



“ I'M A *firm believer* THAT TO BE THE *best advisor* IN ANY BUSINESS FUNCTION, *and certainly in procurement*, YOU HAVE TO HAVE A *solid grasp* OF THE CONCEPTS OF YOUR AREA OF EXPERTISE. ”

# “Quality, Integrity, & Efficiency”:

**George Schutter,**

CHIEF PROCUREMENT OFFICER, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

EDITED BY *Ryan Burke*



## ***Contract Management***

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS INTERVIEW. PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF.

### ***George Schutter***

My career spans 25 years as a leader in both the private and public sectors. I am currently the chief procurement officer for the District of Columbia, which is a professionally fascinating and rewarding position. I'm charged with leading the professionals in the Office of Contracting and Procurement (OCP),<sup>1</sup> who manage over \$5.2 billion worth of acquisitions annually for 77 District agencies. Their requirements range from bridges and roads to public safety, health, and technology, and support the over 670,000 full-time residents of our nation's capital—a number that climbs to well over a million during the workweek.

I was appointed by Mayor Muriel Bowser in May 2015. I am charged with the overall leadership, implementation, and coordination of procurement activities using best practices and in accordance with the laws and regulations of the District of Columbia. Supported by a staff of 223, I am also responsible for audit and compliance of procurement activities, certifying District procurement professionals, and overall agency contracting and procurement operations.

## CM

WHAT PREVIOUS POSITIONS OF NOTE HAVE YOU HELD?

## GS

Prior to joining the District of Columbia, I served as TechnoServe's CFO.<sup>2</sup> Prior to that, I served as executive director in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia for Grant Thornton's Global Public Sector, opening regional operations in Dubai's International Financial Center as well as developing offices in Iraq. I also had the pleasure of serving as the Peace Corps' global CFO, as well as their first chief acquisition officer. I'm also proud to have served as a U.S. Marine for 10 years domestically and abroad.

I have led international efforts on procurement and financial management reform, change management, transparency initiatives, policy formulation, process reengineering, and capacity building efforts in developing countries. I have been fortunate to have experiences in more than 75 countries around the world. These experiences have made me quite comfortable navigating through operations involving such things as international finance, procurement, contracts, change management, and negotiations in just about any environment.

## CM

HOW HAVE YOU LEVERAGED AND BROUGHT FORWARD THIS EXPERIENCE INTO YOUR CURRENT POSITION? HAVE YOU FOUND THERE TO BE KEY ENABLERS OR COMPETENCIES FROM THESE PREVIOUS ACTIVITIES THAT ALIGN WITH YOUR CURRENT DUTIES AND OBJECTIVES?

## GS

I have been very lucky in life to have earned professional experience in incredible organizations with truly amazing missions. Honing leadership skills in the Marine Corps, gaining broad

cultural experience and interaction in the Peace Corps, and developing consulting skills in the private sector with Grant Thornton—these have all helped me in my current role as the District's Chief Procurement Officer. Also, having both deep finance and contracting experience greatly helps me to lead across the integrated procurement teams.

## CM

HOW WERE YOU FIRST INTRODUCED TO NCMA?

## GS

As a graduate student at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School. I was introduced to NCMA by Dr. Dave Lamm—an icon of the defense contracting profession at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School.

## CM

SPEAKING OF EDUCATION, WHAT KINDS OF CONTINUING EDUCATION HAVE YOU PURSUED, INCLUDING CERTIFICATIONS?

## GS

I hold degrees in accounting from the Illinois Institute of Technology and an MS in acquisitions and contracts management from the US Naval Postgraduate School. In addition, I'm a licensed Certified Public Accountant, Certified Professional Contracts Manager, and Chartered Global Management Accountant.

## CM

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA IS A UNIQUE AREA IN TERMS OF STATE AND LOCAL CONTRACTING.<sup>3</sup> HOW DOES THE DISTRICT AND OCP DEVELOP ACQUISITION PLANS?

## GS

I am a firm believer in acquisition planning and the importance of it in a strong contracting organization. Acquisition planning is an ongoing process, but we expect that

each year plans will become more refined and useful to help me and my team determine the allocation of our people resources.

In the business of procurement, especially in our jurisdiction, where we manage federal, county, and major municipal city infrastructure needs, we will always have unexpected needs that can be best met through contracts with industry. The ratio will change based on the environment, but in our jurisdiction, I believe 10% of the time, you have to ensure you have the people and systems in place to deal with those urgent needs that change in real time; for the other 90%, you have to ensure you have the contract vehicles and procurement plans in place to handle the budgeted requirements that are annually planned.

This 2017 fiscal year, working with the program and finance professionals in all 77 of our partner agencies, we developed acquisition plans that allowed us to identify approximately \$5.2 billion worth of planned acquisitions from those agencies. We're in our third year of this District-wide effort, which will culminate in an annual District acquisition plan with further granularity and will be more useful as a baseline for organizational resource management and sourcing strategies.

We are currently in the early stages of the fiscal year 2018 acquisition planning process. We are also working with the District's chief technology officer to further automate our acquisition planning tools so we can capture additional information and facilitate milestone planning for individual procurements, forecasting to industry, and provide further transparency on opportunities for small and District-certified businesses.

**CM**  
HOW IMPORTANT IS TRANSPARENCY IN CONTRACTING TO YOU AND OCP?

**GS**  
Transparency in contracting continues to be one of my top priorities for the agency, and is mandated by the Procurement Integrity, Transparency, and Accountability Amendment Act of 2015 (PITAAA),<sup>4</sup> which went into effect earlier this fiscal year. Our goal is to increase the frequency with which we post documents to our website<sup>5</sup> and ensure ease of navigation for our customers.

We condensed several databases on our website so that the notices of contract award and the award documents are more conveniently posted in the same place. We have now posted 94% of contract awards—exceeding \$100,000 in fiscal year 2016—and fewer exceptions in 2017. Members of the public can find a large number of contracts on the District's FOIA portal<sup>6</sup> in addition to what's posted on our website. We continue to post a report of all of our purchase orders and purchase card transactions on the District's digital public square on a monthly basis.

**CM**  
DOES THIS INITIATIVE TRANSLATE TO INTERNAL TRANSPARENCY AS WELL?

**GS**  
Yes. In 2016, we worked to improve internal transparency by creating dashboards that show our progress on our key performance indicators and other factors that help us to regularly evaluate the health of our agency and our progress toward some of our collective goals. We expect these tools will identify existing and emergent trends that will help us to make necessary policy and practice changes. Our transparency goal for this year is to continue to post more information required by the PITAAA and to ensure that posting

contracts is an automated process for all members of the procurement team.

We are also focused on how to improve transparency between OCP and our customer agencies. This fiscal year, we are specifically focusing on a more robust reporting and analysis tool that will highlight key information and data that "speak" to each program agency's individual procurement health—including staffing overviews and contract statuses weighed against their annual acquisition plans.

**CM**  
IN THE GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING SPACE, PROCUREMENT REFORM IS CURRENTLY A MAJOR FOCUS AREA. WHAT TYPES OF REFORM EFFORTS HAS THE DISTRICT PERFORMED? WHAT KINDS OF POLICIES OR PROCEDURES HAVE YOU USED TO STREAMLINE THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS AND MAKE IT MORE EFFICIENT?

**GS**  
There have been heavy procurement reform efforts in the District over the past few years. We've centralized much of the procurement function throughout the District, and we've taken a focused approach to updating the District's public regulations and agency procedures, which are critical in advising staff as well as industry on conducting business with the District.

We focused on efficiency by documenting our processes and updating regulations. Our goal was to both infuse best practices and conform to the PITAAA. We have also developed and circulated flowcharts of the invitation for bids and request for proposals processes to create more standardization in the procurement process and improve planning and coordination between OCP and the program agencies we support. The next round of flowcharts will document the design/build and simplified acquisitions procurement

processes. Earlier this year, we updated our agency policies and procedures manuals to create more consistency in the process for my team, no matter the length of their tenure with the District.

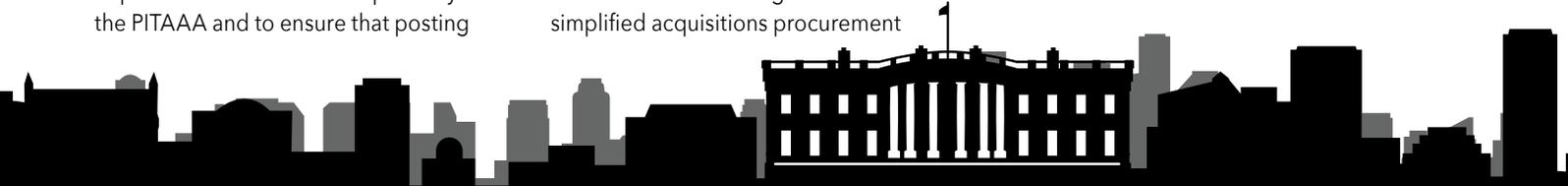
These manuals and flowcharts are designed to help clarify some of the more nuanced aspects of the procurement process in the District.

**CM**  
HOW DO YOU MEASURE HOW EFFECTIVE THESE INITIATIVES ARE FOR OCP'S PARTNER AGENCIES? HOW DO YOU ENGAGE WITH YOUR STAKEHOLDERS AND KNOW IF OCP IS PERFORMING WELL?

**GS**  
Our organization is structured such that we have our procurement team actually working side-by-side with program staff in 23 of our customer agencies. This close interaction makes receiving feedback and determining customer satisfaction easier.

Our leadership team really promotes and encourages our customers to develop a strong relationship with the team assigned to their agency. When there are challenges, we bring all of the stakeholders together to work through the issue and come up with a solution that is mutually agreed upon and balances the programmatic need and the industry support available over the jurisdictional laws and regulations.

**CM**  
TODAY'S PROCUREMENT WORKFORCE HAS BEEN CHALLENGED TO "DO MORE WITH LESS" IN THIS NEW ERA OF AUSTERITY,<sup>7</sup> BOTH FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND, CORRESPONDINGLY, FOR CONTRACTORS WITHIN INDUSTRY. WHAT MESSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONVEY TO YOUR GOVERNMENT AND INDUS-



## TRY COLLEAGUES REGARDING HOW TO MANAGE THESE CHALLENGES?

### GS

I believe efficiencies can be achieved through deliberate planning of future procurement needs in coordination with the programs and entities that procurement professionals support. And don't stop at the development of your procurement plan. Use that plan as the baseline for resource management (such as staffing) and sourcing strategies.

Efficiencies will be gained as the periodic planning continues to mature and improve as more granular details are provided, followed by better analyses, and then making more educated procurement strategies and execution.

### CM

WORKFORCE TRAINING IS OFTEN HIGHLIGHTED AS AN AREA OF CONCERN AND SOLUTION TO REAL OR PERCEIVED PROBLEMS IN TODAY'S PROCUREMENT SYSTEM. HOW DO YOU REACT TO THE NOTION THAT TRAINING IS A KEY ISSUE?

### GS

I agree 100%. In the District, we've designed our certification and training programs to achieve consistency in the process. There are established support tools in place, which create a clearly defined standard that we can measure performance against.

### CM

HOW DO YOU VIEW THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TRAINING YOUR WORKFORCE RECEIVES? DOES IT ADDRESS THE SUBJECTS YOU BELIEVE THEY NEED TO KNOW, OR ARE THERE AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT?

### GS

Last year, we took steps to significantly increase the effectiveness of our training. Our curriculum is competency-based—we teach procurement professionals how to apply concepts in real-world situations, rather than rote memorization. We have re-

ceived really positive feedback so far. Even our long-tenured staff have shared that they were able to learn something new in the training courses they completed, and I think that is very a high compliment for the curriculum and our training team.

### CM

WHAT KINDS OF DELIVERY TECHNIQUES DO YOU USE TO DELIVER THIS TRAINING? HAVE YOU FOUND THERE TO BE SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS TO ONE KIND VERSUS ANOTHER?

### GS

We have found that our contracting officers and specialists appreciate a variety of delivery techniques. We incorporate a combination of classroom discussion, independent assignments, and some online courseware to ensure that our staff develops the core competencies needed to make sound decisions based on best practices in procurement and the laws that govern procurement within the District.

### CM

WHEN BALANCED AGAINST FORMAL TRAINING, HOW IMPORTANT IS RELEVANT EXPERIENCE IN DETERMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TODAY'S WORKFORCE?

### GS

Experience and education go hand in hand. I'm a firm believer that to be the best advisor in any business function, and certainly in procurement, you have to have a solid grasp of the concepts of your area of expertise. If you can cite examples from your personal experience, you will be a successful procurement leader.

### CM

DO YOU BELIEVE TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION SHOULD BE APPLIED AGAINST A UNIVERSAL STANDARD ACROSS THE PROFESSION, IRRESPECTIVE OF INDIVIDUAL GOVERNMENT OR INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT?

### GS

There is value in a universal standard across the profession, and yet there is ben-

efit to training and certification specifically based on the needs of the jurisdiction. In the District, we incorporate both universal best practices and jurisdictional and procedural requirements. George Washington University has published books used across our profession (e.g., *Administration of Government Contracts*, *Formation of Government Contracts*, and many others), so we have leveraged that universal standard knowledge through our partnership with the nationally accredited university in our course development.

Our training ensures that procurement professionals understand both fundamental acquisition principles while also learning how to navigate the codes, regulations, processes, and systems guiding the District of Columbia contracting system, which include federal, District, and regional requirements.

### CM

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS IN THE NEAR FUTURE FOR OCP, AND WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE FOR YOUR LEGACY TO BE AFTER YOU'RE GONE?

### GS

I hope that my legacy will be that I improved the quality, integrity, and efficiency in the District's contracting system. In the almost two years since I came to the District, I was amazed at all that the team at OCP was able to accomplish. We have had a number of wins, including:

**Code of Ethics**—One of the first things I did as CPO was to update and reissue our Code of Ethics so that every member of our team understands the importance of ethics in contracting as we execute contracts with taxpayer funds.<sup>8</sup>

**Acquisition planning**—We developed a comprehensive acquisition plan that helps us to more efficiently manage our operation and the contracts that we manage on behalf of 77 agencies.

**Opportunity forecasting**—We posted a forecast of contracting opportunities on our website to help businesses prepare for

and compete for contracts with the District of Columbia. Improved acquisition planning leads to better engagement with industry, which leads to better competition, and ultimately better value for the goods, services, and construction we acquire on behalf of residents, visitors, and those who work in the District.

**Coordinated outreach strategy and industry engagement**—Our procurement professionals personally went out and visited and engaged with business leaders throughout the District, including the leadership from our strong chambers of commerce. We also held events in each of the District's wards and met with hundreds of business owners to share all of the good work that is going on at OCP and in the District's contracting system. This was really a good, solid effort to generally "demystify" contracting within the District.

I want to continue to build on these and other wins we've had so that we can see real, sustained change in the way we man-

age procurement. I am so proud of my team for the major progress they've made in achieving that vision in such a relatively short period of time.

That being said, we do have much more to do. My areas of focus this year include:

**Increase efficiency/utilize best practices**—Awarding and managing contracts efficiently and utilizing best practices continue to be OCP's top priorities for the remainder of this fiscal year and next fiscal year. Our goal is to provide our contracting professionals with up-to-date policies, procedures, and guidance to achieve consistency in the procurement process. Based on industry and District best practices, we will seek opportunities for cost savings and examine ways to streamline the process to improve the quality, integrity, and efficiency of procurement.

**Continue to refine the acquisition planning process**—I want to continue to refine the acquisition planning process so that we are

able to create a thorough, comprehensive plan that identifies anticipated requirements, timeframes for delivery, and the anticipated budget for each programmatic need in the coming fiscal year. We are working with program agencies to develop sound acquisition plans that serve as the basis for procurement forecasts, which are useful tools for current and future industry partners as they seek to do business with the District. OCP is also working with the Office of the Chief Technology Officer to further automate the acquisition planning and forecasting process for fiscal year 2017 data collection.

**Improve data collection/enhance existing systems**—Another priority is to improve our procurement data collection and enhance our existing systems so that we have tools that all members of the integrated procurement team will find helpful in the planning, coordination, and execution of the procurement process. We want to connect the gaps in disparate data, systems, and processes throughout the District so that

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information is reflected accurately about the status and performance of District contracts and procurements.

**Continue coordinated outreach strategy and industry engagement**—Last year, we reached over 2,000 members of the local business community through a coordinated outreach strategy. This year, we are continuing this strategy, including signature events such as “DC Buys.”<sup>9</sup> At DC Buys, current and future industry partners have an opportunity to market their businesses to decision-makers from over 40 agencies around the District. We will continue this and our other initiatives to ensure that concerns from industry stakeholders are addressed and resolved consistently and in a timely manner.

**Fulfill certification requirements**—We have a fully operational Procurement Training Institute with a competency-based certification program that is designed to give contracting personnel the foundation they need to lead and support the integrated procurement team and serve as business advisors to program agencies. Our goal is to ensure that all contracting staff either complete the required tiered certification training or have a plan in place to do so by the end of 2017.

## **CM**

YOU HAVE HAD A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN PROCUREMENT. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU SHARE WITH THOSE JUST ENTERING THIS FIELD?

## **GS**

It's a great field to pursue a career in! Almost any organization across every industry has a growing need for procurement professionals. I would encourage young professionals to gain experience from both the public and private sectors. Experiencing opportunities from many lenses and from all sides of the table will give you great insight to managing the most challenging issues facing our profession today.

Also, consider working for the District! It's a great place to work, particularly in the procurement profession, and we are looking for strong candidates to join our team. Because the nation's capital is a unique jurisdiction, our contracting team handles everything from roadway construction to purchasing police vehicles to office supplies, and everything in between. Our staff has the opportunity to learn about different aspects of contracting and develop expertise in a number of programs. Our organizational structure provides opportunities for broad, practical experience in the contracting and procurement field. It also lends itself to opportunities for career growth from entry level through executive leadership. OCP's opportunities are available on the District's Department of Human Resources website.<sup>10</sup>

**CM**

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONALISM IN CONTRACTING, SUCH AS PURSUING ADVANCED DEGREES OR CERTIFICATIONS, OR PARTICIPATING IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS?

**GS**

One of the things I stress to my team is that procurement professionals must be business advisors to their customers. We need to understand the program's requirements and their budget so that we can develop a strategy that will satisfy their needs and goals at a reasonable price. However, in order to really be *strong* business advisors, contracting professionals must have a conceptual understanding of the topic they are advising on, as well as real-world knowledge and experience, in order to help those particular team members understand how to navigate through the requirements at hand.

One of the best ways to get the concepts and theory is to seek certifications and additional training from organizations like NCMA, and the best experience comes from working through actual contract needs from requirements through delivery evaluation.

**CM**

DO YOU SUPPORT YOUR EMPLOYEES BECOMING INVOLVED AND TAKING ADVANTAGE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH NCMA, SUCH AS BECOMING AN NCMA CHAPTER VOLUNTEER, SPEAKING AT OR ATTENDING TRAINING FORUMS, OBTAINING ADVANCED CERTIFICATIONS, ETC.?

**GS**

Yes. I think external professional development is one of the best ways to supplement professional experience, and it makes candidates more attractive to potential employers. I have always found my involvement with NCMA extremely beneficial to my personal professional growth. As CPO, I look to NCMA to continue to create networking opportunities and share information about industry best

practices. We want to make sure that we are current with trends in the profession and have the benefit of connecting with other professionals who can share their ideas and experience.

**CM**

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT WORKING? WHAT KINDS OF HOBBIES OR FAMILY ACTIVITIES DO YOU ENJOY?

**GS**

For me, DC has been a great place to live. One of the best parts of living in the District is that there is always something new to explore. There's always an event on the Mall, a new restaurant to check out, and I absolutely love hitting the wide range of sporting and music venues. I do find myself occasionally conflicted, though—I'm a lifelong Cubs fan, but I still enjoy catching Nats games. Also, I certainly can't get enough of my daughter's soccer games.

**CM**

**NCMA** **COLLABORATE**

Post about this article on  
*NCMA Collaborate* at  
<http://collaborate.ncmahq.org>.

**EDITOR'S NOTES**

1. For more information, see <https://ocp.dc.gov/>.
2. TechnoServe is an international nonprofit providing business solutions to poverty-stricken areas, leading financial strategy, grants, contracts, and systems coordination throughout their global network in over 30 countries.
3. As mandated by the Residence Act, the Organic Act of 1871, and the U.S. Constitution (as amended by the 23rd Amendment and the District of Columbia Home Rule Act), Washington DC is a federal district, under the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal government. As such, it is not part of any U.S. state and has no representation in the Senate. It is governed by an elected mayor and a 13-member council, but the government maintains authority over the District.
4. DC Law L21-0158, a District law passed October 8, 2016, which, among other things, provided "for enhanced transparency in the District's contracting and procurement practices."
5. <https://ocp.dc.gov/>.
6. <https://foia-dc.gov/>.

7. See, generally, *Annual Review of Government Contracting*, 2016 Edition (Ashburn, VA: NCMA, 2015): 12; available at [www.ncmahq.org/stay-informed/publications/annual-review-of-government-contracting](http://www.ncmahq.org/stay-informed/publications/annual-review-of-government-contracting).
8. The updated and reissued OCP Code of Ethics is available at <https://ocp.dc.gov/page/code-ethic>.
9. For more information on DC Buys, see <https://ocp.dc.gov/service/dc-buys-reverse-vendor-trade-fair>. For more information on how to do business with the District, see <https://ocp.dc.gov/page/how-do-business-district>. Information on OCP vendor workshops and training is available at <https://ocp.dc.gov/service/vendor-workshops-and-training>.
10. For more information on employment opportunities with the District of Columbia, visit <http://careers.dc.gov/>.

**GEORGE SCHUTTER, CPA, CFCM**

- ▶ Chief procurement officer, District of Columbia
  - ▶ Director, District of Columbia Office of Contracting and Procurement
  - ▶ Member, National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO)
- ✉ [george.schutter@dc.gov](mailto:george.schutter@dc.gov)
- 🐦 @DCOCP
- 🌐 [in/georgeschutter](https://www.linkedin.com/in/georgeschutter)