

Speaker Names

Telice Gillom Host

00:04

Welcome to another episode of the NASPO Pulse podcast, your source for all things state procurement. I'm your host, Telice Gillom, and I'm bringing you another episode of thorough discussions filled with insights on the latest trends and topics in public procurement. On today's episode, we're talking about challenges from a chief administrative officer's perspective, and we're talking to Dr Rebecca Hallwerda, the Commissioner for the Indiana Department of Administration and 2024 President of the National Association of State Chief Administrators, or NASCA. Rebecca talks about the challenges that a CAO faces that procurement offices may be unaware of, and tells us how the state of Indiana transformed its state workforce development to better attract, hire and retain staff. She also highlights her priorities for her presidential year with NASCA and mentions some of the current events the organization is taking on this year.

01:08

So make sure you have both of your AirPods in, because this is an episode not to be missed, and, of course, there are more super cool episodes to come. So subscribe to the NASPO Pulse podcast wherever you get your podcasts so you never miss an episode, even if you're listening on the first generation iPod I know somebody out there still has one Feel free to email us with your questions. Now let's take the pulse. Thanks so much for joining us today. If you don't mind, please introduce yourself to our Pulse listeners.

Dr. Rebecca Hallwerda Guest

01:43

Thanks so much for having me. My name is Dr Rebecca Holwerda and I am the Commissioner of the Indiana Department of Administration. I've been in this role for almost three years now. Previously I served as the Senior Policy and Operations Director for Governor Holcomb and, prior to my time in state government, worked for the feds US Senator Dan Coats. Prior to my time in state government, worked for the feds US Senator Dan Coats.

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Before jumping headfirst into public service, I spent 13 years in the public-private sector, particularly in healthcare. So I like to think I have a pretty balanced approach and use the

experience from both my federal, state and non-public service sector days to really streamline processes, come up with really practical solutions while being very cognizant of the rules and regulations that guide our work. So I was born and raised in Louisiana, so I will always bleed purple and gold and will be an LSU fan, but I have really come to love the Hoosier State. Indiana is considered to be the crossroads of America and really connects the country, so I'm pretty biased, but I think Indiana is one of the best places to live, work and play. And, not to mention, we are home to the greatest spectacle of car racing known as the Indy 500. So we got some pretty good things going for us.

Telice Gillom Host

03:08

That sounds like a great time. I haven't myself made it to the Indy 500, but maybe one day you got to put it on your list.

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

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It's fantastic.

Telice Gillom Host

03:19

So you are the 2024 NASCA president, and what are some of your top priorities for your presidential year with NASCA?

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

03:29

Well, I was privileged to be named in January to be the president of NASCA, which stands for the National Association of State Chief Administrators. Really, the mission is to engage states in transforming government operations through the power of shared knowledge, operational excellence and thought leadership. And when I assumed this responsibility and started thinking about what do I want to focus on this year, I kept coming back to three R's, as corny as that sounds. And that's resourceful, responsive and re-energized. And resourceful in a couple of ways we just hired an incredible new executive director, elizabeth Whitehouse. And re-energized and resourceful in a couple of ways. We just hired an incredible new executive director, elizabeth Whitehouse. And with new leadership comes new ideas, new energy and the opportunity to be resourceful in our partnerships and the way we do things. We no longer have to do things the same way that things have always

been done, but it really gives us the freedom to imagine and involve to what the organization should be.

04:28

Second, responsive In a CAO's world, things change really quickly, and so NASCA wants to be responsive to best practices, trends and the needs that CAOs have so they can better manage and change whatever may come their way. And then, lastly, re-energized. We host two conferences a year in the spring and fall, an annual leadership conference and an institute, and I want everyone who comes to the conferences not just feel like, all right, I'm checking the box, let's get this over with. I've put in the time that I need it to. I really want individuals to look forward to connecting with colleagues, hearing about new solutions to problems and leaving re-energized to keep doing their job. I often say that when I go to a conference. If I was a cell phone battery, I would be at about a 6%, so I want people to be able to foster relationships and discussions between everyone. That really charges all back to that 100%.

Telice Gillom Host

05:32

You mentioned some of the needs of chief administrative officers, and what would you say are some of the needs of CAOs that procurement offices may be unaware of?

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

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of CAOs that procurement offices may be unaware of.

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A CAO is responsible for managing many departments that touch every single agency in state government.

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For instance, the Indiana Department of Administration is responsible for all state contracts, procurements of goods and services, supplier diversity, fleet management, state government facilities, campus security, supplier diversity, fleet management, state government facilities, campus security, surplus, the call center, public works and capital projects. That's a lot, so we all have to be moving in the same direction and communicating in order to be successful. We have to communicate internally with each other, with our sister agencies, with the vendor community, to make sure everyone understands what the

project is, the requirements, the timeline, and I think that the CAO is looking out for state government and the agency holistically and we rely on procurement officers to do their homework and make sure the state is getting the best goods and services that are of great value for taxpayers. And the CAO doesn't get into the weeds, but that's where trust comes into play with the procurement officer and the CAO trusts the procurement officer that they're doing their job and providing great government service to all of our internal and external clients.

Telice Gillom Host

07:03

What would you say are some of the other big challenges for a CAO?

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

07:08

I would say you know, workforce is always something that is really important because we want to make sure that we have the employees that we need with the technical skill to be able to do the job. Usually there is, between public and private, with procurement officers, a pretty large learning curve, and so it's really being able to get people up to speed and knowing what all of the crazy requirements and regulations are so that they can very easily talk with vendors and other sister agencies to walk them through the process.

Telice Gillom Host

07:54

I know that NASCA is a strategic partner of NASPO and, this being your presidential year, can you talk about how some of the priorities for your presidential year and some of the priorities of NASPO overlap?

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

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Absolutely so. Nasca and NASPO definitely overlap in what our priorities are. We may have different target audiences and scope as a CEO, because we're focused on that big picture of the agency, while the procurement officer is in tune with what the actual procurement needs are. But we're both always in a constant state of process improvement. To modernize, to provide better service, to be innovative, to use analytics, to have data-driven decision-making these are all things that we're both striving to do in order to have smooth

operations and do what's best not only for our agency but also sister agencies and stakeholders.

Telice Gillom Host

08:55

Getting back to that workforce development issue, it's such a crucial issue that agencies all across the country and really probably the world, are looking at right now. We know that Indiana has made some big changes for its state workforce development. Can you talk to us a little bit about that Indiana has made?

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

09:12

significant changes to state workforce development. Can you talk to us a little bit about that? Indiana has made significant changes to our workforce development. Recruitment and retention has always been an issue, and we recognize the need for a comprehensive approach to employee engagement. So Governor Holcomb convened a task force of what the future of state work should look like in the next 5, 10, and 25 years. So the task force was comprised of large and small agencies, new and veteran leaders, cabinet and non-cabinet members to really ensure a holistic approach. We discussed questions like what have we heard from employees? What are other states doing? What is the market demanding that we do?

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And so we developed a roadmap for the future of state work and the policies that would guide the change and kind of implemented things into three phases, included a general salary adjustment, which was the first time this had happened in 12 years, resulting in an average 5% increase for employees. Flexible work arrangements are now offered so employees have the opportunity to work three days in the office, two days remote, or choose the alternative work schedule, which is four days in the office and your fifth day off. We also did an education reimbursement program so all employees can receive the maximum \$5,250 each year, regardless of what they're studying, as long as it was from an accredited institution. And then one of my most favorite benefits is the community service leave, where employees have two days per year to volunteer at a non-profit of their choosing and they do not have to take personal or vacation time to do it. So we tried lots of different and kind of batted around different ideas and then, when it came right down to it, we found that these were really the issues that people cared about the most when they were looking for employment and trying to retain our current employees.

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Phase two launched a dependent care support survey to find out if child care was a barrier. This led to Governor Holcomb proposing legislation that was passed and he signed into law that gave families greater ability to access child care, state pre-k vouchers and also introduced the concept of substitute positions at child care centers, similar to a substitute teacher in schools, so providers would not have to shut down if employees got sick. And then phase three was a year-long compensation study that looked at every position in state government, first streamlining titles so all agencies had uniform titles, group positions and bands to ensure equity across agencies so people weren't just skipping to another agency because it was \$1,000 more if they went to that agency and did an analysis of pay by looking at the private sector, nonprofit and other government positions, whether municipal or states, to determine if there was disparity. In the end, most employees did receive a pay increase and now we're incredibly competitive with our private sector so we can recruit better candidates and we're able to retain the great employees that we do have.

Telice Gillom Host

12:49

That's good news. That's very good news. How easy or difficult was that process.

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

12:55

It took a lot of time and it took a lot of thought, but I think in the end the time and thought that went into it really produced a great product and benefits that state employees are happy to have and for those that are looking for work, that's kind of the core things that they're looking at, so it keeps us very competitive.

Telice Gillom Host

13:21

Have you noticed whether or not it has made a difference?

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

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It's made a big difference. We're having much less turnover, much less agency hopping and able to recruit really highly qualified candidates.

Telice Gillom Host

13:39

This issue is a very important issue to NASPO so important, in fact, that we are a participant in the National Governors Association's Skills-Based Hiring Task Force, and I know that Indiana also is a participant in that task force. Yes, we also a participant. And, speaking of the workforce issue, one of our top 10 priorities for state procurement is succession planning. Can you give us some insight into how your office has addressed that critical topic?

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

14:25

We have done a complete overhaul of how we have structured procurement. It used to be that everyone was kind of in the same category of procurement. There was really no opportunity for upward mobility unless the deputy commissioner of procurement or one of the directors left. So this often caused retention and recruitment issues. So we have restructured things to have three different tiers in procurement. Individuals can come in, figure out the process, learn how things work at the tier one level and as knowledge increases and a person is given more responsibility, they're able to keep moving up in their careers. So it goes from an analyst to a specialist, to a consultant, and we have seen fantastic success with the restructuring. In fact last year we were fully staffed, which had not been the case in nearly two decades. Wow, that's incredible. We were very excited. It kind of showed us that it worked.

Telice Gillom Host

15:28

So in your office, the procurement staff is not tasked with doing everything. They get a piece of the procurement process and as they increase in knowledge they change from one piece to the next, instead of adding pieces to that puzzle.

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

15:46

Correct. So you're coming in as the analyst and just kind of looking at how contracts are set up, working with vendors. Then you kind of move to the specialist where you get more contracts that are a little bit more sophisticated, a little bit more tedious, or some vendors who need a little extra TLC, and then, once you get to the consultant, you can pretty much answer any question that is thrown at you and you're not off your step at all if a curveball is thrown.

Telice Gillom Host

16:23

It's like the saying how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

16:28

That is exactly right, Because really the procurement process, especially in government, can be so overwhelming. So this kind of gives everybody just a kind of a little taste, see how it works, and then as you get skilled and you have that knowledge, you're able to take on a little bit more and continue with some upward mobility for your career.

Telice Gillom Host

16:50

So what advice would you give to our NASPO audience?

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

16:54

I would like to say to the NASPO audience and all those in procurement thank you, thank you, thank you for your ability to tackle big problems, walk agencies through the process, answer unending questions and deliver an outcome that includes products and services that impact the citizens of your state. You most likely will never talk to or hear the stories about how what you did on the back end made the difference, saved the day or gave your constituents the best quality of life. So know the work that you do is important and it really is so appreciated.

Telice Gillom Host

17:37

I would agree, Just as a fun way to close it out. Have you got a corny joke? You want to tell me it's a Christmas joke?

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

17:44

I love Christmas jokes. I know we're in the wrong season, but one of our procurement specialists had a clear whiteboard and it said what kind of music does Santa like to listen to? What's that Rap that's?

Telice Gillom Host

18:02

good. That's all I got. That's good. That's all I got. That's good. That's all I got. That's good, that's all I got. That's good.

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

18:08

I haven't heard anything new since December.

Telice Gillom Host

18:13

That's good. We'll file that away and put that one back out in December and hopefully get that one back out in December. Thank you so much for joining us today. We really appreciate it.

Dr. Rebecca Holwerda Guest

18:25

It's been my pleasure, thank you.