

Kevin Minor: 0:04

Greetings Pulse takers. Episode 17 of the NASPO Pulse, the podcast where we are monitoring issues in state procurement. We've got our finger on the pulse of our interview with Diane Lancaster. We discuss her role as the chief learning officer for NASPO, building academic partnerships not only with the association but the profession of procurement in general, and why that's so important. Part three of my interview with Diane is also out and ready, so make sure you treat yourself to this delicious three-part brain meal. Think of it as part one is the appetizer, part two the meat or the vegetable, part three is the hot fudge sundae or whatever kind of dessert you enjoy. Seriously, though, not only do you get invaluable advice and experience from a master of her craft valuable advice and experience from a master of her craft. The interview also continues to demonstrate the importance of honing your craft and always being able to take your knowledge one step further.

Kevin Minor: 1:16

Got questions, comments? Love to hear from you. Email me. Podcast at naspoorg. Make sure you subscribe to us on Apple Podcasts, spotify, google or wherever you get your listings. Let's take that pulse. You know you mentioned that you had been communicating with several different states, and we've talked a little bit now about some of the ways that NASPO, which is where you work now, has exceeded expectations. I don't know if a lot of people know this or not, but you, technically, were the first NASPO employee yeah, the first one hired by. Naspo became its own freestanding agency and you are the chief learning officer. You are the CLO of NASPO, if you want to give me just a quick overview of those responsibilities of a CLO at an agency like this, and then I want you to talk about things that we're working on right now.

Dianne Lancaster: 2:18

Yeah, things we're working on right now. The, the chief learning officer, was the first position that NASPO as an organization created. Naspo actually has been around for many, many years. It was formed in 1945. 1947 was the launch date and so we're pushing towards our 75th anniversary. 75th anniversary and NASPO as a nonprofit association, like many, had used pretty much a standard service provider service situation where you know the accounting and the conference planning and all of the you know the day-to-day work was done by a service company.

Kevin Minor: 3:05

Sure.

Dianne Lancaster: 3:06

And that worked great. That worked great. We had great service and great relationship for many, many years with that model for professional development. The problems that states have had with building training or maintaining training and again I'll talk about that as we talk more about why I got into teaching have gotten worse and worse when there are budget problems in a government.

Dianne Lancaster: 3:47

When there are budget problems in a government, training is one of the things that is the first to go. So over time there has been this drain. So NASPO was increasingly being asked to, hey, help us. We need training, we need professional development and we can't do it on our own. And for a while we struggled along, trying to do the best we could with our service management company. But that was not their mission, that was not their business model. Their business model was practical bookkeeping and conference and event planning. So the organization, the leadership board of directors, talked and took I don't know for years probably, and finally came to the conclusion that, well, we really need to have somebody who is NASPO-centric, who has experience and understanding what the states need, to take charge of this.

Kevin Minor: 4:44

Yeah.

Dianne Lancaster: 4:45

And I was, you know, interested in it. When the job announcement came out, it was open competition. I had no idea if I was going to qualify as a learning officer particularly, but I put my hat in the ring and through a very serious competitive process, I got the nod I was given, offered the job, and I took it gladly and at the same time retired from the state of Oregon chief procurement office and have not regretted a day. Chief learning officer should be focused on the mission. Again, back to the basics. What is the mission of the professionals that this organization serves?

Dianne Lancaster: 5:34

Naspo's mission is to serve the professionals who work in state public procurement offices around the country. By extension, to serve those who work in the agencies, who work in local government public procurement people in state and local government. By extension, the primary mission of NASPO, National Association of State Procurement Officials. And so the job is to develop and bring serve up professional development in ways that people can partake of it and can benefit of it. And so the chief learning officer's job is to consider all the delivery methods that are available, the money, you know, what can we afford to put together?

Dianne Lancaster: 6:29

And so that's, and when I took the job, none of that. I mean, we were just talking about it, it was okay and like day one, it was like all right now. What the good news was that, in our case, at NASPO, the development of the organization continued, and so, while I was the first position it was the first position that was designated the board quickly realized that this couldn't be all of it. This couldn't be all of it and that in order to truly bring forth, to truly serve the country, the states, there had to be more. And so, within about six months then, we hired a chief executive officer, Dr Hatton, and started hiring staff, and it became obvious that economically and efficiency wise, everything that it made sense for us to just go ahead and stand up our own organization with our own accounting, our own payroll and human services and, you know, human resources and mission own values, our own mission, our own values.

Dianne Lancaster: 7:43

And so for the shoot, it's been three and a half years of just kind of gone by in a flash.

Kevin Minor: 7:48

It has.

Dianne Lancaster: 7:50

Yeah, that's what we've been doing and it's been the job of CLO. I mean, it's shifted and morphed as we've gotten more advanced, but I would say that this has been a capstone for my career. But I would say that this has been a capstone for my career because to help create to me creation of a jewel, a multifaceted, sparkling jewel of learning programs, where do people, how do people want to get their professional development? They want it on their PDA. They want it. You know they want it at home or you know they want it wherever they are. They don't really necessarily want to go to a classroom and now going to a classroom is pretty much unavailable.

Kevin Minor: 8:38

Yeah.

Dianne Lancaster: 8:39

So we have to get savvy about how do we do this. Well, in the time I've had with this job, we've built in fact, we're on our third learning management software system, because learning management software has has changed and evolved just in this amount of time, and each each time we're advancing, we're going to more sophisticated software. Our blog, our community networks, now our virtual conferences. This summer we had the Reach Conference. There were over 500 people at that conference. 500 people came to that conference over a couple of

days. And again, satisfaction. We're constantly measuring satisfaction. Is this what you want? Is this good enough?

Dianne Lancaster: 9:34

For me, it's about quality and affordability and because we can't make learning more expensive than people can manage, people have to be able to buy it, they have to be able to pay for it, and NASPO has done a fantastic job of making it free, or basically free, or so low priced that it's not a barrier price that it's not a barrier. And that's because and of course this is in NASPO this is one hand washes the other. This is because we have our own interstate cooperative NASPO. Value Point is the. That again provides tremendous public service and as part of that, the return is a little bit of money that comes in as administrative fee, which then is plowed back into the states, has created some wonderful metrics to show how efficient we are at keeping administrative costs down, keeping them at the tightest margin we can, while delivering top quality back to the states.

Dianne Lancaster: 10:54

Now, that's what I mean to me. That's what a CLO is supposed to do. You're supposed to create the mechanisms that are varied enough. Again, top quality always. If we can't do good quality, then I don't want to do it.

Kevin Minor: 11:10

Right.

Dianne Lancaster: 11:11

And again, you've got to bring it. You've got to bring it, you've got to make it accessible, and that means affordable and accessible in all the ways we've talked about.

Kevin Minor: 11:19

We've also reached out to quite a few academic partners. Yes, and this is a development that is over the past three years. I knew you weren't going to forget about that.

Dianne Lancaster: 11:29

I wasn't. So if I think of the last three and a half years, to me actually the academic program goes back a little deeper, because I was on the board, and both as the president of NASPO and as a board member, for many, many years. And so we started, dr Hatton and I started talking about academic connections. Shoot, it's been five years.

Kevin Minor: 11:53

Right.

Dianne Lancaster: 11:55

At least since we started about talking, wouldn't it be great if NASPO could have real connection relationship with some fine universities around the country that we could count on and rely on, and they on us, to try to build some interest in students to come to work in public procurement, to build internships, scholarships, go to their career fairs, try to get the word out to students that, hey, public procurement is a professional career area you can be proud of. You're not going to get rich at it, but you know you can make a decent living and you can have a satisfying career.

Dianne Lancaster: 12:40

So, trying to get that sense of public service as a career out there. So there's that. There's also research, and I mentioned that we're doing a research project right now. What we did in the academic circle to create it was we had many discussions about that. When I say we board of directors members, you know various people talking about okay, if we go out and make some partnerships with universities, what Should we have one? Should we have many? Do we go with the public policy programs? Do we go with the business management programs? What should we do? Because there isn't a lot out there that focuses on public procurement. So we had to figure out okay,

who do we tag along with? Who is most likely to want to talk to us? A lot of people don't understand that. Big universities you have to have employment. You don't just walk into a university business school and say, hi, I'm here from NASPO, you know and take care of all our needs.

Kevin Minor: 13:43

Be my partner, yeah, be my partner, be my friend. Yeah.

Dianne Lancaster: 13:47

No, we had to literally travel around the country. So, first things first, we settled on supply chain management. For a number of reasons, Supply chain management programs for a number of reasons. We felt they had the the most. They checked off the list of skill sets that that public procurement people need okay so the program content, that was number one.

Dianne Lancaster: 14:12

Then we went for all right, let's get let's talk to supply chain programs at the top of the heap. Again. Quality, let's talk to those who are really at the top of their game. And so we looked at varieties. You know US news reports a variety of ways that colleges and universities are ranked. We also were very concerned. We want to be friends, Do you want to be friends with us? Again, we were turned down. There were a number of universities who said, oh yeah, that's nice, but we really don't do much with government.

Kevin Minor: 14:44

Right.

Dianne Lancaster: 14:44

Because we're not well-heeled, we're not going to bring a \$50 million endowment to them.

Kevin Minor: 14:49

Right.

Dianne Lancaster: 14:50

And people ought to understand universities business they've got to make money.

Kevin Minor: 14:55

Of course they're taking a risk on you, just like you're taking a risk on them.

Dianne Lancaster: 14:58

That's right, and you're going to need stuff. You know, they know that you're going to, you're going to need attention and so, and do they even have? Do they have students that are even going to be interested in you? So we went around the country and we knocked on doors and and we you know we started with. Then we knocked on doors and we wanted to have something in every region. Then we knocked on doors and we wanted to have something in every region. We wanted to have something that states in that region could look to, because this is supposed to be a model. But this goes back to why did I get into teaching, and I got to tell you the story about why did I get into teaching, like many CPOs.

Dianne Lancaster: 15:39

The economic crashes that we've had in the first part of this century and there have been several. We had a big crash after 9-11. There have been a number of mini recessions, I guess, and then there was the Great Recession. Training programs were gutted, and every time you have that, then your training program is in jeopardy. Well, here in Oregon, mine was on the block and I figured there was going to be not much of a way I could save it, and that meant staff. I mean, I had a training program, training and certification that we built in Oregon and and so it was on

the block.

Dianne Lancaster: 16:16

Well, I had a connection out at the local community college, somebody I went to school, to graduate school with, and I called and said I'm strapped, I don't know what to do. She said well, come on out, Let me introduce you to the dean of the business school here and let's talk about what we can do. So we did, and the dean said look, I'm not, I'm not. I don't have the resources to put together a public procurement course or a training program. And it isn't about money, it's about subject matter knowledge. I don't have anybody to teach it.

Dianne Lancaster: 16:52

So the deal we made was okay. Literally, I said okay, I'll help teach it. I'll ask any of my training folks that would like to ride along if, if they'll be willing to work with it, we'll develop a class and in return, if you'll sponsor the class, we'll teach it, you know, and in return, will you teach us because they wanted to go online, they're a heavy online college will you teach us how to work your online system so that we can put it online? And they said okay and we did a deal. So there were two trainers in my group who were literally at risk of losing their jobs any minute who said okay, we'll do this with you, Diane. And so the three of us designed a class, worked with the college and literally basically volunteered to go out there and teach one night a week. You know the first class to get it off the ground. In the meantime, we went out and took the classes to learn how to put it online and by the end of a year we had an online class in public procurement. That was nearly 10 years ago.

Dianne Lancaster: 18:08

Since then, we've added courses and the state of Oregon Debbie Dennis's training group, which is thankfully now back at some strength, has now wonderfully and artfully made connection has now wonderfully and artfully made connection. So they have a lot of the training that they do and then they work with the college on some of these other pieces. So the whole point of the academic circle I call it the academic program is modeled. It is about public procurement offices and officers using the resources that are really pretty much right there, close by, if it's a community college or a university, whatever you got at hand and making that connection, working with them to leverage the resources that you need to have, resources that you need to have. So we now have and, as it turns out, my college here in town in Salem, Oregon, Chemeketa Community College was very jazzed about our success added to it and now has a two-year associate degree program in procurement and supply chain management program in procurement and supply chain management.

Dianne Lancaster: 19:29

So it's, you know, it's that willingness to say, okay, I'm not sure what I'm doing, but I've got the end mission in mind. My folks, my government needs training, we need educational opportunity. How am I, again, as a public service person, how am I going to help with that? And so you just have to say, okay, yeah, I'll go to this meeting or I'll, you know, I'll read a book, I'll help put together something.

Dianne Lancaster: 19:51

Now we have, because Chemeketa is a strong connection to Oregon State University and Oregon State University has a supply chain management good, supply chain management program. We made that connection and so and again the notion chain management program. We made that connection and so and again the notion is that you've got some regional connection, you've got a place you can go and you can connect with, and it's been great because you know we go down to Arizona State. Arizona State government has benefited from this partnership, California has benefited from the Arizona partnership and it's the same up in the other areas, uh, in the other area. So here we are, um now well into it, and relationship takes commitment and it takes time. So we have one full-time position, uh, Dan Kruger, who's our current academic affairs manager, and his job, of course, is to nurture these relationships, and that's my job too.

Kevin Minor: 20:45

Right, and I would assume that this wasn't at the beginning or throughout making these relationships. This was not a goal, but the academic partners have been extremely helpful during the coronavirus.

Dianne Lancaster: 21:02

Oh, yes, oh, my goodness. And again, relationship means commitment. It means we go there, whether it's virtual or in person. You know, before the, before the pandemic, I mean literally, we'd go.

Kevin Minor: 21:18

Very symbiotic relationship.

Dianne Lancaster: 21:20

Thank you for the word.

Kevin Minor: 21:23

Yeah, absolutely, and it's one of my favorite words. I like to use it when I can. I know that that was partly our relationship with academia. Help with some of the work that we did with the Supply Chain Council. Oh incredible and help with the networking that these universities had with some vendors, and likewise to help connect even public and private partnership.

Dianne Lancaster: 21:46

Thank you for raising that Oregon State's just one example. When the pandemic hit, every university has got some form of business advisory council. You know, the supply chain program has got some kind of business council. Well, the one at Oregon State which I've been serving on for years now and Debbie Dennis is now on as the CPO of Oregon, they immediately swung into action. They asked the program chair hey, how can we help, how can we help these NASPO people because they now know about us? And so that group alone started a series of calls and everybody was invited, just a free form, you know, anybody from the business world or the NASPO world come to the call. And so we had Friday calls for shoot for about two, three months, Friday calls with, you know, these people that would show up and sometimes would say okay, and states would talk about their needs and the supply chain people would say, hey, I have a friend in the garment business, I have a friend in the logistics business. I have or I mean because you know these businesses weren't always on point, but they reached out to friends and connections trying to help in any way they could, and there are some, some real good stories about some of the help that they brought to to different people in different states across the country. So is that practical assistance?

Dianne Lancaster: 23:24

Now we're doing a study with which the academic partners brought to us. We had four universities come to us, university professors come to us and say, hey, we'd like to help you study the effects of the pandemic on procurement practice so far. What is happening, what is changing, where is this headed and how does this all affect the standing of the public procurement community? In other words, how does this help elevate the profession? What can we find out about this? Engaging and asking for every state in the country to be interviewed with our academic partners to talk about their experiences and tell their stories. And it's amazing. The stories that are coming out are just incredible. A lot of it, the good parts, are about the interstate connections.

Kevin Minor: 24:19

Right.

Dianne Lancaster: 24:19

And not just because of the Oregon State thing, but NASPO itself weekly calls with every director in the country, every chief of government officer in the country, to come to the table and share. We had a call this morning, an interview, where the person interviewed said you know, I didn't necessarily get a lot of hands on practical deliveries out of these, but I got support. I had some people I knew I could talk to every week and I heard some good ideas

that then I brought back and said okay, let's try this and just the, just that connection, relationship. It's all about relationship.

Kevin Minor: 24:58

Oh gosh, and I can imagine just the data aggregated, though, between value point and NASPO and just what the data that they purchasing, data that they saw from these states during the pandemic has probably told its own story. That's very helpful.

Dianne Lancaster: 25:14

I'm sure and I'm not. I don't put data down. I love you know data is important, Metrics are important, but, Kevin, it gets back to the person-to-person connection.

Kevin Minor: 25:26

Yeah, but.

Dianne Lancaster: 25:26

Kevin. It gets back to the person-to-person connection, and a CPO is in a thankless job. It is a no-win job because you are not going to make everybody happy all the time. It's just the way it is, and so you've got shortages of supply, you've got payment issues, you've got suppliers unhappy, you've got agencies unhappy.

Dianne Lancaster: 25:47

I mean you're constantly in a pressure, you're an agent, you are in a pressure spot. So to be able to connect without pressure, to connect with colleagues in NASPO, however that happens through the communities, through personal contact, whatever to be able to connect, to be able to know that you're not alone and there are people that you can talk to about the issues of the day. If you're still paper-driven, you can talk to people about that. What can you do? That doesn't you know. And if you're just frantic for anything, and maybe it's metrics, maybe it's some data to help show your administration that you know you're just frantic for anything, and maybe it's metrics, maybe it's some data to help show your administration that you're doing okay with pricing. These things are important. These things are important.

Dianne Lancaster: 26:34

They're so important that we have a special place in our website. We have special listings of COVID-19 resources and support 19 resources and support. It's on the bottom of every signature block for every staff person, because we we know that people need to be have a place to go and find information and a place to go to talk to others.

Kevin Minor: 27:00

Wow, isn't your brain just full on delicious thought, on delicious food thoughts. I'm just hungry. Anyway. Hope you enjoyed that part two of my interview with naspo clo, diane lancaster. Make sure check out part three, which is also out now, where we discuss the importance of teaching procurement, what Diane sees on the horizon and what she plans to do in retirement. Spoiler alert it is not to stop teaching and to stop learning. Make sure you check out the NASPO blog, pulsenaspo.org, and catch up on some procurement articles written by your very own NASPO staff. Pulse Season 1 will be coming to an end. We have a really great interview to finish up the season with our 2020 president, george Shutter. But fear not, because we will be back for Season 2. Because the P pulse keeps beating, I'm your host, kevin minor. Go listen to part three, you.