

System Purchasing and Support Services, University of Illinois System Interview

Daniel (Dan) Szajna, Director of System Purchasing and Support Services, University of Illinois.

Amy Heggemeyer, Coordinator of University Contracts at System Purchasing and Support Services, University of Illinois.

Monday, November 07, 2022 2:37PM • 1:23:34

SPEAKERS

Dan Szajna, Amy Heggemeyer, Inbar Michael

Inbar Michael 00:04

Awesome. Okay, so my name is Inbar Michael, I am a graduate student representing the University of Illinois archives. I'll let my interviewees introduce themselves. Could you state your name, professional title and the department that you work for?

Dan Szajna 00:20

Hello, my name is Dan Szajna. I am the Director of System Purchasing and Support Services at the University of Illinois.

Amy Heggemeyer 00:28

Hi, I'm Amy, I'm a Coordinator of University Contracts at System Purchasing and Support Services with the University of Illinois.

Inbar Michael 00:36

Great. And today's date is November 2, we're here meeting on Zoom to discuss UIUC System Purchasing and Support Services in conjunction with SHIELD and the university's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic for the inclusion in the University of Illinois COVID-19 Documentation Project. So my first question, just so we have a better understanding and also for future researchers, when they listen back to these audios and look at the transcripts. Just could you tell us a little bit about the department that you work for? Is it a long standing department? Was it something that was developed more recently? And what are the primary functions, goals, or products from that department and you can also talk about your role here a little bit [if you wouldn't mind]?

Dan Szajna 01:20

Certainly. So System Purchasing and Support Services came into existence back in January of 2019. It was formerly Strategic Procurement. With the transition to System Purchasing and Support Services our responsibilities were the transactional purchases for administrative level offices at the University of Illinois. So these are your shared offices that go across all three campuses, things like Office of the

University Council, University Payables, Accounting and Financial Reporting, Treasurer's Office, President's Office, etc. This coincided with a transition of this campus purchasing units to be reporting under their own campus leadership. So as the campuses took over responsibility for their purchases, system leadership wanted their own system purchasing office, and that's how we came into existence. And then recently, in addition to our purchasing responsibilities, we also took on revenue generating and no fund contract processing activities, and that's when Amy joined our team as well. We are unique as a purchasing office as we also have a data analytics arm that handles data analytics reporting for purchases across the system as a whole. Our goals are to meet the purchasing and contracting needs for system offices at the university. And, you know, I think we've been doing a good job of that. The primary involvement with COVID is tied to the SHIELD Illinois organization, which is a system level office, and there's a couple of different flavors of SHIELD throughout the universities, as I'm sure you're aware. There's the campus SHIELD project that was doing the testing for students, SHIELD Illinois was established to rollout testing across the state of Illinois. And they had a big focus on K-12 testing and testing at other colleges as well, colleges and universities. So all of the support for purchases to ramp up SHIELD Illinois, and all of the contracting to do that came through our office. Now, Amy, anything to add to that, what am I missing?

Amy Heggemeyer 03:39

Not too much. The only addition I would say is that that transition of revenue generating no fund occurred during COVID. So we had that additional office transitions. And as well as the standard transitions of working towards COVID activities.

Dan Szajna 03:56

There were a handful of agreements that originated out of the old office that we kind of inherited. And then for Amy got a deluge of agreements.

Amy Heggemeyer 04:05

Because they were starting up just as the transition was happening. And so it was unlearning this now and here we go.

Inbar Michael 04:14

Great. Yeah, that's very helpful, especially as we move into the questions that are more like SHIELD related. So in terms of the role, like the specific roles that you both play in the department, could you elaborate on that more as well?

Dan Szajna 04:30

Sure. So as director, I kind of oversee the different sections within the office. I have a purchasing background so I am much more apt to roll up some sleeves and help in the purchasing aspect of the office. But obviously supporting Amy and what she's doing and analytics folks as well. Specific to COVID response and SHIELD. I took it upon myself to take on a large majority of the SHIELD related purchases. And that was for a couple of reasons. Number one, the Governor's emergency disaster proclamation allowed us a lot of flexibility in how we purchased during the pandemic. And I wanted to take on that responsibility myself, I did not want to put that on anyone in the office. In addition, because of some of the nuances with SHIELD, you know, I was able to focus on that. And we were able to think

more broadly as to how we can support that specific office with everything going through me, versus, you know, one person doing this one person doing that the remaining purchases that we still continue to handle, the rest of the group is very familiar with, and they were able to pick up that additional workload while I was focused on these pieces. From Amy's perspective, over 1000 contracts collectively between both sides of our office, we executed over 1000 contracts for SHIELD Illinois. And I would say a bulk of those agreements, I think it was over 900 came from Amy's arm of the office. And please, elaborate Amy a little.

Amy Heggemeyer 06:11

Sure that's right. Yes. So as Dan had pointed out, there was a recent addition of revenue generating slash no fund contracts. And there had previously been a system level office that I was part of that manage those across the board for all campuses and all system offices. And then it was determined to transition us to specific units, which is how I got to join the System Purchasing. And that was happening around the same time in summer of 2021. That corr-, yes, summer of 2021. There we go. That the SHIELD Illinois was starting to really get established in terms of executing the testing contracts with colleges, with K-12 schools, both public and private. And as the person responsible for those tended to be, well, they are they were either no funds because they were funded through public health, or they were, in the certain cases, there were a few companies that were purchasing companies located in the state of Illinois, that were also purchasing the testing process. So we would work with those contracts, who've worked with us as well. And those were just starting to come in right before the transition. My supervisor at the time was following the sort of the same concept of Dan, this is going to be something unique. So I will start as the person working on this. But when it became clear that I was going to be the one transitioning to system and SHIELD Illinois, was the system purchasing works with system purchasing. I started learning those contracts and brought them with me, as it were to system purchasing. And yes, as Dan pointed out, it started as a few, but then it quickly became at the initial part well over 600, close to 700 in that first year. And since then, even with renewals and newer contracts were on 900 or I think even over 900 at this point.

Inbar Michael 08:18

Oh, okay. So from what it sounds like, because I have like a question about like how your role is changing in pandemic? It sounds like your roles during the pandemic were like, primarily COVID, like SHIELD related from what I took it. Yeah,

Dan Szajna 08:32

It was a bulk of my time. Absolutely. And a bulk of Amy's time, just from the volume that we processed. You know, it's from the purchase side, one would think, you know, the campus testing kind of led the way right, they paved the way for what the parameters were needed, when it came to the supplies needed the infrastructure needed and such. So we tried to leverage a lot of that, right, we tried to mirror what they were doing. But with the supply chain the way it was, you know, there were some things that SHIELD Illinois had to do very different from the campus SHIELD piece. And so that's, you know, even from stuff like the PCR testing machines that we bought we and some of the robotics that we were trying to use, it just wasn't available. So we had to kind of verge down a different path or for some of those things. So it was very interesting. It was nothing was cookie cutter by any means. It was a lot of new and interesting purchases. And our office, if you think of University Administration, we don't have

medical offices. We don't have laboratory offices or scientific testing offices per se. We have a lot of business offices, so we buy a lot of services. So some of this stuff, some of the machinery we're buying some of the equipment we were buying was very new to our office.

Amy Heggemeyer 10:01

and also to that end, the contracts we use typically aren't medical based contracts, those aren't units that we work with. So thankfully, we have a really strong support and University Council, who works to develop the revenue generating, no fund contracts that we could put into use quickly for, for the school's purposes.

Dan Szajna 10:27

And it's important to point out Inbar that we did not, we didn't stop, right, just because we were focused on COVID Doesn't mean we didn't have other contracts and purchases to make. You know, I still had a portfolio of renewals that I had to get done before the fiscal year end. And Amy had, you know, other customers [you know] the University Press and CARLI [Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois] that she used routinely working with that she had to keep agreements go in there, too. So it was it was a lot of additional work on top of our normal day to day.

Inbar Michael 11:00

Alright, well, yeah, I was curious about that, like how that kind of like shifted with the pandemic, and everything in terms of responsibilities. And just out of curiosity, Amy, this is like, a little bit more for you, because it's the contract related, what is revenue generated? No fund contracts? And I guess what was, what did those mean for SHIELD like, once you got those done?

Amy Heggemeyer 11:25

Certainly. So a no fund contract means that there's no money exchanging hands at the customer is not paying us as a result of this. And so we did have to bake that into the contract that while the services would get paid for they were getting paid for through either federal funds or through state allocated funds. So those were no fund contracts. But then there were certain situations, as I mentioned, where private companies would also want testing services, and they were paying for that service. So that's a revenue generating our receivables contract. So the bulk of the contract language itself was largely the same because it was about the testing process, it was more about the who was paying whom which is what made that difference there.

Inbar Michael 12:14

Yeah.

Dan Szajna 12:16

And I don't want to get too into the whole business model of SHIELD Illinois. But if you think about it, early on, in this process, there weren't many tests available. And because of that, there wasn't funding for stuff like testing K-12. Schools. So SHIELD's initial outreach from what we saw, was we want to partner wit big companies that have you know, a warehouse or a assembly line or such that they need to have people working on. So if you look at some of the early agreements we had that were revenue generating, that would be like Caterpillar and not Caterpillar, ADM [Archer Daniels Midland Company]

in Decatur, and Rivian, electric car manufacturer over in Bloomington, they have a large number of people that we could, you know, functionally send in a group of folks to test and it made logical sense from the economic side that the manufacturer, the company would pay for it, and help SHIELD kind of ramp up their production.

Amy Heggemeyer 13:19

And as the pandemic has progressed, even some of those types of contracts have shifted slightly where it is still majority K-12 schools, majority K-12 public schools, there has also been the shift to community testing sites. So looking more at finding a location in an area that has a lot of access, and then getting contracts in place. So that SHIELD Illinois can come in and get set up and provide testing to a wider swath of the community.

Inbar Michael 13:48

Okay, great. So the contracts are related to helping, like get places have like to have funding to have sites where they test sorry.

Amy Heggemeyer 13:57

Yes. We can't just- SHIELD couldn't just show up at Smith Elementary School and say we're here. They had to have permission to be there. They had to have permission to take saliva samples from minors. And so these contracts, created that process that gave them those permissions.

Inbar Michael 14:17

Okay, yeah, no, that's super helpful thank you. So this is like, a little bit shifting from SHIELD but we'll come back. I'm just wondering, like, when was the first time you heard about COVID-19? Did your Department have any sort of like, initial response to it or responsibilities [that they] take on or what was- how did that look like?

Dan Szajna 14:40

So I have a medically fragile child at home. So I was pretty aware as to what was going on with COVID-19 as it started emerging. And I believe the university shut down on a Tuesday back in March and it was actually the day before where I told my team. I said, "Hey, you know, let's go remote". Everyone bring your laptops home everyone plan on working remote, we're gonna shut down. And then obviously the university came through the following day with a more broader thing on the shutdown. So there was some inklings that this was going to be bad and it was going to get really bad. And it was it, I'd say back in March of 2020, it felt different. You know, we've had things in the past, like the avian flu, or bird flu, SARS before that. You know, there's been a few scares in the past where, you know, this is going to be the big one. For some reason, COVID just felt different. And that's why, you know, I initially made that decision to kind of send people home, and, and start thinking through, okay, where, how do we help, what do we need to do? And that was really, across the board from the team, everybody stepped up, you know, what, how do we support our departments that still need to buy stuff, even though they're not in the office? How do we, you know, keep the lights on at the university, ultimately, and quickly as the campus SHIELD testing expanded, and then we formed the SHIELD Illinois office, it really kind of got a lot bigger than any of us had imagined. Early on in the process, I was actually asked through Discovery Partners Institute (DPI), which is a system level office, to sit in on some phone calls to help with this

planning. If you think about the state of Illinois, not having budgets for a few years prior to that, the pandemic, the state was very limited in staffing and resources and all that kind of fun stuff to get a response to COVID, if you will. So they were looking at every option, they had to bring people to the table to assist. And DPI is fairly newer unit at the university as well, that had some resources they could bring to the table when it came to project management or, you know, assistance or bringing others to the table and such. So DPI, through Bill Jackson, as the executive director, got involved with the state said, hey, what can we do to help. And I was working very closely with Illinois Emergency Management Agency, as well as Department of Public Health on starting to ramp up what on what the state's response would look like. And I think that was my first big toe into the pool of COVID, because I got involved in an emergency purchase to bring a third party consultant on board to assist the DPI and the state with you know, what do we need to do here? In some of those discussions were, you know, very, very high level, like, what is our testing response going to be? Where are we going to put testing sites, community testing sites, and this was all originated by the state, right? So it's not just, you know, one county, one city, one university, this is across the state of Illinois, which is a very, very large state when you think about it. So getting testing sites up in the Chicagoland area, a number of them so that, you know, it's all around the city. But then also, how do we serve the lower populated sections of the state? And, you know, it was a lot of, I believe there was a lot of research and data that went into it, right, where you have the mass amount of people up in Chicago, there seem to be more infections popping off. So it was made more sense to test more frequently up there. Further south, obviously, it got down there eventually, but at the onset, it was not as big of a concern. So that was a lot of the focus. And, and so, my first, like I said purchase, if you will, was for the emergency purchase to bring on a third party consultant to assist with some of this. And then quickly, the state realized they were having issues sourcing the nasal swabs and the viral transport media, which I was asked to assist them in sourcing. So that's I got those were my first two forays into the process there.

Amy Heggemeyer 19:29

Would you mind repeating the question?

Inbar Michael 19:31

Oh, yes, of course. Um, so when was the first time you heard about the emergence of COVID-19? What was the response of your department? Like what was there something before the university decide something or after? Yeah.

Amy Heggemeyer 19:47

Sure. Okay. Yeah, as Dan pointed out, I was one of those people that had started noticing it earlier in the news and sort of keeping an eye on where things were going, what things were happening and it was kind of amusing in our household because I was sort of like, on the side starting to like just, you know, gather a few supplies on hand and telling my kids like, you know, just as so when flu season comes, we always try and make sure we have like Pedialyte and working thermometers on hand, I'm just doing that right now the same as normal. And then I don't know what happened. But some, some meetings were starting to pop up in different units about you know, it could be potential that we will need to go remote or have some less time in the office, and something must have happened in my husband's office, because all of a sudden, he gives me a call. I was like, this is a big deal. And I'm like, yes, yes, I know. Yes. That's why I've been, you know, buying a few things here and there. And very

similar to what Dan said it, it started in the office I was in at the time, because I was in a different had different directors supervisory at that point, where there were these discussions of Okay, it looks like we might need to be going remote. What does that look like and starting to make those plans to then Tuesday when it was, oh, no. Nope, just pack up and go home right now. It was one of those like, we were in the office, and they said, go home. And that was also a spring break week. Right before, well it was the week before spring break. So again, having kids getting them home and then hearing no, they will be staying home beyond spring break. And again, my husband works for the athletic department, there was the big 10 tournament in Indianapolis. And I'm getting like real time phone calls throughout the day. Was it Thursday or Friday? Where he's like, okay, they're closing down, you know, they're just going to have the teams playing the games. No, now they're closing down. No, now we're coming home. And he was starting to like really sort of figure out what was going on.

Inbar Michael 21:39

Right.

Amy Heggemeyer 21:40

And our office just really started, as Dan pointed out, a very similar process, where we're the revenue generating side of things, looking at how we can still support our customers while doing remote work, still figuring out how to connect with each other. And then additionally, this addition of how are we supporting the activities of SHIELD Illinois as that was becoming a project at the system level that we would need to assist with. And then it was finalized that yes, we were actually our offices were getting dispersed and merged out to other units. So then it was a who's working with what. And a lot of our, I would say if I can back up a bit, a lot of [hours] on the revenue generating side with regards to SHIELD was also looking at- We worked with a lot of study abroad agreements. So looking at what that meant, what that meant in terms of active agreements, what that meant in terms of students, what did study abroad look like? So there was actually a lot of looking at what were virtual options. And how would those get written into contracts so that we could keep our students safe, while also providing them with a study abroad experience that they're looking for. So there was that aspect of it that I was working with a lot before coming to system purchasing, and then predominantly working with the SHIELD Illinois contracts.

Inbar Michael 23:10

That's an interesting perspective considering all this study abroad. I know that some- well at least everyone that was at my undergrad had to come back home.

Amy Heggemeyer 23:21

Yes, everybody had to come back home. And then there were ongoing discussions at the various international offices of- for the next that next academic year, what could this look like? What can we potentially do? To provide experiences also to provide experiences for international students. Who were looking- who had been accepted to Illinois. How can we get them Illinois coursework while they're located in China.

Inbar Michael 23:48

Right.

Amy Heggemeyer 23:48

So there was a lot of work on that end of, what can we agree to? Who can we affiliate with in China, that we can then set up virtual classes that the students can attend as remote students, but still as University of Illinois students?

Inbar Michael 24:06

Yes. Great. All right. So with that, we'll start transitioning more to questions about SHIELD, which we've already kind of been talking about. But the initial question I had was, what was your and your department's involvement with SHIELD and we kind of already talked about that, but I guess more about like, when did it begin? Was it like, right at the pandemic? It sounded like maybe like, a couple of weeks in, but just a little bit of-

Dan Szajna 24:30

Sure. Maybe I don't know if you want me to talk a little bit about the state involvement first, and then I'll kind of expand out. So as I said, you know, we're kind of supporting DPI and ended up working with the state. I was actually asked to help them source swabs. And so it was really interesting utilizing the university has a lot of scientific vendors. [Thermo] Fisher Scientific, VWR, we have some smaller ones like [Caneta] Scientific. And so right away, we dove into let's use our contacts and try and find these testing supplies that are needed because they just didn't exist. They were, you know, the second that swabs were manufactured, they were being rolled, they're being sold. So we couldn't necessarily buy them, we were looking for them in warehouses almost. And we're actually able to leverage the Illinois Higher Education Cooperative, which is made up of all of the public higher ed schools to utilize some of their contacts as well, to find some swabs that we could purchase. So it was really interesting, you know, the university was making some very large dollar value purchases that were in turn being, you know, re-distributed to Department of Public Health for testing purposes. There were units at I believe, Chicago and Urbana that were making the viral transport media. So after you swab someone's nose, you would put it in this vial that kept it alive until it got to a lab to be tested. And then there was one gentleman, and I am blanking on his name right now that he found a way that he was able to re-manufacture a product to make it into a nasal swab. And it was really interesting, it was actually a it was a cleaning swab that was used on like camera parts or camera lenses, a high tech camera lens cleaner. And what they did is they actually put it in an oven and melted it down to extrude out the plastic and make it longer. And you know, so my name gets thrown in there as "Hey, Dan's trying to find swabs." This guy says, "Hey, I'm making swabs you need to see things, you know." So I was actually able to work with them to order a bulk of these camera cleaning swabs that he extruded out was able to send up to one of the public health labs for review and testing. And as they were being reviewed and tested, then we had to talk through, you know, how do we get them sterilized? How do we get them packaged and such? So we were having phone calls with stuff like that. This all predates SHIELD. This was all just, you know, how do we help, right? Because as a public university, that's part of the mission of the University of Illinois is be supportive to the state as a whole. So we were doing that, and just some interesting conversations, like I said, that were far outside of my wheelhouse, if you will. But definitely interesting in how this all ramped up, and how many people at the university were coming up with ideas and ways to help. I believe there were folks in I think it was UIC's theater, it was they were making face masks and such, you know, so the least likeliest of places that you think someone would

be assisting or having ideas on how to support the university was bringing them to the table. So specific to SHIELD from my perspective, I still pretty much remember the phone call. It was August of 2020. It was with a gentleman by the name of Andrew Greta, who is in the business office at SHIELD. And Andrew called me up and said, "Hey, we need to buy a lot of these PCR machines." And I said, "Okay," you know, we, we have a contract with Fisher Scientific, that's where we're looking to buy them from, they ran, I think we were looking at maybe \$70,000 worth of PCR machines, roughly 20 or 30 of them, I don't remember the exact quantities up top my head. But these things were hot commodities, because people started to realize you can do this saliva testing, and you can test with a PCR machine. So these were not an easy thing to come by.

Inbar Michael 24:31

Right

Dan Szajna 24:41

And I said, Okay, you know, let's talk, let's get our Fisher rep on the phone. Let's talk to them. Let's see what we can do. And ultimately, you know, it's like, well, I don't know if we can get them to you as quickly as you want. We can try, we can do this then. And we said, You know what, we're going to put the order in, we're gonna get in line, we're going to put the order in so we can start getting them as soon as they're available. And it actually worked out pretty well. I jokingly in hindsight, I laugh a little bit, because when Andrew called me, I was a little skeptical. I won't lie. I was like, the plans that they had about rolling testing out across the state. Having known what I saw on the state's response, and how long it took them to get it out. I was like, There's no way this little system office at University of Illinois is going to be able to get this off the ground. And boy, did they ever prove me wrong. The volume of testing they've done, but it was I still remember that phone call, you know, talking about the 30 PCR machines. And, you know, buying them was the easy part, right. We had the contacts with Fisher, we knew what we need to do the testing. A lot of it was logistics. When were they going to get here? Where were they going to go? We actually had someone I think he was in aces, that said, Hey, we can repurpose us a doc we have specific for these, we can accept them here, get them here. You know, we'll protect them. And it's climate controlled. They can stay here until you're ready to ship them out, you know, then we had to figure out okay, now that we have these machines, and we have labs that are coming on board, how do we get them out to the labs and get them installed? So it's a multi-prong approach, it was not just a "hey buy these" it was really thinking through the whole logistics of the purchase.

Inbar Michael 30:42

Do you want me to repeat the question Amy or-

Amy Heggemeyer 30:50

Yeah, sorry.

Inbar Michael 30:51

Oh, no, all good. Um, so what was your and your department's involvement with SHIELD Illinois, which we did earlier? And then when did it begin? Because I know you were in a different department at that time,

Dan Szajna 31:03

Months? Right.

Amy Heggemeyer 31:03

Right. So it did begin once for- the part that I'm aware of began once SHIELD Illinois was up and running. And so that contracts were determined were drafted up and then established as the standard template that would be used. And then our unit began working with SHIELD Illinois to get those contracts signed by the other parties and back to us so that they could be fully executed. And as I pointed out earlier, the import- I know, people aren't always like contracts, that's kind of like, okay, just sign it, whatever. But what a contract means is it means that SHIELD can bring in their, their whole system of getting things set up of taking the tests of bringing it back to those labs for, for the actual testing purpose, and having the permissions to do that, which as you may have noticed, in the news, you know, people are very concerned about having permissions of whether or not you can take their, their saliva. So we really wanted to make sure that we had these rules and regulations in place before we were going into schools in particular. Now, I would say one component of that also is that kind of is reflected in the contracts. We talked about how first there were over 700, and that there have been subsequent ones since then, also kind of tells the story about how long people thought COVID might last because the initial contracts, were only set up for what one, one fiscal year, sta-

Amy Heggemeyer 31:04

Yes, some of them were initially it's like these will end on December 31. And then it was let's at least get these through the end of the school year. So let's get these to June 30 of 2022. Right?

Dan Szajna 32:55

Yes.

Amy Heggemeyer 32:56

So. But that is, we're talking about renewing hundreds of contracts here in a few months timeframe. So that if the contract is not in place, then SHIELD cannot be there. So then you have a stoppage of have access to testing. So we had to go through a very long process of one a lot of times explaining to the other to the other party, why we need to renew, getting them to renew, getting them the contracts back and then getting them all sign. So that was a month long process that got us to the end of June 30. And then the funding got extended for another lease for another fiscal year at the state level. And so now we're looking at who has permissions for what for how long to have their testing. And that's what we've got going on with the contracts right now is looking at who's there, and how much time they've got still.

Dan Szajna 34:02

I think that's important to note, like the whole impetus, the whole thought process behind SHIELD is it's a break even deal for the university, right. We don't want to be losing money, you know, doling out testing across the state. But we also don't want to be making, you know, boatloads of money either. So all of our testing has been tied to either state or federal funding. Majority of it started with the Illinois Department of Public Health and an intergovernmental agreement that allocated funding for the testing. And then that the way the federal government has doled out money kind of changed midstream. And

that's why some of the agreements now are tied to federal funding. And as such, they have a different end date than some of the state stuff. So that is it because this was never supposed to be going on this long that has really thrown a lot of work on or play just in maintaining those renewals and the differences now, right? Was this a private school or public school and which which funding bucket do they fall under?

Inbar Michael 35:08

Right? [I didn't] even consider that a lot of people were probably just expecting it to be over in a couple of months and here [we are].

Amy Heggemeyer 35:17

Right

Dan Szajna 35:18

And we also had, I don't know if you recall but there was also some issues with our Emergency Use Authorization [EUA] from the FDA [Food & Drug Administration]. So at one point, the university was operating under the concept that we had an EUA, from the FDA. And they said, Oh, no, you don't really and so that was an interesting time, because then it was all hands on deck to get through a clinical trial that we could show. It was similar to the test that they modeled it off of, and we're able to get that EUA completed. But we had some agreements early on that referenced EUA authorization that we had to oh, we need to update these and we need to extend around the time. And it's been a lot of work keeping up with all the nuance that goes into the project.

Inbar Michael 36:10

Yeah, that makes sense. So this, I guess, I think you might have touched on this Dan. You mentioned- Oh, we actually when we we're like looking into like the work that y'all have both done, we saw that you you've done some like emergency purchasing work. And then you'd signed an emergency purchase in April 2020. With the officer, the auditor general, is that what you were referring to?

Dan Szajna 36:38

Yeah, that was a third party. That was a third party consultant that we leverage on behalf of DPI to assist the state in that initial COVID response. At the time, the governor's disaster proclamation did allow purchases to be made outside of the Illinois Procurement Code, which is typically how we buy things that's my bread and butter. But it was so new and so fresh that we had not got received any kind of guidance on how we're supposed to leverage that. So we ultimately made that purchase using the standard emergency provisions within the Procurement Code, which is why it was published on the bulletin. Since then, we did receive some guidance from the chief procurement officer for higher education on when we should apply the governor's disaster proclamation. And when we should be purchasing underneath the code, and we've done some of both throughout the process. You can probably see if you go to the procurement bulletin, you can see some of the purchases that I've made for the lab services that we outsourced. And but there's also a very big number of agreements that we did purchase under the disaster proclamation and not under the Procurement Code.

Inbar Michael 38:00

Okay, so in that case, that kind of leads to like the next question of what is what you just mentioned, the main differences between emergency purchasing in comparison to regular purchasing or is there other things?

Dan Szajna 38:13

Yeah, so typically, in a procurement setting, we're going to look at it trying to do a competitive solicitation, and getting bids or proposals from multiple respondents, we have options to do things such as a small purchase, which is below a certain threshold, or sole source purchase, or the emergency purchase that we just talked about. But primarily we're looking at some form of a competitive solicitation, especially at the dollar values of the purchases, we're buying with SHIELD. Those processes, I mean, can take anywhere from two to eight months, depending upon the volume of work that we're trying to put into the solicitation. So you can tell the pace that SHIELD was moving and the pace COVID was moving. Ultimately, the Procurement Code just plain didn't work, we had to make some purchases is obviously being good stewards of the university and state money, making sure we're trying to work with the best vendors we can find. But not necessarily going through the full blown formal process, it would have extended out to purchase way longer than we would have wanted. And [if you] think about if you think through what it takes to get somebody signed up or registered for a test, to get the test processed, right? To track that test, both at the testing site and through the lab, and then provide results ultimately to that individual and ultimately to the Department of Public Health or statewide recording. There's a lot that goes into that. Electronic medical records, the vials people are spitting into the labels that go on to the vials the PPE at the collection sites. You know, the transportation of the samples, the lab services doing the work, all the equipment in the lab. Right? Those are all purchases we've made throughout this.

Inbar Michael 40:16

Yes, yeah. It's a lot to keep track of. I listening to a previous interview, and they're also kind of discussing the entire process. And I was like, I never even consider this because I was like, undergrad students so- Yeah, yeah.

Dan Szajna 40:30

This is it's really so the interesting thing about SHIELD Illinois leadership is they came from the Business Office, okay, from the Business College. And they came at this from a business perspective, which means they had- they're not science smart. They really aren't. They had to bring in folks that were science smart to address that portion of it. But they knew the logistics, the contracting the you know, the logistics was the key to all this honestly, supply chains. Yeah. And that having that expertise, Ron Wilson and Andrew Greta, I mean, those, the background that they brought to this really made it successful.

Inbar Michael 41:15

Great, yes. All right. So I these- for I guess for context, these, these are questions that I kind of pulled from the preliminary survey that we had sent you. And I was hoping that you would be able to expand on the three areas that you mentioned, that you were involved throughout the pandemic. And I know, we did cover a little bit already. You mentioned some special projects you're involved in. So I'm just going to break it down into three sections. Amy, if you have anything to add, as well, because I know

that your work has overlapped. And you can definitely jump in. But I did pull this from Dan survey. So just, you know. Um, so you mentioned, you're assisting in the Illinois Department of Public Health Emergency Management Agency [illegible] testing swabs and viral transport media, which, like I said, we did discuss a little bit just kind of curious, like, who you were primarily working with? How are you working together? Like, was the work virtual? Was there traveling? And what was the extent of this work? Yeah.

Dan Szajna 42:16

Yeah. So um, as I said, it was impossible to find swabs I received a list of maybe 15 different swab model types, and was asked if we could source them. And you know, very quickly, I hit all the roadblocks that everyone else that was trying to buy them hit. And so I, you know, was like, well, we can do better, like, what else is available? What other options are out there a lot of the outreach that I had, you know, "hey, we can't get you this one. But we could get you that one." And, again, I don't have a science background, so this was all foreign to me. And I needed help. So I kind of went back up the chain said, "Hey, we might have some potentials, but I don't know, I need to be working with some folks." And so ultimately, I started working with IEMA, which is the Illinois Emergency Management Agency. And when you think about Department of Public Health, again, very understaffed for a pandemic response at the time. So if you think about their purchasing office, and what they were doing on a day to day basis, they did not have the bandwidth, and the wherewithal to expand out and do purchasing for a pandemic response. That's where IEMA comes into play, right? IEMA says, "Okay, we're going to take over purchasing for you, you tell us what you need, we'll find it." So there was a lady I was working with, she actually, her primary job assignment was IDOT [Illinois Department of Transportation]. And she was reassigned under the disaster proclamation to come over and sit with IEMA and help them in their sourcing activities. So her and I worked very closely together, we were, I would find things and send them over to her and she would buy them. There were like I said, a few things that I purchased, that then they turned around and bought from the university, just because that was the quickest way we could get something done at the time. But ultimately, we ended up having kind of a small team that was a representative from IEMA, myself, representatives from public health, and the Illinois National Guard, because the Illinois National Guard was managing and operating the test collection sites. So, you know, not only was it we need this swab, but this swab can only be used in these testing sites. And this is our volumes that we have. So we're running low and we need more, you know, so that was brought into those discussions. But ultimately, you know, that transition from IEMA- IEMA was dedicated to a set amount of time and then it kind of transitioned to Department of Public Health. And after it got back to public health, and they had staffing to respond. That's kind of when I rolled off of that portion of it. But I'd say it was a good- April of 2020, to maybe August of 2020, which coincides with SHIELD Illinois purchasing activities taking off,

Inbar Michael 45:09

Right? Okay. I'm writing down the dates for myself. And then do you know, like, how much material was purchased for this date during this time? Is it I mean, I wanted to give like a, like a big number, but like generally?

Dan Szajna 45:27

Over over a million dollars in swabs and viral transport media. And there's, it's, it's very interesting, when you have supply chain issues, what has to happen, okay? Number one is finding the products.

Dan Szajna 45:46

Number two, what I found very quickly was money talks. If you have cash or a cheque that you can hand somebody, that cheque has to be with the state of Illinois or University of Illinois name on it, so they know what's going to actually cash, right? If you have cash or cheque that you can hand somebody, you are much more likely to get those products. Our traditional purchasing method is let me issue you a PO [Purchase Order], you'll submit you'll ship the stuff to us and net 30 payment terms you'll get paid, right? That didn't fly. It really didn't. So when I talked about the university buying some of the swabs, it was because we had accounts with those vendors already. And they knew that we were going to pay I can make a net payment on them fairly quickly. They were okay shipping that. So it made more sense for the university to float the state that money for while the state got their payment made. There's stories and I can't say I was not involved in this one. But there was one vendor that had PPE that, you know, I have it, it is on a plane on its way here from China. It's going to whoever gives me the check first. And there's a story that somebody from Springfield was in a car, drove halfway up to Chicago and met this vendor with a check from the comptroller's office, the state comptroller's office and said, "Here's the check," and they got their PPE. That's the kind of stuff that had to happen. At one point, the other story that I'll share just because it's interesting was governor Pritzker utilize some of his resources or his I don't know if his resources or his connections to have a chartered flight, bring PPE and testing supplies into the state. I know SHIELD had to reach out to the state senator's office when we had stuff that was held up in customs at O'Hare to try and get some of our supplies released. So it's very, it really shows you the power of government in overcoming obstacles. When there is a public health crisis. By share those stories, I think they're very important to know, you know, who you can reach out to and what areas you can leverage to get assistance.

Inbar Michael 45:46

Right.

Inbar Michael 48:05

Yeah, no, thank you for sharing those stories. They're interesting mentions. I mean, given there was a state of emergency for quite a while makes sense that people would go to that extreme to get supplies. Just like interesting to hear particular story about that. The second project that you listed, you said that you investigated the feasibility of the university manufacturing swabs. So did this actualize? And then if not, are there deciding factors that ultimately determined it was not feasible?

Dan Szajna 48:37

Yeah. And so this project was one of my first forays into a broader medical testing arena, if you will. The concept of what the researcher was doing extruding this plastic out from this camera cleaning swab made sense to me, right. And from a functional perspective, you know, at one point, some of them were dropped off in my at my home, because someone else was going to pick them up. So I had some of them and I was able to look at them and feel them. And from my perspective, it felt absolutely like the same swab that you would put in someone's nose and do a sample test for the old school COVID test lay, right? And I say old school because these were the ones that actually went into the

back of your nose, not the ones we were accustomed to now. So but again, I'm not a researcher. I'm not a scientist. I'm not in the medical field. And it was pretty interesting when we had we we bought some more of these camera swabs, we had them extruded out, we had them shipped up to Department of Public Health. And literally it was "No", like that was the response from public health. And I was just like, put this make sense. We got a way to fix this. We can do this, you know, and I Just my my jaw hit the ground. And the research up there, very succinctly put it to me, you know, this is a piece of plastic that's going to go up someone's nose, we haven't tested this for sterility, we don't have it packaged, right, it just came in a big old box, right initially. And you know, what happens if we stick it in someone's nose and it breaks, or, you know, it's going in, and it breaks and, you know, puncture someone's nose, or a piece of it breaks off and, you know, great things to think through that, you know, clearly just were not on my radar. And had I had the experience now that I knew-, you know, when I started that conversation, the hurdles to design a testing device like that, the testing that needed to go into it, the clinical trials, and all that kind of stuff, it would have been a lot to overcome, in my opinion. For the universities perspective, university doesn't do that too often, right. So if you think of private industry, that has the wherewithal and are routinely doing these type of readings and such, they're much more apt to be able to get through something like that quicker. And that's why you saw a lot of the commercial test at the market sooner.

Inbar Michael 51:16

[Yeah I didn't even] consider all those factors. But that's very important, especially for the time when we would do the ones that went all the way back.

Dan Szajna 51:27

But there was a lot of time invested in that both from a researchers perspective, getting more products for him to extrude getting them sent up to public health. In the meantime, like I said, we were talking with packaging vendors, about how do we get them packaged? How do you get them sterilized? Sterilization was taking about four weeks at that point, because there was a lot of stuff people were trying to get done for the pandemic.

Inbar Michael 51:53

So it just, I mean, well, they said no, so nothing ever came out of it even with like the sterilization.

Dan Szajna 52:00

Right.

Inbar Michael 52:00

Okay. Okay. And this final project, which I think Amy probably wants to talk about, because it does mention contracts. You mentioned you were responsible for contracts to start up the SHIELD Illinois K-12 testing program throughout the state. So how many programs were initiated? And then what was the timeline?

Amy Heggemeyer 52:21

So mine was one component of an onboarding process that was managed through SHIELD Illinois. I know that they would start by having an outreach to various, both public and private schools making

that offer in the first year we were talking about. And by first year, I mean, the academic year of 2021 to 2022. That was about 625 schools first year, and that's, yeah-

Dan Szajna 52:59

I'm gonna step in Amy, that some of those were individual schools.

Amy Heggemeyer 53:03

Right.

Dan Szajna 53:04

Some of them were district.

Amy Heggemeyer 53:05

Full districts. Yeah, thank you for clarifying that. Because what we're to- when I'm saying schools, we're talking about both private charter schools. There were a few charter school systems. Then there were the majority, when we're saying schools, we're actually saying school districts. So we are talking and that was for that first year. When we're talking about that number, there are about 800 public school districts in the state of Illinois. So not all of them, but most of them and across the state. were put into place. And then I believe even Chicago public schools have a separate agreements. Unique to that.

Dan Szajna 53:51

In context, I mean, just down here, you know, you have the Champagne Unit 4 school district. You have Urbana School District, private schools, you got St. Thomas More, you got Countryside, you got Next Gen. I mean, Champagne isn't that crazy big, right?

Amy Heggemeyer 54:10

That's right.

Dan Szajna 54:11

Just off the bat, I'm naming five or six, so testing was offered to all K-12 schools throughout the state.

Amy Heggemeyer 54:20

And it was an opt in system.

Inbar Michael 54:23

Okay.

Dan Szajna 54:23

It was a matter of those schools saying, yes, we want it and then getting that agreement signed.

Amy Heggemeyer 54:31

Right.

Dan Szajna 54:32

Amy had a lot on her shoulders for that, a lot. And that's minimizing it.

Amy Heggemeyer 54:37

And there was a lot of then following up with SHIELD as they were coordinating with the school districts to get an actual grasp of who they were working with, who had signed off on particular contracts. They typically didn't sometimes people will come back with a contract and say, well, we don't agree to this. We need to change that. And that was not the case with these. It was this is the contract. This is what you accept. So it was it was always fascinating to observe where this cut- where the districts were in questioned, because like I mentioned it was across the state. But you would find like clusters in certain areas and areas where there weren't as many schools, school districts signing up. You had areas where one district in the area was signing up and another district in the area was not signing up. So that's how we saw that happening. The timeline really was as they came to us, because it was an opt in situation, SHIELD Illinois was promoting this testing, was promoting it as free testing because it was being paid through the state. Now there was and I do know that there were some school districts that had questions about that, is this truly free? What will happen at some point that down the line, we have to pay for it? And I know, that question came up from time to time with different districts. So it was a fair amount of SHIELD doing the groundwork of confirming with districts that yes, this is a fully paid process right now through the state when it comes to the public schools and that for the private schools that this is fully paid through federal funds at that time, with those first rounds, making it clear to them how easy it was for the- because the schools also had to provide a certain number of volunteers to help with the coordinating. And also convincing them that the test, the SHIELD testing specifically was a lot less time consuming than the nasal swab tests. Because I know those were common questions that came up from districts when-

Dan Szajna 56:44

Was time out of the child's day, if you're going into the gym, to do your saliva testing you're not in the classroom.

Amy Heggemeyer 56:53

So, the timeline really was contracts could come in at any point. And sometimes we even had contracts coming in in the second semester of a school year that the school district had decided to come on board and wanted to get those in place, even through the end of the school year, you would see you know, as COVID would increase at certain times, then we see an influx of more contracts coming in, as COVID started to wane a little bit more as more as vaccines came in for particularly for the elementary school age, we saw less schools. And certainly, we saw less schools getting signing up for the next school year's worth of COVID testing. Another aspect of that that was to the advantage of school districts public school districts was that there had been announcements through public health [of] emergency testing that if there was an outbreak, they could come in and do emergency testing, however, and that was offered to any district. So you did not have to sign up for a test. If there was an outbreak, they could come in and do that. However, they- the districts were informed that priority would be to schools that were already contracted because the testing systems were already there. So there was that level of incentive for different school districts for the school districts to sign up. And I think there were some that still kind of held back because they felt like if there's a if there's an emergency

people will come in, and not necessarily thinking about if there's an emergency, there's going to be five different school districts. And if three of them have contracts in place, the priority is gonna go there first.

Dan Szajna 58:32

And this is where you can see some disinformation surrounding COVID affecting the decisions. I mean, these are local school boards that have these decisions. A lot of our agreements were signed by superintendents of school districts, and if that superintendent did not believe in COVID, or saw a news article that said it's a joke or whatever, I'm not going to be signing up.

Inbar Michael 58:55

So I'm wondering, like, if you're able to give a number like approximation of how many schools are still like in contract with SHIELD like for this [school year]?

Amy Heggemeyer 59:07

I would have to look up the number right now. It is definitely less. I would have to confirm the number with you. That's what I was thinking. It's definitely I would say somewhere in the 200 to 400 range. And at this point, it is a mix of I would almost say it's more a 50/50 mix of private and public. Okay, whereas previously it was majority public school districts.

Dan Szajna 59:07

Good question.

Dan Szajna 59:33

Then again, a lot of that is tied back to the having the vaccines available. Yep. The resources associated with testing.

Amy Heggemeyer 59:41

And we have had some districts that hadn't signed up the previous year, sign up this year. So we've had newer districts join on. But several had dropped off,

Dan Szajna 59:42

I think I alluded to SHIELD having, you know, some boots on the ground with the school districts they actually have, I guess, for lack of better term, a marketing team, right? That when they find a contact, they're going out to that contact and saying, "Hey, we provide this for free. This is what we do. This is what you need to bring to the table. What are your questions," you know, and they kind of listen, and they try and respond to those at the onset of testing, right? It was those of you that are with us, we're going with you, right? So they said, We're not taking changes to our contract, you sign it as is, or you can go to the back of the line, we'll get to maybe eventually, you know, if you don't have the resources to assist in the testing and stuff, you know, I'm sorry, we can't help you right now, you got to bring something to the table on that front. So they did a lot of that legwork and weeded out a lot of the problem children that we would have had to on the contracting side ultimately. You know, and if you think our earlier contracts, Amy, we had like, school nurses signing some of them right, you know. Assistant to the principal and stuff, people who didn't even have authority to sign these things that we had to go

back and say, hey, you know, this is got to be your superintendent, this is going to be your principal who can actually sign this.

Amy Heggemeyer 1:01:13

Cause that could be a problem down the road. If parent in that school district would FOIA it and see why did the nurse at this one school sign off for the entire district?

Inbar Michael 1:01:24

Right.

Dan Szajna 1:01:26

And that was- Amy mentions FOIA, which is the Freedom of Information Act.

Amy Heggemeyer 1:01:30

I didn't know if we wanted to mention that.

Dan Szajna 1:01:32

I don't know if it's good. But I mean, you want to talk about a significant volume of work. Every thing that SHIELD has done, all their contracts, all of their purchase orders, heck, even most of their emails, requested [read it] via Freedom of Information Act request. If you think about how much work goes into entering 600 Plus contracts into a contract system, routing them for approvals, signing them, now having to go pull those 600 contracts, again, to prep them for a FOIA response. You know, and I think that's come up multiple times now is that we're over 1000 contracts. So it gets to be a little bit of work.

Inbar Michael 1:02:18

Yeah. Yes. I, you mentioned FOIA and then I was like, Oh, I actually learned about this one of my classes. Yeah.

Dan Szajna 1:02:26

It's a very powerful journalism tool. So I would strongly recommend if this is what you're getting into in your career, learn it specific to wherever you're going to be doing any kind of journalism. But it does take a significant amount of time, and resources to respond to those requests.

Inbar Michael 1:02:44

Yeah. All right. And to kind of like wrap up SHIELD questions. My final one was, did your collaboration with SHIELD change over time as the pandemic progressed? Or did it remain relatively the same? How did that look?

Dan Szajna 1:03:00

You want to start, I'll let you go.

Amy Heggemeyer 1:03:02

I was gonna say, from my end, it was, you know, it's been pretty much consistently the same contacts over at SHIELD that we've worked with over time, some different, there have been a few people that

have come and gone, but we've had our standard people that we communicate with. And from my end, a lot of it was getting some of those questions hammered out the- no a school nurse is not a is not an authorized signatory for an entire school district. So them learning what questions they need to ask when they are sending this contract out, because they have done the hard work for me of saying no, this is the contract so that I'm not having to come in negotiate, but I'm helping them get those final questions and having the we've been able to establish that relationship to check in with questions to let me- so that we could our office could reach out to them and say we see that a whole several hundred of these are getting ready to expire. What is your plan? That we see that the- your funding sources changing that they could reach out to us and say, you know, funding is changing? What does that mean for our contracts so that we can get those ready and in place to be prepared? Because they've recognized the value of having those contracts in place ready to go? How that is necessary before they show up. So-

Dan Szajna 1:04:20

Which reminds me Amy, we got to start thinking about that for our private sector schools if they are not going to expire December 31.

Amy Heggemeyer 1:04:27

December 31. Yes, yes.

Dan Szajna 1:04:32

So from my perspective, I will say at the onset of SHIELD, it was very similar to dealing with Department of Public Health and the Illinois Emergency Management Agency. There was a lot of resources and individuals reassigned to assist and work with SHIELD out the gate and to get them off the ground. Those people by now have long gone back to their original roles and some of them have been moved around within SHIELD to better suit their competencies, right. So I will say, Andrew has been my [loan] constant throughout all this, he was the first person to talk to me about it. He's still there today. And I'm really managing a lot of the organization, from my perspective, just from what I see, there's a lot of people over and I don't want to diminish any of the hard work they're doing. But from the contracting finance perspective, he's my go to guy he has been since day one, that continuity has helped immensely. Had Andrew's position changed over three or four times, I'm going back to square one teaching each of those people the exact same things, the issues that Amy just talked about, right. So that's been really helpful. The trajectory of our work with SHIELD has changed over time. Initially, it was buy boatloads of equipment and be ready. Okay, then it was okay. Now we need places to put the equipment in labs to assist us. Then it was okay, now we need to get, you know, customers on board that want to get tested. At this point, I don't want to say stuff is on cruise control. It's gonna end up biting me.

Amy Heggemeyer 1:06:23

Well, even then, I'm sorry, go on-

Dan Szajna 1:06:25

But, you know, I think a lot of what we've done in the last year has been refining our processes. We had, I want to say six or seven collection and courier service providers, I think we're down to two now.

And that it's because you know, the other ones, either they're having invoicing issues, or, you know, it wasn't enough work for them, they didn't want to be involved. So you know, we kind of consolidated on that [front]. We, they branched out to some other areas, you know, they needed a more centralized location in Illinois. So they have the Darien hub, if you will, where they warehouse stuff and they have a lot of stuff coming in out of there. So you know, taking something as simple as that, right? Seems simple. Yeah, you lease a building, that wasn't even our offices job. That was the real estate office. But then, you know, well we need trash service, we need internet service, we need phone service, you know, so then you're working through all those service agreements and such. So last year has been a lot of refining and doing better and improving their processes. At this point, from a procurement wise, I'm looking at when stuff expiring in when do we need to renew things to make sure we're maintaining one of the larger agreements that we have is with federal warehouse companies out of East Peoria. If you think about it, you know, like I said, initially, we were dropping off our PCR machines in this random [aces] dock. And you had a very nice, smart gentleman there helping unload them and keeping them safe, but also not trained warehousing not trained in warehousing. You know, testing equipment. Federal, is centrally located in the state. They are a, I believe, a federal, private contractor, that they- I don't know if I can say this, but maybe I can I don't know. They were involved in distributing out some of the early vaccine allocations and such, so we knew we could trust them. We knew that they had bandwidth to get stuff across the state timely. And they knew we knew that they knew how to handle scientific equipment without breaking it ultimately. So stuff like that, you know, at this point, we're maintaining things. We have the process in place. We know the vendors that are working well. We're not changing out too many vendors at this point. It's about you know, let's hopefully get this across the finish line wrap up testing, and then we start winding down [illegible] [Arrangements agreements].

Amy Heggemeyer 1:08:59

Yeah, that's where I'd say we are right now is looking at not you know, it's not- the pandemic is not over. But when it's shifting to endemic, what does that look like? And as Dan pointed out, that looks like us looking at what's going on with current contracts, and what is needed in the future. We have seen that in a shifting as we mentioned away less school districts, less of those and more community sites. And that does also change in terms of what types of contracts we are receiving. So even as Dan pointed out, we aren't a leasing office. But if a unit such as SHIELD is using a space temporarily, borrowing space from a fire station, a church, public health building, there is a separate rental agreement that does come through us and so that's been one that we've been working with SHIELD to help understand. Again, you can't just show up in the building. You do have to have a rea- an agreement in place before you can be there and helping them work through that process to identify where they're going to be what is a building in that particular region that is amenable to working with us with regards to contracting so that they can get set up and have a resource that is available to the public at large? not strictly a school not strictly a business.

Inbar Michael 1:10:26

Right, great. All right. So in that case, speaking of winding down, I have a couple of like final questions before we wrap things up. And the first one is that, you know, this pandemic has been quite a roller coaster of waves, variants and constantly changing guidelines. What do you think of the university's response to the evolution of the pandemic?

Dan Szajna 1:10:51

I'd say I'm proud of the work that originated out of the university for testing. And we didn't stop there. I believe some of this legwork dates back to SARS, when that was supposedly coming off. My understanding is that's why they built the concrete pad over by vet med where we ended up putting a testing lab, right. So the thought process in you know, hey, there's a big world problem going on. And the university is going to be at the forefront of solving it for ourselves, right, we're going to protect our students first. And that I think, is huge. And I hope that that I hope that the students have U of I see that. The awesome aspect of the university is we don't stop there. You know, we built out SHIELD Illinois to test across the state over 3 million tests. And that's probably going back a few months, I wouldn't be surprised if they're closer to four at this point. Every one of those tests that came back positive with somebody that hopefully is not infecting a grandparent or you know, a sibling or somebody that is immunocompromised I believe there's been research done that shows SHIELD testing at the level it was done has saved lives, hands down, no questions asked. So that's awesome. And we didn't stop there even you know, the Board of Trustees allocated or created SHIELD T3, to bring this out to the masses outside of Illinois. So the ideas that were formed in testing, and how we were able to extrapolate that out is immense when you think of the work that went into it, but again, very proud to be part of it, very proud of the university as a whole, in protecting its students and the community. And lending this knowledge to a broader good for humanity.

Amy Heggemeyer 1:12:51

I don't have much more to add to that really do appreciate that we that, as a university, this university did take strong steps right at the beginning in protecting students and protecting staff and doing remote for as long as, as they did to, to really- and set up those guidelines in place for campus to keep people as safe as possible.

Dan Szajna 1:13:21

You know, we've been so focused specifically on, you know, our response with SHIELD. As I pointed out, you know, we still kept the lights on for the system offices at the university. And there was a lot of work that went on there too, right? You know, when we pivot to going from, you know, for the most part, everyone working in person in offices, to remote in the flip of a switch, you know, there was a lot of logistics associated with that, you know, making sure everyone had, believe it or not, people still had desktop PCs, that they had to like, box up to take home with them [and stuff]. You know, so working with AITS [Administrative Information Technology Services], the technology group here to buy bulk laptops and allocating those, making sure we could ship stuff to people's home addresses when we buy them through our normal processes. That's a lot of a lot of work on top of the support of SHIELD Illinois. And I bring that up just so that that stuff doesn't get lost as well. You know, it's one thing to put your head down and focus on the pandemic and that response and I think everyone's gonna patch on the back say a good job, you know, you were part of that. But also thinking through how do you maintain what you need to do in your day to day jobs in the team and System Purchasing Support Services stepped up routinely throughout the pandemic to think through things be creative and provide solutions to our units, which I'm proud of.

Inbar Michael 1:14:45

And perhaps is like relates to that. But when another question was just what have been some of the most challenging parts of working during the pandemic and I was just thinking about the fact that you were- took on even more responsibility so I'm wondering if it was related to that, or perhaps something else that was going on,

Dan Szajna 1:15:04

I would say absolutely the volume of work that we took on was immense. And I will say that was a across the board team effort. And, you know, I focused on purchasing for SHIELD, that meant my typical purchasing activity still on the rest of the team, Amy focused on getting SHIELD contract signed, and there were some delays and some of the campus and the other unit contract [illegible]. But there was this camaraderie in it all right. Everyone on the team knew I wasn't able to do X purchase, because I was dealing with the SHIELD stuff. And no one was questioning, you know, I'm not slacking off by any means I have a lot on my plate. And they stepped up and did that. The units that had stuff that was delayed, because we were dealing with SHIELD stuff, they gave us a lot more room and a lot more bandwidth. Honestly, it- I saw a lot of these other people we've worked with it had staffing added, you know, to help address this, in hindsight I think that would have helped a little bit. But I don't know, if anyone really foresaw this getting to be the volume and the bandwidth and the scope that it is. I would have liked to have had one of the other challenge, I'd say, it would have been nicer to have a little bit more closer relationship with the campus purchase campus SHIELD group at the onset. As I said, we were really trying to mirror what they were doing. And we hit road bumps very quickly in the supply chain. And understand the reason that that was not as cohesive as I think it could have been. The campus folks were running at the speed of light with trying to get testing ramped up as well, too. But I think we had, we had communications going back and forth that I think improved for everyone. I don't know, if you recall, the initial testing, used to have that 50 ML vial. Remember that big old honking thing. You know, that's what SHIELD Illinois was going to start with. And ultimately, they weren't available [because] Urbana was buying them all up. So we re engineered our process, right to do the smaller vials with a straw or a funnel. And then subsequently, you know, campus kind of went down that path after they saw kind of what we were able to do. So I think that's an area where we could have had some improvement, staffing wise, and some more collaboration between the two. But I do think some benefits came out of, you know, being able to give each arm of SHIELD its own autonomy, to set up the program to work for them all have the same foundation, but there's some nuances to how each of us do it.

Amy Heggemeyer 1:18:11

Yeah, I wouldn't add too much more to that, again, unique to my situation. The whole time was a period of transition. So I just kind of came to- I had been in my job for a year and then SHIELD hit and then I was switching offices and then the SHIELD contracts came in. And yes, as Dan said, it was a lot of making sure the other units that I work for had their needs met while also meeting this massive need. So there would be I would essentially like- which I don't typically have to do block out a half to two thirds of a day that was strictly SHIELD contracts and then make sure to factor in some time for the others to keep them moving. And yeah, I did- for the most part, people were all very patient because everyone was in that same boat of trying to negotiate what working from home looks like. So-

Dan Szajna 1:19:08

Not just working from home, but working from home with the kid next the other [illegible] zoom calls, right?

Amy Heggemeyer 1:19:13

Yes. Working from home and also navigating the what's going on? Are you in school right now? Are you not in school right now? And yes. And then we were one of those households that got a puppy. So yeah. But it's been great. And-

Dan Szajna 1:19:30

The puppy 's been quiet the whole conversation.

Amy Heggemeyer 1:19:33

She has, I know. She's sleeping down here. Yeah. So I usually have to mute on the ready so that if she sees something.

Dan Szajna 1:19:42

I will say I'm very proud of the fact that I received a commendation from President Killeen for my support of the SHIELD Illinois testing. I have that hanging up in my office. And everyone on our team received a commendation from Dr. Avijit Ghosh, the Executive Assistant Vice President for all their support as well. And I'm very proud of that. I hope that everyone is proud of their letters. I know. It's acknowledging the volume of work that we did. And we attempted to do that, not just on the on the letter side, we also did some financial pieces throughout as best as we could. But, you know, it's, it was a lot of work. And I and I don't want that to get lost in the mix. You could tell I'm a little excited talking about it. Yeah. Because it, it was different work. And it was for a greater good that we were all putting our heads down and chugging through. But in hindsight, there were some late nights, there were some very stressful nights as well.

Inbar Michael 1:20:42

Yeah. Congratulations on that. And also, thank you to both because you did a lot of from what I hear in this interviews, so that's amazing. And just like, final thing, if you have anything you want to add that we haven't talked about, if not, that's also fine, but just wanted to ask that before we close things up,

Dan Szajna 1:21:01

You asked about changes in the trajectory of the SHIELD testing, one thing that I didn't touch upon, was, at one point, as the antigen test came on board, and were more available, there was a idea of supplementing SHIELD testing with antigen test. And, again, supply chain fun stuff, right, we actually were able to get a purchase of a couple million dollars worth of antigen test. From the second it hit our door. I think we had a check paid to the vendor within a three day process, which the bureaucracy of the university that takes a lot of levers, and I explicitly because any purchase over a million dollars requires Board of Trustee approval. So it was the first time that I had to go through an emergency board of trustee approval, I was working very closely with my colleagues and university payables to say, hey, as soon as I approve this, you got to be ready to get them paid. And that's across the board, that kind of camaraderie we had, like we had people stepping up support offices, you know, across the

board trying to help make things happen. So I don't know if I'll ever get that kind of collaboration. My career again, I hope if I do it's not because there's another pandemic, yes. All right.

Inbar Michael 1:22:29

Great, yes. Thank you for sharing that. Um, if that's all we can conclude here. Thank you so much, again, for taking time out of your day to come speak with me. I really appreciate it. And I learned a lot and this was very interesting. Yeah, thank you.

Dan Szajna 1:22:45

We appreciate- I appreciate being part of it. Like if there's any piece of information that we shared that can help down the road. I'm glad and, you know, thank you for inviting us. And I gotta say on record, thank you, Amy. She has been a godsend in this process. She joined our team because of the reorganization but she very quickly became part of the family. And really, there were, I was so focused on the purchasing stuff, she had the other piece and I was able to really put my head down and run away with what I needed to know and she was going to take care of that in definitely integral piece to this being as successful as it was.

Inbar Michael 1:23:28

Great. All right. We will end the recording here.