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**Q&A**

**In conversation with NEPO & Bloom as they celebrate 10-year partnership milestone**





**In 2012, NEPO developed an innovative new approach to procuring professional services, by using a neutral vendor to manage a dynamic supplier marketplace. The resulting solution was named NEPRO and Bloom was appointed as the neutral vendor.**

NEPRO is a managed service solution that provides a cost-effective and compliant route for the procurement of professional services by the public sector. Through NEPRO, buyers can choose from thousands of providers via a pre-accredited supply chain, available across 20 categories and 340 sub-categories of professional services spend.

Buyers are helped to define a robust specification for the required outcome. Procurement specialists then manage the invitation to bid, proposal receipt, evaluation and selection of the best supplier to meet the need. That means suppliers can be briefed, contracted and working on site in significantly less time than traditional procurement routes.

In this interview, Nicola Shelley, managing director and Steven Sinclair, procurement and commercial director at NEPO join Adam Jacobs, founder and Amabel Grant, CEO at Bloom to celebrate ten years of providing the public sector with specialist professional services.



# What were the drivers for establishing NEPRO?

## Steven Sinclair - NEPO Commercial Director

“ When NEPRO launched ten years ago, we knew that it would meet public sector challenges around choice, value and compliance when appointing consultants and professional services.

NEPO wanted a solution that went beyond the limitations of a traditional framework agreement, so we seized the opportunity to set up something national in size and scope and provide a different route to market for SMEs.

Our partnership with Bloom has taken this even further and positioned NEPRO

as an enabler for economic growth. Over our decade of delivery, we have welcomed over 4,000 accredited suppliers into our marketplace, of which 90 per cent are SMEs, connecting them to public sector customers.

Developed by NEPO, we wanted a managed service approach that ultimately brings benefits to buyers. Since then, both NEPO and Bloom have gone from strength to strength, supporting over 400 public sector organisations to deliver in excess of 10,000 projects. ”

## Adam Jacobs - Bloom Founder

“ NEPRO has grown from strength to strength, offering the public sector a compliant, speedy route to appointing professional services. We saw an opportunity to enhance the public sector to achieve its aims of supporting SMEs whilst freeing up valuable time for them to concentrate on high value, strategic

projects. Our partnership with NEPO makes a compelling case for how the public and private sector can achieve great things together.

We have created a solution that gives the public sector choice and speed to market, without compromising compliance and outcomes. ”



## How have you seen the market change?



### “ Steven Sinclair

Buyers are increasingly turning to SMEs to drive innovation in public sector delivery. Quality outcomes matter more than ever, and this is where Bloom adds value in managing the end-to-end process and driving an outcomes focused approach. ”

### Adam Jacobs

“ The market has produced a range of amazing SMEs and we want to match them with public sector need. Seventy per cent of Bloom contracts are won by SMEs – helping them to thrive and connect them into the public sector. The change within the market will continue to drive the SME sector forward; the economy needs a thriving SME community. ”



## What do you see as the key successes of NEPRO?

### Adam Jacobs - Bloom Founder

“ We are incredibly proud of our achievements over the past ten years. Under NEPRO we have enabled outcomes that help police services tackle county lines, health services address child obesity and hundreds more projects tackling diverse and complex issues, all the while saving money for the public purse.

We are committed to taking this further, our open access marketplace of 4,000 accredited suppliers continues to grow as we provide the UK public sector with the support to make positive change.

For suppliers, NEPRO has really opened up the market, removing the traditional barriers of marketing and selling to public sector bodies. The advantage to suppliers, especially smaller SMEs and VCSEs (voluntary, community and social enterprises), is that once they are registered and accredited with NEPRO they no longer have to go through time-consuming pre-qualification stages, instead they compete on a level playing field against larger suppliers for contracts they might not otherwise have access to. ”



## What do you see as the key successes of NEPRO?

### Nicola Shelley NEPO Managing Director

“ We have really focused on the project delivery of outcomes and what the impact is of these projects, as Adam has already touched on. For example, enabling the North East to up its construction and engineering output via NEPRO on highways and transport, build and design.

The partnership has helped to remove the administrative burden on procurement teams, so they can focus on their own strategic outcomes while we provide expert supplier selection with performance benchmarking.

Another key success is that we have created a fair and level playing field for all suppliers to access public sector opportunities (70% of which has been awarded to SMEs) and typically deliver 14% savings against budget via NEPRO, providing critical savings to the public purse. ”



# How has NEPRO made a difference?

## Steven Sinclair - NEPO Commercial Director

“ Social value is at the heart of what NEPO and Bloom do, in 2020 we were proud to be awarded the National Social Value Award for embedding social value in NEPRO. Over the past ten years, our partnership has generated £96m in social value, making a real difference to the local economy and our communities. Throughout the past ten years we have seen SME partners grow, generating jobs and having both a local and national economic impact.

Through NEPRO we export SMEs to regional and national buyers, opening up the market to public opportunities. This has resulted in a rapid acceleration to market for buyers and suppliers and NEPRO has removed barriers to connecting professional service providers to public sector buyers. ”



## Adam Jacobs - Bloom Founder

“ Bloom was also named as the first procurement organisation to achieve the Level 2 Certificate, accredited by Social Value UK. Working with NEPO we have been able to further embed social value in procurement to ensure local communities and economies reap the awards. ”



# How has NEPRO made a difference?



## Amabel Grant - Bloom Chief Executive Officer

“ Innovation is another area where NEPRO has made a difference. The NEPRO solution has enabled the public sector to act at speed in times of crises, allowing the identification and appointment of the right support to meet emerging challenges.

NEPRO features a dynamic marketplace meaning we are able to meet the public sector’s innovation requirements, for example cyber security, PFI, COVID support, technology innovation, change management, construction and engineering, to name just a few! ”

## Steven Sinclair - NEPO Commercial Director

“ Yes and as testament to this NEPRO was shortlisted in 2018 at the LGC Awards in the Innovation category, highlighting that NEPRO meets a very real and ongoing need within the public sector. ”





# What do you see as the key drivers of change for the future?

## Amabel Grant Bloom Chief Executive Officer

“ The public sector has, and will continue to, undergo big changes. We are operating within a climate of inflation, energy crisis and the cost of living. We will continue to support the sector and evaluate how we can do things differently.

What is apparent is that during a time of crisis there is a need for real innovation.

Both NEPO and Bloom are proactively using technology to elevate procurement. Technology and Artificial Intelligence will continue to play its role as we invest in the development of user-friendly tech that adds value. ”



## What do you see as the key drivers of change for the future?



### Nicola Shelley NEPO Managing Director

“ Moving forward, we will look to double down on what we have already learned over the ten years and use this data and knowledge to enhance delivery for the UK public sector.

Technology will continue to transform the way in which we operate, providing opportunities for procurement teams to work more efficiently and adopt smarter ways of working.

Hybrid working has and will continue to change how we all operate, as will change management and new legislation, as seen with the proposals within the Procurement Bill.

As we move forward and look to the future, we will continue to listen to the needs of buyers and suppliers and continue to make a difference. ”

# Want to get in touch?

## Bloom\*

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