

I-NAPA (Cal-NAPA) Leader Spotlight



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1. (General Background) What or who inspired you to pursue a career in local government?

My primary interests through college were science and engineering-related. As I approached completion of my undergrad degree, though, I found myself drawn to making the connection between the knowledge and skills I'd gained and making a positive impact on society. So I chose grad school at UCLA in urban planning with a focus on social policy, and that got me hooked. After stints in consulting and regional governance, it became clear that local government was the place for me to make a difference.

I probably didn't realize it at the time, but in hindsight this was a no-brainer given that my parents were both small town civil servants – my dad a high school administrator and mom a librarian. But perhaps that just proves that sometimes you need to look around before settling in and focusing on what you find most rewarding.

2. (Being API) Has being an Asian Pacific Islander (API) helped develop or influence your leadership perspective or style?

Absolutely! I'm simultaneously humbled and proud to be an API in a leadership role. Humbled by the knowledge that any successes I've enjoyed were trailblazed by the sacrifices and achievements of generations before. That includes personal interactions with big name community leaders such as Norm Mineta and Dan Inouye, as well as relationships with bosses and mentors I've learned from. The values they demonstrated become engrained into our identities, such as humility and gratitude, balanced with determination, obligation, and staying in sync with the community. These are core elements of my approach to public service. On the proud side, at this point in my career I enjoy sharing my own experiences, including a few hard knocks, with young professionals finding their own path. I just need to stay mindful of not boring them with stories!

3. (Important event / Challenge) What has been the most significant experience and or challenge in your career that changed you professionally?

I've had the extraordinary fortune, and incredible support, to be able to say that every challenge I've encountered has been an opportunity. The most high profile was probably my last year as city manager and departure from the City of San Jose, which was a truly intense and challenging

experience. Coming out of an extremely difficult time for the organization and looking back at the experience, I'm happy to say that I have no regrets in my handling of the situation through all its complexity. I take pride in having been able to set the city on a positive path, and build the momentum that has carried forward since. If that description is too vague, you'll need to google it or better yet listen to a few of my stories. ;-)

4. (Tips/Inspiration) Do you have any tips for aspiring APIs in local government?

My advice is to jump in and show what you can do. Don't spend too much time telling people what you can do; show them. At the same time, I believe that communication and collaboration are the most undervalued skills in local government. So as you jump into the work, don't lose sight of the importance of letting people know what you're doing and establishing a common understanding of how it relates to what others are doing and advances the mission of the organization overall. Understanding and being able to articulate your contributions demonstrates your interest and engagement, and helps ensure you maintain a balanced perspective.

5. (Cal-NAPA related) What would you say to encourage somebody to join I-NAPA?

Along the lines of the last question, there is real value in being able to demonstrate engagement in a variety of contexts. I-NAPA provides a unique opportunity for members to connect with others locally, professionals with shared experiences and challenges. This provides a unique support network to rely on today – as we serve our communities and tackle difficult issues – as well as for the future, when the relationships you build can serve you for a lifetime.

6. (Fun) What do you like to do for fun?

Everything I do is fun; really! Away from work, I enjoy time with family. We're at the stage that one of our kids is now in college and the other nearing high school graduation, so my wife and I will be coming to grips with that next phase of life. We'll have to see what opportunities that brings!