



PEN Member Spotlight

Annie Perez

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Title: Chief Procurement Officer/Director of Procurement

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What is a procurement challenge you've been trying to address in recent months?

Procurement in preparation for hurricanes and disasters is a big one! Miami obviously sees a lot of hurricanes.

On a small scale, recently we were able to procure and distribute directly to the community 750 hurricane kits for the elderly, poor, and others in need, in collaboration with Fire, Emergency Management, & Police, with 500 to be distributed shortly. Procurement is usually behind the scenes and doesn't get to see results. But this was a great opportunity to engage with community members directly.

In terms of the bigger picture, we've been working to be more proactive in our contracting for goods and services for all phases of disaster response: preparing, responding, and recovering. As part of that, we're working to bring more



small, local, and minority-owned firms onto contracts for debris removal after a storm. We held a big hurricane meet & greet to build connections between the five big emergency debris removal companies on contract and potential subcontractors. In our Emergency Debris Removal contract, we stated that 50% of their subcontractors must be local Miami businesses and they should strive to get minority-owned firms.

So, for this event we invited local landscaping and lot-clearing companies, most of whom are minority-owned. These companies by themselves can't clear all the debris from a hurricane, but the national companies subcontract with them during emergencies. All five large firms attended (some even flew in from Texas). We had 51 firms RSVP and 25 show up! One of the companies wrote me to say thank you, stating that all the companies who attended could be great subcontractors.

What advice would you give to people interested in joining the procurement industry?

There are two reasons for joining procurement: the ability to serve your community and the opportunity to influence its direction. Procurement professionals have an amazing ability to make an impact on environmental topics (via energy savings and sustainable procurement) and on socioeconomic issues (by being a champion for MWBEs, building trust in public institutions, and being champions for these businesses). A large portion of our public dollars are spent on purchasing and contracts, many of which go to local firms. This kind of competition lowers prices and develops a sustainable, healthy, local economy.

"Procurement professionals have an amazing ability to make an impact."

It doesn't come easy: to be successful, you need a tremendous commitment to ethical practice and personal integrity. Sometimes people try to get creative and bypass procurement. Sometimes they get accustomed to working with a certain vendor for a long time. At times, your integrity will be challenged! You must have an eagerness to serve, to be challenged, and to grow professionally.

That said, having a career in procurement is phenomenal!

What does procurement excellence mean to you?

Procurement excellence means being a strategic partner and aligning your procurement strategies with the overall strategies of your government. For example, when my team created an [emergency strategic procurement plan](#) for our critical purchases ahead of disasters, we tied every procurement objective back to the City's overall objectives for the city.

To me, procurement excellence also means mitigating risk to the city via contract negotiation and supporting the city's economic development through contracts. There is procurement excellence on an individual level and on an organizational level, and every procurement professional should strive for both.

Why did you start working in procurement?

I worked for 11.5 years at the Miami-Dade County Film & Entertainment Office. In 2007, the County experienced some economic challenges as part of the larger downturn. In 2009, I was a casualty of budget cuts to that office. But I was given the opportunity to collaborate with procurement on a few RFPs, and I was fascinated by contracts—I had wanted to be an attorney once upon a time!

With procurement, you're able to touch all the areas that make government function: fire, solid waste, capital improvements, real estate, public works. You have a unique opportunity that not many people in the city have: through procuring goods and services for different departments, I had the opportunity to learn about the operations of those departments. In the long run, this made me a better procurement professional because I have a true understanding of all aspects of government.

You can make this job whatever you want it to be, but I hope you make it exceptional. With what we do, there's a lot of guts and no glory. But it's incredibly rewarding to reap the fruits of your labor. With every procurement, I try to tell my staff to look at the results and appreciate their role in procuring it.

What procurement-related transformation or change have you been involved in that you are most proud of?

Here's one of our recent success stories: a young man who had attended a virtual webinar on how to become a local seller with Amazon approached me. After the webinar, I connected him directly with Amazon and he participated in the [Black Business Accelerator](#) program and eventually got

his business started on Amazon. He said to me, “You brought me the tools to learn how to get started.”

I’m also proud of my work with the City of Miami and the [Strategic Procurement Department](#) itself. When I came here from the County in July 2014, the City Manager and the Assistant City Manager/Chief Financial Officer told me I had the opportunity to make the Department whatever I felt was appropriate in order to make it a nationally-recognized procurement department. So, I had a blank slate.

The Department used to be more of a transactional purchasing function as opposed to a strategic procurement department. I trained staff in how to write and interpret contracts, because they had been heavily relying on the City Attorney’s office. This was a full-on transformation. We became a centralized procurement agency; certain departments such as public works stopped doing their own procurements.

One of my greatest accomplishments was training staff—I am very proud that my department of 20 has had 24 internal promotions in the last 9 years. This is a direct result of our dedication to training and cross-training staff. I couldn’t be prouder!

What is one skill that you consider essential to be successful in the public procurement field?

Firstly, it can’t all be work—you need to have a little fun too! In Miami, we have an annual retreat around Halloween where everyone gets dressed up for an offsite event with professional facilitators. Fun is crucial.

Second, problem solving and strategic thinking go hand in hand. Most government procurement professionals have a procurement code, state and federal regulations, etc. to deal with. Part of the challenge of this profession is that you will be challenged! Someone will tell you they need something, and you’ll have to be both creative and strategic in your approach.

Third, creativity! I’ve always had the philosophy that “no” is not part of our vocabulary. We will try to find a way to make it work. But, if we can’t find a way—that no is a firm NO. We have usually been able to find a creative way to get our departments what they need in the timeframe they need it without breaking any rules. Departments will sometimes go rogue and do things they shouldn’t on their own, and then you have to fix it.

Fourth, teamwork! We work as a team and collectively solve challenges. I’ve seen a lot of people come and go in my time in procurement; people don’t last without these skills. Having creativity and thinking “out of the box” is very powerful in problem solving.

What outside interests do you pursue when you're not working on procurement projects?

Procurement is a very stressful job! I need to burn off some steam. I do long distance outdoor running. I love it! It clears my mind! I came up with a major procurement solution while I was running. I love being outdoors in nature, I love dancing—all kinds! Latin music, but really any kind of genre. My family is Cuban, and my parents were phenomenal dancers and party animals. I enjoy being with my loved ones: my husband, Raul Perez, and my furry friends—4 cats.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

The **Procurement Excellence Network** is an initiative of the Government Performance Lab designed to help public sector leaders use government procurement as a tool to improve resident outcomes and advance equity. The **Government Performance Lab**, housed at the Taubman Center for State and Local Government at the Harvard Kennedy School, conducts research on how governments can improve the results they achieve for their citizens. An important part of this research model involves providing hands-on technical assistance to state and local governments. Through this involvement, we gain insights into the barriers that governments face and the solutions that can overcome these barriers. By engaging current students and recent graduates in this effort, we are able to provide experiential learning as well.

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