BRMs and site visits per year is as follows:

- FY 2022-23: 80 BRMs | 5 site visits
- FY 2023-24: 300 BRMs | 17 site visits
- FY 2024-25: 415 BRMs | 40 site visits
- FY 2025-26 (target goal): 650-1,130 BRMs | 80 site visits

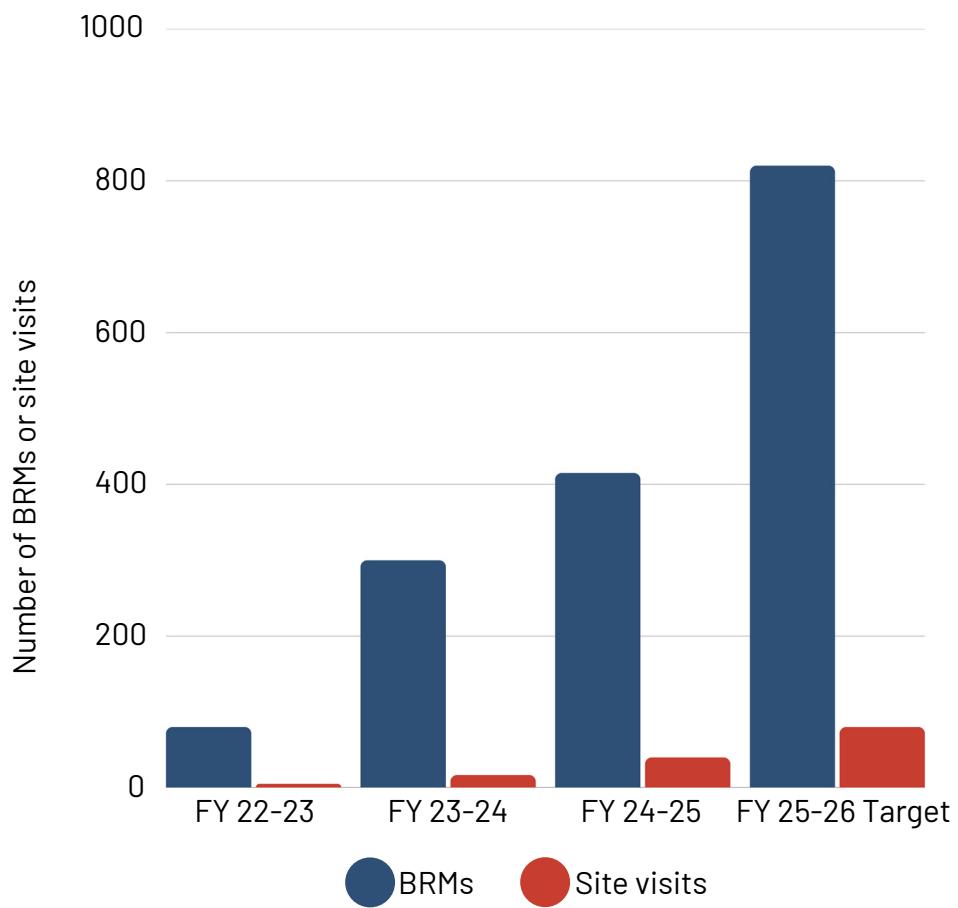


Figure 1: Number of BRMs (blue) and site visits (red) per year

Performance gaps and emerging risks are identified early, minimizing the possibility of formal disputes or protests. Improved agility and responsiveness from the state and suppliers have allowed for issues to be resolved more quickly. Issues that arise are typically one-off events that can be handled within a day. With repeated supplier issues much less common, what previously took several follow-up emails—and sometimes formal escalations—can now be resolved in a single meeting.

The practice has also had a strong, positive effect on internal operations. Division staff are better informed for strategic procurement planning, as they now have more access to real-time market conditions, industry trends, and supply chain impacts. Due to the depth of this supplier engagement, staff members have developed subject matter expertise in key industry topics, enabling the state to quickly anticipate changes in the procurement landscape, focus on specific procurement strategies, and make more informed decisions.

Division staff has included the process in their office goals and performance evaluations. To receive a satisfactory performance rating, staff whose job duties involve interacting with suppliers must engage with at least half of them each year. The goal for the Division is to meet with all suppliers at least once per year by 2026.

## **CONCLUSION**

Florida's approach to supplier engagement combines structured engagement, transparent communication, and performance tracking. It can be implemented expeditiously while still allowing for customization based on specific needs and contract types. Other agencies that may wish to implement their own program can start by creating a BRM meeting agenda template, a site visit agenda protocol, and a supplier performance dashboard. Chason's call to action: "Let's move contract management from compliance-only to strategic engagement. Structured, recurring engagement changes the game for performance and accountability."