

As Mentorship Chair, Mahsa Pan Is Making Mid-Career Professionals Sit Up and Take Notice



Mahsa Pan (WTS-LA Mentorship Chair and Civil Engineer at the Port of Los Angeles), Photos © John Livzey, 2017

Sometimes a great notion is fully realized. But it takes work, a great idea, and a commitment to quality. The WTS-LA Mid-Career Leadership Program (MCLP) serves as a perfect example of a great notion that is being fully realized. A program that joins mid-career professionals with WTS-LA directors-at-large, the Mid-Career Leadership Program benefits all of its participants. And this year, 2017 Mentorship chair and civil engineer at the Port of Los Angeles (POLA) Mahsa Hematabadi Pan, PE, looks to enhance those benefits considerably.

“Last year Veronica Siranosian began a very unique program that really addressed an important need within WTS-LA, one that traditionally received less attention than others. I want to build on the wonderful foundation that she established. And to do that, we reached out to the current MCLP members and got extremely valuable feedback. For example, the general consensus wanted additional structured meetings within the program, including facilitated events on subjects relevant to both mentees and mentors. With that information in hand, we reached out to our board for suggestions on speakers and topics and we discussed topics participants put forward, like how to ask for raises and promotions. So in terms of orchestrating the program, feedback has proved invaluable.”



Ms. Pan plans to continue that feedback loop throughout the year. Running from July 2016 to July 2017, the MCLP is still celebrating its inaugural class. And that class has proven to be quite interesting. According to Pan, on their own initiative the mentees meet monthly at lunch to connect informally with each other on the progress of the program and their mentor relationships. In addition, the original MCLP designated three events: a kickoff program, a mid-program, and graduation. Using group feedback, Ms. Pan decided to add more events before the group graduates. She also explained that WTS-LA will alternate each year between the more traditional program for emerging professionals and the MCLP. But Ms. Pan also emphasizes that much of the credit for the program rests with AECOM transportation and land use planning manager Veronica Siranosian for creating such an important, and necessary program.

According to Siranosian, it wasn't easy, but it was well worth it to address the needs of WTS-LA members.



“For the past two years, we had a very traditional WTS-LA Mentorship program that focused on emerging professionals,” explains Ms. Siranosian. “But what we heard from our membership was that they wanted something more focused on mid-career levels. People were getting to a certain point in their careers where they weren't able to advance or didn't know what to do to advance. So we created the MCLP. The MCLP focuses on more experienced people, people with some level of management experience, and pairs them with executive-level leaders to help them advance to the next level in their careers. The other goal of the program was to better engage our directors-at-large. And the MCLP does both of those things very well.”

“To launch the program, we hosted an event at AECOM that brought together MCLP participants and WTS-LA directors-at-large. Fehr & Peers principal Katie Carr facilitated a discussion that

instructed participants on how to get the most out of an executive-level mentor. She also talked about facilitating mentoring sessions, goal setting, and commitments on both sides of the table, among other pertinent topics. It was a perfect way to launch the program, as we were able to train everyone on how to get the most out of the program at the outset.”

Held at AECOM, the three-hour orientation/training welcomed 16 MCLP participants. And they were thrilled to be there, as entry to the program was competitive. Because of limited space, only half of the WTS-LA members that applied gained entry. According to Ms. Siranosian, they understood well the advantages the MCLP can bring to their careers.

“The members were really excited. This is a pretty exclusive opportunity to have a close mentoring relationship with a top transportation executive, an industry leader. It really is a tremendous opportunity. And the executives are excited as well, as it's a unique way for them to give back to the community. One of our directors-at-large explained that she's always trying to hone her skills as a manager. She wants to keep developing those skills, while keeping a pulse on what emerging leaders are thinking. So she's looking forward to really working with the woman she will mentor.” Sometimes a great notion is fully realized, but it takes work, a great idea, and a commitment to quality. Using the solid foundation created last year, 2017 Mentorship chair and civil engineer at POLA Mahsa Pan plans to advance the Mid-Career Leadership Program to fully address the needs of this significant population within WTS-LA. Want to know how? For more information about the program and WTS-LA Mentorship efforts, please visit the [WTS-LA Mentorship page](#).

