

Kevin Minor: 0:02

Greetings and welcome to the NASPO Pulse. This is the podcast where we are monitoring issues in state procurement.

Amanda Valdivieso: 0:09

We've got our finger on the pulse.

Kevin Minor: 0:11

I'm your host, Kevin Miner.

Amanda Valdivieso: 0:12

And I'm Amanda Valdivieso.

Kevin Minor: 0:14

Amanda, how's it going today?

Amanda Valdivieso: 0:16

Well, Kevin is going pretty good. Just got done with our customer service webinar for Procurement U and I have to say it's been one of those days, honestly, but I'm so excited to be here with you.

Kevin Minor: 0:27

It is a Monday on a Thursday. What was the webinar about?

Amanda Valdivieso: 0:31

So basically we are doing customer service in the procurement office and it's an instructor-led course. We at Procurement U are hosting it about two times a year. So very exciting stuff indeed. We have a great instructor who's teaching it. She is certified, knows her stuff.

Kevin Minor: 0:46

I think you actually interviewed her.

Amanda Valdivieso: 0:47

Would that be Lori Brown? Yes, you interviewed her last year, I believe so she's wonderful, she has such great information.

Kevin Minor: 0:53

Absolutely yeah, I'd like to get her back on this. Lori, if you're out there, if you're listening to us, we're coming back for you.

Amanda Valdivieso: 1:00

Yes, I think I can make that happen. She loves, she loves to do this kind of stuff. So definitely, yes, I think I can make that happen. She loves to do this kind of stuff.

Kevin Minor: 1:05

so definitely Do. You know what else is happening this year, Amanda? The 2021 NASPO Exchange.

Amanda Valdivieso: 1:12

So looking forward to that. Yes, so the Exchange very excited. This is actually our special edition episode for our upcoming 2021 NASPO Exchange. Right, it's coming up April 13th through the 15th. It's a virtual conference and I believe the deadline to register is around March 11th. Does that sound about right?

Kevin Minor: 1:28

Yeah, I think that's right. I think that's right. The NASPO Exchange is a conference for building relationships among the supplier community and state government, which is the largest consumer of goods and services in the country.

Amanda Valdivieso: 1:40

It's also a place where learning, networking and partnering come together to develop business relationships, to support public procurement and to learn more about it. You can visit the 2021exchangenaspoevents.org website to find out more.

Kevin Minor: 1:54

Sounds like this podcast is the right place to get some info too.

Amanda Valdivieso: 1:57

I think it does, and that's why today we are interviewing Bart Lemon.

Kevin Minor: 2:01

Bart is NASPO ValuePoint's Director of Supplier Development and Global Initiatives. He plays a crucial role in coordinating with the supplier community and he's pretty involved with the exchange conference as well.

Amanda Valdivieso: 2:14

So today we'll be talking to Bart about the ValuePoint Emerging Markets Initiative, how this initiative benefits state procurement and how we anticipate continuing the initiative to produce future contract solutions.

Kevin Minor: 2:25

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Amanda Valdivieso: 2:35

Let's take the pulse.

Kevin Minor: 2:37

Bart, thank you so much for joining us today. How are you, sir?

Bart Lemmon: 2:40

Well, thank you, Kevin. Thank you for having me and congratulations on your great podcast. Well, thank you, Kevin, Thank you for having me and congratulations on your great podcast. Thank you, your podcast is being very well received by people and I predict it's going to double this next year. You're starting your second season.

Kevin Minor: 2:52

Well, thank you, bart. I really appreciate that. It takes a village, definitely, and it's a labor of love, and we're glad to have you on as the first guest of Season 2. So the honor is both of ours, I'll say.

Bart Lemmon: 3:09

Well, thank you very much. I'm very honored actually to be here, so thanks again for having me.

Kevin Minor: 3:14

Absolutely, Bart. You are NASPO ValuePoint's Director of Supplier Development and Global Initiatives. What exactly does that title mean? Can you walk us through your responsibilities?

Bart Lemmon: 3:27

Yeah, there's three dimensions really to the job. First is the world of supplier support to our value point supplier community, of which we have about 400 altogether. We offer them business and marketing tools we post in a virtual library called the Supplier Toolbox. We've also created several online learning modules available through Supplier Academy and we've trained about well, I would say half of our suppliers in in-person workshops and I also provide them advice through the business review meetings that we get involved with.

Bart Lemmon: 4:03

So the first part of my job really is just all about supplier support and supporting our suppliers value point suppliers that we have. And then, secondly, I also oversee our emerging markets initiatives, which really considers ideas offered by the private sector, and I know we're going to talk about that here in just a little bit. And then, third, I'm involved in international outreach as we build relationships with other procurement organizations around the world. It's quite striking actually that governments, whether they be here in the United States or Canada or Europe or elsewhere, there seems to be just a common set of problems that they all have to face when they deal with procurement issues. So we're now networking with many organizations and we're finding areas where we can collaborate and work together really for the good of the public sector. So that's the three elements of the job supplier support, emerging markets and then international outreach.

Amanda Valdivieso: 5:00

That's wonderful, Bart. It sounds like you're really getting a value point out there, not only just here in the States, but out there in the world as well. So, before we talk about the Emerging Markets Initiative that you briefly mentioned, because I know we definitely want to touch on that For those of the listeners who may not be familiar can you describe to us what a value point portfolio is and how it is created?

Bart Lemmon: 5:21

Sure, a value point portfolio represents the contract offering for goods and or services that is available to the state members, and so virtually every portfolio contains the number of suppliers that went through the bidding process. They received an award to offer their goods and services through that portfolio, and we currently have about 60 contract portfolios altogether, which addresses a variety of needs involving information technology, for example, public safety, health and human services, office and education related contracts, facilities maintenance and that kind of thing. So, as the states participate, those portfolios become available to the public sector customers to acquire these goods and services. So that's what a value point portfolio is.

Amanda Valdivieso: 6:11

Is there any challenge of portfolio creation?

Bart Lemmon: 6:14

Well, generally, portfolios have come into existence due to a marketplace demand of our state members.

Amanda Valdivieso: 6:20

In states.

Bart Lemmon: 6:21

Of course they acquire similar goods and services to meet their needs and when the demand is high enough, then it could make sense to have a nationwide contract. So the portfolios have come into existence for the most part because we are combining the buying power of several states on a common good or service basis. Now the original ideas which then become portfolios, they can really come from different quarters of several states on a common good or service basis. Now the original ideas, which then become portfolios, they can really come from different quarters. An individual state or a group of states may suggest a portfolio or the portfolio a value point staff may have a suggestion. So there really are different originating sources for the ideas that ultimately lead to

portfolios. And then once the ideas become vetted to portfolios, and then, once the ideas become vetted, then the management board will consider the best course of action and will decide on which ideas actually turn into portfolios.

Bart Lemmon: 7:13

So the way that we actually have established portfolios in the past has worked pretty well. But we're growing, the cooperative is growing, the needs of our members are growing and now we're expanding how we actually collect ideas for portfolio development. So in addition to the states, which of course will have an ongoing role in what portfolios we come up with. We're now entertaining ideas really from the private sector through that program called the Emerging Markets Initiative. So it's really the initiative really is all about how to get more ideas from the private sector of things that they may be working on Expanding the pool of thought right, exactly, that's exactly what it is.

Kevin Minor: 7:57

So what exactly is ValuePoint's Emerging Markets Initiative?

Bart Lemmon: 8:01

Well, in a nutshell, the Emerging Markets Initiative is a birthplace of private sector ideas that may potentially benefit the public sector. So last year we actually launched this initiative and we asked both current suppliers and non-value point suppliers for their ideas. We asked them to provide us with an outline of the benefits of what they're proposing, we requested them to submit any market data that they had, and we also asked them to identify any current public contracts that may exist, which would kind of give us an idea of how these contracts were really structured. So we then focused in on how the idea would be applicable to state governments. You know that's, of course, a pretty important item.

Bart Lemmon: 8:45

We tried to quantify the size of the market hey, how big of a market really is this? And then we attempted to determine the level of resources needed to stand up the contract, because all these portfolios take a lot of management time and support by many quarters to make them work. And then, once we narrowed the ideas down, then we went even further and we issued requests for information documents where we polled that industry to try to get really a better, more acute understanding of how that business really worked on a ground level, if you will. And then, once we got that information, then we polled the states to gauge their interest, and then that's, we sort of brought all that information together and then now we're in a position to actually pursue a couple of those portfolio ideas. So that was the Emerging Markets Initiative. That's how it all flowed together.

Kevin Minor: 9:41

So it's almost like understanding what the states need before they even need it or as they need it.

Bart Lemmon: 9:47

Well, that's one way to look at it.

Bart Lemmon: 9:48

I mean, there's a couple of different ways to look at it.

Bart Lemmon: 9:51

If you just look at technology alone, there are many technology companies that are out there. Of course, technology is changing at such a rapid rate and you take a look at a lot of our suppliers who actually are working on technology. They're working on different ideas right now that we may benefit from in the future, but we don't know about the idea. It hasn't really come to market yet, and that kind of thing. So that's really one area that we're looking for is for our technology companies to say hey, what are you working on that could benefit us? How can we

be in front of the game here? How can we get out in front of this idea so that we could stand up a contract that could have potential benefits to our members? So that's an idea that in the world of technology that's how it would certainly benefit our state members is what is being worked on that we don't know about, that we should know about so that we can think about it and then we could perhaps put into a contract portfolio.

Kevin Minor: 10:53

So you said it, can, you, can you identify any other emerging markets at this time? Can you give me any specifics?

Bart Lemmon: 11:00

Yeah, there's a lot of emerging markets that we're looking at right now. I'll just give you two, for example, in the world that involve technology. One is the world of citizen engagement platforms. You look at every state, you look at all of the political subdivisions, whether it be a city, a county or a university or what have you.

Bart Lemmon: 11:17

They all have different needs. They all have different needs and they all interface with their customers a different way. They all have these technology platforms that engage their customers and the businesses that do business in those states. So you take a look at citizen engagement and you go onto these platforms and citizen engagement involves an ecosystem of types of services. There's identity management, for example. There's gateway management. There is collecting payments from somebody and then being able to store those payments and protect the information so that it's not subject to data breach and all the rest of that kind of stuff.

Bart Lemmon: 11:59

So it's actually a fairly complicated subject when you really think about it, right. So that's something that we looked at and that we'll probably be pursuing. Another one is the world of enterprise content management. How does an enterprise manage their content? Now, all of us who've gone from the office to the home during the pandemic uh, we don't have access necessarily to walk over to a file cabinet and pull out files anymore. So today, enterprise content management is probably more important than it ever has been for an enterprise to be successful and that's a big mark in the United States and growing, and something that we feel that could really benefit our members as we move forward with it. So those are just a couple of IT related types of ideas that came from the initiative, but there's also non-IT related ideas too, sure of course, that perhaps just involve goods, that we didn't really think about it.

Bart Lemmon: 12:58

We've expanded the pool of thought and now, if we've thought about it, you know, we've expanded the pool of thought and now, if we've thought about it, hey, this is a good idea. Let's go ahead and launch it into the stream of commerce for our states to consider, right?

Kevin Minor: 13:09

Things that are seemingly almost obvious, even that, once after they're identified, you're like well, I can't believe we didn't think about that.

Bart Lemmon: 13:17

Yeah, yeah, there's been a lot of that. Well, I can't believe we didn't think about that. Yeah, yeah, there's been a lot of that there's, you know. You look at this and somebody inevitably will say, wow, how come we didn't think about that before? Yeah, how come we didn't see that before?

Kevin Minor: 13:28

That's interesting. That's interesting that you know that nuance and you're talking about just enterprise services. I don't think people really stop to think about when they store their passwords somewhere or they store their credit

card information somewhere.

Bart Lemmon: 13:44

that then has to be protected, it has to be stored somewhere and it has to be looked after, right yeah, and the other thing, too is uh, you know, there's certain information, for example, that where, where they could um, that every public sector has that they don't want to have utilized in other places, right?

Bart Lemmon: 14:03

So I mean, there's a whole world just around data security, data protection, data security, storing things and all the rest of it we live in this data world these days, and this is one of the huge issues that we're not just dealing with here in the United States, but they're dealing with this abroad. Data security is probably one of the huge issues that we're not just dealing with here in the United States, but they're dealing with this abroad. Data security is probably one of the hottest issues internationally that every procurement organization is dealing with.

Amanda Valdivieso: 14:28

Yeah, I keep thinking about a lot of the things that we're hearing in the news different companies getting breached, all of their information getting leaked and for governments, or for state governments, that could be detrimental Absolutely.

Bart Lemmon: 14:39

And for governments or for state governments, that could be detrimental Absolutely Well, that's why many of them have hired CIOs. I mean, that's one of the top of the things on their list is how to protect the information that they have, and it's not easy because you've got new technologies and different bad actors out there trying to steal information all the time. So it's an ongoing battle certainly.

Kevin Minor: 15:00

Well, that's actually a great segue into our next question. What we wanted to talk about is how does this initiative benefit state procurement officials? What do you want them to know about this initiative?

Bart Lemmon: 15:25

Well, it benefits the state procurement officials because the ideas in the industry information that we receive from the private sector is both informative and it's comprehensive. Uh, in the rfis, as I mentioned many of the rfis that we're publishing the amount of response that we're getting is, frankly, just overwhelming. We had in just one of them we had over 32 companies that actually responded to that with information about how that industry works and functions. And if you want to have a really good contract, it has to be very well thought out.

Bart Lemmon: 15:47

One of the biggest challenges that many public solicitations have is not attracting enough response from the private sector. Why doesn't the public sector respond? Response from the private sector? Why doesn't the public sector respond? And it typically and I can speak from experience because I came from the private sector it's because the private sector doesn't view that agreement, that RFP, as perhaps addressing industry standard requirements, for example.

Bart Lemmon: 16:14

So the more you really know about the industry and the more you know how it works and functions, at that point in time, then you can really stand up a very well thought out contract and encourage a lot of participation, which is what you want, because you want to have choice when you're selecting awards and so forth. So from that perspective, it really helps us garner a lot of that information and, should we decide to move forward with any of the emerging markets initiatives, we have the information needed to stand up a good contract. So we'll also lend resources for contract development. Of course, that's one of the things that ValuePoint does, and we also know

that the CPOs. Their time is very valuable and this initiative really is meant to acquire ideas to help them solve challenges.

Bart Lemmon: 17:01

I mean every CPO that we work with. I don't know how they do it. They're just fantastic people. Frankly, I couldn't do their job and what they do is just unbelievable, but they're really good at juggling a lot of things.

Amanda Valdivieso: 17:14

Where do you see it, Bart, going? How do you anticipate continuing onward in the future as you keep going with different contract solutions? How do you see it evolving?

Bart Lemmon: 17:23

Well, we're living in a changing world. Of course, the needs are changing. Like I mentioned, the only thing we can really count on, frankly, is change, and our primary mission as a cooperative is to provide value to our members. That's really what we're here to do. So I see the emerging market initiatives growing, not just here in the United States, but around the world. We do speak to many other procurement organizations. They think this is a great way to actually gather ideas and to be ahead of the curve to some extent, and it really produces a synergy between the public and the private sectors. That's really the idea behind it. Yes, it's to bring the two energy forces together and produce something positive so let me ask you a question.

Kevin Minor: 18:09

You have, you are unique, well, you're. You're unique in many ways, Bart, but you're unique in that you have um, you have experience in, in both public and private, what is so unique about bridging this relationship between private and public entities?

Bart Lemmon: 18:29

What is unique about it? Well, there are two different worlds out there. I mean, when you're in the public contracting world, of course you're concerned about standing up good contracts to be used by your constituents and so forth, but it's a different world than it is in the private sector. In the private sector, you're interested in producing technology, selling things, whether it be goods or technology for that matter but there's a different mindset altogether. You're just concerned about growing your business. You have to operate with profit and expenses in mind and all the rest of that.

Bart Lemmon: 19:02

So this initiative really, I think, sort of brings those two worlds together, and it brings them together in such a way to where we can see what our needs are.

Bart Lemmon: 19:13

We can get some ideas from the private sector as far as what they're willing to offer in the way of ways that we can solve certain problems in the future that we're going to be facing. So I think it's just taking a proactive look into the future, frankly, that if we can think about the future in a certain way and then contemplate what is being worked on, is there a way for us to integrate that into the framework of a public contract and some ideas, like I said, will work its way through the system and others won't, but at least it's trying to be proactive in the world of contract development as opposed to always being reactive about things. So I've, overall it's a, it's a good initiative and you know, we've learned a lot. Certainly, I can tell you that much because the suppliers have been very willing to engage us and give us information, and the level of detail that we have now about how those industries work give us a framework to make a good decision.

Amanda Valdivieso: 20:15

That's wonderful. So how can the state procurement officials? Is there anything they can do to help you with this

initiative, Anything they can do to reach out and be a part of it?

Bart Lemmon: 20:23

Well, I think there's three things they can do, really. Number one they can always just offer their own ideas. Are there any emerging markets that they would like us to pursue and look into? We are, in part, as you know, a research organization at NASBO, so we do like to research things, and do they have anything that has come under their plate that we should think about? So that'd be number one. Secondly, they should just always be encouraging the suppliers to respond with information.

Bart Lemmon: 20:54

As we put out our RFIs, if they're talking to suppliers, just it's a good idea for them, just to encourage them to be responsive. And then, third, once we've actually identified the emerging market idea and the concept and gathered information, just to consider carefully the ideas and how it really meets their needs. So I think that's really what they can do. But our CPOs are great. I mean, they are just very actively involved in giving their opinions at all times and we really do respect them fully for all the work and effort that they do. And I think it's the one profession, honestly, that doesn't get enough credit get enough credit, and there are so many. So much of the public sector is so benefited by the great work of our chief procurement officials and their staffs and, frankly, it's the unsung hero group as far as I'm concerned.

Bart Lemmon: 21:54

So I take my hat off to all of them, really.

Kevin Minor: 21:57

Do you see this information and this engagement, do you see that as something that is helpful in kind of elevating the profession of public procurement, and how so?

Bart Lemmon: 22:09

That's one of our main goals, of course, is to elevate the public procurement profession and I think what's happened over time since the announcement started, actually back in 1947, that, year by year, the profession has been elevated, primarily just because of the good faith effort and the hard work of all of its members. Naspo has issued several books. Now they're up to their third edition on the procurement, the practical guide, which is an outstanding work. I don't think there's a better book, frankly, in the marketplace today. If I could just put a plug in for it. It is an outstanding work of a collection of best practices and diving into how that world of procurement really works and functions.

Bart Lemmon: 22:51

So I'm just a big fan. I'm a big fan of NASPA, a big fan of their members, the quality of work that they do and hopefully this initiative, as we continue to gain deeper understanding about how the private sector really works and functions in areas that could help us, will continue to help the profession upgrade itself. So when you are lifting the profession, it's a lift that never ends. You're always lifting it right, so there's never just a final goal that you reach. You're always trying to strive to be better and hopefully this was one of those things that can help them be better.

Kevin Minor: 23:30

Bart, all that to say that Exchange 2021 is approaching. For those that do not know, exchange is a very unique meeting between our membership state procurement officials, value point staff and suppliers from both private and public sector, and they actually get to meet and discuss for several minutes their initiatives, their ideas and they get to talk about how to do better to do business with each other. This year it's a little different because it's virtual. So, that being said, bart, what is some advice you would give to potential exchange attendees?

Bart Lemmon: 24:15

Well, first of all, before I get into that, I just have to compliment our own conference and events team. I mean, I have been to virtual conferences before and I know it's something that a lot of people are struggling with right now, just in terms of the mechanics, but our conference and events team has done a fantastic job in terms of putting it together, the software, the level of thought that they put together. I've never seen anything, any virtual exchange or any virtual conference, quite like the type that our conference and events team is putting together. So just the quality of conference itself is really top rated.

Kevin Minor: 24:49

But we're all about shameless NASPO plugs here. So there you go. More than there, absolutely.

Bart Lemmon: 24:55

But if you're interested in selling to the government marketplace, there really is no conference like the NASPO Exchange Conference. It's the center of action, it's a place of opportunities where suppliers really do produce results. So my advice is simple Don't wait, sign up, get your spot before all the seats are gone. It's going to be sold out. Sign up, get your spot before all the seats are gone. It's going to be sold out and it really is a very good moment to make an investment in your future by attending the NASPO Exchange Conference. You will not be disappointed. You will learn things that you never knew before, you will meet people that you haven't met before and all in all, by and large, this is just a fantastic venue. There's an expression in sales that sales is a contact sport. This is where you make contact, and I highly suggest that everybody attends the NASPO exchange, and that's both for current value point suppliers and non-suppliers. So there'll be a lot of great content there and I would just hope to see you there.

Kevin Minor: 26:02

And you'll be able to talk to Bart.

Amanda Valdivieso: 26:04

Yeah, that's great.

Kevin Minor: 26:05

Bart will be there.

Amanda Valdivieso: 26:06

Yes.

Bart Lemmon: 26:07

I will be there.

Amanda Valdivieso: 26:08

Thank you, Bart, for taking this time with us today to discuss the emerging market initiatives. I think everyone has learned quite a bit about it.

Bart Lemmon: 26:15

Thank you and best of luck to you both in the future.

Amanda Valdivieso: 26:20

There you have it, folks, Sign up and don't wait From NASPO Value Points Director of Supplier Development and Global Industries himself.

Kevin Minor: 26:29

I like how he said that sales is a contact sport. Yeah, yeah, well, I just mean, it's like where he says you make

meaningful contacts. It's a good metaphor, or is it an analogy? It's a metaphor, right? It's a good metaphor or is it an analogy? It's a metaphor, right?

Amanda Valdivieso: 26:42

It's a metaphor. They don't use the word like. So yeah, it's a metaphor, Is it? It is oh man.

Kevin Minor: 26:49

Alright, a reminder if you are interested in attending the 2021 NASPO Exchange, the deadline to register is March 11th and you can do that by going to 2021exchangenaspoevents.org to find out more. Got questions, comments? We would love to hear from you. Email us podcast at naspopulse.org.

Amanda Valdivieso: 27:09

And make sure you subscribe to us on Apple Podcasts, spotify, google or anywhere else you can get podcasts from. Make sure to check out NASPO blog pulsenaspo.org and catch up on some procurement articles written by your very own NASPO staff.

Kevin Minor: 27:24

That's it for us today.

Amanda Valdivieso: 27:25

So stay tuned and keep your dial tuned in with NASPO Pulse I like it.

Kevin Minor: 27:31

Yeah, thank you.