

Pat Martel

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How did you get your start in public service?

After graduating from USC with a BS in Journalism and Public Affairs, I went to Washington, D.C., to work on Capitol Hill for the House Rules Committee. During my stint on Capitol Hill, I began to realize that writing about government and politics was never going to fulfill my desire to make a difference in the lives of people who felt disenfranchised and whose voices were often not heard. To do so would require working from within government to create change. So, after returning to graduate school at USC and receiving an MPA, I began a thirty-eight year public service journey in local government.

What was the driving force for you entering public service?

The motivation I had to pursue a career in local government was to help create change in society and work to improve the responsiveness of government at all levels in meeting the needs of people on an equitable basis. As a child growing up during the civil rights era in the sixties, I saw the institutionalized injustices that contributed to so many people feeling disenfranchised and without a voice to address their grievances. My commitment to public service was to provide a voice for those who felt unheard and to work toward insuring that every resident would be served in a fair and equitable manner. As an openly gay, woman of color working in public service, I've tried to bring a different perspective to my profession as well as to the people I've served.

Why did you decide to get involved with ILG?

The mission and core values of ILG align with my values and the reasons I spent my entire public service career in local government trying to make a difference. **Through collaboration we can create greater impact.** Our commitment to civic leadership and democracy helps improve the quality of life for all whom we serve. A belief that equity and inclusion are fundamental to building strong and thriving communities. All of these factors and ILG's commitment to be a champion of local government have made it easy for me to be engaged and supportive of the work being done here.

ILG provides the tools for local public agencies to address important public policy issues, facilitate community engagement, ensure ethical and transparent governance, enhance the delivery of efficient, effective, and equitable services to the public, and enhance environmental sustainability. In doing so, ILG expands the capacity of all public agencies to better serve their respective constituencies.

*“If one has courage, nothing can dim the light
 which shines from within.”*

-Maya Angelou

What does it mean to you being a person of color and/or LGBTQ in your role in local government?

As an openly gay, woman of color, I was the “first” in every position that I held in local government throughout my career. In the early years, as an emerging leader, it meant that I didn’t have role models or mentors who shared my cultural experience or perspective. On the other hand, my experience created many rich opportunities for me to connect with people in the community and staff in the organizations I served who viewed me as one of them. This was empowering for them because many had never worked with someone of my gender and cultural background in a chief executive capacity. It opened doors for me, but it also allowed me to open doors for others. It led me to become the role model and mentor for others that I never had.

What are challenges you see in your position or with local government in general?

The challenges brought on by the global pandemic have been the most significant that I’ve witnessed in my career. Even the mortgage crisis and great recession over a decade ago, which spawned the phrase “the new normal” for local government, pale in comparison to the short term and long term impacts of this pandemic. The current efforts to respond and recover from COVID-19 are now being overshadowed by the public outrage over recurring incidents of police abuse and the Black Lives Matter movement aimed at eradicating systemic racism. Our residents have united in their demand for change and look to local government leaders to be courageous in convening community dialogues to strategize how to replace the institutional structures that have allowed systemic racism to persist.

What advice do you have for the next generation and/or for diverse candidates currently working in public service or looking to serve?

Michelle Obama once said, *“As an older leader, I think an important part of leadership is stepping out of the way and making room.”*

We need to identify and support new generations of leaders with energy, passion, and innovative ideas. Those who have been in the succession line, waiting patiently to succeed us don’t want to watch us doing the same things and expecting different results. So, it is the now/next generation that is ready to take the reins and lead us, hopefully, toward a brave new world. This future generation of leadership is the most diverse and open to change that we have seen. They must be encouraged to continue their commitments to public service and being the change they want to see in the world.

