

What Do I Know? –What We Can Take Away from the 2019 Arizona Women Leading Government Conference

By: Thomas Prior, Marvin Andrews Fellow, Arizona State University

In 2019, I was fortunate to attend my first Arizona Women Leading Government Conference hosted in Downtown Phoenix. I was warmly welcomed by this group of over 500 community leaders, advocates, and administrators who are dedicated to improving local government. Not only did I gain takeaways on topics ranging from public finance to public speaking, but I left the conference inspired by the fantastic array of keynote speakers.

The session which had the greatest impact on me was a reverse panel titled, *What We Can Teach Men*. In this session, the roles reversed: panelists took a learning stance by asking questions and tapping into the audience's expertise. During this interactive session, we explored topics ranging from human development and hiring practices to the all too common practice of reinforcing negative workplace traits, by simply tolerating them as opposed to shutting them down. However, what stood out to me was the importance of encouraging an environment of active listening and emotional intelligence. As participants (most of whom were women) continued to share, I wondered to myself, what do I know? These admirable women who are leading Arizona communities had so much wisdom to share, so I began to put those new skills to use, and listen rather than do the sharing.

I asked for some help from seven women who are making an impact on local government about their takeaways or meaningful moments from the conference. Their feedback and insights are a testament to the amazing work of Arizona Women Leading Government.

Brandi Flores, Process & Policy Analyst, City of Surprise

“The 2019 AZ WLG Conference demonstrated the commitment of our local government to strengthen the professional skills of our female workforce. For me, the opportunity to nurture the confidence of hundreds of women was the most rewarding part of this year’s conference. It was a tangible, humbling experience and I am grateful to have been a part of it!”

Mikayla Cutlip, Marvin Andrews Fellow, Arizona State University

“As a current MPA student looking to join the local government workforce in Arizona in the next year, I benefitted from the informal networking with women I admire in our field. I spoke with transportation planners, arts center managers, and analysts who shared their experiences with me. A particularly meaningful session I attended was led by Mae Sinclair, an Organizational Development Consultant from the City of Phoenix, who led us through a career decision matrix- from that, I feel more confident tackling job applications and interviews in this next year.”

Stacey Lemos, Administrative Director/CFO, Town of Oro Valley

“For me, I enjoy attending the WLG Conference each year to connect with other women both within my own organization and in other areas of government to share our experiences, gain

insights and build my network of resources. I equally enjoy the broad variety of sessions where the speakers share valuable tips for both personal and professional growth. Especially moving for me this year was the keynote session with Phoenix Police Chief Jeri Williams, who shared her humorous, common sense, down-to-earth approach to leading the police force of the 5th largest city in the nation.”

Natalie Lewis, Deputy City Manager, City of Mesa

“One of my jobs (at times) is to be the messenger, to allow people to vent/share their concerns. I appreciated the story Chief Williams shared about how she grounds herself during these types of difficult discussions or meetings. She writes self-affirming messages, scripture, and sometimes notes from speakers too. It helps her stay centered, keep perspective about her role and to remember the mission of what she needs to do to best represent herself, the department and the City.”

Jean Moreno, Director of Organizational Performance, City of Glendale

“There was a lot of really great dialogue at the sessions this year which clearly demonstrated that regardless of gender we all bring a different set of experiences to the table that form who we are as leaders. However, the "Be IN-fluential" message was clear - embrace your authentic leadership style, get interested in people, share your humanity, and generate interdependency awareness to contribute to a rich and diverse organizational culture.”

Dr. Maria Church is a leading workplace culture expert helping local governments create innovative, communicative, and trusting cultures.

“One of the biggest impressions I had at the AZ WLG 2019 conference was the diversity of attendees. City/County Managers and interns just beginning their careers sat side-by-side, eager to learn new skills or fine tune existing ones. I also loved the donations supporting women entering the workforce. Attendees really wanted to support each others' success.”

Megan Lynn, Management Assistant to the City Manager, City of Scottsdale

“As someone in the first 10 years of their government career, it’s inspiring to be surrounded by other women in all stages of their leadership journey. Often you can get caught up in day-to-day tasks and projects, but the two days of WLG always re-lights the spark of the power and privilege of working for the government.”