

**Kevin Minor:** 0:02

Greetings Pulse takers and welcome to another episode of the NASPO Pulse. This is the podcast where we're monitoring issues in state procurement. I'm your host, Kevin Miner, and we have another very, very special episode for you today. It's the part of a new series that's going over NASPO internships. We have a great guest for you today, but before that, I'd like to introduce to you my co-host for this mini-series and esteemed colleague, Shukwaja Barksdale. Shukwaja, how are you doing today?

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 0:33

I'm doing fantastic. Kevin, Glad to be here.

**Kevin Minor:** 0:37

Oh, and we are so glad to have you here. Shukwaja, before we get into the episode, can you just give us a little bit of your background and what it is that you do at NASPO?

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 0:46

Yes, Kevin, as you mentioned, I am Shukwaja Barksdale Partnership Coordinator here at NASPO, so we work with strategic and academic partners, so I'm ecstatic to talk about our NASPO internship program today.

**Kevin Minor:** 1:03

Yeah, ecstatic, good word to talk about our NASPO internship program today.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 1:06

Yeah, ecstatic. Good word. Yes. So the NASPO internship program became part of our academic incentives in 2017 as a pilot program, which is another way to elevate the public procurement profession. We wanted to get students interested in the career. Not only that, it was created to help members develop their own internship program for their particular state. We wanted to provide an opportunity to foster a student's education and create an avenue for emerging talent. This gave us the chance to connect with students and show them the benefits of working in the public sector. We've noticed students get excited at opportunities that allow them to use their knowledge they've learned in the classroom, but also apply it to real life, hands-on experiences. With that being said, we have several interns and state members that will be sharing with us their experience of being part of the program.

**Kevin Minor:** 2:01

Absolutely. I could not have said it better myself. And, speaking of our guests today and those that we will be interviewing, we are talking to Sawyer McDuffie. He is a second year law student at George Washington and was a NASPO intern at the DC Office of Contract and Procurement. Shaquasia and I are going to talk to Sawyer about how he found his internship, what appealed to him about the internship, some of his roles and responsibilities, and more.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 2:33

That's right, Kevin, and we're also going to find out the most rewarding part about his experience as well, well, I just can't wait any longer.

**Kevin Minor:** 2:41

Let's get right into the episode. But before we do, I'll have to ask you to please subscribe to NASPO Pulse on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google or wherever you get your podcasts. Give us a good rating or a bad rating, and please don't be afraid to contact us Email. That is podcast at naspo.org. All right, Shukwaja, are you ready?

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 3:07

I'm ready. Are you ready, Kevin?

**Kevin Minor:** 3:08

I'm ready, Shukwaja.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 3:10

Let's take the polls.

**Kevin Minor:** 3:11

Hi, Sawyer. How are you doing today? I'm doing well. How are you? I'm doing well. We're so happy that you're here joining us today, Sawyer. You were an intern in DC and you are currently a second year law student at GW. That's a pretty impressive resume already so far. Can you just go through your collegiate background a little bit more and then kind of what you're looking to do with this degree, Of course?

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 3:34

So I am originally from South Carolina and I went to the University of South Carolina for undergrad, where I was a political science major and a minor in law and society. So I was always interested in law and wanted to come to DC for law school because, of course, this is where most federal laws are made and the whole process is going on. And as a student in law school, I took contract law, which is a required course, and my professor focused on government procurement law more than a regular contracts class would, so that's what got me interested in it. And then I learned that GW has a really good government procurement law program, which I'm going to be declaring a concentration in this fall. So I thought this internship would be a great opportunity to start learning about procurement.

**Kevin Minor:** 4:24

Excellent, yeah, yeah, it sounds like you really kind of have a solid base or understanding going into.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 4:31

Yeah, so actually a lot of what I had learned in my contracts class came up during the internship and, as I'm looking forward to my syllabus for my government contracts courses this fall and spring, a lot of what I learned in my internship will carry over into that as well.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 4:48

So, sawyer, I am happy to have you with us today. And, speaking of internships, how did you find your particular internship with us?

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 4:58

Of course. So in the law school we have a career center job posting page. My undergrad one was not the best so I didn't know how vital it would be, but it's actually a really great resource and I believe the DC Office of Contracting and Procurement, which is the agency I ended up working for, had posted a listing on there looking for undergrad and or law students to apply for the internship. So I interned or I applied through that posting, and that's how I ended up getting the internship.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 5:30

So what made you appeal to that particular internship, or even going into the DC office?

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 5:37

Definitely so. Of course it was close by. I live in DC so I wouldn't have had to relocate Nice. But also I was interested in government procurement a little bit from my contracts class and of course you know, as we're looking through different opportunities, of course we want to do things that interest us. So I wanted to check that out and see what DC was up to.

**Kevin Minor:** 5:58

So what is it that really interests you about contract law?

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 6:03

and procurement, definitely. So I really see the connection between procurement and public service as a really deep one. In my internship and both when I was learning about it in class, you really feel a sense of the fact that procurement is really serving the people because you know, when the legislators make the laws, that's just a piece of paper and there's other officials in the government who have to make that into a reality and at the end of the day, all of the items, goods, services that we're procuring in the government procurement process are going to help the people in some way, and a lot of it is a real physical manifestation in your own community or your own environment that you're in a lot, so you get to see what you're doing in a physical way, which I think is absent from a lot of other industries or jobs.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 6:55

That's great.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 6:56

Sure absolutely.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 6:57

So you mentioned you get to see what you're doing. So what did you particularly do during your internship, like what was your role and your responsibilities?

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 7:30

So we learned all of the foundations of procurement how to be a contract administrator, how to be a member of a technical evaluation panel. She would send me over proposals that had been submitted for requests for proposals, which is a type of solicitation, and I would review them for responsiveness and make sure that they were meeting all the criteria that the district had requested in the solicitation. And then after that we would go to technical evaluation panels with members of the agency that was asking for the solicitation. Because the process in DC, the way it works, is agencies. Most agencies do not have their own procurement power, so they have to work with a contracting officer in DC OCP to get a solicitation together and then DC OCP is responsible for conducting the solicitation process together and then DCOCP is responsible for conducting the solicitation process. So I was working on that.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 8:31

Most of our work dealt with the Office of Planning. So a lot of public life studies or memorial or monument solicitations that the district wanted to get together were the matters that I worked on. I feel like I might be going on and on, but I worked on a bunch of different things, but the physical aspect really came in. The DCOCP was really great. They always asked us for suggestions.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 8:52

As this was their first year with NASPO interns and one of my first weeks, I said I would love to do site visits to go see some of these contracts being performed. And they really went, you know, went all in on that. And we went to the Department of Homeland Security and saw their emergency operations center, which we procured all of the technology for. And then, right at the end of the internship, we went to the Department of Transportation and we toured some of the underground tunnels that the highways go under in DC and they have, you know, all of these equipment, all these services that are related to it that the office procured for. So it was great to see things like materialize.

**Kevin Minor:** 9:40

Go just a little bit more in depth into this um site visit. That's really interesting, yeah definitely so I probably.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 9:45

My favorite one was when we went to the department of transportation.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 9:48

Oh, I bet yeah, that sounds really yeah and, with the district being so small, we could really go anywhere and see anything that was happening in the process. Um. So the chief learning officer of the office, um, who's in charge of all the trainings for you know, all the district members that have to do sorry, there's a truck passing. I live on a very that's okay for the chief learning officer who's in charge of all of the trainings, um, she was one of our intern supervisors, um, and she used to be a contracting officer over the D dot, which is the Department of Transportation, and so she was involved with a lot of contracts for them, including buying these gigantic, like three or four story fans that pump fresh air into the tunnels underground and you know tunnels underground when you're driving on the highway it just seems very basic, like, oh, they dug a hole, but there's so much that goes into it.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 10:44

It's being monitored 24-7 by people with cameras. There's infrared cameras to look at the heat. In case there was a fire and there was smoke that would cover the regular cameras, the fire department could look and see what was going on. And we toured the air duct shafts that are so big, you know, like three people standing on top of each other could walk through. Wow, it was really cool. We got to feel the fans like blowing the air, the fresh air, into the tunnels. And then we, you know, got to get a great big tour of that whole complex. It was very high tech the behind the scenes and in the control room. You have no idea how many people are behind that when you're just driving through it.

**Kevin Minor:** 11:27

It was really cool to see, yeah, For those of you who say contract administration and procurement is boring, it's absolutely not. I mean, that's you know things that you don't think about? Layers and layers.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 11:38

So interesting and great. So, on top of all of the things you mentioned, the site visits the trainings. What was the most rewarding part of your experience with the internship?

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 11:50

Hmm, let me think so I would say, yeah, the most rewarding part would be feeling like you are helping people in general. I know that's kind of overarching and not just one particular thing but at the end of the day, all of this work that you were doing isn't just for you know, some corporation or something that not everybody will see the effects of, but it was for the whole district and not just the people that live here. Which was another thing that I really enjoyed about working in this office was, although we are not the federal procurement entity in DC, every body that visits DC, every tourist from America, from other countries, they see and are affected by the work that OCP did and does, just by virtue of us being the nation's capital. So it really felt like, you know, not only are you serving the people in the immediate community, but you're serving the entire country, because our office is what really kept this city going.

**Kevin Minor:** 12:54

Sawyer is the man that needs to see it. See the work he's doing.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 12:58

Yes, I like to see what I'm doing because I'm such a visual person, so I really want to see what's happening.

**Kevin Minor:** 13:04

So, as a younger professional, someone coming into a career, how do you see public procurement, how do you

see contract administration and what do you hope to see in the future?

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 13:20

Definitely so. When I look ahead, I see so much potential because the government is always going to be procuring things. The government's always buying, even when the economy is bad. They're probably going to be buying more to support the country or the state or federal entity that they're over, so it definitely seems like it's not going to be ramping down. Um, and there's just again so much potential because new things are coming out every day with AI, um and other things that create different challenges for the government and for um the people that procurement is there to help fulfill.

**Kevin Minor:** 13:56

So that's an interesting. That's an interesting point, and we do not have to get into AI today, however, again, as a young professional, what are your thoughts on that?

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 14:07

So, ai I think it's, of course, scary, but it's also interesting. I don't think it's going to be a big boogie monster that's going to take over everything, but it's definitely going to change the way that we live. And as it relates to procurement, I'm not really sure, because it is a very human, a very human element of you know, the government. There's so much that's very subjective and you have to have a human's touch to review these things. You know, I think back to my work when, you know, I would review a proposal for responsiveness and it would say you know, the offeror must provide a substantial and complete project management plan. Well, if you feed that into an AI, what is an AI's you know example of what is complete? It's very abstract things that you kind of need a human to be there for.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 15:06

And especially once you get into the bid, protest process and litigation surrounding government procurement. That is always going to need a human touch. That's great, Sawyer. And speaking of litigations within the DC office, were you able to speak with lawyers present or engage, or they tell you a little bit about what they essentially do as well?

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 15:22

Yes, it was actually great. So, again, it was OCP's first time having interns, so they were very open to suggestions and I let them know right away that I was in law school and I was interested in legal matters too. So I participated in meetings with the office of the general counsel and the chief procurement officer regarding a debarment action that was coming up or a potential settlement of a debarment that was going on, which was very interesting. And actually our chief procurement officer, who was the director of the agency, she went to GW Law as well. So there's lots of lawyers involved in the process from everywhere.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 16:07

But it was very interesting to see and I did also do a little bit of legal research while I was there on some provisions relating to the Buy American Act of 1933 and the Trade Agreements Act of 1979, which was very interesting which you know deals with. You know, not only just you know state matters, but there are federal laws that you know guide state procurement as well, that you have to be cognizant of at all times and you have to make sure you're in compliance with that. And then there's trade agreements with other countries that come in and usurp those laws. So it's very intertwined, and yet another reason that it always will require human touch, because there's so much to keep track of.

**Kevin Minor:** 16:47

You know, I thought we were talking to a next Supreme Court justice, but now I'm starting to think maybe a diplomat.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 16:53

No, no, I don't think so. I think I will be a lawyer for the foreseeable future.

**Kevin Minor:** 16:58

Okay, well, we'll see about that. We'll have you back on in a couple of years and see where you're at.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 17:03

I would say Sawyer to you essentially what advice would you give a prospective student seeking an internship and how to navigate that?

**Kevin Minor:** 17:16

or, from your experience, yeah, and words of encouragement.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 17:19

Definitely. So I would say, go for it, because it was very interesting. I know I spoke a lot about how I have a little bit of a background and a little bit of base knowledge in government procurement, but you absolutely do not have to have that. Especially at my office, dcocp, they were great about teaching you everything from the ground up. So if you know nothing and you go in, you will learn quite a bit and definitely enough to do all of your work at DCOCP. But just apply and see how it goes, because it's a very interesting process and it might sound like boring government stuff but it's actually super interesting and probably more interesting than a lot of other government functions. So go for it.

**Kevin Minor:** 18:04

Absolutely Take that other government functions. Sorry, before we go, it's something that we ask all of our guests and we're going to ask you too. Do you have any advice for our listeners, and this could be professional or personal.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 18:18

Yes, I would say always make sure you like what you're doing. If you don't like what you're doing, you're probably not doing the right thing and definitely procurement could be up your alley, whether you're in procurement or not, but make sure you like what you're doing and that you feel like you're getting something out of it.

**Kevin Minor:** 18:36

Could not have said it better myself. Sorry, mcdovey. Thank you so much for joining us today on the pulse.

**Sawyer McDuffie:** 18:43

Thank you.

**Kevin Minor:** 18:43

We're absolutely going to follow up with you in a couple of years and see where you're at. I will be here. I'll let you know. Awesome, thank you, sawyer.