

TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE

U.S. Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

ON

Pathways to Procurement Innovation

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Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and other distinguished Members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss procurement innovation.

After over 40 years of dedicated federal service in the acquisition profession, I retired in July 2021 as the Chief Procurement Officer and Senior Procurement Executive of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). My career spanned several federal agencies and positions as both a procurement and program official. Today, I operate a small business supporting the acquisition process through advice and consultation to professional associations, industry, and academia. My commitment to the profession and the improvement of the procurement process is demonstrated through the programs and initiatives I implemented at DHS.

Acquisition Workforce: Recruitment and Retention

Speak to any acquisition leader and they will highlight the challenge of recruiting, hiring, and retaining a well trained and experienced workforce. To address the challenge, the federal government needs to *invest* in the growth and development of the acquisition workforce. By that I mean, create programs and initiatives to promote the profession, deliver the right training at the right time, and ensure career paths are clear.

One area where we can improve is in creating consistency across the profession when it comes to certification standards and promoting the use of a common language for the profession. By doing so, we can make acquisition careers more transferable between government and industry, and as a result grow the profession. I believe that the use of a common language will also make it easier for academic institutions to offer degree programs and for individuals to understand and appreciate the profession.

However, certification and training is not enough, we need to train and develop the soft skills and provide “on the job” learning opportunities. While this is nothing new, I believe that today’s acquisition professional needs to know how to communicate, collaborate, and cooperate with others, and they need to be inquisitive, risk-tolerant, and decisive. The best way to gain these skills is through on the job training where they can learn by doing.

The establishment of intern programs is one of the many ways in which agencies can develop and grow their workforce, while simultaneously providing technical, interpersonal, and leadership training. At DHS we established the Acquisitions Professional Career Program (APCP) to attract, train and hire acquisition professionals. We also created a voluntary mentoring program that included self-assessments, speakers, and other learning exercises for procurement personnel. Finally, we encouraged rotational job assignments and participation in specialized training and certification programs such as the Digital Information Technology Acquisition Professionals (DITAP) program.

Such initiatives create an environment where individuals feel appreciated and valued by their leaders.

Improving the Process – the DHS Procurement Innovation Lab (PIL)

I established the DHS Procurement Innovation Lab (PIL) to inspire and motivate the DHS acquisition workforce to put forth ideas on how we could simplify the procurement process, enhance acquisition outcomes, and ensure a more effective and efficient experience for industry and government. My goal was not to seek changes to statute or regulation, but to identify and use all the flexibilities available in the Federal Acquisition Regulation, or the FAR. Our process was designed to test the innovation or idea and share what we learned across the federal acquisition community. Since then, several agencies have created procurement innovation hubs or organizations.

Many of the innovative business practices and techniques developed by the PIL and other agencies are found on the Periodic Table of Acquisition Innovations (PTAI) which is hosted on the Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) website: [Periodic Table of Acquisition Innovations | FAI.GOV](https://www.acquisitioninnovations.org/). Encouraging organizations to promote procurement innovation and sharing what they learn is essential to improving the federal acquisition process.

Several agencies are also using artificial intelligence, robotic process automation, and other technologies to promote efficiency in procurement business processes and enhance the customer experience. Such efforts need to be encouraged and shared across federal agencies.

Working with Industry

While at DHS I implemented discussion forums for traditional and non-traditional contractors to learn about DHS and share with us technologies, approaches, and innovations. Two of the most popular were the Strategic Industry Conversation and the Reverse Industry Day.

At the Strategic Industry Conversation DHS officials shared with industry the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead through a series of keynote speeches and discussion panels. The Reverse Industry Day was a unique forum for industry to educate us on their business practices. Topics included what goes into preparing a proposal, why do companies protest, and how to buy certain technologies. These events provide information and generate ideas for improving business processes and removing barriers to competition. I recommend we encourage agencies to create or participate in such events as appropriate.

Procurement and Contracting Improvements

In addition to exploring the flexibilities in the FAR, at DHS we had success in using special procurement authorities including Other Transaction Authority (OTA) and the Commercial Solutions Opening Pilot (CSOP) program, to acquire innovative technologies and solutions.

These authorities provide greater flexibility in the drafting of the contractual agreement since they are not subject to the FAR and enable organizations to acquire products and services from new or non-traditional contractors with specialized knowledge or expertise. I ask that you consider making such authorities permanent and expand these authorities for use by the CFO Act agencies.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I remain committed to the success of our federal government and the acquisition profession. I take this opportunity to express appreciation for my colleagues in government, industry, and academia and a special thank you to this Committee for seeking solutions and providing the support this profession deserves.

I look forward to your questions.