



# Collaborate to Innovate

## FOUR PILLARS OF FEDERAL PROCUREMENT TRANSFORMATION

April 19, 2023

BY Amanda Starling Gould



**maximus**

# About the Partnership

The Partnership for Public Service is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to revitalize the federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works. The Partnership teams up with federal agencies and other stakeholders to make our government more effective and efficient.

# About Maximus

For more than 40 years, Maximus has been a strategic partner to federal, state, and local agencies, improving the delivery of public services and empowering government to respond to complex challenges with speed and impact. Maximus combines technology with unrivaled understanding of government agencies' missions and operations to make government programs more customer-focused and effective to meet the challenges of today and future needs of tomorrow.

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	4
<b>Collaborate internally</b>	6
<b>Collaborate with other agencies</b>	8
<b>Collaborate with the public</b>	10
<b>Collaborate with the industry</b>	12
<b>Conclusion</b>	15
<b>Author</b>	16
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	17
<b>Project team</b>	18



## Introduction

In a [plan](#) released in December 2022, the White House committed to using procurement “to take on our most pressing challenges as a country.” The Partnership for Public Service, informed by our past research and analysis, has also called for improvements to government procurement.

“The federal acquisition community supports some of government’s most critical priorities—from advancing racial equity and modernizing our infrastructure to addressing climate change,” wrote Polly Hall, senior advisor to the chief of procurement at the Department of Homeland Security, [and a member of the Partnership’s Federal Innovation Council](#). “To deliver on these priorities, federal leaders and agencies need to develop new ways for government to procure—or buy and acquire—the goods and services it needs,” Hall said.

Guided by a commitment to champion transformation efforts, the Partnership, with support from Maximus Federal, conducted interviews with federal innovators to capture modernization efforts in digital procurement happening across agencies. To innovate, the [Partnership asserts](#), our government needs to “adopt new approaches and strategies that harness creative thinking to deliver more effective services and better outcomes to the public.” This report offers examples of agencies applying such approaches:

1. The U.S. Digital Service’s team-based model of procurement brings together experts across the agency, which can result in faster, cheaper and more sustainable procurements.
2. The Department of Homeland Security’s Procurement Innovation Lab is collaborating with agencies across the federal government to pilot and expand procurement experimentation.
3. The Department of Justice and 18F demonstrate how procurements that structure public collaboration can produce more accessible digital services.
4. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration is collaborating with industry to transform digital procurement, through its just-launched NASA Acquisition Innovation Launchpad.

These practices exemplify modern digital government, one designed to serve all people equitably. And at the heart of each is a reimagining of productive collaboration.

**Our procurement leaders recommended collaboration as foundational for digital transformation in their field:**



**Collaborate Internally:** When procurement is a team effort, government can deliver effective, equitable, future-proof products more quickly and at lower cost.



**Collaborate Across Government:** When collaboration and experimentation are structured and shared, agencies can pilot innovation techniques and all of government could benefit.



**Collaborate with the Public:** When government collaborates with the public, [excellent, equitable and secure](#) services can result.



**Collaborate with Industry:** When agencies collaborate with industry, impossible problems can become solvable challenges.

Ongoing efforts to modernize federal procurement have produced trainings, such as [the Digital IT Acquisition Professional Program](#) and our own [Leadership Excellence for Acquisition Professionals](#) program, as well as important tools such as the [TechFAR Hub](#)—a technology-focused complement to the Federal Acquisition Regulation recommended by our procurement experts. However, there is broad agreement that continued innovation is critical for equitable, effective digital service delivery. Modern digital procurement practices—modeled by the agencies here—can result in products built for purpose, built for people and built for service.



## Collaborate Internally

**At USDS, a whole-team approach to digital procurement removes silos.**



### THE INNOVATION

Transforming how its units work together to achieve successful digital procurements, the U.S. Digital Service has redesigned their procurement process to include cross-agency collaboration.

In a typical federal agency, the product and procurement teams work in silos, with procurement coming in last on a project, and sometimes reluctantly, according to our experts. At USDS, in contrast, the product, engineering, design and procurement offices collaborate through the entirety of a project, with each discipline given equal voice in decisions along the way. Culturally, USDS views procurement as an interdisciplinary project. Logistically, the workflows of the product and procurement offices include consistent productive interaction.

At USDS, procurement strategists are valued “business advisors” who help the agency achieve its product goals, USDS acquisition strategist Camille Hogan said. They are adept at navigating acquisition regulations and skilled at managing external partners.



## THE IMPACT

Hogan has been able to secure successes and prevent roadblocks by being involved in product development from the start, she said. “I’ve been on projects from the beginning, and it’s worked beautifully,” she added. “We are able to plan ahead as much as possible to keep momentum going.”

On the other hand, she said, “I’ve also been brought in after a team has worked for weeks or months and then come to me and say, ‘here’s what we want to do ...’ and I say, ‘if only I had spoken to you a month or two sooner, I would have been able to give you different things to explore because this idea you have, we could do it, but it’s going to be challenging.’”

Throughout the project, as part of the team, procurement experts bring knowledge about new or unique acquisition possibilities, values-aligned vendors, impactful contract language, and available reusable resources or shared digital services already in use at an agency.

Whether the project is small or large, Hogan said, “sometimes it’s just one procurement action that could stop everybody in their tracks.” The advantage of being part of the team, she said, is that she can spot issues and raise opportunities from the beginning. “The magic happens,” Hogan said, “when we’re able to break down disciplinary silos.”

---

**“The magic happens when we’re able to break down disciplinary silos.”**

– Camille Hogan, Acquisition Specialist, U.S Digital Service

---

The USDS said its unified team approach proves its worth by saving time, reducing risk, procuring more sustainable products, and delivering accessible digital services more quickly. More broadly, USDS’s collaborative practices are set to breed innovation across federal procurement. “The movement toward interdisciplinary teamwork is out there,” Hogan said, “and people are interested.” As USDS works with other federal agencies, it is modeling the success of an interdisciplinary approach, with all of government benefiting.

### Takeaway

Collaborate internally and build partnerships externally to ensure best-fit, best-priced and sustainable digital public services.





*Photo credit: U.S. Department of Agriculture*

## Collaborate with other agencies

**The Procurement Innovation Lab at the Department of Homeland Security trains procurement innovators across the federal government.**



### THE INNOVATION

In 2015, the Department of Homeland Security chief procurement officer established the Procurement Innovation Lab to test processes that could potentially improve ineffective, inefficient procurement conventions. The PIL aims to refine best practices and share insights with the federal acquisition community, by targeting innovations that lower barriers to entry, increase competition, improve mission outcomes, and shorten the time it takes to award contracts.

The PIL supports acquisition professionals across federal agencies by providing tools and training in procurement innovation. Their ever-expanding toolkit includes webinars, clinics with coaches trained in Scrum and the Digital IT Acquisition Program, a ["PILCast" series on YouTube](#), access to acquisition innovation advocates, and idea competitions—all designed to support the federal community in transforming how procurement works.





## THE IMPACT

The PIL gives acquisition professionals a “safe space to come and try new ways of doing business,” said Hall, the senior advisor to the DHS chief procurement officer, who served as the PIL executive director from 2019 to 2022. “An innovation mindset and creative thinking about solutions are now becoming part of our culture,” she said.

In its seven years, the PIL has developed an online resource library [with templates and checklists for advisory down-selects, fusion procurements](#), and nearly three dozen other tested techniques. Its annual yearbook highlights procurement teams putting these into practice. These public venues for learning and storytelling are a critical element of the PIL’s impact mission. They are key to the lab’s success, according to Hall, and part of its advocacy of systemic change in federal procurement.

The PIL can boast that thousands of federal employees and agency partners have already benefited from these offerings. Since its inception, according to PIL data, the lab has supported more than 140 procurement projects and awarded more than 2,000 digital training badges. And the 20 PIL projects supported in fiscal 2022 resulted in a cumulative cost savings of \$814 million, with many of those projects awarded to small businesses and, in most cases, the time-to-award for these projects was shorter than usual. The PIL also serves as a model for newer labs, such as the Department of Agriculture’s Procurement Innovation Effort, begun in 2020, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s Acquisition Innovation Launchpad, started in 2023.

“I really do think the experimentation model and the intentionality with how we’ve structured it as a repeatable process built on collaboration—employing agile practices and rituals to the way we engage in the PIL—is really part of why it’s replicated,” Hall said. “We’ve been able to impact not just our own activities at DHS but the stand up of labs employing similar frameworks and models at other agencies.”

---

**“We have definitively made great strides. And I think all the strides that we’ve made show us that there is so much more opportunity.”**

– Polly Hall, Senior Advisor to the Chief of Procurement, Department of Homeland Security

---

“Agency missions cannot be enabled without procurement, so us getting it right really does matter,” Hall said. “We have definitively made great strides. And I think all the strides that we’ve made show us that there is so much more opportunity.”

### Takeaway

Collaborate across agencies to bolster procurement innovation.



## Collaborate with the public

**DOJ procured customer engagement for better digital service delivery.**



### THE INNOVATION

To better serve the 3.5 million annual visitors to the Americans with Disabilities Act website, the Disability Rights Section of the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ contracted with [18F](#), a technology consultancy within the General Services Administration that leads partner agencies through the digital service acquisition lifecycle, to redesign ADA.gov.

The 18F [approach to procurement](#) and service design centers those who will be using the products. This “human-centered” approach is exemplified by 18F’s commitment to engaging the public. Before building or buying anything, says 18F Innovation Specialist and Product Design Lead Aviva Oskow, the cross-disciplinary 18F team seeks first to understand the agency partner and the people they serve. For ADA.gov, 18F implemented inclusive usability research to learn about those 3.5 million visitors and how, when and why they access digital federal services.

18F’s procurement solution included taking advantage of previously-built, pre-approved and open-source tools like [cloud.gov](#) and the [United States Web Design System \(USWDS\)](#)—solutions also mentioned to us by Maroya Faied and Lindsay Goldstein at the Office of Natural Resources Revenue and by David Herring at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Using tools already available and compliant with [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) allowed 18F to dedicate time and resources to understanding the people who would use the site, including foremost the disability community and advocates. “Instead of rebuilding the wheel each time, we work off of existing, proven solutions—giving us space to do this critical human-centered work,” Oskow said.

Site designs informed by discovery research with potential site users were taken to the disability community for comment on content, functionality and representation. User experience is foundational to 18F’s [methodology](#). “We’re not building for a set of requirements, we’re building for the needs of people,” Oskow said. “The product vision for ADA.gov was to empower users without being patronizing or intrusive.” From start to finish, the procurement process prioritized [accessibility](#), simplicity, [plain language and real people](#).

---

**“We’re not building for a set of requirements, we’re building for the needs of people”**

— Aviva Oskow, Innovation Specialist and Product Design Lead, 18F

---

To ensure the site remain responsive to user need, the [DOJ procured services from Nava](#), a public benefit corporation focused on supporting government digital services, to continue translating new usability issues into site improvements.



#### THE IMPACT

18F’s research guided procurement decisions and enabled designers to incorporate critical feedback to shape the new ADA.gov site. Public participation led to more readable, usable and accessible content, the [DOJ reported](#). A visitor can now quickly find what they need without undue friction or frustration. The new site allows someone to “understand their rights and the rights of others [right away] by clearly and intuitively providing up-to-date information,” Oskow said.

The site is also more representative of the public themselves—Oskow even tested site imagery with participants, for example, to be sure they felt themselves seen or described in the virtual space. ADA.gov is an example of a government digital service that has been designed *with* the community. 18F’s partnership with the DOJ illustrates how agencies can build public collaboration into procurement for more equitable and accessible digital services.

#### Takeaway

Collaborate with the public by procuring usability research and responsive customer feedback mechanisms.



*Photo credit: NASA/David DeHoyos*

## Collaborate with industry

**A new NASA Acquisition Innovation Launchpad is collaborating with industry to solve planetary problems.**



### THE INNOVATION

Following a long tradition of invention, NASA is reimagining the innovation lab concept to promote industry collaboration and strengthen program management practices in procurement. Karla Smith Jackson, assistant administrator for procurement, and Geoffrey Sage, director of the enterprise service and analysis division at NASA, recently launched the NASA Acquisition Innovation Launchpad (NAIL).

The NAIL will bring together NASA’s program managers, acquisition professionals, engineers and researchers to focus on “identifying and adopting transformational commercial business practices, modernized data analytics, advanced technologies for decision making, smart program management techniques and organizational change,” Jackson said, with the intent of making improvements in acquisition culture, processes and policy. “We have a \$25 billion a year budget, and 80% of that comes through procurement. We need to make sure we’re spending it equitably.” Jackson said.

The NAIL will be a collocated space for NASA’s 10 centers to collaborate under a central umbrella to share innovation across the community. “Previously, something may have happened at one center and stayed within those four walls,” Sage said. Now that the Office of Procurement has transformed into an enterprise organization, Sage said, the NAIL will enable centers to better share experiments and learnings.

The NAIL has also reinforced innovation at the senior executive level, according to Jackson. “We have an evaluation criterion now where each of our 11 senior executives must sponsor one innovation and then at the end of the year, talk about what it was, what the expectation was, and how it turned out,” she said. “I believe that if I have 11 people that are held accountable for one innovation apiece—it doesn't have to be enterprise wide, it could be local—that something is going to work, and we can together change our mindset and the way we're doing business.”

The NAIL aims to go beyond the federal procurement labs that have come before. The biggest difference between the NAIL and its predecessors in other agencies, according to Jackson, is how NASA’s “launchpad” is intentionally engaging industry.

The industry piece, “that's really something that we're creating in this space,” Sage said. “For example, for the development of our lunar terrain vehicle, we actually sent a group of our engineers to talk with General Motors, to explore their factory and understand their design concepts,” Sage said. “We're not necessarily solving unique problems here. We want to be able to leverage other ideas by working together.” Sage stressed that “collaborating with industry during the requirements phase of our procurements will result in more efficient, cost effective designs and/or solutions to help us meet our Moon to Mars objectives.”



## THE IMPACT

The potential impact of working with industry is profound. When the NAIL debuted, it invited industry to suggest procurement-related [process, tool, or technique innovations](#), and within a few days had over two dozen submissions. “There are a lot of new technology innovations we can leverage in the commercial space as well as different types of industry partners,” Jackson said. NASA goals include reducing cycle times and costs, and meeting schedules. The NAIL, she said, will be “the enabler that's going to allow us to meet those goals.”

---

**“We couldn't have gotten to the moon in the 60s if we didn't have all those industry partners with us. It was a joint effort, and we haven't forgotten that. Collaboration is at the core of NASA NAIL.”**

– Karla Smith Jackson, Assistant Administrator for Procurement, National Aeronautics and Space Administration

---

The innovation launchpad is institutionalizing the idea of innovation and the process of working with industry to tackle challenges, Sage said. “We—NASA and industry—can both benefit,” he added. “The idea of a culture of innovation is going to be a big, big push for us within the NAIL,” he said. “We’re rethinking how we do business and how we continue becoming more efficient and effective.”

The partnership with industry has served NASA well for decades. “We couldn't have gotten to the moon in the 60s if we didn't have all those industry partners with us,” Jackson said. “It was a joint effort, and we haven't forgotten that. That collaboration is at the core of NASA NAIL.”

#### Takeaway

Collaborate with diverse industry partners to leverage cross-sector solutions.



## Conclusion

To tackle complex societal challenges and better serve the public, government agencies must collaborate internally, across agencies, with the public and with industry to take advantage of diverse expertise as well as the lived experience of the people they serve.



Collaborate internally and build partnerships externally to ensure best-fit, best-priced, sustainable digital public services.



Collaborate across agencies to bolster procurement innovation.



Collaborate with the public by procuring usability research and responsive customer feedback mechanisms.



Collaborate with diverse industry partners to leverage cross-sector solutions.

We steadfastly believe a commitment to collaboration is foundational for significant and sustainable change. The agencies we profile here are proving that collaboration can transform procurement, and procurement innovation can lead to more equitable, effective digital government service delivery.



# Author



Amanda Starling Gould, PhD, manages a portfolio on the Partnership's Technology and Innovation team with an eye toward building a modern government that is equitable, accessible, and sustainable. As a technology scholar, she brings to this work many years researching and teaching on topics related to systems thinking, futures design, public interest technology, innovation, and the environmental effects of digital technologies.

# Acknowledgements

Our work has been informed by conversations with experts across government:

**Karla Smith Jackson**, Assistant Administrator for Procurement at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration

**Geoffrey Sage**, Director of Enterprise Service and Analysis Division at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration

**Polly Hall**, Senior Advisor to the Chief of Procurement at the Department of Homeland Security

**Aviva Oskow**, Innovation Specialist and Product Design Lead at 18F

**Sparkle Joy Meadows**, Head of Product at U.S. Digital Service

**Camille Hogan**, Acquisition Specialist at U.S. Digital Service

**Lindsay Goldstein**, Program Analyst at U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Natural Resources Revenue

**Maroya Faied**, Product Manager at U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Natural Resources Revenue

**Waldo Jaquith**, former Procurement Technologist at 18F and recent Senior Advisor to the Administrator at the General Services Administration

**David Herring**, Director of Communication & Education at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Climate Program Office

**Troy Cribb**, former Associate Administrator at the General Services Administration

**Aaron Snow**, Interim Executive Director of the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University and former CEO of the Canadian Digital Service

**Shelby Switzer**, Director of Digital Services, City of Baltimore

**Patty Cogswell**, former Acting Deputy Administrator at the Transportation Security Administration

**Judy Brewer**, the Office of Science and Technology Policy

# Project Team

## PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

**Katie Bryan**

Communications Director

**Samantha Donaldson**

Vice President, Communications

**Amanda Starling Gould**

Manager, Technology and Innovation

**Mark Lerner**

Director, Technology and Innovation

**Michelle Ly**

Associate, Technology and Innovation

**Ellen Perlman**

Senior Writer and Editor

**Paul Pietsch**

Senior Manager

**Nicky Santoso**

Digital Design Associate

**Max Stier**

President and CEO

## MAXIMUS

**Lisa Veith**

Senior Vice President, New Market Growth,  
Federal

**Teresa A. Weipert**

General Manager, Federal



600 14th Street NW  
Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20005

[ourpublicservice.org](http://ourpublicservice.org)  
(202) 775-9111

 [partnershipforpublicservice](https://www.facebook.com/partnershipforpublicservice)

 [@PublicService](https://twitter.com/PublicService)

 [rpublicservice](https://www.instagram.com/rpublicservice)

# maximus

1600 Tysons Blvd.  
Suite 1400  
McLean, VA 22102

[maximus.com/federal](http://maximus.com/federal)  
(703) 251-8500

 [Maximus](https://www.linkedin.com/company/maximus)

 [@Maximus\\_news](https://twitter.com/Maximus_news)