

Our Chat with



NCMA Executive Director Michael Fischetti recently interviewed Joanne Woytek to discuss the intricacies of governmentwide acquisition contracts, as well as what it takes to succeed in the profession.

Joanne Woytek

Program Manager / NASA SEWP

Edited by RYAN BURKE

In February 2016, NCMA Executive Director Michael Fischetti interviewed Joanne Woytek to discuss the intricacies of governmentwide acquisition contracts [GWACs],¹ as well as what it takes to succeed in the contract management profession.



MICHAEL FISCHETTI:

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. Please tell us a little bit about yourself.

JOANNE WOYTEK:

I am the program manager for the NASA SEWP Program²—a premier GWAC providing federal agencies access to the latest in information and communication technology product solutions. I manage the strategic direction, planning, and day-to-day operations of SEWP. I'm a 38-year veteran to Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) in Greenbelt, Maryland, and I've served in my current program management role for the past 15 years.

Tell us a little more about SEWP. What is its mission?

Solutions for Enterprise-Wide Procurement (SEWP)—pronounced *soup*—is a multi-award GWAC vehicle focused on commercial IT products and product-based services. Our mission statement is:

As an established and agile leader in the federal acquisition community, the SEWP Program Office manages a suite of government-wide IT product solution contracts that provide NASA and all federal agencies with timely access to mission-critical technologies. The program provides best value and cost savings for the federal government and American taxpayer through innovative procurement tools and processes, premier customer service

and outreach, and advocacy of competition and cooperation with industry.

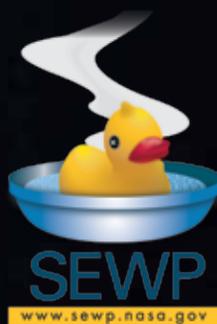
What types of products and services does SEWP offer to federal agencies?

The 147 pre-competed contract holders within the program offer a wide range of commercial advanced technology, including tablets, desktops, servers, IT peripherals, network equipment, storage systems, security tools, software products, cloud-based services, telecommunications, health IT, sensors, video conferencing systems, and other IT and audio-visual products. Product-based services, such as installation, training, maintenance, and warranty are also available through SEWP.

Given the current federal budget scenario and economic austerity, what are your key initiatives to support your agency customers' efficiencies, missions, and policies?

As a GWAC, our main focus is providing a platform for government customers to leverage in support of their internal efficiencies, missions, and policies. Therefore, our initiatives center on frameworks and tools to obtain products and services such as cybersecurity and cloud computing.

In terms of strategic sourcing, we are focused on governmentwide strategic sourcing initiatives set up through the Office of Management and





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“**...Without diversity, a one-note office environment can lead to stagnation of thought and ideas.**”

Budget. SEWP is the lead for a NASA/General Services Administration/National Institutes of Health partnership to support a desktop/laptop strategic solution initiative.³

At the agency level, we also provide tools that can be leveraged by an agency to support their own strategic solution needs. In support of agency strategic solution initiatives, quality, and oversight—as well as chief information officer (CIO) oversight as required under the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA)—the current SEWP contracts are set up to provide tracking and reporting to agency CIOs on the IT purchasing being done by their agency. We have several agencies, including NASA, the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, etc. that are obtaining regular, automated reports at no cost to them. And one of our new initiatives for this fiscal year is to allow CIOs to designate products that they have assessed and cleared for purchase for their agency. This will provide an automated and easy method for the procurement officials to know when receiving a quote if there are products that the CIO has cleared and those that may need some form of CIO-level assessment before purchasing.

In terms of posting contracts online, SEWP has always led that effort. From interactive postings of the initial request for proposals to all subsequent contracts—all are fully posted online for customer download.

SEWP has also put a lot of emphasis on training. While we prefer to go out and train customers at their sites, and continue to do so, we have had to add new training options to reach as many acquisition officials as possible. We have two training videos available online and recently added a PDF training document. We have also begun holding webinars twice a month.

What previous experience were you able to leverage for your current position? How did this experience prepare you for your current leadership role?

My background was technical—programmer, system and database administrator, computer help desks, etc. That background provided me with both positives and negatives. Fortunately, I believe I have been able to keep the positive aspects and learn new skills and gain new knowledge through the years. Specifically, my technical

background is unusual in the acquisition world dominated by procurement and business specialists. The positives this brings include a vision of how to use technology to accomplish innovative practices and an end-user customer perspective on the acquisition process. What I needed to learn was the Federal Acquisition Regulation—and what it does and does not mean—and how to be a manager of a diverse workforce (the majority of which is nontechnical).

How do you measure effectiveness and efficiency for your customers? Are there metrics or tools you use to assess and measure customer satisfaction?

There are several ways we obtain feedback from both government customers and industry partners. We send out annual surveys, which can provide insight into any trends—both good and bad. The most frequent (daily) interaction that provides great feedback is through tickets and phone calls to our customer service desk. While I do not read each e-mail, I do “touch” each of them. This allows me to watch for issues beyond, “I forgot my password,” etc.

But the best way to engage with customers is one-on-one. Going to a customer’s office and listening to their questions is the best way to gauge whether the program is meeting their needs. If it isn’t, we can determine what needs to change. I would estimate at least 75 percent of the changes I institute come from the direct conversations I have held with industry and government personnel.

What cultural examples exist in your organization that assist in improving your performance?

There are two main cultural areas I find the most challenging. One is to have a supportive environment while maintaining professionalism. The question of when are you friends and when are you coworkers—it’s important to establish the boundaries. When is sharing personal anecdotes helpful and when are they inappropriate? The second is how to promote diversity while ensuring everyone understands and respects the differences in background, personality, aspirations, etc. that diversity brings.

These are also the challenges that can make for a strong and dedicated workforce. Comradery (we are more than coworkers) leads

to less stress—or at least more outlets to relieve stress by knowing we are all in the same boat and working together. And without diversity, a one-note office environment can lead to stagnation of thought and ideas.

Today's procurement workforce is very challenged to meet their mission in this new era of austerity. What message would you like to convey to your government and industry colleagues and customers regarding how you are managing these challenges?

Austerity has, is, and will be a part of the acquisition landscape. Hoping for more funds and resources is not a useful exercise. Rather, focus on pairing up what resources you have with the tasks you need to accomplish and prioritize.

Don't just prioritize what needs to be done first—ask yourself what can be done slower, and what needs you should bring your “A”-game for and what might be okay if done with your “B”-game. If you try to do everything to perfection, nothing will get done. And some tasks may need to be done by someone else or perhaps simply won't get done.

Be deliberative in making these choices and let those who have some influence on resources know what choices you made and why you made them.

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?

Opportunities to learn are of course important. The biggest challenge is finding ways to fit training in with getting the job done.

It's also a challenge to find effective training. Training just to get enough learning points to keep a certification is not effective. Training to learn a new skill or hone an existing one should be the focus.

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?

While training opportunities exist, I will admit that the effectiveness and actual utilization of those opportunities is spotty. Trying to find the right training with the appropriate time, place, and length of commitment is always a challenge. Organizationally, if a staff member finds the right training, I do what I can to support what that time, place, and length may be.

How effective are the techniques used to deliver the training your workforce receives [e.g., online, classroom-based, rotational experience, etc.]?

The more practical the training experience, the better. But the actual method needs to be in part based on the person and the subject. The best technique must speak to the needs and goals of the people being trained.

How important is relevant experience, when balanced against formal training, in determining the effectiveness of today's workforce?

Training is important throughout one's career, but obviously has more relevance with newer employees who do not yet have any experience to fall back on. But even experienced staff can benefit from formal training, as that can provide new perspectives and keep them up-to-date on the latest thoughts and trends.

What do you like to do when you're not working? What kinds of hobbies do you enjoy?

I golf and occasionally bike (I would like to get more into the biking again). Also, a couple of years ago I got my first dog, who takes up much of my free time either walking, fetching, or relaxing on the sofa. I have two grown and now married children who are successful and happy—what more could I ask for?

What are your goals in the near future for NASA SEWP, and what would you like for your legacy to be after you're gone?

My goal is to have a program that serves both government and industry as a customer-focused, mission-enabling, efficient, and streamlined approach to the acquisition of IT. I have many visions of how to achieve my goals, and I want my legacy to be that those visions have been turned into reality and had a positive effect on the acquisition process for not just my program, but for all government programs.

You have had a successful career in procurement. What reflections do you have as you look back from where you are today? What advice and guidance would you like to share for those just entering this field?

One of the most important lessons taught to me by the founders of the program I run is the need to see all participants as partners and not adversaries. There is a lot of talk about industry and government partnership—which is extremely important. Within the government acquisition process, all parties need to work together and understand each other's perspectives. Procurement officials should look to form bonds with their end-users. The best outlook to have is “how can I serve my customer?”

“ ...It is possible to go through life and a career on cruise control, but to make a real impact beyond just getting the job done, personal growth needs to be a personal goal. ”

Your participation in this interview and *Contract Management Magazine* is an integral part of the learning component for our 20,000 members around the world. What are your thoughts on the importance of professionalism in contracting?

It is possible to go through life and a career on cruise control, but to make a real impact beyond just getting the job done, personal growth needs to be a personal goal. There are many ways to improve and increase one's presence. Being aware of the issues both you and others face through reading, attending conferences, etc. is one way. Education, especially for those starting off, is a must as there are more aspects to any job than one can know the instant they start a job.

But however one moves forward in his or her career, I think the most important universal truth is to be open to change within yourself and to take it upon yourself to find the right path for you.

Do you support your employees becoming involved and taking advantage of professional development opportunities through NCMA or other similar organizations [e.g., becoming a chapter volunteer, attending training forums, writing for NCMA publications, obtaining advanced certifications, etc.]? How can NCMA, as the professional organization for contract management, better help you meet your responsibilities and challenges?

I am fully supportive of employees being involved in professional development opportunities. I view NCMA in particular as closely aligned to my program and many of the staff's career paths.

The biggest challenge is finding the time to utilize the resources available. This is likely a universal and ongoing issue of getting through the daily work and still having time to participate in organizations like NCMA. It is a tough balancing act, but one that I know is important. **CM**

ABOUT JOANNE WOYTEK

JOANNE WOYTEK is the program manager for the NASA SEWP Program. She has been a key figure in the continual evolution of SEWP since its inception more than 20 years ago. She is responsible for managing the program's strategic direction, planning, and day-to-day operations. In late February 2016, she was honored with the 2016 Federal 100 Award.

Send comments about this interview to cm@ncmahq.org.

ENDNOTES

1. Editor's Note: A *governmentwide acquisition contract* (GWAC) is a contract established by one federal agency—in this case, NASA—for governmentwide use that is operated by an executive agent designated by the Office of Management and Budget pursuant to 40 U.S.C. 11302(e).
2. Editor's Note: NASA SEWP was the first GWAC to be offered in the federal acquisition space. The original contract was awarded in 1993, and it's currently in its fifth award iteration ("SEWP V"). All federal agencies are able to purchase from SEWP. See www.sewp.nasa.gov for more information.
3. Editor's Note: This particular strategic sourcing initiative was mandated by Office of Management and Budget policy memorandum M-16-02, "Category Management Policy 15-1: Improving the Acquisition and Management of Common Information Technology: Laptops and Desktops," available at https://nitaac.nih.gov/nitaac/omb/memo/OMB_Mandatory_Source-Workstations_Memo.pdf.