

Kevin Minor: 0:05

Hello, welcome. Episode 11 of the NASPO Pulse. This is the podcast where we're monitoring issues in state procurement. We've got our finger on the pulse. I'm your host, Kevin Minor, and I'm doing okay over here at NASPO HQ. How are you we're thinking about you doing okay over here at NASPO HQ. How are you we're thinking about you. So this episode today, it's a great episode.

Kevin Minor: 0:35

We are talking with Jesse Marks, chief Bureau of Goods and Services for the state of Florida, and we are talking maps. No, not like maps of Florida, although I'm sure that'd be an interesting conversation. There's a lot of really beautiful places in Florida. I'm a fan of their beaches. No, I'm talking about Florida's market analysis and procurement strategy Maps. This maps process is something else, people. Among other things, it helps to ensure the historical mapping of your procurement, reduces the concern of losing institutional knowledge of your procurement, reduces the concern of losing institutional knowledge and sets a defensible position for selection of the method of procurement. Now, can you think of any instances where that might come in handy? Now, small disclaimer this interview with Jesse was done back in March. We had to put it on hold for a little while, but that does not make this any less relevant. Let me tell you, in fact just let Jesse tell you let's take the pulse. Jesse Marks, thanks for joining us on the pod today. How are you?

Jesse Marks: 1:32

I'm great, Kevin. How are you doing?

Kevin Minor: 1:35

I'm doing well. Jesse and I are talking via Zoom right now as we practice our social distancing, and I can hear you pretty well, Jess. Can you hear me?

Jesse Marks: 1:47

Yes, I can hear you, wonderful.

Kevin Minor: 1:49

Awesome. Well, thanks for taking the time today to talk to us about Florida's maps. We actually had a couple different webinars and presentations on the topic and it just continues to get interest among membership and it's something that's really innovative and really creative, so we wanted to talk to you a little bit more about it. Currently, you are the Bureau Chief of Goods and Services with the Division of State Purchasing for the state of Florida. Is that correct?

Jesse Marks: 2:18

That's correct, Kevin.

Kevin Minor: 2:20

That is a long title. Can you explain that to me? That is a long title.

Jesse Marks: 2:23

Can you explain that to me? I'd be glad to so. Procurement Bureau. Chief of Goods and Services. As you can imagine, almost anything is a good or a service. We're really busy here in the great state of Florida. We also have an IT and Special Projects Procurement Bureau as well.

Jesse Marks: 2:44

So between the two bureaus. We tag team procurement and we're all about obtaining a best value for the state of Florida. So our procurement profile consists of a variety of things, anywhere from office, medical, dental supplies to ag and lawn equipment, translation services, furniture, motor vehicles, you name it. We do it here in Florida.

Kevin Minor: 3:09

So you're kind of all over the place in terms of if it's not a good, it's a service and they all connect, but they don't. Some of them are completely different.

Jesse Marks: 3:19

Absolutely yes. Every procurement is different. Which is the beauty in procurement? Is you kind of become a jack of all trades and a master of none?

Kevin Minor: 3:32

That's fair. I like that. Hey, there's nothing wrong with being a master of none. I've been one for a long time. It's not a bad way to live, Jessie. How long have you been with procurement? Bad way to live?

Jesse Marks: 3:44

Jessie, how long have you been with procurement? So I have been in procurement roles various ones for 12 years now, all with the state of Florida. For Department of Management Services, specifically my current agency, I joined the department as the deputy director of departmental purchasing, and so in the agency procurement world your customers are really the different divisions that live in the agency. And then, thankfully, Roz asked me to join her leadership team in state purchasing, where I was able to broaden my procurement horizons, and now our customers are all of the state agencies and the eligible users here in Florida.

Jesse Marks: 4:34

And eligible users are cities, counties, universities, so we really have the whole gamut of customers that we offer goods and services to.

Kevin Minor: 4:46

And, for those that don't know, Roz is Roz Ingram and she is the CPO of Florida and our upcoming or incoming president, our 2021 NASPO president, and she is a friend of the pod and a wonderful member, so we love her too. So what is MAPS?

Jesse Marks: 5:09

Can you explain that acronym? For me, absolutely so. Maps is our Market Analysis Procurement Strategy.

Kevin Minor: 5:16

The what, the who, the what.

Jesse Marks: 5:20

So maps are a great document that, at the direction of Roz, when she became the chief procurement officer for Florida, she wanted there to be a way for state purchasing to not only really have a collective, you know place where we store information about making informed procurement decisions. So what does pricing, benchmark pricing, look like? Industry data, where have we been on the current contract or is this a brand new contract? And so really this is almost like a seven or eight page type briefing document and it helps us make informed procurement decisions along with keeping that knowledge documentation in house. So if we have someone that you know retires or that that leaves DMS, we can always go back and say, ah, that's why we made that decision, and so it's it's. It's critical also for the historical purposes.

Kevin Minor: 6:27

So it's something that you keep on file so you can go back, we do.

Jesse Marks: 6:34

It's a wonderful tool because sometimes we'll get questions from our executive leadership or, you know, maybe

downtown with the legislature and they'll say, hey, do we have a contract in place for motor vehicles? And we can go look in our maps folder and say, absolutely, we do. They may have some high-level questions like, hey, who are the current contractors or do you have renewals available on the current contract? And so it's a very easy way to store that data and to provide accurate information internally and externally for our customers.

Kevin Minor: 7:10

Yeah, and it can take some of the time right out of the process. Make it a little bit faster.

Jesse Marks: 7:17

It really does. I mean, you know, we don't have to be as repetitive. So we're all about working smarter, not harder. And so why have three different people answering the same question in a month span, when we all have one centralized place where you know, one person already did the legwork and documented the procurement decision? And then we have it in one centralized place.

Kevin Minor: 7:42

And I guess we should also mention that MAPS is real, deep, deeply rooted in market research, and you have quite a bit of experience in market research, don't you? You do a lot of training with that too.

Jesse Marks: 7:55

We do. Yeah, I've had the pleasure of working with NASPO and Procurement IQ and we use that tool here in Florida for every map that we complete. We love Procurement IQ. We have a specific industry section in our maps and so we may be looking at you know how fast is the industry growing or declining? For we'll just use disposable paper grinding, for we'll just use disposable paper, and so for like example, would be paper towels and toilet paper. You know that price factor may stem from the price of pulp and so kind of. What is that benchmark and those factors and pricing? And then we look at risk assessments and we also gauge the Bureau of Labor statistics with our producer and consumer price indexes.

Kevin Minor: 8:51

Right.

Jesse Marks: 8:51

And that percentage is the market's going up or down? How fluid is it? So yeah, we absolutely look at our industry information and our maps process.

Kevin Minor: 9:03

And so you know why did you guys start using maps? Like, how did that come about? Were you guys just sitting around one day and said you know what? We need a map. We need a map to follow. How did that come about?

Jesse Marks: 9:28

state purchasing. We had like a one or two-page PowerPoint that we would use to document very high-level contractor procurement information. We would take it downstairs to our executive leadership for briefing and so Roz, coming in very similar background that I have to Roz's, is on the agency level.

Jesse Marks: 9:46

You know she was always thinking what are the impacts to the customers? And because we have a very, you know, highlighted customer information section in our maps like is the current contract working? What contract improvements do we need to make? Are our financial consequences language strong enough for the vendor community if they're not providing quality goods and services? So really Roz wanted there to be a way where we were documenting not just customer information but industry information. I mean, just because Florida issues a competitive procurement doesn't mean that we're getting best value or best bang for our buck. Procurement

doesn't mean that we're getting best value or best bang for our buck. And so it was really important to Roz and the executive leadership team here to have a centralized place where we were gathering all of those factors for procurements and contract decisions and then keeping them for historical purposes. So it really just kind of morphed. We've you know, like everything, it's lessons learned, and so we've added sections as we've gone through the process.

Kevin Minor: 10:55

Yeah, like any good innovative and creative idea, it kind of morphs and forms into something else and better. It's adaptive, highly adaptive, right? So there wasn't one central place for all that information before maps? Was it literally just a free-for-all every time?

Jesse Marks: 11:16

Yeah, it really was up to state purchasing, or for our divisions and actually our divisions at DMS they do kind of like a mini version of the maps for our agency purchasing shop. And so, you know, every time we would go to issue a new procurement, we'd have to have the conversation right with, like, the current contract manager and say, hey, how's the current contract working, or how much are you currently spending on this contract? And so it was a lot of, you know, puzzle pieces and we figured why not just create this awesome document where we have a central focus?

Kevin Minor: 11:57

Yeah, saves a lot of time too, right? It seems to all kind of go back to saving that time and allowing you to get more done. So walk me through the decision-making process for one of these documents.

Jesse Marks: 12:12

Okay. So with the MAPS process, our purchasing analysts in both the procurement bureaus they really put their labor of love into a MAPS. It usually takes them about a month or so to make sure they've got all the important information into the map and then it starts routing through our approval process here in Florida. So the Bureau Chiefs take a look at it and then our Florida is very unique that we have an Office of special counsel that is designed to really mitigate procurement issues up front. I think a lot of states they just have general counsel where folks will get into, you know, like a protest with a procurement or they're more kind of decentralized and thankfully here in Florida we have very much hands-on special and general counsels here. Our special counsel reviews it for state purchasing and then it filters up to our deputy director and our director Ross and then, based on the dollar amount, it goes to our executive leadership so that may be our deputy secretary or our chief of staff level for final execution.

Kevin Minor: 13:33

Okay. So, and it seems like it expedites that process too it allows someone in Roz's position and even higher up to just consider the bottom line.

Jesse Marks: 13:47

Absolutely. Just consider the bottom line, absolutely. And it really takes out the guesswork or the follow-up, because, allowing leadership the opportunity to make those informed decisions and us to provide nothing but facts, no opinions, in this document they can go wow, we're, you know? Because we benchmark what is New York, California, Texas, states of similar size and scope, what are they paying for a certain good or service? And so it allows them the ability to make those informed procurement decisions and it also cuts down on them then contacting Ross or one of the bureau chiefs, saying hey, what are we doing with?

Jesse Marks: 14:23

this contract Because they're in the know, at all times, right, and that information is just at arm's length saying hey, what are we doing with this contract?

Kevin Minor: 14:27

Because they're in the know at all times, right, and that information is just at arm's length. They can grab it at any time that they need to without having to bother. Well, bother is not really the right word, but inquire right.

Jesse Marks: 14:41

Yeah, inquire is a good word.

Kevin Minor: 14:44

So you know that was kind of leading into my next question. Maps helps to reduce that speculative decision making.

Jesse Marks: 14:58

Mm, hmm, right, so talk to me just a little bit more about that. Yeah, absolutely it does. So, you know, a lot of times, especially with competitive procurements, Florida has a healthy protest process and so, with you know, we'll get questions like well, why did you issue an invitation to bid which is solely price? And with the MAP process we've documented okay, well, especially with the help of Procurement IQ, it'll you know, it gives us industry information about how is a good or service specifically sourced, and is price the only factor, or should we be looking at quality and expertise, staffing levels and so references and our financials? And so there's lots of things that we look at. That lets Florida know. You know we are reducing any type of question marks when it comes to our procurement and the method that we decided to employ for our customers.

Kevin Minor: 16:02

So speak, to how MAPS reduces concern of losing that institutional knowledge that you've gained.

Jesse Marks: 16:09

Absolutely so. A really good example is my very first maps that I did here in state purchasing for.

Kevin Minor: 16:17

Florida the first maps.

Jesse Marks: 16:20

Oh, you'll never forget your first map. It was for office supplies, which may sound boring, but it's anything but here in Florida it's an \$86 million contract.

Kevin Minor: 16:33

Wow.

Jesse Marks: 16:34

Widely used.

Kevin Minor: 16:36

That's some change.

Jesse Marks: 16:37

Yeah, I mean it was a tough one, but it was a great learning experience. And so, going to that first one, I had all these questions about why is this structured? A certain way we actually have a third-party benchmark that we use for office-wise and lots of different quirks with this contract, and I had all these questions that I wanted to add facts into the map and the person that worked on the procurement last was no longer with the department and so I had to schedule a meeting with thankfully, that person was still in Tallahassee at a sister agency.

Kevin Minor: 17:22

Right.

Jesse Marks: 17:23

And I was able to gather all this information, but truly, that knowledge, documentation went out the window when she left the department and so, just going through that, I was able to document this very unique office supplies process for Florida and now we have a map for it. And so before Roz implemented this process, there was none. And so before Roz implemented this process, there was none. And so if folks went to different agencies or retired, there was no really having that conversation and saying, hey, what were some of the hangups or what products or services were most bought by you know agencies and you know which pens weren't working for customers, and so it just it was. It's a great tool to ensure that, no matter who's here, we know the facts about our procurements and contracts.

Kevin Minor: 18:20

Right, and just think if you weren't able to get in touch with that employee again, with that staff member, that could have been a nightmare, oh my gosh, it could have been a whole different story.

Jesse Marks: 18:33

It would have been really tough. I mean even having those multiple I mean hours of conversations about the current contract and kind of where we were even on the, because this was the third iteration of the office supplies, procurement and contract, and so there was background on the first iteration and she worked on the second iteration. So, as you can imagine, if I didn't have that conversation with her, I may have missed a pertinent piece of information.

Jesse Marks: 19:05

Right we actually used to use office supplies via a consortia and then we decided to bring that office supplies procurement in-house as a state term contract and that's mandatory for our state agencies. But there was a lot of reasons why we decided to do that and thankfully I was able to document that in the MAPS process.

Kevin Minor: 19:30

And you've used it since then.

Jesse Marks: 19:33

Oh yeah, oh yeah, I, I, I was. I'm really proud of that office and and, yes, we, we go back to it frequently and you know, you work on a procurement three years ago and and sometimes you can't remember what you did last week, and so it's just a great tool to go back to and and go ah, that's where we landed, you know you're telling me you can't remember a procurement that you did three years ago. Well, I can, but I always like to make sure I've got my facts straight.

Kevin Minor: 20:08

There you go, so I want to switch back just a little bit and talk about why should states consider using this maps process, because I know we've gotten a lot of really good questions. I know that I've passed your contact info off to several people in other states and I'm sure that you've gotten some really interesting questions, so maybe speak to that a little bit and some advice and why states should consider using maps.

Jesse Marks: 20:38

Absolutely. You know, I think one of the most important parts of using the maps is the pricing analysis. And how do we benchmark if we're getting the best deal? And in Florida, with our maps, we look at numerous sources. We look at what is NASPO and other purchasing consortia doing. Again, we look at our states of similar size and scope Texas, California, New York. We also look at our geographic neighbors. So we may look at, you know, Georgia or

Alabama, south Carolina, alabama, south Carolina and I think that's important for states to do, because just because you're issuing this competitive procurement, the economy may have changed. I mean, production may be actually going down, and wouldn't that be great in certain instances. And so why pay three bucks for something when you can pay \$1.50 for a box of pens instead? Because you know the market best and gathering that industry information from Procurement IQ and looking at you know what are your sister states and geographical neighbors.

Jesse Marks: 21:50

You know what about lawn care services? We wouldn't use a benchmark for New York because the geographics are much different here in Florida, but we may look at Georgia or Alabama to say, wow, are we getting the best deal for lawn care for our different state buildings or custodial services? We also really think it's important to use it, because you can notate similarities and differences. I can't tell you how many times I've been in an executive leadership briefing and they say hey, jess, you know what? Is New York paying for this? Or does Texas even have a contract for this? Are they doing this in-house? Are they outsourcing these services? And so it's critical to know your industry, and it just furthers your knowledge of what you're procuring and that, as an end result, gets you the best value.

Kevin Minor: 22:50

Well, Jess, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us today. I think this is a really important process and I think it's going to be a great resource for other states who want to know more about the MAPS process.

Jesse Marks: 23:02

Absolutely, kevin. It has been a pleasure, as always, speaking with you and I look forward to working with you.

Kevin Minor: 23:10

Yes, and Jesse Marks is the Bureau Chief of Goods and Services of the Division of Purchasing for the great state of Florida and it was our pleasure to have us today. And, jesse, I hope that we are talking again soon.

Jesse Marks: 23:26

Thank you so much, Kevin.

Kevin Minor: 23:29

So what's Jesse saying, no matter who's in the office? The MAP maps process helps ensure the facts about the procurement are documented Right. Why have three different people answer the same question in a month's span? I'm sure that's happened to you before. Right, the pleasure of talking with Jesse. Is your state doing something similar? Maybe this is the first time these thoughts have ever occurred to you. That's okay, let us know. Email us at podcast at naspoorg. We would love to hear from you, also happy to put you in touch with Jesse If you have any more questions. I know she's always ready to help.

Kevin Minor: 24:09

Jesse has also participated in several NASPO webinars on market research and I'll make sure to put the link for those recordings in the description of this episode. That does it for us on the Pulse today. If you haven't already, make sure you subscribe to us Apple Podcasts, spotify, google or wherever you get them. Fresh listenings. You do not want to be the only person who didn't take the Pulse the Pulse. Make sure to check out our blog, pulsenaspoorg, and to catch up on your daily dose of procurement literature written by your very own NASPO staff. I'm Kevin Miner. Until next time.