

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



Yoko Igawa
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Monica: What attracts you to local government?

Yoko: I was always drawn to public service and this was always a part of my extracurricular activities. I wanted to make a difference and started in the sciences, but found myself interested in the policy side. I was involved in a PhD program in biomolecular science and engineering, and quickly learned that in order to sustain advancements in medical research, I needed to be able to influence the policy that determined its funding. I wanted to effect people's lives by influencing policy. In appreciating and dedicating myself to medical advancement and healthier lives for all, I gained an even deeper appreciation for a life well-lived. In the process, I realized that I value most the opportunity to influence the quality of life for people through public service, public policy, and public administration.

Monica: Tell me more about how you've had the opportunity to influence the quality of life of people through policy.

Yoko: When I started working in local government during my MPA program, I was working on the intersection between healthy living and policy. I was implementing ordinances and policies on tobacco use while working in the Parks and Recreation Department of a small city. Studies showed that the elimination of secondhand smoke is directly correlated to health benefits of a community. By helping to lead policy change around tobacco use in that city, I could directly impact the quality of life for its residents, visitors, and business community.

Monica: What led you to switch from working at a city to a JPA?

Yoko: Problems often span beyond a city and have a regional impact. I transitioned into working for a joint powers authority because it is rewarding to work on issues from a big-picture perspective. I absolutely love that I get to constantly interface with 22 cities, the County of Los Angeles, the California State legislature, and the Federal government to collaboratively address and solve tough issues that can make significant positive impacts in the region that my agency serves. Though each community has a unique way of addressing policy, I have the opportunity to help guide the bigger picture to solve problems.

Monica: What is an example of a regional problem that you are excited to be working on right now?

Yoko: With the recent passage of California's Senate Bill 1, the Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017 and the County of Los Angeles' Measure M, a comprehensive transportation investment initiative, it is a really exciting time to be working in transportation. In the Los Angeles area, the region is famous for facing congestion, and now there are both State and

County funding to improve mobility for individuals by innovatively and collaboratively creating and maintaining regional, multi-modal infrastructure that promotes public transportation, transportation network connections, walkability, and bikeability. For me, I also enjoy the fact that all of these improvements are interconnected with creating healthy, active communities because improved mobility also helps to create health, wellness, and improved quality of life in communities.

Monica: What are your future plans?

Yoko: I am interested in continuing my work regionally. Perhaps a Director role with the County, a JPA, or working at the state level. I enjoy all of the moving pieces that you deal with at a regional level and I consider myself a generalist.