

Kevin Minor: 0:05

Welcome to the NASPO Pulse Podcast, your go-to source for all things state procurement. I'm your host, Kevin Miner, and I'm Josh Dakota, and I am thrilled to bring you yet another episode of in-depth discussion and expert insight on the latest trends and topics in public procurement. Josh, how are you doing today? I'm doing great. Kevin, how are you? I'm doing well. Where have you been, Josh? What have you been doing? What have you been up to? We haven't heard from you in a little while.

Josh Descoteaux: 0:34

I know I'm back and it's so great to be back.

Kevin Minor: 0:36

It's great to have you.

Josh Descoteaux: 0:37

I have been very, very busy, and I've been very, very busy with a lot of the things that we're going to talk about today in terms of the topic of cooperative procurement.

Kevin Minor: 0:47

That's right. We're talking with none other than Jamie Shore, who's NASPO's Chief Cooperative Procurement Officer, and we're going to talk a little bit more about what that new role entails some of the exciting opportunities and initiatives in that role. What else are we going to talk about, Josh?

Josh Descoteaux: 1:05

We are going to talk about cooperative procurement and what that is and how NASPO can be the leader in that space.

Kevin Minor: 1:12

We're also going to ask Jamie to talk about the new initiative to complete a solicitation in just 105 days. We're going to see the potential challenges and, overall, how that's going to benefit members. How do you think that's going to benefit members? How do you think that's going to benefit members, Josh?

Josh Descoteaux: 1:26

It's going to benefit them greatly, and I think it's going to be one of those things that we're going to remember that, wow, this has changed the game for good no more two-year solicitations and I think that we can really be the leader in that.

Kevin Minor: 1:40

Absolutely. So let's just jump in and ask Jamie about these things, but first we've got more exciting episodes in store for you in the coming weeks, so make sure that you subscribe to us on the NASPO Pulse podcast to never miss an episode. We are on Apple Podcasts, we are on Spotify, we are on Google or wherever you get your podcast. So sit back and relax and let's take that pulse. Absolutely, Josh. Jamie, you were the primary member from Maine just a couple months ago and now you are the drum roll, please. Naspo ValuePoint Chief Cooperative Procurement Officer. You're also a good friend of the pod. We've had you on several times, so I feel like at this point, everybody knows you. But for those of us who don't know, you just give yourself a little introduction.

Jaime Schorr: 2:32

Yeah, thank you, Kevin. So, as you mentioned, Jamie Shore, formerly with the state of Maine, now super excited to be the chief cooperative procurement officer with NASPO. The Chief Cooperative Procurement Officer with NASPO. Woo, yeah. And so just a little bit about my background. I started out as an attorney in Virginia, so I have my JD from Regent University in Virginia Beach. I have a Master's in Business Administration with a concentration in

Healthcare Management from New England College, and if all of that sounds fantastic, right, it's nothing compared to my new credentials, which are CCPO. Super excited to be at NASPO and in this role I just want to expand upon. It's really more than just cooperative procurement. For ValuePoint, the idea around cooperative procurement really expands beyond just the cooperative portfolios that we put together with our lead states and value point. It really involves supplier engagement and looking at other business verticals that may make sense from a cooperative procurement perspective. So I would just say that the opportunities are endless as the CCPO.

Kevin Minor: 3:44

So, Jamie, how has your experience as a chief procurement officer of a state prepared you for this role, and what are you kind of taking bringing with you? What are you leaving behind?

Jaime Schorr: 3:55

I am so fortunate to have the experience that I have had from state of Maine and public service, not only as the CPO, but working my way through not only private procurement but also public procurement, so I do have a little bit of the best of both worlds. As a state CPO right, there is an incredible amount of pressure and best value that has to be demonstrated on a day-to-day basis. I learned really from the ground up about cooperative, competitive procurement, sole source contracts, terms and conditions, how to negotiate and just how to make the most out of the very precious dollars that we have. So, bringing that into a NASPO role, I feel that my background and my education can now be served not only to the people of the state of Maine but also to other CPOs in a public capacity across the country. Whether you're the CPO for a state agency, a locality, a municipality, a university, my goal is to bring my expertise to you as a CPO and make your job just a little bit easier.

Kevin Minor: 5:10

And so what do you see being some of your key initiatives in this new role, let's just say, within the first year?

Jaime Schorr: 5:17

Oh, I'm so glad you asked that question. Thank you, efficiency, transparency, supplier engagement. But let's take a step back and the cooperative procurement division of NASPO is our new white glove service. So if you are, if you think about going into dinner, right, and you're having like a four-star dinner and they have white gloves into dinner, right, and you're having like a four-star dinner and they have white gloves, I mean you are catered to from the second you walk in until the second you walk out.

Jaime Schorr: 5:50

Think of the NASPO Cooperative Procurement Team as just that. We put on our white gloves and we ensure that, if you are a public entity, you have the research available at your fingertips, you have top quality contracts available at your fingertips, we have top quality contracts available at your fingertips. We have suppliers that are engaged from the beginning of a solicitation right through to the end, through contract administration, and our team, Josh, being part of this incredible team, is there to assist throughout the process, right? So where there's bandwidth issues or there's other maybe questions or concerns at the state level, we ask that, if you are a state or other public entity, reach out to us so that we can help you, because our goal is to get again those best-in-class contracts that will help you ultimately save taxpayer dollars.

Kevin Minor: 6:43

Well now I just can't stop thinking of contract administration as a five-course meal. Yes, and I'm wondering what I'm going to order. I'll have the duck laroche.

Josh Descoteaux: 6:54

I'm getting hungry and efficiency.

Kevin Minor: 7:00

And the efficiency, yes, and how quickly I can get it, I mean that's a good metaphor. And the efficiency, yes, and how quickly I can get it, no, that's a good metaphor, and I noticed that you gave a little shout out to our magnificent co-host, Josh. Can you expand upon?

Josh Descoteaux: 7:15

that a little bit, Josh. What is your role? Yes, so as a cooperative portfolio manager, I will be one of those folks with the white gloves, and I really do appreciate that kind of analogy, because it's not only the X's and O's of procurement, but it is also about that customer service aspect. Getting the best value it comes through the customer service aspect. So Jamie's team, me included, we're really excited for these new initiatives. And so, Jamie, as you were talking about cooperative procurement, I wanted to go back to that because I was thinking about kind of the old kind of in my head on awarding these contracts. It is many different aspects of not just a multi-state NASBO value point how you would think of that cooperative procurement but also bringing in a lot of those different elements. So can you describe what NASBO can be a leader in in cooperative procurement and just some of your ideas around that?

Jaime Schorr: 8:25

Let's break down the definition, then, of cooperative procurement, and I'm going to use the ABA, the American Bar Association Model Procurement Code definition, which is cooperative purchasing means a procurement conducted by or on behalf of one or more public entities. And so if it's conducted by a public entity, naspo is that partner, that helping hand to assist throughout the process. If it were to be conducted by NASPO, then we're the lead, with the public entity being our partner, naspo, and NASPO ValuePoint, specifically, has run our business model such that the public entity is the lead state entity and that satisfies a whole host of statutory requirements from the various states or public entities. When I think about cooperative procurement, what's so critically important, especially coming out of COVID, is that term that you use, which is buying power. There is incredible power in the volume and the leverage that, collectively, the public entities can gain when purchasing together.

Jaime Schorr: 9:40

Being from Maine, I may be a fairly sizable geographic state. You know, being from Maine, I may be a fairly sizable geographic state, but I am really small fish in a very big pond. California, Texas, some of those larger states have incredible buying power, but if I can partner with them, and maybe some of our other smaller states Rhode Island, New Hampshire, et cetera. Let's get some partnerships together so that these large companies globally have a recognition that there is a need for some incredible buying power from public entities and again that helps stretch the taxpayer dollars. So when you think about how NASPA, ValuePoint and our cooperative purchasing arm can get involved, we're there to really foster those cooperative procurement relationships.

Josh Descoteaux: 10:23

And how can our members get more involved in that cooperative process?

Jaime Schorr: 10:28

Well, short of giving out your email and your phone number, Josh, I would say which we have which we have and we will do and you can give out mine too as well, reach out to us, ask us.

Jaime Schorr: 10:40

if you've got questions, you know, just foster a conversation with us and I you know. More importantly, you know, just foster a conversation with us and I, you know. More importantly, we have opportunities for involvement throughout the process, whether it's being on a sourcing team, helping us with market research, just giving us general ideas of what you need, oftentimes, emerging markets and what's coming down the pike and what we should be thinking about in terms of cooperative solicitations that we want to be prepared for. All of those ideas stem from conversations with our members. So even if you just want to have a conversation with one of our team members for a couple minutes, that oftentimes stems into a really very powerful conversation. Opportunities all

over the place to learn about cooperative procurement.

Kevin Minor: 11:31

Jamie, that's really interesting. I want to go back for just a second. Can you expand a little bit more on this idea of buying power and there is leverage in volume?

Jaime Schorr: 11:40

Absolutely. I'm going to use COVID and an example from COVID which we've all talked a lot about and probably don't ever want to talk about again, but it's a really it was. It's a turning point in the in the profession of procurement. Going into COVID, some of our larger States had the ability to purchase masks and purchase other PPE, the personal protective equipment. Maine did our very best, but again we were.

Jaime Schorr: 12:09

We didn't have the dollars or the need and what we saw was that states started to almost we were bidding against each other, right, and when you have 49 other states buying exactly what we were buying, the smaller states lost. Right, because we didn't have the volume were buying. The smaller states lost right Because we didn't have the volume, whereas when you have maybe five to seven states that join together, all of a sudden those dollar figures continue to go up and vendors start to notice and here's a purchase order that's coming down the pike and there's seven states that need X widgets right, and so that helps collectively expedite the supply chain but also bring the price down because it could be a guaranteed purchase and the vendors or suppliers understand that there is a need for these collective states to ultimately purchase, whatever the widget may be that buying power is huge, and not only the buying power but also the coordination that can come with that buying power, the coordination, the relationships that you create amongst the states that might not necessarily have talked to each other before.

Josh Descoteaux: 13:18

Now. You can kind of open up or unlock a whole different kind of, maybe perspective or skill set from another state, and I think that that's a really cool aspect about cooperative procurement.

Jaime Schorr: 13:29

Yeah, that's a great point. Josh is leveraging the knowledge and expertise from other public entities. Yes, absolutely.

Kevin Minor: 13:37

And just the camaraderie and networking, just the ability to discuss similar issues and maybe come to a solution together.

Josh Descoteaux: 13:49

Absolutely.

Kevin Minor: 13:50

Which I think COVID was a positive thing at COVID. I think we're probably doing that before COVID, but I think you know one, a silver lining of COVID I know there's not many, but was that fostering that ability to network more because you had to?

Jaime Schorr: 14:03

And there's power in numbers, there's also knowledge in numbers.

Kevin Minor: 14:08

I like that. So, jamie, let's talk a little bit more about the new initiative to complete a solicitation in 105 days. What is that and why is it an important initiative?

Jaime Schorr: 14:21

105 days in when you're talking about state government or really any government entity, is like that. I mean right, it just goes instantly. And to think about completing a competitive procurement in 105 days, most people would say it can't be done. And I'm going to do a little play on Top Gun Maverick here and I'm going to tell you it can be done. I've done it and we're going to do it. Naspa ValuePoint will be the leader in competitive solicitations. So what does all this mean?

Jaime Schorr: 14:53

We found out quickly, going back to COVID, that the procurement statutes and the way that we conducted our business on a daily basis didn't work right. We weren't agile, we weren't efficient. We ultimately broke just about every statute and rule that was out there because we had to sole source and emergency purchase so many different items and services. Now, coming out of COVID, the procurement profession as a whole recognizes that there is a need to perform our daily job faster, better, more efficient. Oftentimes I'm going to use a technology system as an example. When we're buying a technology system, it can be very complex, right. And by the time that we finish the solicitation, that technology is already three to five years old and it's outdated, right. And so now we're working on something that's even farther behind, not to mention the state budgeting process, which takes approximately two years, and you're thinking ahead two years down the road, two years prior. So the process of procurement needs to be faster and more efficient.

Jaime Schorr: 15:57

The NASPA Value Point team is actively working on perfecting and operationalizing solicitations that will be accomplished in 105 days. Now, for the skeptics out there that are listening, I will be the first one to say that not every solicitation can be run in 105 days. There are some levels of complexity and some parts of the process that will be out of our control, but as a general rule, we will go into every competitive solicitation with an understanding that this is the general expectation for the timeline. And then, if there are parts in the process that alter 105 days, that's okay. But we all have expectations from the supplier side, the public entity side and the cooperative purchasing side of what that timeline should ultimately be.

Josh Descoteaux: 16:46

So, Jamie, you said 105 days. I'm just wondering why not 100? The nice round even number of 100.

Jaime Schorr: 16:52

I'm really curious to know what constitutes that 105 days. I'm giving an extra five days of wiggle room in the event that we need an extra day or so.

Kevin Minor: 17:01

Oh okay, no, that's smart.

Josh Descoteaux: 17:05

I love that.

Kevin Minor: 17:05

You know transparency folks.

Jaime Schorr: 17:09

In some I mean somewhat seriousness right, it does allow for an extra five days. However, when you look at the totality of the process and let me just be clear the 105 days is from the day that we are putting pen to paper to draft a contract until contract execution. So it involves drafting, review and approval, posting, evaluation, awarding and contract negotiation right. So there is parts of the process that will happen on either end, but the 105 days is putting pen to paper and then contract execution. For the solicitations run as little as 32 days. That obviously feels

particularly challenging when you're trying to combine multiple public entities. I've also seen them run as long or more than like 24 months. That feels hard. So we're trying to find that happy medium. 16 weeks might be the right timeline, 90 days might be the right timeline, but from the get-go in 2023, I'm putting myself out there to say that 105 days feels like the approximate, correct timeline, that across the board, as a general rule, we can be running solicitations.

Kevin Minor: 18:25

I mean, I think, once you, in all seriousness, once you explain that it sounds like a totally reasonable number.

Josh Descoteaux: 18:32

timeline and I think that when you're thinking about from my perspective it's like wow, 105 days. That is super quick. And the more that you stand back and think about it, you might have to do some thinking and deconstructing of the process and just thinking about things in different ways. And I think that, like we said before, the knowledge that we have, the connections and the relationships that we have, this is a total cooperative effort and I think that with this effort comes a possibility to really shorten this up and really change what the status quo has been.

Jaime Schorr: 19:05

I appreciate your pun where you say it's a cooperative effort, because you're exactly right, it is a cooperative effort.

Jaime Schorr: 19:12

I would add one additional point, which is the NASPO team will be operating as a team to support every cooperative portfolio, just as in the States you might have one lead public procurement professional assigned to every contract, and I've recognized that that may not be the best methodology going forward.

Jaime Schorr: 19:36

So we're restructuring our team to better support our members and our state leads. We now have two contract portfolio managers assigned to every contract portfolio. We will have additional staffing that supports from more of an administrative perspective. We'll also have this is really so exciting we will also have a supplier engagement manager that will be dedicated to every portfolio to help those conversations with suppliers and states and fostering some of the education that is necessary around suppliers. We're hoping to assign some project managers so that, as we're going through the solicitation phase, we can have a project manager, keep everybody on track and the timeline. So this really we're demonstrating from a NASPO perspective the importance to have a team dedicated to every portfolio to ensure that we can run the 105 solicitation, which really it's creating efficiency, it's creating transparency and we're the first to the marketplace.

Kevin Minor: 20:33

Right, and that comes with its own challenges and also growing pains. So I think just hearing you say that you recognize that that might not always be the best course to get to a solution, I mean that just sounds pretty standard.

Jaime Schorr: 20:50

Some of the challenges, Kevin, I think that we should be thinking about. Vendors may not be prepared to answer in 105 days. That does put some strain on our suppliers and our vendors to be able to respond accordingly. So there is some pre-work that will need to be done prior for the state or NASPA value point and putting pen to paper to drafting. We need to be upfront with our supplier community to say this solicitation will be coming out on this date, right, and we commit to telling you about it. So if you can commit to responding in this timeframe, we commit to telling you about it.

Jaime Schorr: 21:25

I think the evaluation team, the sourcing teams, etc. Need to also carve out time in their incredibly busy schedules

to allocate a little bit of time to these solicitations. So there's some prioritization there that needs to be done, and I'm going back to that term that Josh used, somewhat pun intended, around cooperative right. This really is a cooperative effort from all parties and that's where relationship building and fostering the communication and collaboration between all the stakeholders will be incredibly important to meeting that 105-day timeline.

Josh Descoteaux: 21:56

Absolutely. That sounds excellent.

Kevin Minor: 21:57

I feel like there's a cooperative pun. There's a few jokes cooperative jokes that go on throughout the ValuePoint team.

Josh Descoteaux: 22:05

Procurement puns.

Kevin Minor: 22:06

Getting a little taste of that.

Josh Descoteaux: 22:08

Jamie, this sounds awesome, this sounds revolutionary. This sounds innovative. How will it benefit members?

Jaime Schorr: 22:14

I'm going to do the ultimate faux pas. I'm going to answer your question with a question.

Josh Descoteaux: 22:18

With a question.

Jaime Schorr: 22:20

How does it not benefit members? There is absolutely no downside to moving a procurement to a more faster, agile, efficient, best value practice.

Jaime Schorr: 22:35

There are some risks that we will need to mitigate along the way, and we recognize that there are some risks. We recognize that there are some challenges, but there is absolutely zero downside to running a solicitation in 105 days for suppliers, for public entities and for the cooperative procurement profession. And one I would just say, one topic that we haven't touched a lot upon really is the supplier community. This is huge for them because now all of their time and energy and resources that are dedicated to a very lengthy procurement process, they can shorten up and really mitigate some of those financial exposure, if you will, or financial risks, and so that's ultimately going to bring our costs down as public entities. There's no downside.

Kevin Minor: 23:23

So, jamie, how will this new initiative impact supplier diversity?

Jaime Schorr: 23:27

Supplier diversity does play a role, especially in this day and age. We want to make sure, as a public entity, that we are offering our contracts to a diverse population for a whole host of reasons, of which we could probably have an entire other podcast on. Naspo has committed to developing our supplier engagement business vertical, if you will and so that business vertical, in combination and partnership with our NASPO ValuePoint team, will help suppliers learn from a small business perspective could be women-owned, veteran-owned, lgbtq, any of those categories that are as defined by states. Our goal is to make sure that every supplier that wants some education around how

to do business with a public entity receives that education, and in addition to the cooperative purchasing arm. So do they understand what a cooperative procurement is? Do they understand how to work with NASPA ValuePoint? Most importantly, and so that all of that will be tied into supplier engagement, Kevin, I would go as far as to say in six months we could do a follow-up podcast to talk about supplier engagement and the business vertical that NASPO is creating specifically for suppliers.

Kevin Minor: 24:41

I would love to. It's a date. I'll set it up. We'll make that work. Absolutely All right. And now we will move on to our patented, famous key takeaway game takeaways. This we don't even really need to explain this anymore, but if you're new here, Josh and I will present key takeaways from the interview and Jamie is going to decide whose takeaway is better. She can decide mine's better, she can decide Josh's is better, or she could give us a tie, which I hardly think will be necessary, because my takeaway is fire. I'm going to let Josh go first.

Josh Descoteaux: 25:20

Oh, Kevin, usually I sarcastically say, oh, no pressure for our guests to make a tough decision, but I think the pressure is all on me because I report directly to Jamie, so I don't know what to do here. I'm just saying I am going to hearken back and I love this as a quote. Even. I think what Jamie said about power in numbers is also there is knowledge in numbers. Now that is truly impactful to me and I think it really goes a long way to sum everything up to say that the knowledge that we have, we are definitely better together in terms of the cooperative initiatives that we can do and also that buying power that we talked about, boom.

Kevin Minor: 26:04

That was pretty good. I'm not going to lie, that was pretty good. I have several notes here and mine was going to be that top gun. Maverick is an outstanding movie, it's true. It's up for best picture. Um, it's a good one, but then I thought better of it and, um, Jamie discussed buying power and leveraging volume and how we talk about how that's important because it forms that network and that buying power is going to be affected greatly, I think in such a positive way, and I mean, like she said, we could have another entire podcast just on that subject alone, and I just thought it was extremely interesting to see how this new initiative and this new position within NASBO is going to ultimately affect buying power of smaller states and work to develop an even better, more sound network than we already have.

Jaime Schorr: 27:03

So I now get to say who won the takeaway game.

Kevin Minor: 27:07

You now get to decide whose takeaway is better.

Jaime Schorr: 27:10

It depends on the definition of better and therefore I'm going to say you both had amazing key takeaways, and I'm going to add my own takeaway, wow.

Kevin Minor: 27:21

This is unprecedented.

Josh Descoteaux: 27:23

Unprecedented folks.

Kevin Minor: 27:25

We have the interviewee adding their own takeaway.

Jaime Schorr: 27:28

Under President Singleton's leadership Delbert Singleton, the CPO for South Carolina. I am so pleased that he has fostered innovation within all of us and really, the key takeaway for me is we, as NASPO, can now present these amazing innovative ideas to continue to elevate the procurement profession. So, all that being said, you both win innovation.

Kevin Minor: 27:54

I think you win.

Jaime Schorr: 27:55

Innovation is the key for 2023.

Kevin Minor: 27:57

So I'm super excited, Well we'll take that and we'll say that Jamie is the winner First guest to ever win it First guest to take control of.

Kevin Minor: 28:09

This is not not. We're not setting precedence here, um, but that's fair. We'll give it to her, jamie, before we go. Um, we really appreciate you being on, um. We will leave all kinds of resources in the show notes, including, like we talked about, josh's uh contact, as well as jamie, your contact. Um, we'll leave a link to the ValuePoint website, which I know has several great resources and really anything else that Jamie and Josh give me to put in the show notes I'm happy to put in there. But before we go, jamie, do you have any advice for our listeners? And this can be just life advice. It doesn't have to be professional advice, it can be anything.

Jaime Schorr: 28:52

Great question. I will offer this one piece of advice that somebody actually recently gave to me, and it is the word unstructured. As procurement professionals and or other professionals moving through our career, it's so important to foster unstructured time, whether it's on a daily basis, a weekly basis. I have also challenged my own staff to be thinking about unstructured time because that helps us grow not only as individuals but as professionals, and I would encourage anybody out there listening to foster that unstructured time throughout your your daily life, your weekly life, and if you have any time that you want to feel unstructured, please make sure to check out the naspo pulse podcast as often as possible yes, we are all about shameless plugs.

Kevin Minor: 29:45

There you go on the podcast. Get as many as we can. Please listen, listen. That is great advice, jamie. That was beautiful Friend of the pod and NASPO's new chief cooperative procurement officer. It has been a pleasure to speak with you. I know we will be speaking with you again in the future.

Jaime Schorr: 30:06

Thank you both for having me on and look forward to future conversations.