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**Times**

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

**DIVERSITY,  
EQUITY AND  
INCLUSION**

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# Taking Action on Race Dynamics—Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

By the Port Authority Office of Diversity and Inclusion

Just four years after its creation, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's



Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) was put to the test last year when the bistate agency's chairman and executive director tasked it with crafting a meaningful response to address racial equity in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder in May 2020.

By mid-June, Port Authority Chairman Kevin O'Toole and Executive Director Rick Cotton established a Leadership Steering Committee (LSC) of 10 senior executives led by Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Michael Massiah to address race dynamics within the agency, culminating in a report and action plan.

The LSC held nearly 30 employee listening sessions, engaging approximately 2,400 participants from across the agency, including union employees and members of the agency's Employee Business Resource Groups, which help foster a diverse and inclusive work environment. These sessions generated more than 600 employee comments and recommendations for improving workplace culture, diversity and fairness at the agency and its facilities.

Working groups, comprising employee volunteers, identified immediate, short- and long-term recommendations and initiatives in six key focus areas designed to advance real change:

1. evolving agency culture
2. manager and employee development
3. transparency regarding human resources practices and functions
4. police diversity and enhanced best practices
5. the Port Authority as a good community neighbor
6. demonstrating commitment through policy

The groups' work demonstrated the value and strength of diverse employee teams and leveraged the agency's dynamic and multicultural workforce to lead efforts, collaborate, elevate honest feedback and shape thought-provoking programs.

Earlier this year, LSC produced *Taking Action on Race Dynamics*, an extensive and far-reaching 25-point plan that included new standards of excellence. Among the plan's key initiatives:

- Agency management training courses and leadership development programs have new course content to train managers to mitigate unconscious bias, practice non-discriminatory behaviors and manage diverse teams to affirmatively cultivate, recognize and celebrate a welcoming and respectful work environment.
- Anti-racism training is mandatory for all represented and non-represented employees.
- All agency recruitment programs were overhauled to ensure highly qualified, diverse pools of applicants for positions ranging from entry-level to operations and maintenance, from technical professional to executive.
- Employees will receive an annual report providing all workforce demographic data.
- The Port Authority Police Department (PAPD) will implement the use of body cameras by officers, a policy generally consistent with approaches New Jersey and New York State Police departments have taken. PAPD also has implemented best practice policies in policing, including an updated use-of-force policy and new policies setting standards for providing medical assistance to arrestees. Further, the agency is completing an overhaul and upgrade to its recruitment programs to strengthen diversity in the police academy.
- Upward mobility programs for career professions, such as administrative and entry-level job categories, are underway that will have a high proportion of diverse employees and provide networking, training and mentorship for existing employees.

- A non-retaliation policy has been extended to complaints concerning workplace equity.
- An Employee Experience Advisor is charged with resolving workplace equity issues generally; supporting productive workplace practices; and creating an official office where employees can discuss concerns related to inclusion, workplace equity and respect in the workplace. The agency's performance evaluation system will include emphasis on mitigating bias, improving fairness and impartiality in the evaluation process and allowing multiple sources of feedback for employee performance evaluations.
- Employee materials will highlight the history and heritage of the diverse cultures represented at the agency and foster greater cultural understanding and dialogue, including the addition of Juneteenth as a permanent agency holiday. A virtual cultural library highlights the diverse heritage of employees and new policy enhancements support employees' ability to express their socio-political views appropriately outside work.
- Ongoing educational series about race, transportation and economics ensure that agency executives and employees with decisionmaking roles are well informed about race dynamics and the socioeconomic context within the agency's service region.
- Employee forums on the agency's community outreach programs now seek employee suggestions and feedback to improve or strengthen existing efforts.
- A recently issued guide to a respectful workplace creates a blueprint for acceptable workplace behavior and assures all employees feel valued.

"Since releasing the report, we have put into place several initiatives that will help guide the agency in achieving the goal of a truly dynamic, forward looking, diverse and inclusive workplace," Massiah said. "We want all of our employees to feel empowered and be supported so that they can be their authentic selves in the workplace."

In addition to helping foster a more inclusive and responsive internal work environment, ODI is steadfastly committed to Title VI and Title VII compliance responsibilities, as well as cultivating greater opportunities for Minority and Women-owned Businesses (MWBs) through its Business Division.

The Business Diversity and Inclusion Division has best practice programs regarding certification, compliance and capacity building. Novel capacity building programs include the A&E Principal Academy, which provides architecture and engineering owners' special business and financial executive management programs. Businesses also can take advantage of technical support with the engineering department, which provides a university-based construction management program to improve operations. This set of business opportunity and engagement programs have significant socioeconomic impact on the MWBE community and diverse neighborhoods surrounding the agency's facilities.

The results: An extraordinary record in the Port Authority's most recent projects. Contracts awarded to certified MWBE firms at the LGA Redevelopment Program exceed \$1.8 billion, the largest for any public-private partnership project. And, more than \$450 million has been awarded to MWBEs for EWR Terminal A & Consolidated Rental Car Facility/ Parking Garage projects.

To read *Taking Action on Race Dynamics*, go to <https://www.panynj.gov/port-authority/en/press-room/press-release-archives/2021-press-releases/port-authority-releases-new-25-point-plan.html>

*For more information, contact Pamela Mendoza, project manager for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, at [pmendoza@panynj.gov](mailto:pmendoza@panynj.gov).*

# DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION, AND RE-ENTRY INTO THE WORKFORCE: Timing Is Everything!

By Terry Ross

I am a lifelong diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practitioner, involved with these topics long before they emerged into a field. It has been almost a year and a half since I last worked face-to-face with colleagues. As we transition from virtual settings back to in-person settings, I have been asking: What does this major re-entry mean for DEI? I expect we will find that a lot of new people are now interested in it, that many organizations have created positions dedicated to it and that our workplaces have renewed interest in demonstrating their commitment to it.

## The Context of Change

So much has transpired since we last worked face-to-face, most likely in Spring 2020. In a sense, we have experienced a societal DEI growth spurt. The videotaped murder of George Floyd propelled protests in cities across the country. COVID-19 exposed us to the reality of “pre-existing conditions” that many people have dealt with for a long, long time. “Cancel Culture” and “Critical Race Theory” have become household concepts. The televised economic struggles of so many people from all walks of life, the continued shooting of unarmed people of color by the police and unprovoked attacks toward Asian, LGBTQ+, Jewish people and others have awakened many to DEI’s importance.

## DEI Newbies

*How do I get started in DEI?* More friends, colleagues and strangers have asked me that question in the last 18 months than the number who have in the last 18 years. It has been incredibly exciting...and disappointing. Some got mad that I do not have a magical checklist to accommodate their “wokeness.” Others genuinely wanted to be an ally but did not know where to start. After too many frustrating conversations, I learned that it is more effective to teach them how to fish than to give them the fish. I no longer do their work for them. Instead, I encourage them to answer the following questions in writing before embarking on the journey.

- *What makes you want to get involved in DEI?*
- *Why weren’t you involved in DEI before?*
- *What foundational work have you done to prepare for your DEI journey?*

- *What do you have to offer to DEI during your journey?*
- *What are your hopes and aspirations for DEI going forward?*

Once they have answered these questions, we can move forward in this work better, *together*. It is important to meet people where they are and help them find the right tools to augment their journeys.

## Organizational Change

Even more exciting than people committing to DEI are the organizations doing it. Organizational commitment often involves creating DEI positions, providing DEI resources and/or going deeper into existing efforts. The biggest mistake that many organizations make is moving too fast to prove they are committed, without doing the necessary foundational work. This often leads to big mistakes at the beginning and the need to start over. Most organizations already are populated with people who can help move them forward. Yet the organizations themselves are inadequate at finding and involving them in this important work. Right now, demonstrating organizational listening and community building are far more important than creating mission statements and hosting an unconscious bias workshop.

For many organizations, the most important DEI task right now is finding the right path to take for its commitment. That is an art more than it is a science. DEI involves dealing with all types of people and it is not a monolith where one size fits all. Rather, DEI is a mosaic full of strategies and objectives that could work. Identifying the right path for an organization is like finding the right diet for a person: All diets work if we stay on them. Finding the path we can *maintain* is more important than finding the *perfect* one.

## The Road Ahead

As we re-enter our workplaces, many of us will find DEI to be front and center. That excites me! It is my hope that during this unprecedented time of commitment, ASPA members, Chapters and Sections can share advice with each other and for everyone on this journey. To support this effort, I will be writing a series of articles—both here and

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# Ethical Dilemmas and the Challenge of Social Equity

By James Ward



As we approach a racial reckoning in America—with the realization of Juneteenth as a national holiday, the sobering reaction to George Floyd’s murder by former Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin and the gut-wrenching atrocity of the Tulsa Massacre—we also must confront the reality of systemic racism in our institutions and frameworks. Just one example: State voting reform laws enacted after electoral victories of political candidates favored by citizens of color.

Such measures are nothing new. Similar attitudes were present in the aftermath of the American Civil War, bringing an end to Reconstruction and a brief period of time during which African Americans were successful in electing black and white progressives to political office. The Hays Compromise of 1877, a deal between the two political parties that ended Reconstruction and allowed Rutherford B. Hayes and Republicans to remain in the White House, resulted in federal troops withdrawing from the South, white supremacy returning with a vengeance and pro-Confederate Democrats reasserting control of institutions and frameworks. *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court decision upholding racial segregation, was the final nail in the coffin as the federal government was no longer committed to promoting racial equality under the law. That remained the case until the second era of reconstruction began in the 1960s.

More recently, the January 6 insurrection by those who believe the 2020 election was stolen, law enforcement members benefiting from qualified immunity after killing unarmed black suspects and non-compliance with the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause for same-sex couples based on religious beliefs all beg for an examination of pluralist (politically institutionalized competing ideas and interests) liberal ethics.

Public ethics in the United States is largely anti-foundational, to the extent that public discourse reflects interest-based political competition, conflict and compromise; there is no consensus on any universal obligation to address or redress historical imbalances related to discrimination and social inequity. The closest that Western liberal theory gets to recognizing moral foundations is through

terms and outcomes of political discourse. In other words, pluralist systems make for pluralist ethics; common ground can only be found in negotiation and compromise, if at all. Contractarian and communicative ethics specifically tie moral agency to the tentative consensus that might follow. As far as moral agency, even within the context of religious beliefs and institutions (historically a central force in the development of American social mores), major differences exist depending on context. As a result, institutional discrimination continues due to persisting norms.

The critical legal studies movement stresses that the legal profession is naturally political, as are adjudicatory and regulatory processes. It also shows the ethical impact of “moral neutrality”; as an institution, law cannot break through bounds set by politics. One example is when the Supreme Court stripped the pre-clearance provision of the Voting Rights Act almost 10 years ago. The only remedy is political, through activism, electoral pressures and evolving public opinion.

The failure to reach consensus and the pressure to reach it can both lead to moral error and injury. That is where normative codes and stated institutional commitments can make a positive difference. Alford and Friedland defined the pluralist perspective in Western liberal theory as one concerned with the makeup of political institutions from multiple public functions, roles and values. They cast pluralism as the finger on the balance scale, tipping value dilemmas from institutional interests toward group ones. However, the picture that emerges is one of institutional stasis and a political system incapable of engaging or enabling moral commitments.

Organizational culture always will determine how actions are to be interpreted relative to an entity’s goals and needs. Yet Cooper suggests that expectations of public office can be met only if there is an inclusive culture conforming to them. Public ethics needs to become more concerned with actualizing such values as social equity by examining the conditions that make realizing moral and public obligation possible. The institutional and regulatory limits on public office are as likely to hamstring individual moral commitment as to strengthen it.

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The background is a sunburst pattern of colorful triangular segments radiating from the center. The colors include shades of blue, red, yellow, green, orange, and pink, separated by thin grey lines. In the center is a white circle with a thick black border and a thin brown inner border. Inside this circle, the text is written in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

**Promoting  
Diversity,  
Equity and  
Inclusion at the  
Local Level**



# PROFILES OF DEI OFFICES

The events of the past few years—and even long before—have shone a fresh light on the need for a greater institutionalization of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in public service work. This is the case across our governmental institutions, but it is especially true at the local level. Some cities presciently formed offices to support this focus almost a decade ago, while others have established them more recently, with more and more announcing their plans every month.

What do DEI offices do? What are their priorities? How do they interface with other departments across government? How do they engage with stakeholders? City DEI directors and managers answered these questions during a 2021 Annual Conference panel. This edition of *PA TIMES* looks at five of those individuals and the work they lead and facilitate. These profiles showcase the importance of this work, the directors' dedication to the mission and the intended impact these efforts will have to improve citizens' quality of life.

## Brion Oaks

*Brion Oaks, Austin's first chief equity officer, is responsible for working with city leadership and local communities to create an equity framework and facilitate dialogue and organizational practices to support the development and adoption of equity as a shared value. He is the technical expert in addressing equity as it is applied to citywide policies, programs, practices and budget decisions with an overall vision to make Austin the most livable city for ALL. He previously served as vice president of health equity for the American Heart Association's southwest affiliate, where he oversaw its department dedicated to improving cardiovascular health for vulnerable populations and reducing disparities in the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease. Oaks received his BS from the University of Houston and MPA from Texas State University. He can be reached at [brion.oaks@austintexas.gov](mailto:brion.oaks@austintexas.gov).*



**What brought you to DEI work? And, talk about how your position came to be and how your office fits within the larger city government framework.**

I got into this field because I am a public health advocate at heart. I lost my dad to congestive heart failure when he was only 49 years old, which started my interest in chronic disease and led to my nearly 15 years with the American Heart Association. A lot of my work centered on analyzing the social determinants of health—who had access to health care?—and health disparities. The deeper you dive into that field, the more you understand that someone's social and physical environment is probably the most influential predictor of their health outcomes. Go a step further and look at cities' histories and the role that institutional racism plays in their growth and development. It is no longer a surprise to see life expectancy differences. In my role, I can be committed to the thing I am most passionate about: Making sure people live healthy lives.

In 2016, Austin began its journey with establishing an equity office, shortly after a report from the Martin Prosperity Institute listed it as the most economically segregated city in the United States. That same year, we were listed as one of the best places to live in America and won an award for being the most family friendly city. But, our poverty rates showed Latino and Black children were five and seven times more likely to live in poverty. Our communities of color began to ask: Are we truly the best place to live when we have such alarming racial disparities? They convinced the mayor and city council to pass a resolution that established our office. Our charge is to bring leadership and guidance around racial equity and question how we disrupt the systems that have not traditionally served or met the needs of our communities of color.

**What are the greatest challenges that you and your office have faced recently?**

The pandemic exposed how severe racial inequity was in Austin, which was manifested in almost every way. At the beginning of the COVID-19 response, our equity office wedged our way into the city's emergency operations center because we knew racial equity was going to play a part in every facet of how we were trying to respond. We looked at every angle, even down to setting up our testing centers and our concerns that all of our centers were drive-through. We had conversations about zero-car households and populations that were more dependent on public transportation to get to the centers. Geographically, our city is racially divided, east vs. west: Neighborhoods on the east side of Austin are predominately communities of color and those on the west side are predominately white. Most of our medical infrastructure is in the west side; we did not even have a lot of access to private providers on the east side. So, how do we account for that related to testing? The same question applied to vaccine access.

Related to the economic recovery, most people considered essential workers and required to continue to go into work were people of color; they also would bear the most risk for COVID. It was a constant challenge to look at everything we had to do to stand up as a city. Our office often works to position ourselves around getting in front of issues, instead of always having to respond. Given that nothing like COVID-19 had happened before, we were trying to respond, course-correct and deal with equity issues after the fact. As we have gone through it, it has helped our staff, especially those responding to crises and emergencies, to see the intersection of racial equity and response design. It has been a tough year, but I think it has made us better as a city overall.

**Has your office engaged in truth and (re)conciliation work to acknowledge historical racial injustices in your communities? If so, what has your experience with those initiatives been like?**

Recently, our council passed a resolution to begin research in this area. We are working with two universities to analyze city land use policy as an entry point to understand the cost of the impact to our black community. One important area we are examining is some of the United Nations’ models; for true reconciliation to happen, you not only have to look at compensating for the loss but also to ensure the abuse stops. As cities get into this area, all adverse impacts to communities of color have to cease and desist, and that is a big body of work. True healing cannot happen until we stop harming.

**To what extent are your city’s diversity and inclusion approaches relevant to surrounding counties? Do you coordinate with your county government/ community, especially if your city is the county seat?**

It depends on the issue. During COVID-19, we have coordinated with the county because our emergency operations center is a city-county joint effort. But, there are other things we do as a city for which we are not aligned with the county. We want to promote and export our equity work to other institutions, including our school district, which has an equity officer, and some of our universities. We try to collaborate and connect locally but there is not a formal way to work with the county.

**How do you deal with structural inequalities? What types of initiatives are underway to address them?**

This is the foundation of our office. We use a racial equity assessment tool at the department level; it is part of a continuous improvement process. Our city’s departments perform an assessment and we perform a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis. From there, the departments develop action plans and come back two years later to assess again. It is a journey. It is ongoing work to dig continuously into our policies, practices, procedures and personnel around how we can improve, and then disrupt some of the things we do and imagine new ways to do them.

We also are working to shift our thinking from “fixing people” to “fixing systems.” Our city’s history is rooted in responding to racial inequities in our communities with a program. We now are pushing back and asking: Out of existing resources, opportunities and bodies of work, how can they be utilized better—rather than trying to stand up a new service or program? We want to dissect what has

been designed and built and learn why it is falling short. What about us has produced this inequity over the years and in a particular area? Some of these new efforts come from introducing tools that can help us do this, but we also spend a lot of time training and developing staff to provide them with the skills to do this work. This is a culture change for our city. In partnership with the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, we host a monthly “undoing racism” workshop for our city staff and community members to better see and understand the complexities of racism. How does it manifest itself in systems? What is the history around the design of institutions in this nation? Who were the systems built to serve, who were they built not to serve and who they were built to punish?

**Some—even many—people will revert to their standard attitudes toward these efforts eventually. What are some things you have done to respond to this reality?**

We have a lot of hard conversations on a daily basis. Austin is interesting because it is seen as a very progressive and liberal city, which you would think would make this work easier. But, it is counterintuitive. We work with a lot of people who have the language around this body of work; when it comes to putting it into action, however, there often is a gap to the goal.

As a result, we feel like we are on autopilot. We have a conversation around why it is important to lead with racial equity on a daily basis. In a “liberal” city, where people are passionate about a lot of identities and social circumstances, there is a desire to take other -isms over racism. We have to have this conversation around what the data tell us continuously and constantly provide examples for why it is important to center race in this work around equity. Otherwise, we are never going to have the impact that we want to have as a city. That is our biggest daily challenge.

We also talk a lot about our history and encourage people to sit with that history and the city’s decisions and policies, understanding the context for why we see what we see today. Often, you will see that a policy was rooted in some racialized decisions. We talk about Austin’s 1928 master plan, as well, which segregated our city and encouraged very racist decisions from that moment onward: Who has what and how was land used? Those decisions predict so much of what we see today.

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## Stefanie Bowers

*Stefanie Bowers is director of equity and human rights coordinator for the City of Iowa City. Her experience focuses on providing strategies, planning, facilitation and development of government work on racial equity and engagement for the present and long term. Her work includes enforcement and protection of Iowa City's Human Rights Ordinance. Bowers graduated from the University of Iowa with a BA and holds a JD from the University of Iowa College of Law. She can be reached at stefanie-bowers@iowa-city.org.*



### **What brought you to DEI work? And, talk about how your position came to be and how your office fits within the larger city government framework.**

Iowa City began to look at an Office of Equity and Human Rights through community-led initiatives. We started looking at racial equity in 2012, the year Trevon Martin was murdered in Florida. Like many others across the country, community members reacted and expected more from their local government in advancing equity at the municipal level. In response, the city council established an ad hoc diversity committee, which met for approximately one year and developed a set of recommendations on ways the City could advance this work. One was to create the Office of Equity and Human Rights.

Using racial equity toolkits and resources that Portland made available to acquaint ourselves with them, we began to apply an equity lens to review our policies, services and programs. The advisory committee also asked City staff to produce a racial report card each year, looking at hiring, City board and commission members' demographics, the number of race-based complaints received and police data for adult and youth arrests and charges. Since 2013, the council has prioritized advancing racial equity as one of its strategic goals.

I began my first position in Iowa City in 2006 as human rights coordinator. At that time, I was responsible for enforcing local anti-discrimination laws. In 2012, that position advanced to being equity director.

### **What are the greatest challenges that you and your office have faced recently?**

Operationalizing racial equity and making it part of daily practices, a challenge we have experienced since our work began.

Fortunately for my office, the county handles public health, so Iowa City did not have some of the burdens that other communities face related to COVID. But, the pandemic certainly has affected our ability to engage in outreach and conversations with our community. If you want to improve, you have to talk with community members and find the barriers so you can identify ways to mitigate or remove them. COVID became a challenge to us having those conversations. Prior to winter, we could use city parks and socially distance, but once winter hits in Iowa, we have almost four months of cold weather and it is not as easy to gather.

### **As 2021 moves along and many return to their "normal" or longstanding attitudes toward DEI efforts, how has your office responded?**

This is common and something you see in this type of work. One thing that assisted us with City staff was when the council made equity part of its strategic plan and the city manager made it a priority. Leadership plays a very important role in making it clear to folks that this is something that is expected of them if they are working for the city.

Additionally, HR added questions to staff's yearly evaluations related to what they have done to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in their role with the city. When something becomes part of a performance evaluation, it encourages reasonable people to do things to ensure that they can point to their contributions when they are evaluated. Our job descriptions also mention the city's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion; when we conduct interviews, we ask candidates about what that means to them and how they think they can advance those initiatives if selected to work for the city.

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# Nefertiri Sickout



*Nefertiri Sickout is chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer for the City of Philadelphia, where she leads the Mayor’s Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. She joined the Mayor’s Office in August 2016, serving initially as assistant diversity and inclusion officer, and later as deputy diversity and inclusion officer. She previously worked at Pepper Hamilton LLP, where she practiced law as a commercial litigation associate, handling complex contract litigation matters involving business and partnership disputes. Sickout earned a BA from Clark Atlanta University, an MA from George Washington University, a master’s degree in developmental psychology from Teachers College, Columbia University and a JD from Villanova University School of Law. She can be reached at Nefertiri.Sickout@Phila.gov.*

**What brought you to DEI work? And, talk about how your position came to be and how your office fits within the larger city government framework.**

I was born in Queens, New York and raised in Atlanta, Georgia by a single mother and extended family. Growing up in the early 1980s, I saw firsthand how the crack epidemic ravaged my community. Each day, on my five-block walk to elementary school, I passed crack houses and sex workers, saw drug paraphernalia litter the streets and wondered why my community was poor and others were not. I also understood that although I lived in an economically depressed area, my family was a buffer to those circumstances and served as my foundation to a different life trajectory. However, that childhood experience grounded my ambitions so that my career aspirations have focused on working to disrupt levers of entrenched poverty or systemic unfairness. Where a child is born, and to whom they are born, does not need to determine their life trajectory, foreclosing positive life opportunities and outcomes.

The beginning of my career centered on childhood well-being, including nonprofit experience and graduate degrees in education and psychology. I attended law school, as well, to develop systemic advocacy skills and worked at a large law firm practicing commercial litigation, which taught me how to operate successfully under pressure with little room for mistakes. I joined Mayor James Kenney’s administration in 2016 and am fortunate to serve the public in a formal diversity, equity and inclusion role.

In 2016, Mayor Kenney signed an executive order (<https://www.phila.gov/ExecutiveOrders/Executive%20Orders/eo0116.pdf>) establishing the city’s inaugural chief diversity and inclusion officer (CDIO) role within the Office of the Mayor. The role included strengthening diversity and inclusion within the city’s workforce, including hiring, promotion and retention, to reflect the diversity

within Philadelphia’s communities; providing strategic oversight for robust participation of minority-, women- and disabled-owned businesses in city contracts; increasing representation of minorities and women in the construction industry; implementing diversity and inclusion training programs; and advancing a citywide diversity and inclusion strategic agenda. I joined the office as assistant research and policy officer, later becoming deputy diversity and inclusion officer. I was recently appointed into the chief role, having served in it in an “acting” position.

In early 2020, Mayor Kenney signed another executive order ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-151YB\\_oye9CFHqSD6YuhhXoEmNsifke/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-151YB_oye9CFHqSD6YuhhXoEmNsifke/view)) to rename the office to include “Equity” in its title. It also established formal oversight for this office over the Mayor’s Office of LGBT Affairs and Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities and mandated diversity, equity and inclusion training for all supervisors and managers. Further, it expanded the office’s work by launching a citywide workforce diversity, equity and inclusion strategy that requires annual departmental strategic plans on employment-related DEI efforts and formalized the city’s racial equity strategy, requiring all departments under the mayor’s authority to assess key policies and practices for opportunities to advance racial equity and develop equity action plans.

**How do you deal with structural inequalities? What types of initiatives are underway to address them?**

Upon joining the Kenney Administration, I was fortunate to lead a team participating in Racial Equity Here (<https://livingcities.org/resources/353-racial-equity-here-learning-report-lessons-from-5-cities-operationalizing-racial-equity/>), an initiative of Living Cities and the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). The initiative provided two years of resources and training to five U.S. cities as part of a national movement of governments

working to dismantle institutional racism, eliminate racial disparities and improve outcomes for all. The initial equity pilot work and capacity building culminated in the city's formal racial equity strategy ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mD\\_nFigDnjNe8cf1N3dVGt4I6VHNNOf/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mD_nFigDnjNe8cf1N3dVGt4I6VHNNOf/view)).

In October 2020, we began implementing an expanded framework for all departments to drive more equitable outcomes for City employees and communities of color. My office leads this strategy in partnership with other departments. All departments reporting to the mayor will prepare an annual plan on their strategic efforts to achieve real advancement toward greater representation of and participation by employees of color and other historically marginalized and underrepresented groups in our workforce. The annual plans will contain three core sections:

1. workforce planning, including forecasting hiring opportunities in the exempt workforce and revising policies and procedures that serve as institutional barriers to more equitable employment outcomes
2. diverse recruitment, focusing on targeted efforts for recruitment from a diverse and qualified group of potential applicants, designed to secure a high performing workforce drawn from all segments of the population
3. workforce inclusion, including a plan for developing a supportive, welcoming and inclusive work environment, enabling employees to contribute their full potential and develop professionally

Achieving a workforce that is diverse, inclusive and equitable means our workforce reflects the diversity of communities we serve across the breadth (functions) and depth (hierarchy) of city government. The resulting increase in the diversity of experience and constructive engagement from employees is intended to improve service delivery, employee selection and productivity, which are critical for the City of Philadelphia to best serve its residents and communities.

Under the City's racial equity strategy, which encompasses the workforce strategy, all departments reporting to the mayor will be required to conduct racial equity assessments and create action plans by the end of 2023. Departments are completing this work in phases over three fiscal years, beginning with a first cohort of 10 departments in FY21. In consultation with expert consultants, departments completing the FY21 cohort will:

- Learn and internalize an anti-racist results-based methodology to improve our communities' conditions.
- Identify and solve for culture change required internally and with communities.
- Build the "muscle" to continuously incorporate a set of principles into organizational work so it more contributes to racial equity.
- Have a set of customized priority strategies for implementation based on departmental capacity, vision and need, consistent with the mayor's directive for a racially equitable Philadelphia.
- Serve as models for other departments challenged by implementing racial equity-focused work in a way that produces results.

Departments' short-term efforts focus on improving service delivery, internal practices and community engagement, with a long-term goal of closing gaps in outcomes so race no longer predicts a person's success and outcomes are improved for all.

In addition, the City's budget office has institutionalized racial equity in the annual budget process, requiring each department to reflect on how its budget impacts racial equity. There are racial equity questions in the budget forms for existing budgets, new spending and budget cuts, partially to help departments identify and understand disproportionate disadvantages that individual decisions might confer on various communities. Moreover, in annual budget meetings with departments, the budget office prioritizes having departments reflect on their procurement goals for advancing more inclusive contracting outcomes with minority- and women-owned businesses.

### What are the greatest challenges that you and your office have faced recently?

This work takes time, commitment and collaboration. I would highlight three challenges in recent years. First, to effectively advance diversity, equity and inclusion goals, both within and outside government, collaboration is necessary. The efforts to dismantle institutional and structural racism cannot fall to a single individual or office. They take a collective commitment and effort across an organization. Many institutions still see the work through compartments within certain people or units, making it very difficult to leverage opportunities, resources and thought partnership for a truly effective strategy. The City has made important progress and equity is a core operating principle in many departments and across many

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# Markisha Smith

*Markisha Smith is director of the Office of Equity and Human Rights for the City of Portland, Oregon. Her work focuses on best practices in equity, diversity and inclusion; culturally responsive practices; and closing opportunity/access/belief gaps for historically and currently marginalized groups across the state. Prior to this role, she served as director for the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at the Oregon Department of Education. Smith also was director of undergraduate teacher education at Warner Pacific College; assistant professor at Western Oregon University and Northern Michigan University; and high school English teacher in Houston, Texas. She can be reached at [markisha.smith@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:markisha.smith@portlandoregon.gov).*



**What brought you to DEI work? And, talk about how your position came to be and how your office fits within the larger city government framework.**

I began my career as an educator: I was a high school English teacher in Houston, Texas and deeply involved in the education system. Beyond the fact that I am a black woman and have experienced the world through that lens, that role sparked an interest in what was happening in our systems—particularly our education systems. In higher education, I taught college courses in Michigan and then Oregon, focusing on equity and racial justice and preparing educators for the education system. I kept thinking there was something more—another way—that I could influence these conversations. I took a job at the Department of Education in Salem, Oregon as director for the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and had an opportunity to see, from a legislative standpoint, how policy has a tremendous impact on the students and communities we serve. I had the opportunity to come to Portland in 2019. I had been consulting and learned that my work did not only have to be in education, but could cross sectors. I took the job with City of Portland and have been excited to be a part of what is happening here.

The office was created through a city ordinance in 2011 and a lot of tools and resources were developed with a very internal focus. Part of our work looks at our systems, policies and practices and their impact on the communities we serve. We have been working on our strategic plan, incorporating how our “inside” has to be heavily influenced by our “outside.” In January 2021, my role expanded to be part of the mayor’s leadership team; I serve as special advisor on issues of racial justice and equity. We have a strong foundation and continue to build on it.

**What are the greatest challenges that you and your office have faced recently?**

We learned a lot through how we organized our emergency response. We even saw it with the CARES Act funding and in developing toolkits and guidance on how we distributed resources into communities and directly to individuals and families who were and continue to be in desperate need.

Another challenge has been interesting for me. A colleague recently said, “Now that we’re in a post-racial justice era...” I immediately went into the Zoom chat to address this statement. For some, the activities of 2020 were a moment in time; they were not seen as something that has been “a moment” for a really long time and continues to be a challenge. I often struggle with how to combat others’ capacity to forget the work we do or the instinct to “check the box” and call it “done.” My office is dedicated to ensuring the work we are doing continues to be top of mind. We very intentionally center race and continue to remind people that this has been a really interesting challenge. The work also is a reminder around privilege and how some can turn that on and off. Along with COVID, racism and anti-blackness are pandemics. That reminder has continued to present opportunities for how we engage and perform across our city.

**As 2021 moves along and many return to their “normal” or longstanding attitudes toward DEI efforts, how has your office responded?**

In June 2020, we adopted new core values for the City of Portland. Two are anti-racism and equity. When I encounter resistant colleagues, I remind them of the core values we have adopted as a city and of all the ways we have attempted to institutionalize our commitment to equity. I engage in real conversations with people. And, I am unapologetic: We have core values and are committed to doing things differently, disrupting

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## Krystal Reyes

*A native of Moline, Illinois, Krystal Reyes is chief resilience officer in the Mayor's Office of Resilience and Equity for the City of Tulsa. Previously, she was director of community engagement for the New York City Health Department's Division of Family and Child Health. She also served as executive director of the Hunts Point Alliance for Children in Bronx, New York and senior adviser for Children and Family Services in the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, New York City. Reyes attended New York University, where she earned a BA and an MPA. She can be reached at [kreyes@cityoftulsa.org](mailto:kreyes@cityoftulsa.org).*



### **What brought you to DEI work? And, talk about how your position came to be and how your office fits within the larger city government framework.**

A chief resilience officer is tasked with implementing a resilience strategy. There are about 25 of us across the United States and almost 90 worldwide. Tulsa's resilience strategy was conceived in 2016 and launched in 2018, with racial equity as our core resilience challenge. This focus was developed through a series of community conversations and community engagement. More than 2,000 people were involved in the plan, which contains 41 programs, policies, practice changes and events we think will make Tulsa a more resilient, equitable and inclusive city. We received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation through its "100 Resilient Cities" initiative, as well. I lead the Mayor's Office of Resilience and Equity, tasked with implementing the strategy.

I have a background in nonprofit management and have worked in mayors' offices previously. Tulsa was on my radar but when I learned it had released a strategy focused on resilience and racial equity, named historical and root causes of the inequity we see today and had assembled a plan for addressing it, I was in! I came to Tulsa to work on this, lead that office and implement that plan.

### **What are the greatest challenges that you and your office have faced recently?**

In Tulsa, our county health department is the lead for addressing COVID, but our mayor and county health department director work together very closely. We partnered well in addressing many of the challenges that arose during the pandemic. We were one of a few cities piloting efforts to increase testing at the very beginning; we centered equity and received some resources to break down barriers to testing and language accessibility. We have community health workers who speak our city's community languages—English, Spanish, Burmese and Zomi—and are available via a variety of communications channels at any time and can go to people's locations to provide tests.

When we looked at who was disproportionately affected by cases, our Latino community was the hardest hit. It represents around 14 percent of the county population but, at one point, about 30 percent of COVID cases. We formed a committee, comprising our Hispanic commission, health department, my office and a collective impact program, that meets bi-weekly to identify ways to create partnerships, ease burdens around testing and vaccines and build bridges. We partner with local radio stations to host Facebook live events in Spanish and have Spanish-speaking doctors to support that work.

We also have focused on the economic fallout and are launching a municipal-level free financial counseling program. We worked with community partners on the initiative as members of our community felt financial shocks from layoffs, furloughs and whole industries shutting down.

All of our work is based on data, which we use to locate inequities and model programs. Each year, we release an equality indicators report looking at data across justice, education, public health, services, housing and economic opportunities vis-a-vis how different groups are faring. The indicators also help us maintain a practice to break things down by race and ethnicity, which helps drive much of our work.

### **How do you deal with structural inequalities? What types of initiatives are underway to address them?**

We work closely with our chief of economic development on economic incentive policies to provide tax incentives, provide public funding for land development and bring jobs to the city. We have revised some policies and added others related to "banning the box" to support those involved in the justice system, as well as internationally trained immigrants.

We have been very intentional in how we can apply an equity lens and, more generally, how our economic development entities have engaged. They are very decentralized and have redundancies



in staff, so our chief of economic development went through a strategic planning process and consolidated them. Racial equity and shared prosperity now are core to the mission within our economic development authority.

**The work you do is absolutely critical, but also extraordinarily difficult. How do find the energy and will to keep this work going and inspire others to join you?**

When you are doing this work, it is important to remember how the work has a direct impact, from “policy” to “protocol” change. If someone was able to open a bank account or attend a city council meeting because there was an interpreter there—I have to be very intentional in remembering those things and seeking them out. That is the “why” for me: Helping make this city a welcoming place where people feel safe. That is a great joy to me.

BRION OAKS

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**The work you do is absolutely critical, but also extraordinarily difficult. How do find the energy and will to keep this work going and inspire others to join you?**

We love laughter. I have an amazing, wonderful team. We have a lot of tough meetings and conversations. But, at the end of the day, we jump on Zoom and laugh and tell jokes. It is a form of therapy for how to deal with the stress and trauma around the job and role. We spend a lot of time supporting each other.

STEFANIE BOWERS

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**The work you do is absolutely critical, but also extraordinarily difficult. How do find the energy and will to keep this work going and inspire others to join you?**

One of the things that keeps me motivated is hearing what other communities are doing. Peers’ support is extremely important for both motivation and learning. There is so much overlap, even though we may be in different spaces. What is seen in one community is reflected in others across the country.

NEFERTIRI SICKOUT

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strategic priorities. We still have further to go in connecting the dots, which is challenging in a large jurisdiction with high need and constrained resources.

Another challenge concerns the resources necessary for building a data infrastructure that can be used to identify indicators and measure progress across strategic priorities or agencies. The City has rich data but needs support to develop the appropriate infrastructure to utilize big datasets that can inform strategic investments or policy decisions across multiple agencies and outcomes, as well as make data more easily transparent to residents.

A final challenge is integrating our engagement with Philadelphia’s communities with the Mayor’s Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Fortunately, many departments participating in the racial equity strategy have community engagement strategies for their mission and scope of work. However, my office focuses more internally on the processes, policies and culture of government as a means to improve governance in the short term and communities’ outcomes in the longer term. With additional capacity, we would seek to partner with community stakeholders to move the work forward in a way that better represents community needs, priorities and solutions.

MARKISHA SMITH

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systemic oppression and replacing it with new systems. We cannot have people as barriers. We are in a moment in time when we cannot waste time. Some can engage in training and get to the place they need to be. Others cannot. We have to be okay with encouraging them into other roles.

**The work you do is absolutely critical, but also extraordinarily difficult. How do find the energy and will to keep this work going and inspire others to join you?**

I have been trying to practice the difference between my “what” and “why.” My “what” is being director of this office and doing this work; my “why” is very different: It is my kids. As crazy as it has been in the pandemic, home with them, they are still my “why.” What does city government and these institutions look like for them in the future? If I can have some influence on some very small part of that change, I am motivated.

# TRUST BUT VERIFY: A New Framework for AI Accountability

By Farahnaaz Khakoo-Mausel and Dennis Mayo



Artificial intelligence (AI) is perhaps the most societally significant technology of our time. It is not only ubiquitous; it is beginning to permeate our institutions. The federal government uses AI for law enforcement applications, approval of benefits and in the military; private and nonprofit sectors use it in health care, employment and financial services, among other areas. These systems often are developed with the promise of increasing efficiency, performance or outcomes of public sector programs. How can public sector administrators, managers and auditors ensure those aims are met as they consider and evaluate systems?

Some federal agencies have developed guiding principles for using AI systems, but we need to ensure that how we use these tools moves beyond principles and aspirations of responsible and ethical AI and toward practical application. This is especially true if we want to ensure accountability and meet the challenge of embedding ethics and oversight into AI systems and verifying that they work. Stakeholders involved in implementing the systems need to understand their role in ensuring oversight.

At the Government Accountability Office (GAO), we have crafted a path forward and produced the federal government's first accountability framework. The goal is to ensure that in addition to "baking" some basic principles into AI technologies, there are implementation practices, procedures and approaches for practitioners, auditors and evaluators. Last year, GAO convened a forum of experts to discuss how to oversee a technology that is often invisible to the people it affects. The

accountability framework was the result. We will use this guide for the first-ever evaluations of federal AI, including any systems developed in the private sector for the federal government.

The framework provides concrete practices for managers and auditors to help ensure federal AI use is worthy of public trust and effectively solving problems. These practices fall under four key areas: governance, data, performance and monitoring.

## Governance: The People Behind the Applications

AI systems tend to be opaque, which means we may think they are improving a process when that may not be correct. Our framework sets up federal managers to keep a tighter leash on systems and demonstrate each system's trustworthiness to a broad community of stakeholders, including policy experts, civil liberties advocates and those the system affects.

For example, what if an AI system that helps an agency determine applicants' eligibility for Medicaid makes biased inferences or assumes faulty criteria? Our framework sets forth governance practices to address the possibility.

One practice is to set a specific, measurable goal for the system, which the agency and public can use to understand how it works and verify it is working properly. In the case of Medicaid, an appropriate goal might be to improve the agency's accuracy and speed in approving eligible applicants and denying ineligible ones. A clear goal lets agency staff determine with relative ease when a system is working and when it needs to be fixed or shut down.

An equally critical practice is to collaborate meaningfully with diverse stakeholders. For example, Medicaid applicants affected by an AI system would get to review the system's goals beforehand and call attention to failures after deployment. Stakeholder engagement is part of the process from the beginning, not an afterthought.

## Data: The Input and Output Issue

Major technology companies and researchers have rolled out AI conversation "bots" at one point or

another, often to disastrous—or at least remarkably strange—results. Remember the chatbot that, in less than 24 hours, learned to amplify offensive remarks in its interactions with Twitter users? As we have seen, overt prejudice is alive and well online; when AI uses that as input data, we should not be surprised by the output.

The problem of biased data goes beyond social media misadventure. Bias—in the statistical sense of favoring one outcome over another—lurks almost everywhere. Over the years, medical researchers have done studies that overrepresent white people and men, and police departments have assembled mugshot databases that overrepresent people of color. Our framework prescribes several safeguards against biased data. For instance, users need to document where their data come from and verify that they represent the populations served by the AI system. If, for instance, researchers are developing a system to flag signs of cancer in a mammogram, they should analyze the races, ages and other salient characteristics of the people whose mammograms were used to “train” the system.

Agencies using AI can help mitigate some of these data problems. They can ensure they know their data sources—whether they are relevant, who collected them and in what context, how they change over time, and whether and how they were processed. That knowledge can help unearth implicit and explicit biases before AI can amplify them.

### Performance: Does It Work?

Facial recognition technology perhaps is the most reputationally challenged technology of the moment. Although it can improve the accuracy and speed of criminal investigations greatly, mistakes can send innocent people to jail.

One practice that could solve that problem, or at least dramatically reduce it, is to set precise performance metrics to ensure AI systems either meet our needs or get unplugged. To address racial disparities, facial recognition metrics would need to include not just accuracy but numerical targets for very low bias.

Another important practice is to specify how the larger system is supposed to perform, including the role of human supervision. Some systems may need to be autonomous, such as cybersecurity software that quickly detects and patches vulnerabilities. With facial recognition for criminal investigations, however, trained humans need to review the outputs to ensure accurate performance.

### Monitoring: The Test of Time

At times, AI has had trouble adjusting to situations that are different from the conditions under which they were created. The COVID-19 pandemic likely will offer plenty of examples. Changes in everything from traffic patterns to consumer spending to hospital utilization will change the data driving the models, a phenomenon known as data drift. Our framework calls on users to monitor data drift and set limits on how far it can change before a system needs to be adjusted or decommissioned.

Back to the Medicaid example: Demographic change is a potential source of data drift that agencies should monitor if they use AI. Aging and migration can lead to new patterns in the applicant pool or in the kinds of claims submitted for reimbursement. An AI system might be recommending claim rejection based on old assumptions; without monitoring, we would not know it.

AI holds tremendous promise for helping government and other sectors of society work more efficiently toward the greater good, but we cannot trust the noble intentions or brilliant thinking behind the technology. In other words: Trust, but verify. GAO’s oversight framework is one way to build transparency, equity and other principles into AI from the start.

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*Dennis Mayo is senior analyst at GAO, where he leads projects for the science, technology assessment and analytics team. His work has focused on organometallic, organic, inorganic and materials chemistry, and more recently on oversight of artificial intelligence systems. Mayo received his Ph.D. in organometallic chemistry from the University of Maryland, College Park and his BA from The Ohio State University. He can be reached at [MayoD@gao.gov](mailto:MayoD@gao.gov).*

# Debt Is Critical...and Differs Among Federal, State and Local Governments

By Richard F. Keevey

The federal government is issuing debt faster than one can count, most recently due to annual budget deficits necessitated by extraordinary spending to address COVID-19. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the total debt held by the public will reach \$35 trillion, or 107 percent of gross domestic product, by 2031. State and local governments continue to issue debt, too, but at much lower levels; bonded debt totals approximately \$4.5 trillion. Each level of government issues debt for different purposes.

## State Debt

States issue debt for three reasons: to finance capital improvements, finance short-term cash flow imbalances and, in rare cases, finance budget deficits. The first two purposes are legitimate, assuming short-term bonds—notes—are liquidated before the end of the fiscal year. The third purpose constitutes and reflects poor public finance, but some states have stumbled in the past and are doing so again.

There are three types of debt: general obligation (GO) debt, appropriation debt—sometimes referred to as contract debt—and revenue-supported debt. In most states, GO debt is approved by voters, in contrast to appropriation debt, which is approved by the legislature and governor and issued by a designated authority established specifically for that purpose. States establish special purpose authorities to finance infrastructure projects with bonds secured by its revenue, such as a turnpike authority. This debt is not on state balance sheets.

GO debt has the full faith and credit of a state's taxing power, while appropriation debt is subject to annual appropriations. Wall Street views the former as more secure than the latter, as the legislature could decide not to appropriate funds for the debt service. That is unlikely, as future bond sales would be almost impossible or prohibitively expensive.

Debt comparison across states is based on per capita, or a percent of personal income criteria, but this can be deceiving as different states assign functions to different governmental levels. For example, California finances most school construction at the state level, while Texas finances most of it locally. New Jersey does both.



In addition to bonded debt, most state and local governments have “non-bonded” obligations, the two largest being pension and retirement health benefits. Unlike bonded debt, which requires annual debt service appropriations, these obligations are funded for a longer period with employer and employee contributions and the investment of these contributions.

## Federal Debt

The federal government issues debt for just about anything and everything, including capital purposes (including infrastructure) and ongoing operating costs. No distinction is made between the two. While states have an operating budget and separate capital budget, the federal government does not have the latter. Federal bond sales support Medicare, purchasing aircraft carriers, the IRS and so on.

There are two definitions for federal debt. The first, “debt held by the public”—that is, the accumulation of annual budget deficits—totals \$22.5 trillion and is climbing. For the last 22 years, the federal government has had deficits; during the last 62, only five had a surplus. Second, money “borrowed” by the Treasury from several trust funds, principally the Social Security Trust Fund, totals \$6 trillion. That loan will be repaid by future bond sales when dollars are needed for benefit payments.

Like state and local governments, the federal government also has “non-bonded obligations”—unfunded liabilities for future social security, Medicare and military and civilian benefits—totaling approximately \$120 trillion, which may require more borrowing.

## Some Observations

Complicated? Yes. Compounding the complication: Each level of government has its own ideocracies. But, is debt bad public policy? Not necessarily.

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# Public Administration, the Pandemic and the Twin National Crises of Fairness and Democracy

By Allan Rosenbaum



The worldwide impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has had many consequences, mostly bad. Particularly tragic have been the death and severe illness it has produced—and continues to produce—everywhere, but especially in economically challenged locations. Among other things, this has called attention to the inadequacies of public health systems.

This awful event has had other consequences, many of which are likely to be significant in ways yet to be determined. Some may have the positive benefit of calling attention—in an increasingly dramatic way—to what have been long festering but frequently ignored societal problems. In most cases, these problems will need the engagement of a robust public sector if they are to receive an effective response, requiring involvement of and commitment from public administrators and those who educate and train them.

## Public Administration and Fairness

Far too often, far too many—including policymakers and more than a few public administrators—have chosen to ignore the reality of many of our most serious societal problems. For example, the huge disparities in adequate health care access, plus the obvious need for much greater investment in public health systems (even in the wealthiest countries), have seemed shocking when the media have highlighted them over the past 18 months. Yet it certainly does not surprise anyone even slightly familiar with public policy matters.

The pandemic has brought renewed and increased attention to such matters, including the more general issue of the fundamental fairness with which society's most important resources are distributed. It also has spotlighted the role of the public sector and the manner by which it distributes public resources. This has been further driven by the grim reality that the pandemic's most significant negative impacts have been borne very heavily by the elderly and poor, often people of color or various national minorities. In most places, these people have had

very limited access to health care, or educational and economic opportunity more generally. To say these issues require much greater attention within public administration is an understatement.

Far too often, we have focused on matters of organizational effectiveness. We have believed that questions about the nature and role of the public sector are best left to other (perhaps more political) actors and disciplines. In terms of practice, teaching and training, the long tradition of the separation of politics and administration has resulted in situations where public administrators and those involved in the public sector remain far too silent when these issues are discussed. The great irony is that few participants in related decisionmaking processes are better qualified to understand what is needed to improve public services' quality and the fairness with which they are distributed than those who manage them.

During the past four decades, both in the United States and, to a lesser extent, abroad, we have witnessed the emergence of the greatest degree and continued growth of inequality in nearly a century. In 1930, the wealthiest 10 percent of the U.S. population possessed 85 percent of the nation's personal wealth. By the mid-1980s, the top 10 percent's share declined to 60 percent. Yet in the almost 40 years since, it has risen to close to 75 percent. This is not surprising as the share of total U.S. national income received by the top 10 percent has grown from 35 percent of all national income to almost 50 percent during the same period.

This has not only served to undermine middle class economic growth; it has meant that the most basic resources many people need to survive, let alone succeed, are increasingly and vastly maldistributed to those who already possess great wealth. At the same time, dramatically declining tax rates have left the public sector with only a fraction of the resources it had in the 1970s, and which it even more desperately needs today to redress such inequities. Those committed to public administration must begin to address these realities with the same vigor and determination that the discipline's many activist founders were committed to 120 years ago during the Progressive era and in the 1930s during the New Deal.

## Public Administration and Democratic Governance

Almost as consequential as the pandemic's terrible and inequitable impact on humankind is its negative impact on too many governments around the world, especially regarding the public perception of, and attitudes toward, governmental effectiveness and democratic governance values. This can be seen in many concerning developments, some related to the effectiveness of governmental responses to COVID-19. It also has led to growing debate about the capacity of authoritarian versus democratic system response. The pandemic has been the vehicle for some governments to impose or increase limits on basic human rights, intensify societal polarization and further declining faith in the ability of free societies to effectively address public problems.

In the pandemic's aftermath, examining and reinvigorating the nature of our profession's role in promoting effective democratic governance will be a critical challenge for public administrators the world over. Concern over the connection between democratic government and public administration as it is practiced dates back to the origins of the country and the *Federalist Papers*. Academically, it dates back at least to the beginning of the discipline in the United States.

Today, Woodrow Wilson's seminal essay, "The Study of Administration," is mostly remembered for establishing the belief that administration can be separated from politics. Notwithstanding this erroneous belief, Wilson suggests three other more consequential premises. First, that it is critical to learn from what other countries are doing—he thus reports on administrative practices in England, France and Germany. Second, he makes a strong case for then-emerging efforts to develop civil service systems in the United States. Third, and most important but often forgotten, he notes that effective public administration is directly connected to democratic government. He commented, "The principles on which to base a science of administration for America must be principles which have democratic policy very much at heart."

While many rightfully have grave concerns about the societal impact of Wilson's views on race, his essay has had a powerful impact on shaping the study and practice of public administration. The study of comparative public administration, especially following World War II, has become an important part of the field's academic work. Although often far less than perfect in practice, most countries and their public administrators accept, at least in principle, the concept of a strong commitment to merit-based civil service systems.

Similarly, for good or ill, separation of politics and administration—the ideal of nonpartisan,

nonpolitical public administration—has become a dominant theme. In the United States, the notion that nonpartisan, nonpolitical public administration is good public administration is embodied in the frequently stated belief that there is neither a Republican nor a Democratic way to sweep a street (or engage in more complicated programs). However, the question of *whose* streets get swept when, and how frequently, is often highly political and partisan, and highly consequential for the communities involved.

One result of the Wilsonian nonpartisan/nonpolitical public administration fallacy is that some of the field's most influential U.S. organizations strongly promote such a perspective. So, too, do international organizations. Thus, the fallacy is further re-enforced, even when many increasingly recognize it is not only impossible to achieve but arguably not in the best interests of either the profession or society.

Unfortunately, significant portions of the field have forgotten Wilson's comments about needing to build effective public administration practice on a foundation of, and commitment to, democratic institutions, principles and values. Too often, both in the profession and contemporary public administration academic and training programs, little or no attention is paid to addressing democratic principles of government. Perhaps some assume it is a given. If so, one can only wonder where they have spent much of the past decade.

Equally concerning is that for an increasing portion of the discipline, there appears to be a growing view that good government and democratic government are separate matters. This view is asserted increasingly by scholars, experts and government leaders from major countries significantly less than democratic themselves. Yet they also can be found within democratic systems. In some academic settings, we hear that even where academic freedom and free speech may be very uncertain, at least good government practice can be taught, and perhaps practiced. It is ironic, at best, that we see this within dictatorial political systems built and reliant on systemic corruption. But, it is surprising and concerning to find this perspective within democratic systems, too.

At no time since the end of World War II has the need for remembering Wilson's tenets been more relevant and necessary. It is true for most Western democracies, especially the United States, where democratic institutions have been challenged for longer than the past four years. It is equally true for new and more established democracies in many parts of the world that find themselves reverting to and witnessing the reemergence of highly authoritarian practices. Given these developments,

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# Mental Workspaces

By Areeba Yasin

*"I hope this email finds you well during these unprecedented times."*

*"I hope you and your family are staying safe and healthy given these trying circumstances!"*

*"I hope you're doing well and staying healthy!"*

The transition to a remote workspace in a COVID world impacted nearly every aspect of a typical white-collar job or internship. It became difficult to find motivation without collegial collaboration. Office resources, which we had come to expect, were unavailable. Some individuals were displaced from their residence and had to switch time zones. What I found especially difficult, however, was writing the opening line to an email. I was so accustomed to a specific way of life that I had to put extra thought into the simplest of ways we communicated with one another. Every email during the first month of quarantine started with the same, "I hope this email finds you well during these unprecedented times." I continuously struggled to find creative ways to communicate, only to find myself repeating the same line over and over.

As a Pakistani-Muslim American, I often feel that my lived experience differs from others and, consequently, that typical resources and opportunities do not fit for me all the time, forcing me to create my own avenues to success and productivity. During the COVID-19 quarantine, I noticed many others also were learning new and personalized ways to feel productive and successful, a shared lived experience. And, although accommodating for a pandemic in our work life certainly is challenging, it can present the opportunity to collectively retrain our minds to focus on the essentials and reshape the way we think about our work life.

In addition to my newfound trouble with opening sentences, I struggled with larger issues like focusing during work hours and finding structure in tasks. Like many of us, I had to find a way to change my entire perception of what "work" looked like...and do it quickly. Prior to the pandemic, I used a method called classical conditioning, pairing stimuli to create a new learned response. I linked two stimuli, a location and a specific task, and my learned response was to focus only on that task at that location. Before quarantine, I was in college, taking six classes and working a job at my university and an internship with a Political Action Committee. Short on time, I wanted to ensure that when I was working on a task, I was focused and efficient. Internship-

related work took place at the internship office or in the school library. University work happened when I was in the office. Schoolwork was in my dorm or the building housing my major. Each responsibility had a designated workspace (or two) so I could link the workspace with a specific task and know I was in that space until the work was done. This tool helped me manage time and stay focused when I otherwise felt overwhelmed by my to-do list. With the pandemic's onset, it became difficult to find designated physical workspaces for specific tasks, so I began to train my mind to link two new stimuli for a specific outcome.

COVID-19 has helped us focus on the essentials and reshape the way we think about space. For many, "space" is restricted to our home. Stuck there, it often seemed we spent whole days trapped in our minds, as well, unable to declutter our thoughts and find structure. I had to be creative with how I reconditioned myself to feel productive while finding a way to feel more mentally organized. Though I could not create new physical spaces, I created new mental workspaces around specific tasks, such as opening specific browsers or apps. This helped me ensure my screen was clear and, as a result, my mind started to feel more organized.

My first priority was ensuring that I had easy access to communicating with my classmates and coworkers. I paired communications tools (email or apps) with browsers specifically related to the work at hand. Exiting out of my inbox meant I mentally exited the workspace. Entering and exiting the mental spaces I created with internet browsers helped visualize my remote workspace in a new but effective way. This certainly is not a typical way to practice classical conditioning, but it allows you to use the basic concepts to focus and declutter your mental workspace.

Working remotely has its challenges and requires us to develop new mindsets. Just as simple tasks like writing the opening line to a sentence became difficult, subconscious systems and habits came into question and no longer worked. Increasingly, there is no set way work "should" be, so it is up to us to redefine work spaces. We all hold pre-existing biases for how certain things *should* be. We are accustomed to how we previously operated in work spaces have a preconceived bias for how things *should* work, making it difficult to be inclusive and accommodating of society's ever-changing needs and experiences. We must learn to adapt and reshape how we view work and life because

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## ETHICAL DELIMMAS

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The call here is to create more ethical space for public servants within their institutions. Pluralism is not enough to guarantee this outcome. This begs for reconsidering the implications for leadership in the public sector, including ethical and transformational leadership with mutual engagement and shared commitment between public servants and those with claims to equity. Conflict may arise between a leader’s understanding of what professional public service demands and what an organization expects. It becomes the leader’s responsibility to sort out the best possible solution to the given situation.

It is often a matter of the individual courage of a public servant faced with a compelling claim to equity that makes the difference, not any collection of diversity policies and practices. If ethical action presupposes freedom *and* makes freedom possible, conscientious public servants must possess critical, analytical and deliberative tools and social competencies. They also need to exhibit the kind of leadership for justice that courageous, principled action requires and makes possible.

*James Ward is author, coauthor or editor of three recently published books dealing with issues of public ethics and social equity, including Policing and Race in America: Economic, Political and Social Dynamics; Leadership and Change in Public Sector*

Organizations: Beyond Reform; *and* Institutional Racism, Organizations and Public Policy. *He serves as interim director of the MPP program at California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo. Ward can be reached at jamesdward80@gmail.com.*

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## TIMING IS EVERYTHING

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for other ASPA publications—highlighting different options for personal and organizational DEI growth. I look forward to collaborating with you on this important work. Let the journey begin...

*Terryl Ross has more than 30 years’ experience in equity and social justice, specializing in the intersectionality of race, changing demographics, emerging trends, higher education and new media. He was assistant dean for diversity, equity and inclusion at the University of Washington’s College of the Environment; founder and director of Mosaic Nation; director of community and diversity at Oregon State University; regional affairs manager at the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce; and an AmeriCorps director and military intelligence officer for the U.S. Army. Ross earned his Ph.D. in educational and communications technology from the University of Washington and his MA from Syracuse University. He can be reached at terrylross2020@gmail.com.*

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## DEBT IS CRITICAL

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Most state debt is issued for critical infrastructure projects and more will be necessary. Unlike the federal government, state governments cannot print money to support an “infinite” amount of debt. Most important, the capital market itself, if not state constitutions, limit how much debt states can issue.

The issue is different for the federal government due to its size and use. Budgetary tradeoffs, decisions between defense spending and safety-net programs and tax policy debates all impact how much debt the federal government can afford in the future. Can it issue an unlimited amount of debt? I do not think so, but I truly do not know. However, the answer is much more complicated than a simple “yes or no,” or a certain number. Those who say “Just balance the budget!” are not realistic and certainly not informed. Needs are too expansive and growing, especially as the population ages, health care costs increase and known and unanticipated emergencies develop.

But, we *can* reach a realistic compromise. We must reform the tax code to raise more money. For example, reduce the \$1.7 trillion of “tax expenditures” (credits, deductions, etc.), increase the top tax rate on individuals and corporations, perhaps alter defense policy and bend downward the growth curve in safety net programs. None of these options are accomplished easily but are, in my judgment, necessary so federal debt is at a reasonable level vis-à-vis the wealth of our nation.

*Richard Keevey is a former New Jersey state budget director appointed by two governors from each political party. He held two presidential appointments as deputy undersecretary of defense and chief financial officer at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Keevey is an executive in residence at Rutgers University, lecturer at Princeton University and elected fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration. He can be reached at rfkeevey@yahoo.com.*





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# Straus Historical Society Names 2021 Straus Public Service Scholars

By Mallory Sullivan and Marc Holzer



The Straus Historical Society recently announced the fourth cohort of its public service scholarship program. The program's goal is to help support students' continuing education in public service, which it defines as employment in government, the uniformed services, nongovernmental research and educational and nonprofit organizations. ASPA's Massachusetts Chapter (MassASPA) selected four recipients from among a very competitive applicant pool, recognizing their demonstrated potential and promise for a fulfilling career in public service.

As the world moves through its second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, evidence continues to show public service as a pivotal harbinger of stability, safety and health. The 2021 applicant pool for the Straus Scholarship Program illuminates the continued passion and creativity of younger generations. In their applications, applicants detailed societal challenges that they intend to address through a public service career, underscoring the critical need for individuals committed to the public good. Straus Scholars embody the ethic of service over self, made evident by their service experiences and academic pursuits.

Here is a look at some of this year's recipients.

Danielle Bertaux studies public international law and human security in the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, where she will earn a Master of Arts in law and diplomacy in Spring 2022. With studies focused on human rights and gender-based violence, Bertaux aspires to a career with the U.S. Department of State. "My commitment to public service and the betterment of human lives fuels my motivation to work on complex human rights issues in pursuit of influencing a more just and humane world," she said. Bertaux has previous experience with research, advocacy, politics and nonprofits.

Dillon Cooke, pursuing an MPA from American University, said, "Throughout the rest of my career, I hope to center my professional efforts around better diversifying, training and managing the U.S.

diplomatic corps...to effectively respond to the geopolitical, financial, public health and climate crises that are converging in the 21st century." Cooke has prior experience interning for several congressional offices and working with the National Public Education Support Fund, San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation and Center for Peace and Security Studies.

Iris Hinh is pursuing a Master of Arts in politics and education from Columbia University Teachers College "to hone my understanding of the successes and inadequacies of other nations' education systems and policies." She has experience as an intern with the U.S. Department of Education, American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California and AmeriCorps. During the pandemic, Hinh, alongside peers at Columbia University, mentored students of health care workers. She intends to pursue a career that spans education policy and classroom education.

An incoming student at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, Miriam Israel will pursue a Master of Arts in law and diplomacy and a Master of Theological Studies. Motivated to "work with communities around the world to address climate change and help prepare faith communities to be leaders on issues like conservation and sustainability," she has experience in the fields of community engagement, interfaith dialogue, refugee resettlement and research.

The Straus Historical Society's principal purpose is to foster educational activities related to the settlement of Jews in the United States and, in particular, the family of Lazarus and Sara Straus, their ancestors and descendants. Its programs are shaped by the Straus Family's involvement in government, commerce and philanthropy. Beginning in the 19th century and continuing into the 20th, members of the family served in governmental positions at the federal and local levels including the House of Representatives, as ambassadors and as presidential cabinet members. Through their positions, as well as a consequence of their acting as advisors

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# ASPA Chapters Celebrate Public Service Recognition Week, Honor Excellence in Public Service

By Karen E.T. Garrett

*Launched in 1987, Public Service Recognition Week (PSRW) takes place annually during the first full week of May. As his predecessors have done, President Biden commemorated the work of those dedicated to the public good with a proclamation, and the U.S. House and Senate each issued resolutions. ASPA Chapters typically celebrate PSRW with conferences, networking events, awards celebrations, social activities and more. Many of those events were not possible, but that did not stop Chapters from honoring their community members in special ways.*

## Bay Area Chapter

The Bay Area Chapter celebrated PSRW with an awards ceremony on May 7. Six individuals were honored for their contributions across six service areas:

- Lara DeLaney (senior deputy county administrator, Contra Costa County) for contributions to public utilities
- Kent Elder (assistant director, public works-special services, Santa Cruz County) for contributions to public works
- Officer Rocco Lucido (homeless liaison and community resource officer, Martinez Police Department) for contributions to public safety/law enforcement
- Kristy Michie (assistant director of public health, Monterey County Health Department) for contributions to public health
- Rebecca Schenk (NVTA transit manager) for contributions to public transportation
- Danielle Schmitz (director of planning and capital improvements, NVTA) for contributions to public transportation



The awards were presented during a Zoom event with presentations from fellow public administrators, including NAPA Valey Transit Authority Executive Director Kate Miller and Martinez, California Chief of Police Manjit Sappal.

## Buffalo/Niagara Chapter



In April, the Buffalo-Niagara Chapter held its annual conference and awards program, providing an opportunity for the western New York public administration and nonprofit field to examine national and local issues affecting its communities. The event also promoted communities of learning as vehicles to advance local government/nonprofit/university collaboration, leading to transformative community change. The theme was “Governing through Crisis,” focusing on the state’s response to COVID-19.

Award honorees included:

- Myron Glick, MD (founder and chief executive officer, Jericho Road Community Health Center), who received the Excellence in Nonprofit Administration Award
- Oswald Mestre, Jr. (chief service officer and director of citizen services for the City of Buffalo), who received the Excellence in Government Administration Award
- Jason Rivera (associate professor, SUNY Buffalo State), who received the Excellence in Public Administration Education Award

## CenTex Chapter



ASPA's Central Texas Chapter (CenTex) presented awards during its June 9 virtual ceremony honoring PSRW. Multiple research teams were honored with the James W. McGrew Research Award:

- Four teams from the University of Texas at Austin were recognized for their research projects, including "Rural Revitalization in Mitarai, Osaka Shimojima Island, Japan;" "Extending Electric Service to Rural Nepal;" "Conservation and Community Wealth Creation in India: Challenges and the Way Ahead;" and "Autonomous Rural Transportation Challenges and Opportunities in Inan-cho Shimane, Japan."
- Melissa Bell (Texas State University) was recognized for "Toward Equal Access: A Model for Lay Advocacy Programs That Serve People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing."
- Texas A&M University's The Bush School of Government and Public Service was recognized for "The Impact of Environmental Hazards in Texas."

Numerous scholarships were awarded, as well, and Texas State University held its Pi Alpha Alpha induction ceremony.

## Detroit Chapter

A Detroit Chapter committee recognized five community members for their work in the past year:

- Julia Blok (program specialist, Urban Alliance) was honored for work as a public service partner.
- David Coulter (Oakland County executive) was honored for work as an elected official.
- Tracy Hall (Office of Metropolitan Impact) was honored for work in educating future generations of public servants.



- Joyce Parker (Deputy State treasurer) was honored for work as an elected official.
- Ashlynn Terry (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services) was honored for work as an early career professional.

## Evergreen Chapter

The Evergreen Chapter celebrated PSRW with a Zoom event featuring then-University of Washington Assistant Dean for Diversity Equity and Inclusion Terryl Ross. Joined by ASPA President Allan Rosenbaum, who provided remarks at the beginning of the event, Ross gave a lecture discussing diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and making social justice a reality. Four individuals also were honored with awards for their work:

- Alejandra Tres received the Call to Service Award.
- Rosie Rimando-Chareunsap received the Billy Frank, Jr. Race and Social Justice Award.
- Jenny Six received the Advancement of Collaborative Governance Award.
- Sayla Miles received the Outstanding Graduate Student of the Year Award.



## Greater Houston Chapter

The Greater Houston Chapter held its PSRW event on May 6, which included a keynote speaker and an awards ceremony. The event featured remarks from Larry Payne, chairman of the City of Houston Mayor's Task Force on Policing Reform. Seven individuals from the community were honored for their work. Receiving Public Service Leadership awards were:

- Renee Clarke (registered nurse, Texas Children's Hospital)
- Chris Hollins (Harris County clerk, Harris County)
- Cindy Mejia (chief of staff, University of Houston)
- Michelle Paul (executive director, Capital IDEA Houston)
- Nathan Watkins (city manager, City of Mont Belvieu)



Receiving Public Interface awards were:

- Amber Newman (chief executive officer, Boys & Girls Club of Brazoria County)
- Daryl L. Smith, Sr. (Fort Bend Precinct 2 constable, Fort Bend County)

### Hampton Roads Chapter

The Hampton Roads Chapter honored four individuals with awards this year:

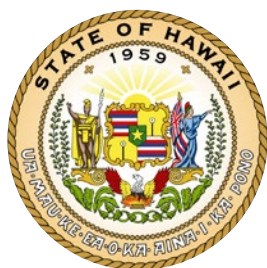
- Celeste Green (associate professor, School of Professional and Continuing Studies, University of Virginia) received the Dr. Wolfgang Pindur Award for Distinguished Service in Academia and Practice.
- Carmela Gregorio (storekeeper, Out-of-School Time Programs, Department of Parks & Recreation, City of Virginia Beach) received the Outstanding Public Employee in Hampton Roads Award in recognition of her efforts to maintain quality services to the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Paul Long (dean, Public Safety, Allied Health and Human Services, Thomas Nelson Community College) received the Julian F. Hirst Award for Distinguished Service.
- Tihara Richardson (doctoral student, Old Dominion University) received an academic scholarship for her studies in public administration.



### Hawaii Chapter

The Hawaii Chapter, ASPA's newest Chapter, celebrated PSRW for the first time on May 7 via Zoom. Awards were presented to individuals and their teams within Hawaii state and local government in honor of their efforts to safeguard residents against COVID-19. Each received Excellence in Leadership awards:

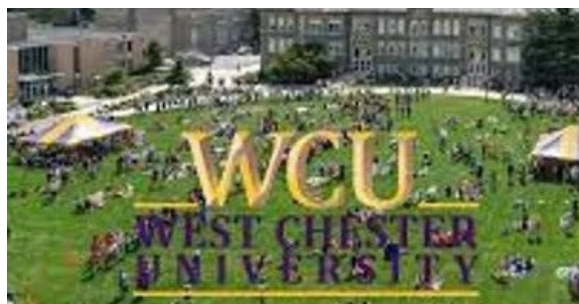
- Governor David Ige
- Lieutenant Governor Joshua Green
- Major General Kenneth S. Hara, (director, Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency)
- Kauai Mayor Derek Kawakami



- Janet Berreman (district health officer, Kauai District Health Office)
- Elizabeth Char (interim director, Hawai'i Department of Health)
- Steven Hankins (Hi-EMA, Emergency Support Function)

Governor David Ige and Lt. Governor Josh Green attended the ceremony and accepted awards on behalf of their team.

### Keystone State Chapter



The Keystone State Chapter held its annual awards event via Zoom on May 4, announcing award recipients and hosting an open-ended attendees' discussion looking at how their organizations have responded to the need to "pick up the pieces." Awardees included:

- Beverly Cigler (distinguished professor of public policy and administration, Penn State University) received the Lifetime Achievement Award.
- Victor DeSantis (executive director of community engagement, government and economic development, Millersville University) received the Chapter Leadership Award.
- Kate Ellison (manager, government advocacy and communications, UPMC and MPPM student, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh) received the Outstanding Scholar-Practitioner Award.
- Dakotah Kennan (MPA student, School of Public Affairs, Penn State Harrisburg) received the Outstanding Student Award.
- Eric Raabe (MPA student, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh) received the Outstanding Student Award.
- Alaina Sforza (MPA student, Department of Public Policy and Administration, West Chester University) received the Outstanding Student Award.

- Saahir Shafi (doctoral candidate, School of Public Affairs, Penn State Harrisburg) received the Outstanding Student Award.
- Alex Swan (economic development analyst, PA DCED and MPA student, School of Public Affairs, Penn State Harrisburg) received the Outstanding Scholar-Practitioner Award.

Two teams of young scholars also received awards:

- Zoe Burch, Yingzi Liu and Brett Stewart (MPA students, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh) received the Outstanding Student Award for “Developing Collaborative Capacity to Enhance Municipal-Level Fire Services in Allegheny County.”
- Donald Dyer, Christina Emond, Michael Hackenburg and Andrew Zeller (MPA students, School of Public Affairs, Penn State Harrisburg) received the Student Paper Award for “Cost-Efficient Mitigation Strategies for Ransomware Attacks on Municipalities.”

### Lowcountry Chapter

The Lowcountry Chapter held an awards ceremony on May 5 to honor three awardees for their community public service efforts:

- Linda Bell (South Carolina State epidemiologist)
- Eric DeMoura (town administrator, Mount Pleasant)
- Leah Schonfeld (assistant vice president and chief human resources officer, The Citadel)



### Sacramento Chapter

The Sacramento Chapter was not able to hold an event this year but continued its awards tradition, handing out its 39th Annual Awards to seven honorees:

- Kathie Denton-Williamson (Placer County Health and Human Services) received the Ross Clayton Lifetime Distinguished Public Service Award.
- Alexis Fernandez (California Department of Social Services) received the Government Innovation Award.



- La Familia Counseling Center received the Community Service Award.
- Michael Lynch (Improve Your Tomorrow, Inc.) received the Rising Star Award.
- Yolanda R. Richardson (California Government Operations Agency) received the Elizabeth Hill Public Official of the Year Award.

- Mindy Romero (Center for Inclusive Democracy, University of Southern California Price School in Sacramento) received the Chester A. Newland Academic Excellence Award.
- The Sacramento Regional Family Justice Center received the Grantland Johnson Intergovernmental Cooperation Award.

The Chapter received a diverse slate of applicants for this year’s awards program and looks forward to hosting future programs in-person as situations permit.

### South Florida Chapter



The South Florida Chapter held its annual awards reception online via Zoom, including raffling off a cruise to support the Chapter’s scholarship program. Ten honorees were awarded for their efforts in support of public service:

- Gregory Harrison (city manager, City of Pompano Beach) received the Public Administrator of the Year Award.
- Karyn Cunningham (mayor, Village of Palmetto Bay) received the Elected Official of the Year Award.
- Farm Shar received the Nonprofit Organization of the Year Award.
- Sean Foreman (Barry University) received the Public Educator of the Year Award.
- ACLU, Greater Miami Chapter received the Public Service Advocate of the Year Award.
- Kaila Witkowski (Florida International University) received the Student Member of the Year Award.
- Ina Charles received the Chapter Member of the Year Award.

- Rahel Weldeyesus (Miami-Dade County Office of the Mayor) received the Rising Star Award.
- *Miami Today* receive the Public Information Award.
- Jose (Pepe) Diaz (Miami-Dade County chairman) received the Presidential Award.

## Utah Chapter



The Utah Chapter hosted its annual awards ceremony virtually on May 20, honoring four individuals/organizations with awards for their outstanding accomplishments in public service. The Chapter values its opportunity to recognize public and nonprofit employees and volunteers at the federal, state, county and local levels for their contributions. The awards included:

- Dorothy Adams (deputy director, Salt Lake County Health Department) received the Distinguished Service Award for Outstanding Contributions to Public Service.
- Angela Dunn (state epidemiologist, Utah Department of Health) and Justin R. Lee (director of elections, Utah Lieutenant Governor's Office) received the Distinguished Service Award for an Appointed Official.
- The Utah Multicultural Commission received the Distinguished Service Award for Excellence.

ASPA congratulates this year's honorees, as well as all of our Chapters that held events or otherwise celebrated PSRW. Thank you for your service.

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## FAIRNESS AND DEMOCRACY

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it is critically important to reconnect the study and practice of public administration to its original roots in democratic government across political systems.

Among the many significant and complex issues raised as a consequence of COVID-19 are two key questions that will have continued relevance long after the pandemic subsides. They involve the effectiveness of democratic governments in addressing complex service delivery situations and the basic fairness of modern society. These concerns have grown as it has become increasingly evident that our economic and governmental systems have worked to leave large numbers of individuals far behind when it comes to having the necessary resources to defend oneself, and one's family, against COVID-19. Our profession should be at the forefront of examining these issues and, through research and teaching, suggesting how they can best be addressed. Far too often, it has not.

*Allan Rosenbaum is professor of public administration and director of the Institute for Public Management and Community Service and the Center for Democracy and Good Governance at Florida International University. The first ASPA president to serve a two-year term and a second non-consecutive term, he also served two terms as president of the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration. Rosenbaum is a member and vice chairperson of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration; serves on 11 journal editorial boards in eight countries; and is a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration. He can be reached at rosenbau@fiu.edu.*

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## MENTAL WORKSPACES

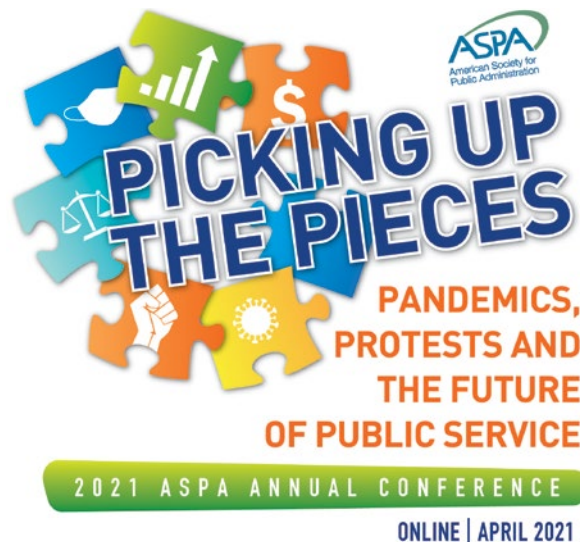
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there are new, more inclusive and authentic ways to experience professional environments.

*Areeba Yasin is a student at American University studying economics and political science. She interned with the San Francisco Federal Reserve Bank, where she helped strengthen government outreach activities, and served as inclusivity director for D.C. College Democrats and communications director for a congressional campaign. Yasin has worked on a variety of diversity, equity and inclusion projects (DEI), most recently designing a DEI survey for her high school and compiling data to sustain an inclusive curriculum. She can be reached at areebayasin101@gmail.com.*

# ASPA's 2021 Conference Highlights Ideas for "Picking Up the Pieces"

By Karen E. T. Garrett



Held online April 9-15, ASPA's 2021 Annual Conference brought together more than 1,800 public service professionals—practitioners, academics and students—to tackle some of the most critical and visible issues of our times. While all conference themes speak to a moment in time or current need, *Picking Up the Pieces: Pandemics, Protests and the Future of Public Service* focused sharply on the nation's and world's most important conversations. Many discussions reflected on societal inequities and disparities laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the steps that public servants, students and scholars can take to address them.

The first online conference ASPA has ever held, the 2021 event also was one of the most engaging. For example:

- Concurrent sessions had an average of 33 attendees.
- Each presidential panel and plenary session welcomed 100-200 participants live.
- Attendees spent—on average—17 hours accessing the content across all seven days.

- Global attendance increased by 30 percent over the 2019 in-person conference.
- Student participation provided vital engagement and accounted for 40 percent of conference activity.



Long-time attendees also observed exceptional first-time attendee participation and all participants enjoyed the round-the-clock session access, a product of the online environment. This year's event proved that an online conference can foster tremendous connection—certainly a goal for both attendees and organizers. (ASPA staff also reported after the event closed that it exceeded both expected registration numbers and budgeted revenue.)

## Our Work Matters

The event launched with an opening plenary from Los Angeles County Director of Personnel Lisa Garrett, who discussed the challenges her county has faced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. "Our work matters," she declared, describing the magnitude of effort her team of more than 100,000 employees put forward since March 2020. "Our greatest asset is our people and it is imperative that we support them."



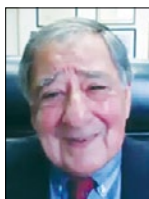
As she described the most important skills the LA County workforce has developed since the pandemic's onset, Garrett focused especially on the importance of using technology well to serve citizens and employees. "Automation creates uniformity in practices, and it creates efficiencies,"



she said. “Efficiencies create more meaningful work for employees. Meaningful work creates engaged employees. Engaged employees create higher productivity levels. And higher productivity creates great service and happy customers...Moving forward, the most successful agencies will be those who embrace this time as an opportunity to adopt—adopt new technologies, applications and processes—and those that are brave enough will provide greater autonomy to their employees.”

Garrett’s remarks reflected the immense esteem in which she holds public service—and public servants—and that gratitude was foundational for former U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, who delivered remarks as the 2021 Nesta M. Gallas Lecturer. “We have a responsibility to provide help to the most vulnerable in our society,” he said. “You could apply ‘silent warriors’ to all public servants who have dedicated their lives to the job they do.”

Panetta reflected on his decades of service in various capacities and observed that leadership can be found everywhere, no matter what role those leaders play—from elected office to public servant to public administrator to nonprofit manager. As he discussed the crises he managed, the successes he experienced and the dysfunction he witnessed, he observed that we all have to be invested in the great American experiment or it will not work. “We are all capable of serving, doing our duty and protecting our nation,” he said. “Frankly, it doesn’t mean a damn thing if all of us are not willing to fight for our country.”



After his prepared remarks, the secretary was interviewed by GovExec Media Group Editor at Large Tim Clark, who asked him a variety of questions about his experiences, time in service, the work of the Panetta Institute and the current political landscape. They ruminated on the gradual erosion of trust and faith in institutions over time and how we all can work within our democracy to rebuild that trust.



“There’s a sense that if you’re on the wrong side of an issue, you’re not to be trusted,” Panetta said. “There’s a tendency to spread these differences through lies and social media is a vehicle to spread that hate, anger and frustration—rapidly...Competence in government and delivery of services is the best way to confront those who continue to criticize...Love of country has to prevail. We need to respect one another, no matter what the views are. If we can try to re-establish trust in each other, we can put this country back on the right path.”

## Partnership and Trust

The concept of trust and partnership was prominent in speakers’ minds throughout the event’s keynotes and lectures as they reflected on equity, government programming, public service and more. “Partnership is a verb,” Ramsey County, Minnesota, Board of Commissioners Chair Toni Carter said, discussing the work of building local communities and developing effective programming. “We need to make sure someone is better off [from our work]. We need to go from reflecting what we do to making sure we are addressing a need.”



The commissioner cited examples of the need-based programs her county runs, one being the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, which originated within the African American community and was brought to the commission for consideration. Data showed that young African Americans had a greater chance of going to jail than going to college; this initiative was launched to change those outcomes. Starting with reducing the number of people in juvenile detention and continuing with reducing the percentages of young people of color living in correctional facilities, the initiative has been successful and even able to close a correctional facility.

Addressing needs also was the focus of the Donald C. Stone lecture, as Georgetown University’s Don Moynihan provided some of his scholarship related to administrative burdens. “Recognize that burdens are actively constructed—the result of political and administrative choices, or choices we don’t make,” he commented. He discussed the ways in which government programs work for or against their citizens: “Social security was designed to be easy and accessible,” he said. “When government wants to, it can do hard things for its people while not making it hard on the people.” He encouraged attendees to think through how bureaucracy can be used to discriminate and the ways in which bias produces inequities within programs—and then ask questions about program design and contemplate alternatives that will eliminate that bias.



## Seeing Inequities

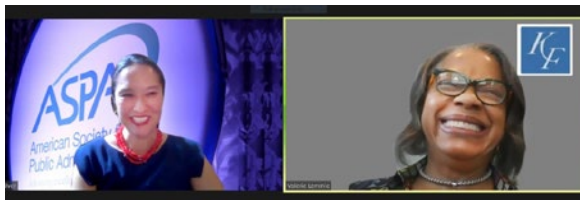
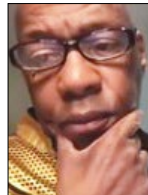
Program-based and social inequities, and racism specifically, were the topic of both the antiracism plenary, featuring anti-racism activist, professor and author Ibram Kendi, and the Gloria Hobson Nordin Social Equity Lecture, featuring Terryl Ross.



Interviewed by Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School Dean Susan Gooden, Kendi's observations went straight to the point: "The only measure of success [against racism] is if there is a generation of Americans who can say they were born in a nation with slavery and they died in a nation that did not have slavery." He went on to contemplate how researchers and scholars can contribute to policy that could make this goal a reality, including at his center at Harvard.

Following the interview, Gooden moderated a discussion during which she asked Professor Brandi Blessett of the University of Cincinnati and Maxwell School Dean David Van Slyke to reflect on a question central to Kendi's work: *What confessions do you think our field needs to make regarding racism?* "History and context matter," Blessett answered. "It is a privilege not to see race. We need historical context to see how inequities evolve and persist across generations." Van Slyke also pushed back on the notion that civil servants are passive in their work: "We have to go back and examine the politics/administration dichotomy; that notion that bureaucrats only 'execute' policymakers' will."

Ross, then-assistant dean for diversity, equity and inclusion at the University of Washington, used his remarks at the Gloria Hobson Nordin Social Equity Lecture to add perspective around diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. "There is a distinction between equity and equality," he said. "Inclusion means not just having people in the room, but also having them run the conversation. Diversity means calling in all people and making space."



Mariko Silver, this year's Elliot Richardson lecturer and CEO at the Henry Luce Foundation, introduced the term "forever projects" during her interview with Kettering Foundation Director of Exploratory Research Valerie Lemmie. "Navigating racism is a forever project...Every time I think I'm done

worrying about it, it bites me," she commented as she described her professional journey toward becoming a leader in a public policy community dominated by white men. "Trust-building is a forever process. It's a way of being." Her remarks centered around the importance of knowing oneself and building a network of supportive people as the cornerstone of growth. "I think about it as a web of influence—people who may not even know they are part of your world. The key is trust...and remember to listen."

The nature of interconnectedness was a theme during the global plenary, as *New York Times* reporter and author Jason DeParle discussed migration and immigration through the lens of 30 years he spent with a Filipino family both in the Philippines and the United States. "Migration is a vehicle of salvation," DeParle observed. "It's good [for the United States] to be the place where people go to make their dreams come true."



The discussions went far beyond this year's plenaries. Seven presidential panels and more than 160 sessions—as well as six symposia and numerous business meetings—provided space for discussions on a wide range of topics. Some of this year's panels featured ASPA Sections' work, including the Section on Emergency and Crisis Management and the Section on Korean Public Administration (celebrating its 10th anniversary this year). Attendees also heard about important global initiatives during a panel focusing on the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals and important local initiatives during a panel focused on cities' DEI efforts, featuring the directors of state and local government offices on equity.

### Honoring Excellence

Awards ceremonies taking place throughout the event offered the chance to celebrate and thank more than 40 people and organizations for the work they have done to advance excellence in public service ([click here to see our list of honorees](#)) and the online event provided space to show acceptance videos from those being recognized.

- The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and National Association of State Election Directors received the Public Integrity Award.



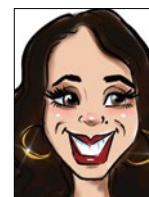
- Janice Lachance received the Elmer B. Staats Lifetime Achievement Award.
- Teodoro Benavides and Mary Guy received the Paul Van Riper Award.
- Roslyn Alic-Batson, Charles Menifield, M. Jae Moon and James Ward received the Donald C. Stone Award.
- Richard Stillman received the Dwight Waldo Award.
- Susan Gooden received the Charles H. Levine Memorial Award.
- Craig Grossenbacher received the John W. Gaston Jr. Award.
- Matt Allen, Community Building Initiative, Kara Johnson-Hufford, the National Low-Income Housing Coalition and the RVA Eviction Lab at VCU received the Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Award.

This year's National Public Service Awards presentation included awards for six distinguished honorees:

- Miguel Marquez (County of Santa Clara), who was honored for his role as chief operating officer for the county.
- Maria (Sandy) Matava (Suffolk University), who was honored for her role as commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (1983-1991) and commissioner of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (1975-1979).
- James Mayer (University of the Pacific), who was honored for his leadership at California Forward in his role as president emeritus and senior fellow.
- Sean O'Keefe (Syracuse University), who was honored for his service at NASA as a former administrator.
- Jennifer Riggle (Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration), who was honored for her service as director of grants policy in this agency.
- P. Benjamin Smith (Indian Health Service), who was honored for his service as deputy director for intergovernmental affairs at the Indian Health Service.

*Public Administration Review* and *Public Integrity* awards were presented, as were Chapter and Section awards and student and new professional scholarships.

From beginning to end, the theme, plenary sessions, concurrent panels and paper topics conveyed the important topics on everyone's minds: COVID responses, equity, racism, public service ideals and other wicked problems that are the norm throughout the profession. "Picking up the pieces," came to the foreground again and again; despite working toward our "noble calling," the sense of "forever projects" loomed. While all attendees were excited to be together, even if online, they also ended the live events with a sense that there is tremendous work to do if we want pieces to be picked up—and hopefully reassembled to tell a better story.



# Members in the News

## Berry Honored for Contributions to the Field

Frances Berry, Askew eminent scholar and Sherwood professor of public administration in the Askew School of Public Administration and Policy at Florida State University, has received the Public Management Research Association's 2021 H. George Frederickson Award for Career Contributions to Public Management Research in honor of her exemplary contributions to intellectual development of the field. The Frederickson Award honors senior scholars for their career contributions, which include building professional capital related to public management research.



## Duffy Awarded Mongolian Friendship Medal

John Duffy, president of ASPA's International Chapter, has been awarded the Nairamdal Medal, a friendship award, from the president of Mongolia. The medal is conferred on foreigners who have made significant contributions to strengthening the collaboration and friendship between their country and Mongolia, as well as contributions to developing the country through their work.



## Myers Receives Josie R. Johnson Human Rights and Social Justice Award

Humphrey School Professor Samuel Myers, Jr. has been honored with the University of Minnesota's 2021 Josie R. Johnson Human Rights and Social Justice Award. The award was established to recognize Johnson's lifelong contributions to human rights and social justice, both within and beyond her tenure at the University of Minnesota. Myers, an economist and the most recent recipient, joined the Humphrey School of Public Affairs in 1992 to lead the newly established Roy Wilkins Center for Human Relations and Social Justice. Using an integrated model of research, dialogue and community partnerships, the center guides and empowers policymakers and community leaders in developing and promoting solutions to the problems of racism and racial and ethnic inequality.



As center director, Myers has become a national authority on the study of racial disparities in a range of areas, including criminal justice, education, mortgage lending, drowning rates and procurement and contracting. In addition to his academic work, he has supported efforts to empower communities of color and their leaders as they advance professionally and educationally.

"Josie Johnson is my idol and role model," said Myers. "She introduced me to many local community elders and encouraged me to do what I have been attempting to do since I arrived here in 1992: be the best possible academic researcher and to undertake research and scholarship on behalf of communities of color."

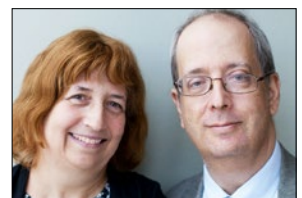
## Goldman Appointed Dean of USC Price School

Dana Goldman has been appointed dean of the USC Price School of Public Policy, where he will hold the C. Erwin and Ione L. Piper dean's chair. Goldman has directed the USC Schaeffer Center for Health Policy and Economics for 12 years. Founded in 1929, USC Price brings research from a broad range of disciplines to bear on pressing public policy and governance issues. The USC Schaeffer Center is but one area of renown within the school, which has leading programs in urban policy, nonprofit management and health policy and management. Previously, Goldman was an economist and director of health economics, finance and organization with the Rand Corporation. He has advised the Congressional Budget Office, served as a fellow with the Brookings Institution and worked as a researcher with the National Bureau of Economic Research. He received his bachelor's degree from Cornell University and PhD in economics from Stanford University.



## Barrett and Greene Appointed to Chair Route Fifty Advisory Board

Announced this spring, state and local government policy experts Katherine Barrett and Richard Greene now co-chair media company *Route Fifty's* recently launched advisory group.



Board members will offer expertise on key issues and trends at the state and local levels and help raise

the visibility of the publication. They are joined by 20 fellow board members, including former elected officials, current state and local officials and representatives from academia, think tanks and associations. Greene chairs ASPA's Center on Accountability and Performance.

### Caraballo Named Director of FIU Civic Leadership Institute

Agatha Caraballo has been named inaugural director of Florida International University's recently launched Maurice A. Ferré Institute for Civic Leadership in the Steven J. Green School of International & Public Affairs (SIPA). Named after the former Miami mayor, the institute will build on his legacy by preparing FIU graduates and citizens to effect positive social change in local and global communities. Caraballo was associate teaching professor and assistant chair in SIPA's Department of Public Policy and Administration and directs a leadership studies certificate program. In addition, she is affiliate faculty in the African and African Diaspora Studies Program.



### Carroll Named Director of UIC Government Finance Research Center

Deborah Carroll has been named director of the Government Finance Research Center at the University of Illinois Chicago. She joins UIC from the University of Central Florida, where she was director of the Center for Public and Nonprofit Management. Carroll's research focuses on management and policy issues of state and local governments, particularly related to taxation, revenue diversification and urban economic development. She has produced more than 50 academic publications and more than one dozen grant-funded white papers and technical reports. She is editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*.



Carroll has served on the governing boards of the Southeastern Conference for Public Administration and ASPA's Association for Budgeting and Financial Management; as editorial board member of the *Journal of Public Budgeting, Accounting, and Financial Management* and *Urban Affairs Review*; associate editor of *Public Administration Review*; and ABFM treasurer.

### Chandra Elected Leader of IPSA Research Committee

Saurabh Chandra, managing director of the IPARN Foundation, has been elected to secretary general of the RC10-Research Committee on Electronic Democracy for the International Political Science Association (IPSA). The foundation promotes research and knowledge exchange for public policy and administration professionals in India. Founded by UNESCO, IPSA is an international scholarly organization aimed at promoting and advancing political science throughout the world. Chandra is a member of the Section on Science and Technology in Government.



### Rutgers Awarded \$1 Million to Establish State Policy Lab



Rutgers has received \$1 million from the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education to establish a policy lab to analyze solutions to critical issues facing the Garden State. Housed in Rutgers' Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy and managed in conjunction with the Rutgers-Newark School of Public Affairs and Administration, an ASPA institutional member, the lab will include expertise from a network of scholars, community members and external policy experts.

The lab's main purposes include providing policymakers with clear and accessible research on state and local governance while assisting stakeholders in troubleshooting unanticipated implementation issues; generating data modeling for policy recommendations to enable state policymakers to test different budgetary and legislative scenarios; and building coalitions across governments, institutions of higher education and community organizations to support evidence-based policy initiatives.

### Kamensky Named Emeritus Fellow

John Kamensky has retired from his role as senior fellow at The IBM Center for The Business of Government where he has been named emeritus fellow. Kamensky served in senior federal government for more than 20 years prior to moving to research work in recent years. He continues to serve on ASPA's Center for Accountability and Performance board.



**In Memoriam: Priscilla Hopkirk**

Priscilla Hopkirk, a longtime Villanova University political science professor, passed away in June. An active member of ASPA's Philadelphia Chapter and a trailblazer for women's rights, she began her service at Villanova in 1967, when she was hired as assistant professor and the first woman in the political science department. She was the first woman to chair the department, a position she held from 1978 to 1988.



An ASPA member for more than 25 years, Hopkirk served the Philadelphia Chapter as secretary, and on various committees throughout her tenure. "She always kept us on target and provided a sense of stability given her long-time commitment to ASPA and our chapter," said fellow Chapter member Tom Sheaffer. "With her, it was always a team of two because she and her husband were inseparable."

Hopkirk was born in Schenectady, New York and grew up in Boston and Belmont, Massachusetts. She attended what was then Radcliffe College and, inspired by a class she took during her first semester with former Franklin D. Roosevelt speechwriter Samuel Beer, she decided to major in government. She received her bachelor's degree from Radcliffe and her master's and Ph.D., both in government, from Harvard. She was active in civic and professional organizations and chaired the Delaware County Council of the League of Women Voters from 1966 to 1968. She remained active in the league through retirement.

**In Memoriam: Mary Maloney**

Polk County, Iowa Treasurer and ASPA Iowa Chapter member Mary Maloney passed away in January 2021. Having served the county for more than 30 years, her dedication to public service was clear to everyone who knew her. A member of ASPA since 1994, Maloney was active in the Association for Budgeting and Financial Management and served in Iowa Chapter leadership in the early 2000s.



Maloney graduated from Iowa State University in 1977 with an economics degree. When she started working for Polk County more than 30 years ago, she brought with her a financial and computer background in business. She also was a staple of the local political scene; colleagues remembered there rarely was a political event she did not attend.

**STRAUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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and confidants to a number of presidents, family members have been involved actively in the formulation of American public policy for more than 100 years.

*Mallory Sullivan is a council member of ASPA's Massachusetts Chapter (MassASPAs). She can be reached at [mallorysullivan@gmail.com](mailto:mallorysullivan@gmail.com).*

*Marc Holzer most recently served as distinguished professor at the Institute of Public Service, Suffolk University, Boston. He is president of MassASPAs and can be reached at [marcholzer1@gmail.com](mailto:marcholzer1@gmail.com).*

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