

**Kevin Minor:** 0:03

And welcome to the NASPO Pulse podcast. This is your go-to source for all things state procurement. I'm your host, Kevin Minor, and again thrilled to be here with you today. We're back on the miniseries. We still got the miniseries. We're doing the other side of the internship miniseries. We're talking to state members. We're talking to the state members who hired the interns that we talked to in our last series. Maybe not the ones exactly that they hired, but we're talking to the ones that managed NASPO interns. Good way to get both perspectives. Today we're talking to Soraya Tavares. She is with the Operations Services Division in the great state of Massachusetts. Shakwasha and I are going to talk to Soraya about the impact having an intern had on her office, what it takes to be a successful intern in Massachusetts and a whole lot more. So make sure you subscribe to the NASPO Pulse podcast and never miss a beat. But, more importantly, sit back, relax and let us take the pulse. Soraya, how are you today?

**Sorraia Tavares:** 1:13

Doing well. How are you doing today, Kevin?

**Kevin Minor:** 1:17

I'm doing good. I'm a little bit stuffy. It's the end of summer, spring allergies, so you'll have to forgive me, but doing okay. Still going to kill this interview with you. Soraya, before we get started, can you just give us a little bit of your background? Introduce yourself please.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 1:33

Oh, absolutely yes, and I hope you feel better soon.

**Kevin Minor:** 1:38

Thank you.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 1:39

So my name is Soraya Tavares. I work for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Operational Services Division. I have been with the Operational Services Division for almost 10 years now. I am now one of the senior procurement staff, a senior sourcing manager in procurement. I have been in procurement for more than 15 years now. Operational Services Division is my third government agency in procurement. My first introduction to procurement was in the believe it or not, in the not-for-profit world and that introduced me to some individuals by, you know, I guess, being almost in a vendor role working with the city of Austin. I then worked with the city of Austin as a contract manager overseeing the community development block grant for a group of not-for-profit organizations that provided a CBD Community Development Block Grant, cbdg there you go Support services to, you know, to youth and adults in the city of Boston.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 3:20

So that was my introduction to procurement.

**Kevin Minor:** 3:26

Wow.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 3:26

Yeah, so I worked there for about five years. I moved over, went to a quasi-state agency, our transit authority, the MBTA, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, stayed there for a little bit and then moved over to OSD and that's where I have been for almost 10 years 10 years this coming December.

**Kevin Minor:** 3:54

Wow, wow. So quite a bit of experience. I think we need to hire somebody just to keep track of all the acronyms. Many of them, yeah Well it's impressive that you remember all those. What is something that you enjoy most about

working in public procurement?

**Sorraia Tavares:** 4:10

You know, I think it's the definitely being able to give back to my community. I think it's. You know, it could be a little bit cliché when people say, oh, I want to work for the public sector because I wanted to give back to, to, to my community.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 4:25

I think it's you know it could be a little bit cliché when people say, oh, I want to work for the public sector because I wanted to give back to my community, but I think it's. You know there's a lot of truth to that, especially being in procurement year. You know, as you know it and with your involvement with you know, with this particular industry we do a lot. Yes, you know you have to take a lot into consideration as a procurement staff from you know. How am I building a contract? What are the resources that are available to me? What are the resources that are available to me?

**Sorraia Tavares:** 5:10

what are the key things that I need to keep in the back of my mind and in consideration to actually seeing the results of that procurement and looking at the stakeholders and whether or not you've met their needs and their goals. And then it transitions to how are we doing? Here comes snow season, how are our vendors doing keeping our own neighborhoods clean.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 5:31

And you know, during COVID, you know how are our vendors helping us to make sure that we had all the you know goods and supplies or, in general, just you know what happens in the supply chain industry, being able to know that we have a state agency that does an exceptional job. You know providing and meeting the needs of the Commonwealth. It's very rewarding. And of course, there's the small businesses and you know seeing our vendor, supplier, you know team just develop and having appreciation for how we are structured and what the resources that we have available to them so they can understand all these acronyms that we have our requirements.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 6:23

So I think that that's what makes it rewarding to know that, as a taxpayer, I, in a way, shape or form, I play a role in how we as a state function.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 6:36

Yeah, definitely. So I would say that would be a great segue, soraya, into you're mentioning the procurement staff and the resources available. Um, would you consider, I would say um, the addition of interns being part of some of that staff to help with, uh, some of that supports, even though they're learning? Um, would you consider that, um more so a big impact to your office currently?

**Sorraia Tavares:** 7:06

Absolutely. I would say 1000%. We have tools that we use this day that were built by our interns. So I think it's important for us to treat interns as our staff and not as some college students that are walking through the door. Yes, there are college students. They can contribute to our procurement process as well, and they have been able to do so. Our interns have been able to do so since 2017, when OSD was first approached by NASPA to be a part of the pilot.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 7:55

All right.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 7:56

Would you be able to describe some of your particular management style or approach when dealing or when encountering an intern, or specifically your current intern you might have had yeah, sure, I wanted to say that for me we talked about acronyms a little bit and I think for me it's very challenging to have an intern and find myself in a position where I have to think about them as different than the current staff.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 8:34

You know a lot of what we do with procurement. It's almost you know like you're working on projects. You start one and you begin another one, or sometimes you have multiple ones. Most of the times you have multiple ones going at the same time. So to me, an intern is someone that is here who is a staff assigned on a project that's a short-term project. So if that project is lasting from May to August, and that happened to be the case for this particular intern that we just had, then that's the project that they're working on. So I need to be able to provide all the resources that would get the intern familiar with the project. And that sometimes is just understanding all these acronyms. What do they mean, where do I find information about them and how do they matter for my project? So if I have to treat my insurance different than I treat my staff, then how are they learning?

**Sorraia Tavares:** 9:39

To me, it's almost impossible. So my process is it's not just my process, it's the process for the particular unit within operational services division that I, that I, work under. We are the strategic sourcing unit. We are the unit that develops and manages all of the statewide contracts that we have for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. So for that, the intern is usually a part of our team. We have a weekly collaboration, in-person collaboration day, and the intern is a part of that collaboration day, attends all the meetings, contributes, provides feedback and asks questions like anybody else would do.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 10:27

I do have a morning check-in every day, so I have this 30-minute block time that is for the intern. If that 30-minute is needed, great. If it's not needed, great. There are times where we've gone over the 30 minutes because questions regarding the projects. Majority of the times it's how's it going? What do you need from me today? How are you progressing? Do I need to clear the path? Okay, you're in good hands, or sometimes it goes. I'm working on a project. I really need help with this task. I need help with this Word project or this Excel project. You think you can find some time to help me to get this done. Our intern this year was great. There were so many little things that he was able to touch.

**Kevin Minor:** 11:24

Good, We'd like to hear that. I'd be worried if you were like no, this one was okay.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 11:28

No, he did, great he did great. There were so many, sometimes things that were not part of the projects, that the main projects, but that was all part of the initial conversation that we had, which was basically, you know, here are the options that we have available. That's another thing that I like to do. You know, we have there's always a project that an intern can work on, uh. So we usually present a list of potential projects and then we'll go through, and that's exactly what we did in the beginning.

**Kevin Minor:** 11:58

There are some of these things here.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 12:00

there were a couple things that we wanted an intern to work on but they didn't get to just because of the security level associated with having access to certain tools. But you know, we were able to pivot and get into other things, so hopefully I've answered your question.

**Kevin Minor:** 12:19

Absolutely. Oh, yeah, well, and you know what it sounds like. You want to provide value to your interns and treat them like staff, but I'm also hearing that you really go out of your way to make them feel valued as well as part of the team. Can you speak to that a little bit? Yeah, it sounds like you really put an effort on that.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 12:39

No, absolutely I think, because you know like if you have to think of interns as staff, because if you don't think of them as staff, then they could easily be neglected, Right?

**Kevin Minor:** 12:53

Or forgotten, right yeah.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 12:54

So, and that's what I don't want to do. So a lot of the times with the insurance that we had this summer, you know, in a way I've I kind of felt a little bit guilty by not having more time to give him, but I think we were in a really good space where he knew he could reach out to me by phone, by text message, you know, by sending an email, and if I send an email and I really need something but I'm not able to get Soraya message, we use Microsoft Teams, microsoft.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 13:32

Teams works out great Microsoft Teams or, if I'm not available, who's my go-to person. That's something that we do now as a unit. We have an open door policy, so you don't have to always come to me. So this isn't Soraya's project. This is an Operational Services Division strategic unit project. This is an operational services division strategic unit project and, as a matter of fact, the intern that we had this summer, his main project. I wasn't the supervisor or the owner of that project.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 14:10

It was my colleague, so the bulk of his day-to-day was basically to understand what that project was and deliver it. My responsibility was to make sure that he had all the tools that he needed, that he had all the supervisory support to get it done. So attending meetings and being with the team, versus just feeling like, oh, I'm just an intern, it's me and this computer here.

**Kevin Minor:** 14:36

Sure, the whole experience right, absolutely.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 14:40

Our intern.

**Kevin Minor:** 14:40

It's important.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 14:41

Yeah, I can confidently say that our intern did an exceptional job in understanding the resources in our tools. We use SharePoint and if you use SharePoint, you know how challenging it is to manage it. By the time his internship was done, he was a pro. He knew exactly where to go I didn't have to walk to go through and walk through. Okay, let me show you where to find these things.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 15:09

I was basically just using keywords, those acronyms, go to the procurement file, go to folder number five and under this you will find that, or work on it and save it in this particular location. So, and that's the same thing we do with

our staff here, but I think one of the things that was really important is giving our interns the opportunity to see and to ask questions about other things that are happening.

**Kevin Minor:** 15:44

Right.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 15:44

I hope that you'll get a chance to interview the intern as well. Like you know, he participated, was very interested in joining our trade show that we call Mass Buys. From the very beginning he wanted to be a part of that. So he was in that showroom, you know, directing folks vendors, buyers, suppliers that were coming in and as an intern maybe others might say, you know, he would have been fine if he wasn't there, he could have been at home behind a computer working on that project, but that was a valid experience for him to have.

**Kevin Minor:** 16:27

Oh yeah, that real world experience I mean, and it can turn somebody off entirely from a career path.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 16:34

And that's okay, right.

**Kevin Minor:** 16:34

If they have a bad experience.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 16:36

Yeah, and even if you might have a good experience, but you might decide this isn't for me.

**Kevin Minor:** 16:43

And now you know.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 16:44

Yes, versus getting a full full year, going through a full full year experience college experience, in university or whatever and finding out that this is not a career path for me at all.

**Kevin Minor:** 17:00

Yeah, yeah, except that we know everybody loves procurement.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 17:03

Of course, right Of course.

**Kevin Minor:** 17:05

Yeah, so that never actually happens.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 17:07

Yeah, no, it doesn't.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 17:09

And since everybody loves procurement, what would you say, soraya, to an individual out there or another intern, like if they're wanting to know the development process from an intern to possibly a full time employee? As far as being a successful intern and just getting that offer at the end, what would you say for you or your office? What does it take, as far as that process, to become a full time employee, to be at your office?

**Sorraia Tavares:** 17:43

Yeah, so the OSD does not have a formal development process. So I was thinking about this question and I reach out to our HR as well, just to make sure that I wasn't missing anything.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 18:00

We don't have a formal process in place that says, oh, if we have an intern, this is what you have to do if you want to become an employee of Operational Services Division or if you want to work with the Commonwealth. You know our interns get exposed to other agencies as well, so they don't necessarily have to work for Operational Services Division. But we have a lot of those conversations. Like, for example, you know, in the exit interview with the intern I had this summer, I pose a question. Is this something that you want to come back to? Right? Or if you want to come back to it, you know you're exploring supply chain, if you want to come back to it, let us know. And also being able to keep those lines of communications open and saying you know, this is the end of my internship, but I know that I can still reach out to Soraya.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 19:01

So we do ask our interns to monitor our job postings and to stay engaged, and you know they want to reapply for the internship. Reapply for it. If there's a full-time employment that you're interested in applying for, definitely reach out and make sure that you follow our process to apply for that. We know all of our interns. We know their names, we know their names and we know the skill set. So if it's someone that we find that you know has had a great impact and we would like to interview them for a position, I'm happy to, to make recommendations and we are happy to consider all the applications.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 19:53

We've hired, successfully hired three interns, oh great, that's my next question, yeah we have one now that's actively employed with us.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 20:05

Yeah, so I can clearly say this and clarify for everybody in the audience here there is a possibility to become a full-time employee with your office or other advancements for those interns.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 20:19

Absolutely, absolutely. We've hired. We've actually I want to make sure that I'm accurate here. We've had two interns, I believe they were both in positions. One of them started off as a deputy contract manager and became a contract manager, and we had one that was in the process of going through the same thing here as well building relationships, some of our procurements, we designate them to other state agencies, so our interns have been exposed to working with other government agencies and that has translated really well into actually being a part of the staff.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 21:26

So I have other state agencies all the time that ask me about some of our. Nasra interns that became full-time employees. So, if there's an opportunity, absolutely, absolutely, yes, absolutely yes. And there has been three times where OSD has hired full-time a NASPO intern right after college graduation and all of them moved to Massachusetts for those opportunities.

**Kevin Minor:** 21:56

Excellent, yeah, that's great. So, prospective interns out there, if you're listening and you want to live in Massachusetts, apply. Yeah, listen up. So, sarai, before we go, is there any advice that you would give either other states working with internship programs or prospective interns that want to apply to want to work in supply chain?

**Sorraia Tavares:** 22:22

Yeah, no, absolutely. I mean for other states. I would say I know OSD prioritizes this opportunity in every year and I think the application process is open now for states. Every year we, you know, take advantage of the opportunity by you know putting in the application, and I think it's important. You know, in procurement, a lot of the times you have a backlog of, you know, projects that you want to get done and you're waiting on having that extra staff person, that extra allocated time that someone can work on it. And I think it's a perfect opportunity to consider a college student who's ready for the opportunity.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 23:15

I think being ready for the opportunity is really important and to say you know it doesn't have to be, you know, an opportunity that requires a lot of management and supervision and if it does, you know putting a little bit more thought into it and identifying the intern that perhaps requires less supervision. I'm not saying that at all, that our intern needed an everyday check-in. That was something that I made available for him if he needed to, and most of the times he didn't need that. So I think it's important to know that. I wouldn't necessarily say that that's what you have to do. I'd say you do have to check in at least once a week to make sure that the project is being done and that the intern is successful. But I would say, consider it. You know we've had interns work on templates. I've had interns help me with editing RFRs. Request for response, request for proposals, because your head is so deep in it. Sure and same thing with responses is so deep in it.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 24:24

Sure, and same thing with responses, templates, you name it and these are things that they're perfectly capable of doing. That exposes them to the industry and you might have a perfect employee out there, a future procurement lead. So that's what I would say to any state, naspo state partner. To the interns I would say you know, you don't have to know the ins and outs of supply chain or procurement. This is an opportunity for you to learn more about it, to decide if it's a field that is right for you. So if you are curious about what it takes for your state to function on a day-to-day procurement is a key part of that. I would encourage you know students to look at what's available through NASPO or outside of NASPO and to consider those opportunities and to think about.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 25:32

You know, in this space here, where most of us are working remotely, I think one of the things that's really key and important is autonomy, desire, willingness to succeed, determination. If you manage yourself well at home, your school space and you're able to deliver and get things done without having someone constantly push you. Well, we all need that. But if you see yourself and you think that you're ready, this is definitely something to consider because it will definitely expose you, not just to you know. Is this the right career path for me? But what is it like working with professionals, adults? Like finding your space and your voice in a room full of adults. And that's something that we've done at Operational Services Division. We've definitely identified when interns maybe need a little bit of a boost of confidence and put them in positions where you know we work with them and say hey, you're come present at this meeting. It's a meeting of professional adults, but you're also a professional young adult, so you can do this.

**Kevin Minor:** 26:54

Um yeah, you're. You're seated at the table.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 26:56

Absolutely, your voice is heard, it's. It's an inclusive environment.

**Kevin Minor:** 27:02

Uh, side note, when you um, I just couldn't stop but thinking about when you said future procurement lead. We should get those on onesies.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 27:11

For NASCO for the event coming up.

**Kevin Minor:** 27:14

There you go, and we'll make sure that Soraya will make sure you get credit for that too.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 27:19

Send me my own.

**Kevin Minor:** 27:22

Absolutely Future procurement lead, and that's the cutest thing. Absolutely Future procurement lead, and that's the cutest thing, I don't know why. Anyway, sorry, I got off track, shaquasia. Is there anything else that you wanted to cover, soraya, do you think we covered everything? Is there anything else you'd like to say?

**Sorraia Tavares:** 27:38

Not that I can think of, but you know I'm here, shaquasia. You know, if there's anything that you wanted to add, calvin, same here, let's go for it.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 27:51

No, Shari, you did a great job. Excellent job. I'm getting educated every single day when I talk about public procurement, especially coming from the state office perspective. So that's what this is all about Just putting the information out there, giving everybody a versatile experience. So now we know some ins and outs not all, but we know some ins and outs as far as what you all are doing over there in Massachusetts in the office over there.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 28:24

And just to know, just to piggyback off of Kevin something that sparked my interest, when you stated hey, like if you don't get a chance specifically with our office, we have, like, the key to other agencies you know surrounding us, so you'll still get an opportunity somewhere in this field. And that's what I feel like a lot of interns or future graduates is looking for that opportunity to get in the cliché, get in where they're fitting.

**Kevin Minor:** 28:55

Right, that's true, though.

**Shaquasia Barksdale:** 28:58

Yeah, that's a big one, absolutely. It's not the end, all be all.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 29:02

Absolutely. I think that one of the things with you know, at least for us here in Massachusetts with statewide contracts, so all cities, towns, including other states, can purchase from our statewide contracts and sometimes you're working on a project where you might have to do some research and that research might maybe means that you need to contact a city or town and, you know, get some information that we're looking for about their experience.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 29:36

To me that's exposure. Our trade show was an exposure because our trade show was attended by, you know, state buyers in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. So being in the room, even if it just means I'm giving you information, I'm directing you directly and indirectly because all of the information, a lot of our information, I should say is publicly available. This gives our intern an opportunity to also understand how is Massachusetts as an organization structured. Maybe I don't want to work for the operational services division, maybe I want to work for, you know, the operational services division. Maybe I want to work.



**Sorraia Tavares:** 30:25

I'm planning to move to a small town in Massachusetts or maybe moving to city of Austin and I want to understand structurally the organizational profile of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. And that internship has given you the opportunity because we're always talking about our buyers. And that internship has given you the opportunity because we're always talking about our buyers, we're always talking about who can buy from our contracts. And that's exposure, directly and indirectly. And I think that's great to have, because we as government we're not structured in a way that folks can easily understand by just reading information online. But when you have someone that can walk you through what's available, then it makes it it's a little bit easier to understand what would be my job search process in the future.

**Kevin Minor:** 31:17

Right, and this isn't a slight towards academia or universities by any means necessary, but that real world hands on experience is invaluable. I mean, you just can't some things you just can't learn in the classroom. You've got to go out and you've got to do it. You've got to get your hands dirty. You can learn theory all day long, but it's putting it in practice and they're both extremely important. I'm just saying that experience that you're, you know, kind of describing right now, that's invaluable.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 31:46

Yes, absolutely I believe so. Yeah, and I'm glad that you guys can provide that Is there anything else that we didn't cover, anything else that you'd continuing to give the you know, massachusetts Operational Services Division the opportunity to welcome future procurement officials to. You know our industry here, our supply chain, contract management, contract development world, and this has been great. I thank you, kevin and Shakwisha, for having me and for the opportunity, and I hope we get more interns.

**Kevin Minor:** 32:35

Absolutely, and we will be following up with you in the months and the years to come that we can check in and see how your interns are going.

**Sorraia Tavares:** 32:42

Sounds great, thank you.