

# DC UNITED

**Seth Miller Gabriel** and **Judah Gluckman** are the men behind the new DC Office for P3s. They tell **Paul Jarvis** about some big plans for the nation's capital



We have 90 days to come up with guidelines.”

Seth Miller Gabriel's opening gambit on the early plans for the DC Office for P3s sounds like the start of a slightly dull, administrative-based movie.

Speaking at the start of December, the head of DC's recently formed P3 unit explained that once the guidelines being created by him and his deputy, Judah Gluckman, are established, they will be passed to the DC government for review. The legislature will then have 45 days to approve them and only after that will the P3 unit be in a position to start thinking about developing a pipeline of projects.

When we speak, Gabriel and Gluckman are less than 10 days into their new jobs and working hard to get the guidelines prepared. While in theory the organization is ready for the industry to start making its pitches for schemes, in practice the

office is not yet set up for that.

“We could get 10 unsolicited proposals coming in, but we have no way of approving them at the moment,” says Gabriel.

“We are just getting off the ground so we need to get a good foundation,” adds Gluckman. Nonetheless, they are keen for the private sector to know they are there, and want to get the industry excited about the opportunities that the unit will create in the future. “We want good engagement from the public and stakeholders,” Gluckman continues.

First of all, though, are those guidelines. Gabriel and Gluckman are determined to ensure the best experiences from around the world are incorporated into their arrangements.

“We have the good fortune of being able to learn from others,” says Gabriel. “We are looking for P3 rules around the world to find the best ones to use.”



Gabriel himself has plenty experience of the P3 industry. “I have been involved in P3s for over a decade,” he explains, “mainly advising governments, and I have been involved in capacity building.”

That makes him a good fit for the new office, as DC looks to build up its P3 expertise and become yet another major player in the market.

“This is a great opportunity for me to bring my experience into practice,” adds Gabriel. “Things are happening here that are not in other parts of the country, because of its special position.”

He points out that this gives the unit some real opportunities when it comes to things such as social infrastructure. “The difference is, the District is the city, county and state. It is one unified tax authority for the whole area. For example, in some places, school districts can be either very independent or closely linked to a county. We don’t have those sorts of problems and differences.”

Gluckman, too, refers to the unique opportunities afforded by DC’s location and its position at the heart of US government. “We don’t have those political divides,” he explains.

“It’s an opportunity to give back to the District,” he continues. “I had the opportunity to work on the mayor’s legislative staff for years and now I have the opportunity to implement that.”

Prior to his appointment to the P3 office by Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser, Gabriel was P3 advisor for Tetra Tech’s Institute for Public-Private

Partnerships (IP3). Previously he was a P3 advisor with Jacobs and KPMG, and was also deputy executive director of the National Council for Public-Private Partnerships.

“For most of my career I have been in the private sector,” he explains. He is keen to highlight this fact as confirmation that he knows what the private sector wants and needs from a potential public sector partner.

The pair hope that the combination of Gabriel’s private sector background and Gluckman’s policy development work will make them a strong team to cover all bases, in terms of creating an environment that works for both the public and private sectors.

Certainly, Gluckman’s work in developing the Public-Private Partnership Act of 2014 has helped ensure the new P3 office will be well positioned to develop a wide-ranging pipeline that could propel DC to the forefront of the US social infrastructure market.

Gabriel believes that the law itself is the P3 office’s “greatest advantage” as it looks to establish itself in the market. “The law allows P3s in a very broad range of projects, including transportation, education, housing, utilities, cultural and recreational facilities.” Stormwater schemes and green energy are also listed as having potential in the capital.

“So we are not just looking at transport. We can do anything.”

Gabriel is determined to make sure the whole of the DC area benefits – something that should help ensure the P3 program gets buy-in from around the District.

The DC area also has some significant housing needs, which Gabriel and Gluckman believe the P3 office can help to address. “We continue to experience a period of growth in DC,” says Gabriel. “The bad news is the infrastructure needs serious investment to catch up. We have a lot of aging infrastructure – some of it dates from the Civil War.”

### Small unit, big plans

Although it remains early days for the office, both Gabriel and Gluckman are confident that they will be able to work quickly to establish a pipeline once their guidelines are approved.

At present, it is just the two of them working in the office, but Gabriel argues it will not need to grow very much, even when it has a full program of work to deliver. “I cannot envision a situation where we get near the 11 that Virginia have, for example. We are following the model of a small team but we will be hiring technical and legal advisors as needed.”

He explains that the office will look to work closely with the likes of Virginia, Maryland and other local procuring agencies, as well as the federal government, to develop schemes that are suitable for all, and ensure that the relevant authority will take the lead on such projects.

“Our office will never own P3 projects,” he continues, explaining that it will merely



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facilitate developments.

As a result, Gabriel expects to see only modest growth of the unit over the next few years, possibly doubling to four people.

This small team will be sharply focused. Over the next 12 months, Gabriel wants to undertake a “robust campaign of both internal education within government and education of the public”.

Gluckman suggests that, by the end of 2016, the office may have a potential P3 pipeline in place.

But Gabriel is keen to point out that the most important thing remains to get the guidelines in place and ensure that both the public and public officials are fully behind the initiative and understand the plans before throwing out a host of deals to the private sector.

“I would rather have a fully mature and robust process, and then go to market, than have a bunch of projects that we can’t do anything with,” he says.

However, looking a little further into the crystal ball, Gabriel is hopeful that the unit will have “had the good fortune” to close its first “two or three small projects” within the next five years. “Most will be social infrastructure and these tend to be smaller, unless you bundle them together which is another option that we could use,” he adds.

Both also want to see the DC Office for P3s having established itself at the heart of DC government. “In five years’ time,” says Gluckman, “there should be trust in the office. It represents a fresh start within the District government.” **P3**



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