

2020 WTS-LA Employer of the Year – Southern California Association of Governments



Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) at a WTS-LA College Outreach Student Mixer

Where all things being equal is just another day at the office...

Each year, WTS-LA singles out an organization for its demonstrable commitment to advancing women, its successful ability to integrate equity, and its absolute dedication to providing professional education and development opportunities for women and minorities. That's a pretty tall order. But it's one that the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) fulfills every day.

Founded in 1965, SCAG is the nation's largest metropolitan planning organization, representing six counties, 191 cities, and more than 19 million people in Southern California. In that capacity, SCAG researches and plans for a vast array of disciplines, including transportation, growth management, hazardous waste management, and air quality for that jurisdiction. And in successfully fulfilling that mandate, SCAG's work is unparalleled. It is a model for the nation. But it's also a model for another reason—its indefatigable efforts to ensure meaningful equity in both its own ranks and to the jurisdiction it serves.



SCAG believes in its people. So much so, in fact, that the organization works tirelessly to institutionalize equity. And it has an enviable record of doing just that. But SCAG never stops or rests on laurels. For example, as recently as July 2020, SCAG rolled out a new benefits package that included twelve weeks of paid parental leave for all parents. It also adopted a resolution reaffirming the agency's commitment to racial and social justice, both internally and externally, to better serve its communities of color and vulnerable populations. Without question, equitable policy is extremely important. But what about action?

Consider SCAG's gender makeup. Between 2012 and 2020, four of the past eight SCAG presidents have been women. Currently, one of three board officers is a woman, with that woman on track to be the next president. SCAG's Executive Team and Management staff includes seven women (out of a potential eleven positions) in leadership roles, including Planning Director Sarah Jepson. From leadership to employee engagement to continuing education to professional development, SCAG constantly assesses

and reassesses its operations and policies to ensure that it promotes and supports equity within. But that equity doesn't stop at SCAG's office doors.

SCAG has long supported WTS-LA, encouraging staff to join the chapter, as well as fully subsidizing membership costs. In the past two years alone, SCAG has sponsored ten WTS memberships for staff. Naturally, that results in many SCAG leaders lending their expertise to WTS. Numerous leaders with the WTS Southern California chapters also call SCAG home, including WTS-LA Scholarship Chair Hannah Brunelle (SCAG Associate Regional Planner) and WTS-LA Programs Co-Chair Estee Sepulveda (SCAG Legislative Analyst). But SCAG's dedication to equity also extends well into the future in the form of scholarships.

Since 2012, SCAG has contributed \$16,000 to WTS-LA's scholarship program. In addition, SCAG awards ten scholarships to high school and community college students from Southern California, as they have for the last ten years. And each \$4,000 scholarship also includes a two-week internship with SCAG or a local planning agency. This year, nine of those ten scholarship recipients are women.

Finally, SCAG in no way limits its generosity to WTS-LA. SCAG strongly supports WTS Orange County and WTS Inland Empire as well, both in terms of sponsored members and scholarships. They even provided support for a new student chapter established at Cal Poly Pomona this year. And WTS is by no means the only organization SCAG supports.

Each year, WTS-LA singles out an organization for its comprehensive approach and effective action in support of equity. That organization must meet an extremely high standard to be so selected. The Southern California Association of Governments exceeds that standard every day, both for its employees and the residents within its jurisdiction.