

International Network of Asian Public Administrators (I-NAPA) Leader Interview



Genesis D. Gavino **Assistant to the City Manager & Chief of Staff** **City of Dallas, TX**

2018 President, I-NAPA

Yoko: What attracts you to local government?

Genesis: I think it would be more appropriate to say that I am attracted to public service which is not exclusive to local government. My innate desire and motivation to serve is rooted in my upbringing and life experiences as the eldest of three first-generation Filipino-Americans raised by a single mother. The struggles of code-switching at an early age to blend in and be more American left me with a desire to challenge, change and dismantle the status quo so people exist in spaces as themselves. As my brother's legal guardian at the age of 20, I navigated difficult and often confusing social services and thought there had to be a better way for someone to access food and shelter. As cliché as it may sound, I want to affect change. And what better way to affect change than to do so at the level at which you have the greatest access to the people, through local government. I've seen first hand how the policies, programs and overall decisions we make at City Hall directly affect the lives of those in our community.

Yoko: Can you tell me more about how you've had the opportunity to influence and affect change in your career so far?

Genesis: One of my proudest accomplishments to date has been the development and implementation of a faith-based emergency shelter for families with children in Tacoma, WA. The City partnered with faith-based organizations to utilize their large spaces such as gyms and gathering spaces to serve as temporary overnight shelters for families with children who were ineligible for services at the family shelter due to capacity or other disqualifying factors. In developing and implementing this pilot program I was able to touch every aspect of City services from understanding fire codes, building capacity, zoning laws, licensing requirements to administer care, and food handling to name a few. There wasn't an aspect of this project I did not know or understand. But the greatest reward was knowing that at least 10 families were sleeping indoors that night.

Yoko: How has working for a city in a different state been like?

Genesis: The phrase rings true...everything is bigger in Texas. I went from Tacoma, WA, a community of 250,000 residents and an organization of 3,500 employees to Dallas, TX, a community of 1.3 million residents and 13,000 employees. From homelessness, to failing infrastructure, to housing affordability, to economic development...the issues are relatively the same, just on a larger scale. It's taking a little bit of time to truly wrap my arms around the geographic expanse of the city, but I've been making an intentional effort to explore the city and familiarize myself.

Yoko: What are your future plans?

Genesis: My future holds continued public service in one way or another. My mentors are still trying to convince me that being a City Manager is in my future, and who's to say it isn't. At this time, I enjoy local government and am committed to the advancement of social justice issues through public policy, programs and services.