

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



Hyun Kim
City Manager
City of Fife, WA

Genesis: What attracts you to local government?

Hyun: I first thought about local government in college – choosing to major in public administration was an easy choice. I really wanted to have a career with a public agency to work on public policy initiatives that would garner real changes within society. Although I started my career within a municipality, my plans were set on working within a Federal agency working on broad policy matters – and I looked to make my way through a few alphabet agencies after my studies. I’ve since pivoted back to where I started – and have come around to the importance of solving pothole sized problems the right way first.

Genesis: Do I have a passion for fixing potholes?

Hyun: Absolutely. In local government we are often times working with partners and other stakeholders to improve on the very way in which we choose to live. Regardless if you are living in an unincorporated county jurisdiction or New York City, the policy implications from local government has a profound impact on the way in which we live and work as a people. I believe there is nowhere else (local government) where you can have as much of an impact on the quality of life for the people that make your local jurisdiction home. Solving small “pothole” problems may not seem meaningful – but providing exceptional public service that alleviates those foundational issues is important so that your community can tackle the transformative issues over the horizon.

As an Asian American, I took a curious path to my current role as city manager. In some ways I’ve always understood the traditional pathways to City Management through a departmental role or an analyst role – but I chose a not often traversed path through a small community in Western Wyoming. I spent ten years in various communities in Wyoming serving some amazing people! From there I took a pit stop back home in Las Vegas before taking on my most current role in Fife, Washington. As I have had the immense blessing of working in smaller communities (from 2,000 to 15,000 residents), I continue to find passion in working side by side with amazing team mates in serving my residents and businesses each day, on their behalf.

Genesis: What are some of the things you are currently doing in your position?

Hyun: I believe this profession is a calling – in that you have to have a passion for serving others first and foremost. Once you get to take on those foundational issues you can really do some fun things with your elected leaders on behalf of the community. My community today is working on a major interstate interchange project led by the City and a regional light rail line that

will fundamentally change the face of our downtown corridor. Infrastructure aside, we are also working towards prudent redevelopment efforts within our community to bring additional housing and commercial opportunities for the millions of additional residents that are moving into our region in the coming decades.

Genesis: What are your future plans?

Hyun: My immediate plans for the future are to continue to be of service to my community and become one of those city managers who gets to stay awhile in one community – I believe I have heard these managers also referred to as “unicorn managers.” For however long that may be, I look forward to the challenges ahead in our profession as we all try to navigate the growing needs of our communities with limited resources.