

Telice GillomHost00:03

Welcome to the NASPO Pulse Podcast, your go-to source for all things state procurement. I'm your host, Telice Gillom.

Kevin MinorCo-host00:11

And I'm Kevin Miner, and we are bringing you another exciting episode of in-depth discussion and expert opinions in public procurement. On today's episode we're talking to Bob Gleason from Broward County, Florida, about procurement at the state versus procurement at the local level.

Telice GillomHost00:28

Bob gives us his insights about the differences and similarities in the public procurement process between the two levels of government and gets into the specifics about how the two levels of government might be able to learn from each other and collaborate. He also talks about the proactive approach he took to transform his procurement office here in Broward County. This is definitely an episode you'll wanna take some notes on. Bob has a wealth of knowledge to share and, as we love to do, we've got even more rocking episodes coming this season. So be sure to subscribe to the NASPO Pulse podcast wherever you get your podcast, so that you never miss an episode, whether you listen on Apple, google Play, spotify or the AM radio in your dad's old station wagon. Feel free to email us with your questions. Now let's take the pulse of public procurement. Hey Bob, it's great to have you join us. Thanks for being here with us today. If you would please introduce yourself and give our listeners a peek into your extensive procurement background.

Bob GleasonGuest01:34

Certainly. Thanks, Telice, for having me here today. I certainly do appreciate this opportunity. So my name is Bob Gleason. I'm currently the procurement director for the Broward County Florida Board of Commissioners. I've been here for the last two and a half years. It'll be three years in September. Prior to that, I was with the state of Maryland as their first chief procurement officer for the last four to five years. Prior to that and before that, I was the chief procurement officer for the Commonwealth of Virginia for about four years and then I came up through the ranks within Virginia as a agency chief procurement officer, statewide contract IT contracts manager and various other positions within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Before that I was with an international nonprofit called Child Fund as their chief or senior procurement director, and before that I was with the US military.

Telice GillomHost02:29

We know that there are some major differences between the two levels in a few key areas governance, the commodities that you purchase, the processes by which you purchase, who the stakeholders are and the interactions that you have with the public. And because you've done procurement at both the state and local levels, can you please talk a bit about the differences in procurement for a state and procurement for a local entity in each of these key areas?

Bob GleasonGuest02:57

Certainly, so these are sort of high-level pillars of both differences and similarities that occur when you're performing procurement or managing or directing procurement, or when you're actually doing an RFP or a bid within these different jurisdictional levels of government. Government Governance, of course, in public procurement starts with the legislative body that is responsible for setting the statutes, the ordinances, the laws, the codes, policies of the jurisdiction. So everything flows down from that and the rules, the methods of procurement come down. Every jurisdiction has their own call it statute or code and so you have to adapt or adopt to the different methods at each level of government. You have, within the states, of course, your legislators. Within the cities, towns, counties, you have your board of commissioners or board of supervisors or whatever the legislative entity is at that jurisdictional level. They make the rules, the policies, the priorities that procurement has to follow in those jurisdictions.

04:20

Categories of purchasing no matter what level you're at, there's differences between construction purchasing, architects, engineers, professional services versus information technology, the hardware, the software, the systems and all the IT solutions. So there's variances both in the marketplace and also with the buying community. So your solicitations have to have the differences in the requirements that are needed for each of those commodities or categories, and then the commodities in those categories differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The state it's a much larger enterprise. You're talking maybe 50, 40, 30, 60 counties and so forth. So many of the states are setting up procurements that are going to be used by others. Oftentimes, in local government you're doing procurements for yourself, primarily so you're buying directly for yourself.

05:19

In some cases you might be sharing that contract with other entities so you might frame it up for others to use, but primarily you're buying for your own entity and of course, higher education is very similar to that. The processes flow down from the codes and statutes of the various jurisdictions, the different methods and the policies. You can get into the different processes you follow for review to get legal sufficiency or to have auditors review your requirements or to even get award authority. Sometimes at the state level you have the authority to award contracts at a very high threshold of dollar value, but in the local government level you typically have a board that you have to go to with an agenda every so often Usually it's every two weeks and present your items for review. So those are the processes that differ. Everybody's going to have their own procurement manual or purchasing manual that tells them how to address small businesses, living wage requirements, all the different priorities that the jurisdiction might have. Your stakeholders are going to be different.

06:33

At the state level, of course, you have everybody in the state who are citizens or residents. In the local government. Typically you have to address the residents or the citizens that reside in that particular jurisdiction. So you get very transactional, very low level in terms of making sure that business is being done within your jurisdiction or at least to maximize the economic impact of your contracts onto your citizens and residents. And, of course, those citizens and residents you have to interact with in residence. And, of course, those citizens in residence you have to interact with.

Every person has the opportunity to petition their government, to grieve or to you know, talk to them about what is important to them, and so you have the public interactions that you mentioned.

07:19

You have to have a forum or a way to communicate with the lobbyist, with your suppliers in your own jurisdiction, as well as the citizens that are impacted by the services. If you're installing a new intersection with traffic signals across from you know you know Eddie's General Hardware Store down on the corner they're very much impacted by you know whether somebody can enter or exit from their location. So every two weeks, if there's going to be something, it goes up into a public website. They get a chance to review it and they get their three minutes of fame to come and ask you why you're doing what you're doing. So you have to be prepared for all of that and, of course they have lobbyists, and those lobbyists have phone numbers for the legislative body. So if they don't like what you have to say, then you certainly have. They certainly have the right to petition their, their lawmakers, and so you have to be prepared for the inevitable conversation to justify why you're doing what you're doing. So that's it in a nutshell.

Telice GillomHost08:21

So that's it in a nutshell At the state level, the lobbyist would be the public quote unquote that you would be interacting with. Is that correct?

Bob GleasonGuest08:31

Yes and no.

08:46

I mean the lobbyist might be residents, but there is a notion out there in the universe that in order to get a contract you need to have somebody who has access, who has a phone number to somebody important, so that they can influence the outcome of the procurement. But with us and our public procurement field, back to the codes and the governance and the processes. We have to be true to those processes. We have to be fair, open, transparent in terms of how we perform the procurement and to make sure that those specifications and requirements are not hardwired to any particular vendor so they try to go out and hire a lobbyist to supposedly make sure that their proposal or their bid might receive a more favorable outcome in the competitive process. But to remain objective and fair, we have to be agnostic, and so we typically have people who are not going to benefit in any way, shape or form and we stay true to the process so they can hire their lobbyists but they might better spend their money making think that is the key to any procurement for a public agency.

Telice GillomHost10:11

One of the things we talk a lot about at the state level is that same process for fair, open and transparent procurements, and I don't think we realize that it is the same regardless of the level of procurement, the level of government. Could you give our listeners some insight into some of the other similarities between the levels of government?

Bob GleasonGuest10:37

There's integrity in the process, and so the citizens have to have trust that their public taxes and the revenues that the jurisdiction collects, whether you're at the state or whether at the local government level and we talk about millage rates, which are rates that are set to collect taxes and fees in order to pay the budgets that are created at the local government level. Same thing holds true at the state level. So having integrity in that process to make sure that there's confidence that the integrity of the process is going to be carried out in a fair and open way, is integral to how government is expected to operate. It's not expected to operate in a way that favors any one supplier or another. Certainly, there are instances where an infrastructure might have a proprietary need that only one or very few suppliers can provide, and that's to be expected but to the extent that competition can be developed within the procurement process. Basically, it's the foundation of how we procure these things, for a number of reasons. Number one it helps to reduce costs, because now you're providing a competitive process that incentivizes people, if they want a contract, to offer either the lowest cost or the best value through whatever the procurement process that's being used. At the state level it's pretty much the same thing, I would say.

12:21

At the state level there might be more often a need for multiple awards. So, for example, if you're buying automobiles, well, you might want to have contracts with all of the three major and then at the state police level they might like brand Y and then in higher education you might have a brand Z where they prefer a different automobile. So you need to make sure that if you're going to have a multiple award, that's typically more desirable at the state level. At the local level, I would say there's oftentimes more need for a single award unless you know it's something that is sort of a universal product or a commodity. If you're acquiring consulting services, there might be a greater need for multiple contractors at the local level.

13:25

But again, I would see that as the big difference state versus local is the need for specific solutions. I'll take water and wastewater at the local government level. We have to have clean water, we have to have wastewater, we have to have solid waste management. Those things are oftentimes going to be a single award because all the pipes, all the valves, all the fittings are going to be specific to a particular solution that the water and wastewater people. And it's a huge business that local governments have to operate. State governments don't do that at all, so they might have three or four different valve manufacturers if they have any at all whereas we have to have pretty much one, maybe a couple.

Kevin Minor Co-host 14:10

There's a lot more that goes into it than meets the eye, right Bob?

Bob Gleason Guest 14:17

Yeah, that's exactly true, and that goes to procurement planning. So understanding the needs, which sometimes even the end user or the business unit that you're doing this for I call them a client. Sometimes the client doesn't understand the market, sometimes as broadly or as deeply as sometimes we're able to see. We're removed somewhat from the day-to-day needs. So maybe we

can look out further onto the horizon or across the landscape to find sources and solutions that maybe the business user can't see, or at least advise them of other alternatives to what they have.

Kevin MinorCo-host15:03

Well, and you're in a unique position because you have worked at many different levels. What can state procurement officials learn from their cousins in local government? That's a great question. Well and likewise, what can locals learn from the state?

Bob GleasonGuest15:22

Yeah, that's right, it's a two-way street. So let me start out to the first part of your question there. I think, just as states try to manage a centralized operation let's say, for a state example, let's say they have 60 different state agencies they don't want 60 different state agencies buying screwdrivers 60 different ways. So what they want to try to do is centralize or leverage the economies of scale that they can bring together in order to provide a cross-tip or a flat-tip screwdriver or however many types of screwdrivers state agencies need, and they can leverage the marketplace using those economies of scale to get a better value, either in terms of cost or delivery or service or quality or whatever the other criteria are. So at the local level, it would help us if the state central office were to leverage not just all of the state agencies, but if they were also to include the needs of our municipal governments and our county governments and our school systems, so that we're really increasing the size of the pie that's represented to the marketplace. And this is nothing new. State offices know this, but working with the stakeholders, ie municipals, local counties and so forth, getting us to be a part of the process, is always the trick I mean we're all paid to be parochial. So a state procurement office is really their focus and their priority is on making sure that their general assembly or their legislature and their state agencies' needs are met first. So it's additional work and it's harder for them to come and reach out to counties or cities and have us contribute in any sort of a way.

17:23

Naspo has, I would say, maybe not perfected, but it's perfected as good as you can get in terms of leveraging the scope of multiple states in order to get the better contracts. I think a state within its own jurisdiction can do the same thing with its local municipalities or even here within the county. I've got 16 cities and I've also got 15 towns or villages and some unincorporated areas and I've also got the Seminole Reservation. So leveraging even within the county I say that about the state, but I could also be doing it with the county, I could be doing it with my adjacent counties and vice versa. So it works. It's a flow down from the state to me and further down from me to my own municipal cities and then it also flows up. So I could be working, can be reaching out with my own state.

Telice GillomHost18:15

Speaking of the multi-levels of government working together, is there a potential for state procurement offices to further assist their local cousins, and or is there a potential for that assistance to work in reverse? Is there a potential for the locals to help the state?

Bob GleasonGuest18:39

yes. So let me start out where I am within the county. So, for example, one way to do that is to form a council. So I've, Maryland, I had the opportunity to chair the Procurement Improvement Council. I've coined that here within the county I'm calling it a Procurement Innovation Council, and so it's a group where we would meet quarterly and we'll talk about procurement-related subjects in terms of better, faster, better value within our contracting processes. So I can extend an invitation to our local you know I said 31 basic, you know municipal governments here within this county we have. So each one, some of them don't have a procurement professional. You might have a town manager that is doing what I'm doing. I've got almost 78, 79, almost 80 people in my office doing public procurement so I can be leveraging our contracts for water, wastewater, chemicals, aggregates, sand, gravel, concrete, steel, whatever it is is needed. I can be inviting my you coined it cousins. You know I can have my brothers and sisters here within the county attend these procurement innovation council meetings and provide better ideas on how we leverage us to develop contracts, on how we leverage us to develop contracts. We don't need 31 different contracts for number two pencils, right, so we could be identifying those categories or commodities of contracts that are beneficial to them. Like gasoline, everybody has fleets of vehicles so we can do that. We already have a local cooperative, the Southeast Florida Regional Cooperative, that we work with, but within the county itself. Because, again, I had a friend of mine in South Carolina he used to talk about the BLP sandwich Every procurement has to be looked at from a business perspective, a legal perspective and a political perspective.

20:52

So every jurisdiction wants business to stay in its own area. So if we can establish our business needs, if we can then get our lawyers all on the same page so that we get legal sufficiency, if we've got 31 lawyers you're going to have 54 different opinions. So if we can get our lawyers on the same page to help support our business needs, then we can deal with the political piece, which is to get approval of these contracts. That can take into the issues that the political body holds as a priority, for example, the issues that the political body holds as a priority, for example, affordable living. What can we do from our suppliers in terms of assisting with affordable living, homelessness, social responsibilities in our procurement processes? You know we have issues with the climate, or you know the oceans and you know the ecosystem in which we're operating. So if we can all work collaboratively together at the local level, then that helps us all.

21:55

And then to your point, if we can float it up to the state level and be aggregating these needs and then incorporating these priorities into the state contracts, that's where it can go in both directions, so we can flow down to help, because some of our needs are going to be different than Miami-Dade. So I'm in an area here I've got Miami-Dade to my south, you know 3 million people. I've got 2 million people. We've got Palm Beach County to our north. That's another million and a half or whatever. Total. You know 6.5 million people in an area that's only like I don't know maybe 1200 square miles. So you know there's a huge impact on our construction, our roads, our transportation systems, our ports, our airports We've got three airports. So all of this we have to be local but on the other hand we should be able to escalate up and work with the state to address these needs at the higher level.

Kevin MinorCo-host22:52

Bob, I don't know why, but the whole time you were explaining that and you did a great job all I could hear in my head was we are family, just over and over again.

Bob GleasonGuest23:05

We are, it's true and that's a fact. Yeah, and you know, you mentioned cousins. Well, yeah, we're all cousins. You know. There's not a difference between any of us in my view.

Telice GillomHost23:22

I think we do silo ourselves. At the end of the day, procurement professionals nationwide, really regardless of level of government, regardless of higher ed or K-12, are doing the same functions for different commodities for different needs. But we're all bound to public service and we're, all you know, bound by integrity and ethical principles. We're all trying to do our best and we really silo ourselves as if we're doing something so fundamentally different and we're not.

Bob GleasonGuest23:58

But focusing on the common denominators between each one of these areas. Those can be our strengths, because across these different jurisdictional lines, we can focus on competencies, on training, on certification, on contracts that are, again, are common across these different areas. It's like being a registered nurse. I mean, you're qualified, you've gone to school, you've got the knowledge, the education. But if you go from one hospital system to another hospital system again back to governance, that was the first thing I think I mentioned Each hospital system is going to have its own policies and procedures, its own charter, its priorities.

24:44

They might even have a little bit different language, jargon that's used within one system or another. But basically, if you're assisting a general surgeon in an operation, your fundamental processes are going to be very, very similar. And the same thing is true here. I mean, at the state level, you might call it an invitation for bids and here, at the local level, we'll call it an invitation to bids. I got here in Broward County and I discovered, well, there's such a thing as called an RLI, a request for letters of interest, which is pretty much what an RFP is where I've been and with everyone I've ever talked to at the state level. But they have identified a different method of procurement. That's simply a variation on a fundamental RFP and they call it something different. So once you know the rules within the governing structure, then you can apply the tools in the right way that it was intended in the beginning, to begin with.

Kevin MinorCo-host25:45

You start to be able to identify some of the terms, some of the terminology, some of the processes that are called different things in different places truly are the same thing function similarly True.

Bob GleasonGuest25:59

And you know I would take it a step further and say you know you mentioned private procurement. There's a lot of corporate. We should be doing procurement in an organized, systematic way that we can also use in the public procurement area. So I'm always in tune with some of the organizations that operate in the public space, not only nationally but also internationally. Because I had the

opportunity to work for the World Bank. I had to go to what they referred to as the Himalayas and I had to do a presentation to seven or eight different countries, and we were in a country called Bhutan the capital is Thiem Phu and so we had Afghanistan, pakistan, tibet, india, bangladesh, sri Lanka, and we are in the room talking procurement. Exactly what we're talking about here and now, but also whenever I go to a professional meeting at NASPO or any other professional association the same topics, the same concerns, the same issues. They're universal. So whether it's public procurement, private procurement, there's a lot that are common denominators between these different channels.

Kevin MinorCo-host27:43

Bob, I've known you a long time. I never knew that about you. That's really cool.

Bob GleasonGuest27:47

Very cool. I flew into the most dangerous airport, I think, on YouTube, flying into Thiem Phu. You have to go between the Himalayan mountains and it's a short landing strip. It's quite an experience.

Telice GillomHost28:02

I think I've seen that clip where you have to exactly get the landing right because you're coming in through a mountain range and if you can't stick the landing you have to then re-accelerate and come back around and try again, because if you don't you will crash into the mountains. Yeah and I think they have all maybe three aircraft in their, in their fleet.

Kevin MinorCo-host28:31

I'm out.

Telice GillomHost28:35

So you mentioned that you made the move from the state of Maryland down here to Broward County and that you came into a different type of procurement office and that you had to do a procurement office transformation and you listed people, processes and technology as a part of that transformation. Can you talk to us about how that works?

Bob GleasonGuest29:01

Certainly Thanks, and that's a great question because I think most people, you know, are looking for ways to improve wherever it is that they operate in. But I was presented with the challenge from the governor there, governor Hogan, to go through a wholesale top-to-bottom, stem-to-stern transformation of the workforce, which is the people, the e-procurement system, which is the technology, and to write a procurement manual and to develop a website and to develop a training program so it blends from people to processes. So you have to have your processes that you're going to train and the people that you're going to train to, and then you have to develop your standards that you want people to operate to. So it's an easy sort of a, and I hadn't done it at quite that level of magnitude in the past. I've done it much in a smaller level, but in Virginia. Virginia was ranked in 2016 as the second leading state in the country for its procurement operations, and so I had done these things, but maybe not in as broad a way or as deep a way as I had to do in Maryland.

30:24

So back to the change. I was tasked specifically to transform the state, the entire workforce, so I had to focus on the different components of change and it's like a chicken or egg. I mean, what are you going to do first and how are you going to do it? And the reality is you have to do it all well and you have to do it all in a timely way. The other challenge I had is I had no staff and no budget, so I had to rely on my own.

Kevin MinorCo-host30:57

It's a little bit of a challenge.

Bob GleasonGuest30:59

So a chicken and an egg.

31:01

Yeah, exactly. But the reality is, somebody described me I think it was Secretary Brinkley, who was the director of their budget office. He said, bob, it's like you go into a garage and you have the greatest sports car in the world. It's a Lamborghini Countach, but it's in 25 different pieces. So now you have to build it all together.

31:23

But you have to know what you're doing, and that goes to the training and competence for a professional procurement officer. You have to know what your vision is going to be, what are the goals you're trying to achieve, and so that's sort of a transformation process I was able to do. But back to people, people you need relationships with. I don't know that you need to be liked necessarily, but it helps to be liked. You have to be respected for your knowledge and experience and your skills of what you've done, and you have to be trusted. So trust, integrity, relationships and having an outline or a vision of where it is that you're going are essential.

32:05

And then communicating Every person you meet, every conversation you have, is critically important to moving to the next step. And it's like somebody, I think at the NASPO conference I heard the keynote say you don't lose 100 pounds, you lose one pound 100 times, and so in doing going through this transformation, you have to be relentless and persistent in pursuing the plan that you lay out. So I was able to do that here with Embraer. When I got here I didn't have the formula, the work plan that I created with the help of legislative leaders and the governor's office in Maryland, but I was able to have a whiteboard and they came to call it Bob's whiteboard, and every day I observed something that I saw a gap or something that was lacking. I would write it up on the whiteboard and so, just for the benefit, I still keep a copy of it by my desk.

33:08

Every time I ended up with 26 different areas that I had brought in from private procurement, public procurement, what I'd seen through NASPO and other states that they did well. I know, for example, michigan's done great things, massachusetts, georgia, there's a lot of states. Utah does great IT

procurement. So you get a sense of what's going on in the universe, of what you do, and you cherry pick and pull the things that you know for the least amount of effort and the greatest amount of value you can then co-opt and bring into your own sort of ecosystem. So the whiteboard in Broward County became the map for me to develop a transformation plan. By the way, too, that transformation plan has turned out into don't have it here with me, but there's like nine steps that I'm going through. I'm forming up a Procurement Innovation Council. I'm going to get all of the key stakeholders here within the county the airport, the seaport, port Everglades. I'm going to get the public works people. I'm going to get all the key leaders who I heard they have problems with contracting and procurement to the table. I'm going to present the plan and then we're going to work on it in an incremental way. So, to lease back to your question, the transformation, having an understanding of what the key components that are affected by what procurement is.

34:43

I say this sometimes we're between supply and demand. You know you have people who need things. On the one hand, all of your clients. People need goods, they need services, they need, whatever it is, solutions, it. And then on the other hand, you have the marketplace, all the suppliers that all want to sell and do business with the jurisdiction, with the county. So I'm in the middle.

35:09

My division is in the middle of trying to thread the needle between supply and demand and make sure that the processes back to processes, all the processes are fair, open, transparent. We do things with integrity and fairness and openness. We incorporate small businesses. We make sure that local businesses have an opportunity. We have an e-procurement system where processes can be cycle time can be reduced, efficiencies can be gained. We make sure the lawyers have an opportunity to get their bite at the apple, the auditors and everybody else opportunity to get their bite at the apple, the auditors and everybody else.

35:45

So the transformation process that was done in Maryland really helped provide the foundation for the transition that's been going on here and, honestly, it's good for the people here, the citizens and residents we get. I think there's like 40 million people that come through here through the airports, the port. We have the Disney port, we have tourists from all over the world and we have roughly 2 million full-time residents. So that's a huge impact on the water, the waste, the infrastructure, the transportation, the transit system, buses, our economy. So it's critical in terms of how the government jurisdiction does business and procurement's a great place to be if you want to have a great career.

Kevin MinorCo-host36:35

It's like a family dinner. You're bringing them all to the table.

Bob GleasonGuest36:39

Yeah, that's my favorite Chinese dish. Was's a. You know, was it the lucky family?

Kevin MinorCo-host36:43

Oh, yeah, yeah, the big bowl.

Bob GleasonGuest36:45

Yeah, chicken pork rice.

Kevin MinorCo-host36:49

You hear that stakeholders Bob's, Bob's serving up family dinner and you get a little bit of everything.

Bob GleasonGuest36:55

Yep, well, that's what procurement does I mean? Um, it's the language of business, is the language of commerce. You've got finance people. I've got CPAs. My boss is a CPA, my chief accountant is a CPA. I've got to deal with the finance people, the legal people, political people and then the end users, the people who are specialists in you know whatever it is that they are. You know in and in any governmental entity. You've got people who are experts in you know pesticides or you know mosquito eradication whatever, it is Great answer.

Telice GillomHost37:30

We thank you very, very much for your expertise.

Bob GleasonGuest37:33

I'll leave it all over to you.

Telice GillomHost37:35

Yeah.

Kevin MinorCo-host37:35

Bob thank you so much for joining us today. We really appreciate your time.

Bob GleasonGuest37:39

You're welcome. Thanks for having me Very much appreciated.