

# Leading Through the Silver Tsunami

Engaging and Retaining Emerging Talent  
in Public Procurement

The SOVRA logo is located in the bottom right corner of the slide. It consists of the word "SOVRA" in a bold, sans-serif font. The letters are filled with a gradient that transitions from a bright red on the left to a lighter, more orange-red on the right. The background of the slide is a photograph of a city skyline with modern skyscrapers and a park with trees in autumn foliage. A large, thick red curved line is positioned in the bottom left corner, partially overlapping the text and the background image.

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# Presenting Today:



**Jeannette Bruno, SHRM-CP, CFP**

**Deputy Chief of Staff and Former Director of  
Customer Advocacy**  
SOVRA

# Audience Poll Question

By a show of hands, how many years have you been working in Public Procurement?

# Agenda

1. Talent Landscape
2. Workforce Risks
3. Strategies to Attract & Retain
4. Reframing Procurement's Narrative
5. Q&A





# VISION

Transforming how governments and suppliers plan, engage, buy, and deliver – through one connected AI-first platform that drives better outcomes for communities.

# SOVRA – Built for Canadian Procurement



**Built For  
Canadian Public  
Sector**



**Canadian  
Headquartered**



**Over 250  
Canadian  
Employees**



**Established  
Canadian  
Network**



**30 Years of  
Canadian  
Presence**

**Over \$14 Billion in  
awarded solicitations  
across Canada in 2025.**

**The SOVRA Innovation  
Center of Excellence is  
located in Calgary.**

**Representation from  
Canadians on both the  
Board and  
Management team.**

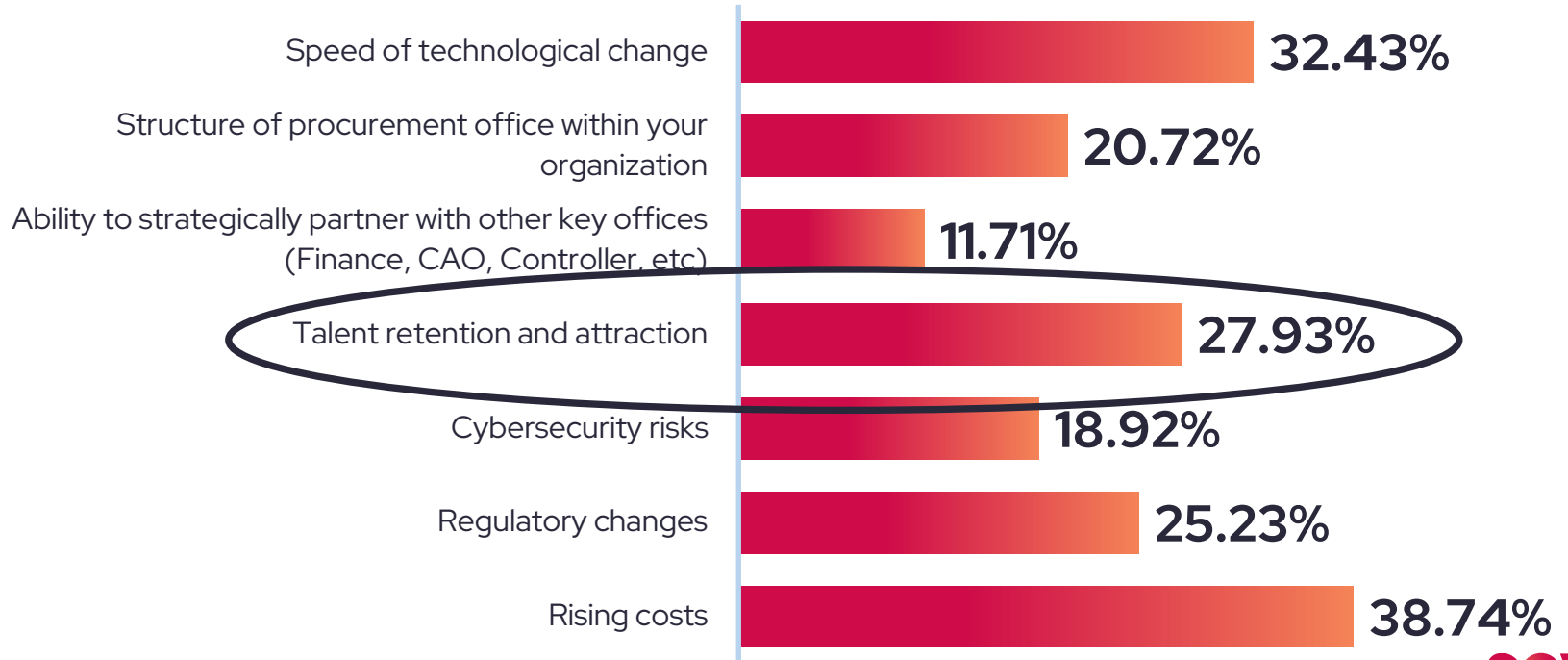
**1,656 Canadian  
agencies use SOVRA  
today!**

**We are Canadian-born.  
We are Canadian-built.  
We are Canadian-proud.**

# The Talent Gap Landscape

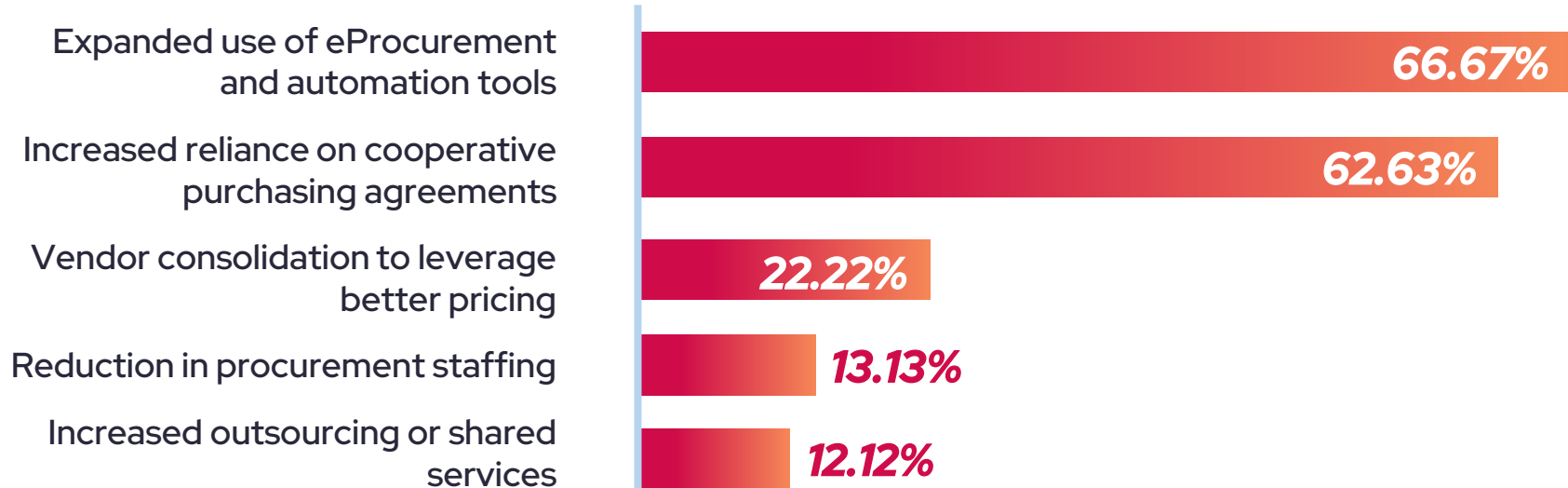
# Talent is a Top 3 Priority

What is your biggest concern about procurement over the next three years?  
(Select top 2)



# Which of the following strategies has your procurement office implemented to maintain service levels while reducing costs?

(Select up to 3)



# Government Talent Gap

Silver Tsunamis Greatest Impact will be the Public Sector

Private Sector		Local Government	
> 50 Years	< 30 Years	> 50 Years	< 30 Years
28%	23%	37%	12%

# Canadian Public Sector Demographics

- **Canadian Federal Sector:**

- Average age of a Canadian Federal employee is **43.4**
- Average age of a senior level employee is **50.1**
- **Greater than three-quarters** of Federal Executives are over the age of 45
- Generations younger than Millennials comprise only **2.5% of Federal staff**
- **80% of the net decline** of ~9,807 positions between 2024 & 2025 were workers in their twenties



# Future of the workforce

## 2026 signals and trends

According to Deloitte, “Gen Z no longer forms opinions of a company based solely on the quality of their products/services, but also on their ethics, practices, and social impact.”

- **GenZ driven by meaningful, values-driven work**
  - A sense of purpose and tangible impact of work is key to job satisfaction
- **Top motivators:**
  - Impact on society
  - Flexibility (Work-life balance)
  - Engagement and growth

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# Workforce Risks and Challenges

# Risks of Inaction

- **Knowledge drain**
  - Institutional expertise and relationships disappear as experienced staff retire.
- **Service disruptions**
  - Prolonged vacancies slow procurement cycles, increase processing times, and create vendor delays.
- **Innovation lag**
  - Absence of digital-native staff hampers adoption of modern tools and new ideas.
- **Compliance risk**
  - Shrinking workforce stretched thin risks errors, audit findings, and reduced oversight.
- **Resistance to change**
  - Competing commitments and fear of new ways of working make transformation harder.

# Drivers of the Recruitment Challenge

- **Outdated technology & processes**
  - Legacy systems and bureaucratic workflows signal an old-fashioned environment.
- **Limited career growth & rigid job descriptions**
  - Unclear pathways and dated titles make it hard to envision progression.
- **Work-life balance & flexibility concerns**
  - Strict schedules and limited remote options contrast with the expectations of emerging generations.
- **Low awareness of procurement's impact:**
  - Few students or early-career professionals understand how procurement shapes public outcomes.

# Impact of Multigenerational Workplace

- **Creativity and Innovation**

- Generationally homogenous teams risk groupthink and stagnation
- Diversity of age and experience fuels creativity and new ways of working

- **Performance**

- Inclusive teams that allow people to be themselves consistently outperform homogeneous ones.

- **Adaptation**

- Diversity of perspectives enables agencies to better adapt to new technologies and evolving supplier landscapes

“Generations are a lens through which to understand societal change, rather than a label with which to oversimplify differences between groups.”

Michael Dimock,  
President Pew Research Center

# Strategies to Attract & Retain

# What brought individuals to the Public Sector

Stability and security a competitive advantage

- **52%** - Pension and Benefits
- **45%** - Job stability and security
- **40%** - Proximity to the job
- **29%** - Base salary or wage
- **27%** - The opportunity to make a difference in a community

# Recruitment Levers & Preferences

## Rebranding government work

Gen Z is focused on building networks and specialized expertise; procurement offers transferable skills in negotiation, risk, compliance and supply chain.

- **Having a friend or mentor in the role is the top lever:**
  - 85 % of Gen Z say this would increase their interest in government careers.
- **Hiring process length:**
  - 81 % want to secure a job within roughly two months.
- **A visibility problem persists:**
  - 15 % cite not being able to find a job posting as a top reason for not applying.
- **Work arrangements:**
  - Over 60 % prefer hybrid work arrangements, making flexibility a key differentiator.

# Recruitment Strategies & Processes

## Purpose, Tech & Flexibility

- **Meet emerging talent where they are:**
  - Leverage social media, online trends, and influencers to advertise openings and share success stories.
- **Shorten recruitment processes:**
  - Streamline applications, use virtual hiring technology, and make offers quickly.
- **Hire earlier & offer experiences:**
  - Co-ops, internships, and shadowing programs let students taste procurement before graduating.
- **Build pipelines & partnerships:**
  - Collaborate with universities and colleges to develop curricula and recruit new grads.
- **Reimagine job requirements:**
  - Focus on transferable skills, curiosity, and adaptability rather than years of government experience.
- **Improve communications:**
  - Clarify job titles and roles, and market procurement as a mission-critical, tech-enabled career.

# Retaining through Training

## Emerging Core Competencies

### AI & Technology Literacy

*“AI will likely touch procurement first. This is an opportunity for procurement professionals to be strategic leaders in how governments best leverage these tools.”*

**Elena Hoffnagle, VP at Partners for Public Good**

### Storytelling

*“Procurement teams need to be advocates for their function by explaining their roles and procedures in a way that really builds excitement and understanding around their work.”*

**Colin Erhardt, Director of Partners for Public Good**

### Citizen Trust

*“These days, people are skeptical about whether the government can accomplish anything, and procurement is a way to start building back that trust between citizens and the government.”*

**David Yarkin, CEO of Procurated**

# Modernization for Retention

Embracing technology to focus on value

- Adopt technologies and **automate manual tasks** to reduce cycle time and improve service quality.
- Invest in data platforms to **provide real-time visibility** into spend, suppliers, and risk.
- Support **change management**: train staff, appoint technology champions, and involve end-users in system design.
- Champion and ensure responsible **AI adoption**: develop ethical guidelines, avoid bias, and involve employees to build trust.
  - 83% of organizations **expect AI to increase efficiency** while only 15% believe it will replace jobs.

# Get Creative

## Rebranding government work

- **Next-gen air traffic controllers: Gamers**

- *Feedback from controller exit interviews reinforces this, with several controllers pointing to gaming as an influence on their ability to think quickly, stay focused, and manage complexity.*

- **Procurement + mission alignment: bridge the value alignment gap**

- *“While about 76 percent of Gen Z respondents noted in both 2024 and 2025 that they were motivated by a belief that their work can make a tangible difference in the world, 2025 saw a significant increase in focus on Gen Z’s own long-term professional well-being: a network of colleagues that they can rely on in the future, and specialized knowledge and subject matter expertise they can leverage in future jobs.”*

- **Building the brand: creating the future of government**

- Positions public servants as owners of the future of government operations. Building new and getting creative in how we work with the public.



# Use Case: Boast About Your Work

## San Francisco Recreation & Park Department

- Under the previous process, park upgrades were slow and costly.
  - Adding a single bathroom could cost \$1 Million
- The department turned to cooperative purchasing, which saved costs and time.
- Every time a renovated park opens, they share a story on their Instagram and discuss the process and money saved by the procurement team's efforts.



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# Procurement's Narrative

# Reframe the Narrative

## Connecting with Gen Z

### • Purpose-Driven Mission

- Show how procurement improves public services, community wellbeing, and social outcomes.
- Highlight the direct link between procurement and issues important to Gen Z (climate, transit, mental health).

### • Tech-Forward Environment

- Invest in modern tools, AI and automation to make work meaningful and efficient
- Adopt mobile-friendly and cloud platforms that mirror the consumer experiences younger talent expects.

### • Flexible & Inclusive Workplace

- Offer remote and hybrid models, flexible schedules, and inclusive policies.
- Cultivate a workplace where diverse voices are valued, and employees feel they belong.

# Use Case: See Yourself Campaign

## City of Denver Strategy

- The city of Denver launched a multimedia campaign featuring diverse employees as brand champions, highlighting job variety, pay, security, and growth opportunities.
- The campaign generated over 1.1 million impressions and 20,000+ clicks to the job page—demonstrating the power of targeted marketing.
- Such campaigns help younger job seekers visualize themselves in government roles, combating stereotypes.



# Impact of Public Procurement

Front page stories for the right reasons

- **Highlight citizen impact**
  - Center narratives on serving citizens and solving pressing challenges like climate resilience, housing, and healthcare.
- **An incubator for innovation**
  - Position procurement as the pilot for emerging technologies like AI, blockchain, and data analytics.
- **Demonstrate transparency**
  - Publish procurement data and create dashboards that visualize spend, performance, and community outcomes.
- **Inspire Pride**
  - Celebrate community outcomes rather than emphasizing bureaucracy.

# Procurement Opportunity & Values Alignment

## Rebranding government work

- 79 % of procurement professionals say ESG issues are important and 74 % expect that importance to grow – aligning with Gen Z’s sustainability priorities.
- The profession is becoming tech-savvy: AI, data analytics and e-procurement platforms counter the outdated “paper-pushing” stereotype.
- Nearly half of Gen Z cite lack of skills and experience as their main barrier to employment; structured entry programmes such as co-ops, internships and rotations can bridge this gap.
- Canada’s public service is shrinking at the top and cutting its youngest workers at the bottom – procurement can rebuild the pipeline by offering purpose-driven, sustainable and tech-enabled careers.

# Rebranding in action

FINANCE

## Pennsylvania County's DOGE Office Saved Government \$14 Million Last Year

Unlike federal DOGE, the Montgomery County office doesn't envision layoffs becoming part of its mission.

Jan. 14, 2026 • Fallon Roth, The Philadelphia Inquirer, TNS



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Workforce

## FAA sets records in effort to hire gamers as air traffic controllers

The agency received over 12,000 applications in less than two days, making the effort “wildly successful,” according to Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy.

APRIL 20, 2026

Get the full story

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# Key Takeaways

# Steps to Avoid the Tsunami

- **Demographic shifts demand action**
  - The “silver tsunami” will peak by 2030, and vacancy rates are already rising.
- **Align with emerging generations:**
  - Emphasize purpose, mission impact, technology, growth, and flexibility
- **Modernize hiring and onboarding**
  - Simplify job descriptions, create early pipelines, and communicate impact clearly.
- **Invest in culture & capabilities**
  - Flexible work, inclusive practices, continuous learning, and recognition sustain engagement
- **Change the narrative**
  - Public Procurement is a critical function and should be viewed as such

# Next Steps

## Diagnose, Invest, & Plan

- **Diagnose:**

- Assess workforce demographics and retirement projections; map positions most at risk of vacancies.
- Identify critical skills gaps by benchmarking against future digital and sustainability competencies.
- Set clear recruitment and retention KPIs tied to diversity, vacancy reduction and employee satisfaction.

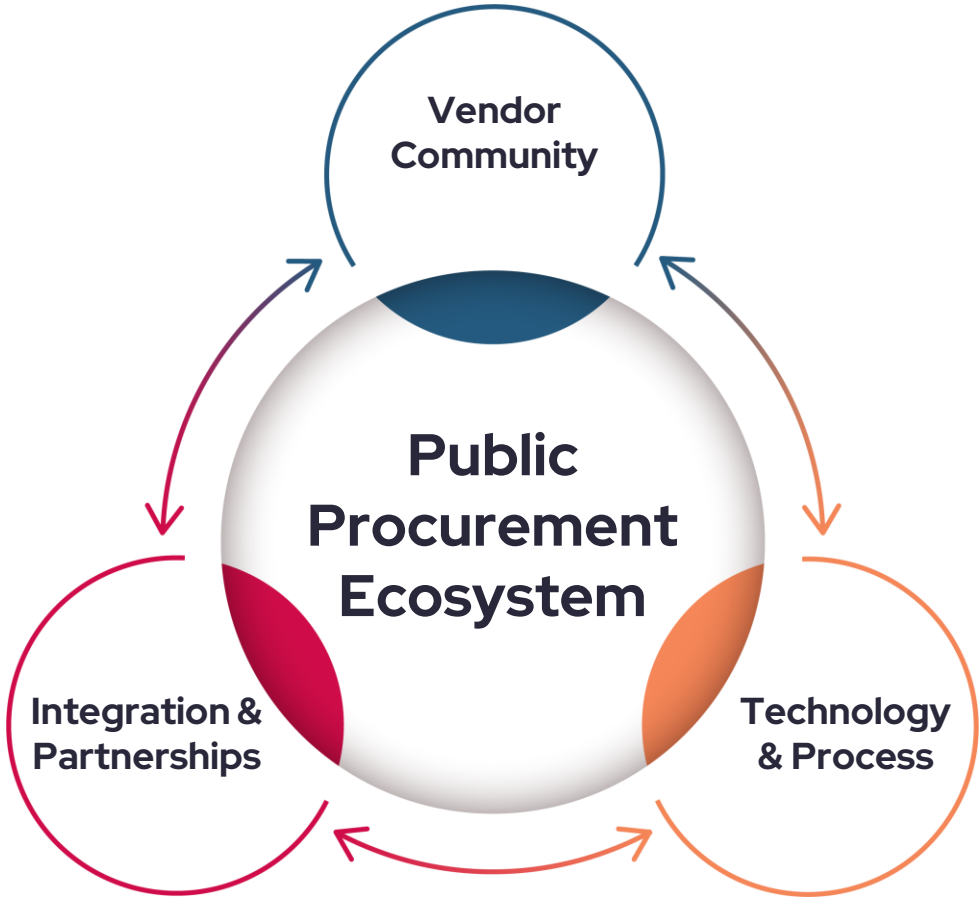
- **Invest:**

- Modernize processes & systems and integrate advanced technological and analytical capabilities.
- Measure and communication efficiency gains, risk reduction and improved service delivery.

- **Plan & Communicate:**

- Remove unnecessary barriers in job postings; adopt skills-based recruitment to widen candidate pools.
- Launch public awareness campaigns to showcase procurement careers and highlight success stories.
- Use storytelling to share employee experiences and reinforce a sense of belonging.

# Reach, Efficiency, & Agility



# Test Your Readiness

Where does your process currently stand?

- Understand your metrics
- Understand your procurement gaps
- Have a procurement vision (get buy-in)
- Use data to make your case

Scan the QR code and take the **Maturity Assessment** to see where you stand





**Thank you**

**SOVRA**