

**Kevin Minor:** 0:02

Hey Pulse Takers and welcome to our Supplier Engagement mini-series. I'm your host, Kevin Miner, and in this mini-series, I interview suppliers live at the 2023 NASPO Exchange Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. We discuss forming relationships and how to make the contracting process smoother. Today I'm talking with Deb Atnip, manager of Education, Capture and Growth with CDW Government. Give us a like and a follow wherever you get your podcasts and enjoy the show.

**Debb Atnip:** 0:33

Hi, I'm Deb Atnip, the Manager for Education, Capture and Growth with CDW Government, better known as CDWG. CDW is a provider of technology solutions and services, not driven by product, but driven by outcome. I always like to tell people that have never heard of CDW we don't make anything, we sell everything. So, coming to us, you get dedicated account teams that specialize in each level of public sector State, local, community, high ed, K-12, they know it like the back of their hand. It's not dial 1-800-CDW and explain who you are to try to find what you're getting. So we look at where you want to be, not five boxes of this or two pieces of that. Where do you want to be? How do we get you there and get you there to take you to the next step. It's an absolute pleasure to work with CDW.

**Kevin Minor:** 1:29

I'm proud to be there and proud of the relationships that we have with our customers, with the members of NASPO and with NASPO Value Point. You did a really good job at that. I feel like you've done that once or twice, twice, yes.

**Debb Atnip:** 1:35

Oh, three times now. Three times now, yeah.

**Kevin Minor:** 1:39

Well, Deb, thank you so much for taking some time to speak with us today. I want to get your perspective on a couple different things. Let's start with relationships. How do you introduce yourself to a chief procurement officer and how do you build and maintain those relationships with government procurement professionals?

**Debb Atnip:** 2:01

I think the first thing to remember when you're approaching a position like that and a person like that is you have to approach them with understanding and respect, understanding what their position is, understanding the demands that are put on them, that their calendars are entirely oversubscribed and, most importantly, this point was brought up by one of my colleagues.

**Kevin Minor:** 2:30

Whatever it is that you do for me? I'm technology.

**Debb Atnip:** 2:32

That is not their only concern. That's interesting. They cover everything. They've got roads to build and they've got high-powered computing to do at R1 universities. All of that is under their purview. They can't know everything about everything, so you have to come to them recognizing you're one thing in their world. So when you understand that I always want to make incredible use of their time, you don't want to waste their time. You don't want to go in doing a sales pitch.

**Debb Atnip:** 3:00

So once you get this meeting confirmed, get an agenda together, share it with them and ask for their input. Is this something you want to talk about, so that it becomes a conversation? And it becomes a discussion, not discovery. So you've done the back and forth with the agenda. In a situation like if you're first meeting them at somewhere like Exchange, you can do a little bit of that on your side, but it's not quite the communication. But meeting them in the

environment, always make sure that you're prepared.

**Debb Atnip:** 3:28

You've got this agenda that's agreed to and then, as you walk through this, when you close the meeting, I think it's critical that you ask for a follow-up, either to bring them updates or to follow through on the things that you said you would do your actions and confirm those before you leave. The most critical, critical thing and I cannot stress this enough this to me is the foundation of a good relationship. To start, do your homework. Do your homework. Know before you go. Don't ask them well, where were you before you came here? Chances are they're profiled on their state page somewhere. They've got a LinkedIn page. Know who they are, know where they've been, how they got to the position that they're in, what are their goals. Read their strategic plan and come to them to demonstrate your value, to be a part of their professional relationship.

**Kevin Minor:** 4:27

Do the work, do the work, do the work. That's what I'm hearing.

**Debb Atnip:** 4:31

Do the work and it's not just an ask how do you bring them value?

**Kevin Minor:** 4:36

Well, it also sounds like you're building a relationship right out of the gate, right? Right out of the gate. What I'm hearing from you is very personable immediately.

**Debb Atnip:** 4:44

Immediately, immediately, immediately, founded in respect, respect their time, respect their commitment, respect their call to service. This isn't the easiest job in the world, it's not the best paid job in the world. It's a job driven by commitment, and so the relationship from that point becomes touch base if you need me for something, I'll reach out, if I have a question, and it becomes collegial.

**Kevin Minor:** 5:12

So how do you? So I kind of understand better how you introduce and you start. How do you maintain those relationships?

**Debb Atnip:** 5:20

Ask them what works best. How do you? I know I like to be, I like to get phone calls. I'm not a heavy text person. Don't add me to your Insta Twitter Cheetah page so I always ask how do you want to stay in touch? I can push things to you that I think might be interesting to you and your staff, which is just a push awareness. Would you be open to a cadence? Maybe 15 minutes a month, nothing overbearing. Sure, maybe every other month, maybe once a quarter, ask people how they like to communicate and then do it. Follow through, oh my God, follow through.

**Debb Atnip:** 6:03

Do the work and follow through, do the work and follow through. I should be on a T-shirt At least. A good refrigerator magnet, absolutely. Or a sticker for a laptop, absolutely. And then relationships are relationships. It will be the way you work with other people, the way you interact with friends and family and colleagues is how you should interact with this person, with these CPOs.

**Kevin Minor:** 6:26

So I want to switch gears just a little bit. Okay, what is your experience working with government attorneys and have you had any success working with them?

**Debb Atnip:** 6:36

I have corporately worked with them. I have a very dark-lined box around legal and that is that when you're having conversations with legal regarding a contract or a solicitation or a concern, you're engaging in a legal conversation.

**Kevin Minor:** 6:59

Absolutely.

**Debb Atnip:** 7:00

It's not just a casual oh sure, we can do that. No, my rule of engagement is I go with my legal and it's not because I'm afraid of legal or I don't trust them. So, oh, if you have an attorney, I want an attorney. It's respectful, it's peer to peer. I facilitate those things and then I let them do their thing together. It saves everybody time.

**Kevin Minor:** 7:24

Sure, and you're using it more of a resource rather than an afterthought or a only if there's trouble. Yes, if there was something that you could say or ask state attorneys, what would that be?

**Debb Atnip:** 7:38

say or ask state attorneys what would that be? Help us understand the clear lines between statute requirements and things that they would like to have in T's and C's. Just put it straight out there Don't touch these, you can't.

**Kevin Minor:** 7:56

Oh yeah, there's no wiggle room.

**Debb Atnip:** 7:57

Redline these and we'll talk about it. Don't redline these because it's statutory. It saves everybody time. Okay, kind of a you-are-here map on T's and C's.

**Kevin Minor:** 8:06

Okay, Cut out the guesswork.

**Debb Atnip:** 8:08

Mm-hmm Okay.

**Kevin Minor:** 8:10

So switching gears again just a little bit, and you touched on this a little bit. I want to dive into it a little bit. More Education, and it sounds like you do your homework and you learn about these people before you go in and talk to them. What is the best way for public procurement officials to educate you on the procurement process and including, like changes and updates? What do you want to hear from our people?

**Debb Atnip:** 8:39

The first thing I would love to share with everybody on the procurement side is there is no such thing as too little to share. Anything that we can learn from the supplier side is good. So I would love you know focus on what's new. So I would love you know focus on what's new, what's changed, what's unique they're the only state that does it and there's a lot of that and what's most impactful? Will it be impactful to us as suppliers? Will it be impactful to the procurement side in how a solicitation is executed? So you know, maybe a two-bullet Tuesday or something where they post things or they push out to everybody that holds their contracts Okay, put it on their procurement site.

**Kevin Minor:** 9:28

There you go.

**Debb Atnip:** 9:28

Publish updates.

**Kevin Minor:** 9:29

Seems like a pretty easy one Updates right.

**Debb Atnip:** 9:31

I mean, some procurement sites are easier to find than others, some are easier to navigate than others. Put that info, faqs, updates, new and unusual. However, they want to do it to push that information out. Every agency, every public entity is unique in some way. When you've seen one, you've seen one.

**Kevin Minor:** 9:53

Oh, I like that. I like that. I wasn't expecting that.

**Debb Atnip:** 9:57

No, when you've seen one, you've seen one.

**Kevin Minor:** 9:58

You've only seen that one.

**Debb Atnip:** 9:59

Yeah, you've seen that one and also share with us. Where do people typically stumble? What is the one piece of this procurement or this, the uploading sites where you put in your response? What's the one spot where people hit a roadblock or they stumble? Help us mitigate that in advance. There's a university in the West I shan't use names. They have a procurement site that can be cumbersome. So at the pre-solicitation workshop they send out a link and say take this training, step through this and here are the things to look for so that when you're submitting your response and you're already stressed out, you don't get freaked out by two changes that are in the procurement site or something over here that has a character limit but something over here that doesn't. So they know that's where people trip up. So they push out and say do the training, those sorts of things, share the lessons that other people have learned the hard way. We're all going to make mistakes, but let's make new mistakes or different mistakes.

**Kevin Minor:** 11:16

I'm hearing also. Just to be very open-minded then.

**Debb Atnip:** 11:21

Very. You can't overshare, even though from CDWG we've submitted hundreds of responses to hundreds of states and agencies. We have new proposal people. We have different processes internally, so we have to relearn those things. It's not one and done. Constant education, constant sharing. Somebody new is going to see it and then also be open to getting some feedback and make it easy for us to share the good stuff and the bad stuff. I know people tend to only share the complaints, but if you make it easy and open that door, I think people will share. Hey, this is awesome, this worked great. Or I've seen another state do this. I will connect you. I've connected people state to state. I work across the US, so my territory is the 50 and 50. Right. So instead of saying this would be great, try it. Hey, let me connect you to a pier.

**Debb Atnip:** 12:27

There you go, you know Texas has some cool things. Let me connect you down there and see how you can use it. And oh, California has some cool stuff. And connect those peers on to different things. We see a lot of different things in our jobs across states or counties, so that back and forth, and some people are really open to it and some people will kind of give it pause and go. No, no, we're okay, Sure, yeah.

**Kevin Minor:** 12:52

This is how we've done it. So we're not, and you?

**Debb Atnip:** 12:54

respect that. Sure, yeah, and you move on. Yeah, but just and I know there's so many platforms and so many places to share that point people to where your procurement updates and your education is. Procurement law is not fun to read. Yeah, but give us the link to it, trust us to go read it and expect us to go read it. Yeah, yeah, expect us to know the rules. Do the work, do the work. I like that. Do the work and it comes back to you a hundredfold in what you get out of it. But do the work. I like that. Do the work and it comes back to you a hundredfold in what you get out of it. But do the work.

**Kevin Minor:** 13:35

So what's one thing that you're taking back from this conference with you to your office, to your people?

**Debb Atnip:** 13:44

The thing that I'm taking back is a shift from what do we have to do next week, next month, what do we have to get done before the end of this fiscal year, Because this space particularly we work on a fiscal calendar right the whole world revolves around those last two weeks I've seen a shift and have been in conversations with we're building out a three-year plan. We are looking so the end of fiscal is still critical because there's so many things that happen. But picking our chins up and looking a little further down the road I'm hearing that more in presentations, in conversations a shift to more descriptive, away from prescriptive. Where do I want to be, what do I want to do? Help me get there. So that's really becoming more of a conversation piece.

**Kevin Minor:** 14:40

You've seen one. You've seen one. You've seen one, you've seen one. Well, Deb, thank you so much for speaking with us today. I really appreciate your time.

**Debb Atnip:** 14:47

This has been the perfect ending to the day Good.

**Kevin Minor:** 14:50

I'm so glad to hear that I appreciate it. I agree, I agree, I appreciate it.