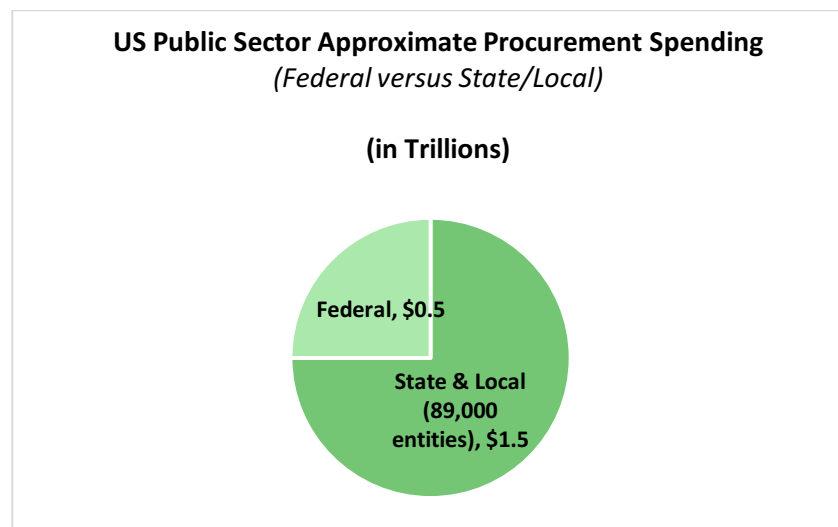


# Why Should We Care About the Public Procurement Workforce?

## Public Procurement's Staggering Scale

State, local, and federal agencies spend almost \$2 trillion each year to purchase an enormous variety of goods and services, ranging from office supplies to armaments, from road repairs to IT systems and social welfare provisions. Public procurement, as government purchasing is commonly known, supports the most basic, day-to-day functions of government, and is also critical to highly complex public undertakings. In other words, the public sector's purchases directly impact the lives of citizens and affect their daily interactions with government.

Additionally, procurement spending seeks to advance public policy goals such as empowering small or disadvantaged businesses or environmentally conscious vendors. Elected officials often use procurement spending to support social policy goals such as workplace safety and fair wages. Government procurements provide revenue for hundreds of thousands of businesses and support millions of jobs. It is an enormous market with immense influence: allocating and administering public purchases is one of the core tasks of government.



Source: Public Spend Forum Analysis: Data Triangulated from Various Sources – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Bloomberg Government (2015 Edition), Census of Governments 2012 Summary Report

## Procurement's Role in Government Breakdowns

In recent years, shortcomings in the procurement system or errors by procurement professionals have been at the heart of many failures of public policy execution. The central role of procurement failures in these endeavors endangered their overall success and threatened core governmental functions.

- In 2013, the Affordable Care Act was nearly derailed by the much-criticized, delayed launches of Healthcare.gov, the federal online insurance marketplace, and the many state health insurance exchanges, in part due to troubled IT procurements.
- Throughout the fall of 2015, Senator John McCain (R-AZ) spotlighted problems in the development of the Navy's Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier, which is more than a year behind schedule and \$4.7 billion over budget.<sup>i</sup>
- For nearly a decade, the Pentagon's development of the F-35 has been bedeviled with delays, cost overruns, and design changes so extreme that the number of planes to be developed and delivered was reduced by 20%. The program is now nearly \$150 billion over budget and is unlikely to be ready for action until 2022.<sup>ii</sup>
- In September 2015, the CEO of Chicago Public Schools pleaded guilty to a felony after pushing through a sole-source contract worth more than \$20 million to a former employer in exchange for 10 percent of the contract's worth and the promise of a job after leaving her position.<sup>iii</sup>
- In 2013, after the tragedy at the Washington Navy Yard, it was discovered that the Office of Personnel Management's contractor who handled background checks—USIS—had lied about conducting thousands of checks, including one for shooter Aaron Alexis. OPM came under criticism for how it managed the contract, and eventually terminated it.<sup>iv</sup>

These examples are just a few high-profile instances of procurement failures, but they illustrate the crucial enabling role that the procurement workforce plays in the delivery of public services. The public, often without knowing it, is reliant upon the public procurement system to ensure that government functions properly. The capacity of the public procurement workforce, which executes the function, therefore deserves careful attention.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/256906-mccain-aircraft-carrier-program-wasted-47-billion>

<sup>ii</sup> Dilulio, John J. *Bring Back the Bureaucrats*, 2014. 66-67 and <http://www.pogo.org/strauss/issues/weapons/2016/the-f-35-still-failing-to-impress.html?referrer=http://www.dodbuzz.com/2016/03/14/oversight-group-f-35-may-not-be-suitable-for-combat-before-2022/>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-barbara-byrd-bennett-plea-met-1013-20151012-story.html>

<sup>iv</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/opm-to-end-usis-contracts-for-background-security-checks/2014/09/09/4fcd490a-3880-11e4-9c9f-ebb47272e40e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/opm-to-end-usis-contracts-for-background-security-checks/2014/09/09/4fcd490a-3880-11e4-9c9f-ebb47272e40e_story.html)