

JUNE 2017 • COLORADO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

COLORADO MUNICIPALITIES

COLORADO CITIES & TOWNS

COMMUNITY

VIBRANCY

LIFESTYLE

HOME

TRAVEL

SAFETY

ELEVATING PUBLIC SERVICE

PUBLIC SERVICE RECOGNITION Week has been celebrated the first week of May since 1985, annually honoring the men and women who serve our nation as federal, state, county, and local government employees.

With all the talk these days about “draining the swamp,” is this really something we want to celebrate? The answer is “Absolutely yes!” Americans really want quite a bit from our government. We want good schools, safe communities, reliable transportation and communication networks, clean air and water, tested medicines, and honest financial markets. We expect those public goods to be commonly accessible and reasonably affordable. We actually like our government, and we want it to work well.

That is why it is so important to focus on the future of public service. The way our government delivers services to its citizens, and the very services it delivers, are likely to be quite different a decade from now than they are today. We have never needed more attention to how we can provide what citizens want and need, in ways that are efficient and responsive. We should be thinking now about developing the tools and processes that can make our vision of future government service delivery a reality. We also should be making sure the people who use those tools and processes to make government work are the very best at what they do. That is where the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) plays an important role.

NAPA helps government leaders solve their most critical management challenges. Since 1967, this congressionally chartered nonprofit academy has provided expert advice to government leaders in building and managing more effective, efficient, accountable, and transparent organizations. Its national network of more than 850 fellows includes former cabinet officers, members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, business executives, and public administrators. Supported by a full-time professional staff, these fellows bring their insights, experiences, successes, and lessons learned straight to the academy’s clients through independent thought leadership, in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums, and conferences. Nowhere else can government leaders consult such a broad array of relevant expertise.

Many of NAPA’s fellows are actively at work in towns and cities across the country, where government meets its citizens, finding innovative solutions to complex problems so that government works better.

Jan Perry was elected a NAPA fellow in 2016. Perry also serves as the general manager of the City of Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department and was on the job when, in September 2015, the Los Angeles City Council declared that L.A.’s homeless crisis had reached a “state of emergency.” Perry and her team developed a

comprehensive program to address the issue. As part of this effort, the City unveiled the Los Angeles Regional Initiative for Social Enterprise (LA: RISE), a five-year, \$6 million program designed to serve the populations hardest to place in jobs, including the homeless, those with histories of past incarcerations, and disconnected youth. LA: RISE integrates employment, social enterprise, and specialized homeless service providers within the City’s workforce system. Participants are placed in entry-level jobs with potential for growth, such as food service, janitorial, street maintenance, and office work. Participants also receive personal support services to stabilize their lives to help them maintain employment, such as financial literacy training and health care, along with career training services. The program was initially funded by the Department of Labor’s Workforce Innovation Fund, enrolling more than 1,000 participants. Under Perry’s leadership, in 2016, the City provided an additional \$2 million to this innovative program serve to an additional 275 people. She continues to provide oversight of LA: RISE in partnership with REDF, a social enterprise nonprofit.

Across the country, Sharon Kershbaum is dealing with a similar issue. The chief operating officer at the Department of Human Services in D.C. and a NAPA fellow since 2016, Kershbaum and her team work to resolve the issues of homelessness, and especially family homelessness, in the nation’s capital.

Kershbaum’s organization provides eligibility determination and enrollment support for federal benefit programs (SNAP, TANF, Medicaid) as well as local programs, through five service centers throughout the district where residents come to enroll in or recertify their benefits. For years, poor service center operations was a pain point for residents, who often waited in line for hours and had to come back multiple times to get their benefits processed. The primary performance measure used to be customer wait time. When the lines got longer, staff were told to work more quickly and gather the documents needed but to wait until later to enter the data into the system of record and to approve later, when the lines were not so long. Invariably, the backlog of cases and number of errors grew, and clients came back again and again inquiring about why their cases were still pending. The agency continued to ask for more staff, thinking the problem was staff shortages.

In November 2016, Kershbaum redesigned the business process to ensure every client’s benefits were fully processed before he or she left a center. Her team trained staff on the new approach and gave them tools to verify information through other sources if clients did not have all the needed documents with them. Kershbaum needed to remove the concern about the wait time because she recognized that things would get worse before they could get better. She has now rolled out the new process in four of the five service

centers. As expected, the wait times got longer because every customer interaction took 20 to 40 minutes. The difference now is that customers do not have to come back a second time. No longer tracking wait time, Sharon now watches the completion rate (percentage of time benefits are fully processed during the initial visit), time to complete a case (to identify staff who are taking much longer than their peers), and active time of staff (to ensure staff are actively “in use” and helping customers). The impact has been dramatic — centers are now able to service nearly 50 percent more clients on a given day, and the wait lines are eliminated. Customers also leave the service center with the comfort of knowing their benefits are approved and available.

Perry, Kershbaum, and hundreds of other NAPA fellows are working on specific government challenges in municipalities and states across the country using best practices based on evidence to improve the lives of their

citizens. At the same time, NAPA also supports several ongoing panel discussions to develop responses to government challenges across a broad array of topics. Of these, the intergovernmental services panel considers challenges and issues related to the U.S. federal system and intergovernmental relations, including the dynamics of relationships between citizens and their government, and relationships between the federal, state, and local levels of government. This thought leadership helps drive the development of policy recommendations and options that inform local solutions like the ones Perry and Kershbaum have implemented.

The Academy is proud of its role in enabling a “government that works, and works for all.” NAPA is proud of its fellows, who are making a difference every day in the lives of citizens in towns and cities across the country, and it is proud that the collective work of all its fellows elevates the mission of public service and the effectiveness of those who serve.

