

FAPAC Annual Leadership Training Advances the Ideals of AANHPI Heritage Month

The Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) recently concluded its highly anticipated 38th Annual National Leadership Training Program (NLTP), which was held at the Westin Hotel in Long Beach, California, from May 8 - 11, 2023. This event marked a significant milestone as the first in-person FAPAC NLTP since the 2019 training event in Huntsville, Alabama. The theme of this year's NLTP, "Advancing Leaders Through Opportunity," shined a light on the important concepts of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) in enhancing training and leadership opportunities by fostering teamwork, innovation, and collaboration within the workforce. (source: <https://fapac.org/agenda2023>)

As a non-profit, nonpartisan organization representing Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) employees in the Federal and District of Columbia City governments, FAPAC plays a crucial role in fostering a supportive environment for AANHPI professionals. Currently boasting a national membership count of over 700, FAPAC continues to empower its members and promote their interests.

Established in 2020, the FAPAC DOT Chapter plays a vital role in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Department of Transportation (DOT). The chapter provides resources, opportunities, and a supportive community for professional growth, cultural awareness, and social connectedness. The executive board members, serving two-year terms, include President Rachel Rabusa [Program Manager at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)], Secretary Ranmali Fonseka [Program Analyst at the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)], and Treasurer Annabelle Flores [Management & Program Analyst at the FAA].

The 38th Annual FAPAC NLTP proved to be a resounding success, attracting over 450 in-person attendees, numerous virtual participants, approximately 30 sponsors (including FAA), and eight partners [including Elevate and the White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (WHIAANHPI)]. The event featured several notable ceremonies, including the Agency and Partner Recognition Award Ceremony, the Uniformed Services Awards Ceremony, and the Civilian Awards and Scholarship Ceremony.

Distinguished keynote speakers added immense value to the NLTP program, bringing their expertise and insights to the forefront. Among the esteemed speakers were Dr. Minh A. Nguyen, Executive Director of the Office of Commercial Space Transportation at the FAA; Vice-Admiral Andrew J. Tiongson and Rear Admiral Andrew Sugimoto from the U.S Coast Guard; Clarence Johnson, Principal Advisor to the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel & Readiness) on diversity management, equal opportunity, and equal employment; and Jane Nishida, Assistant Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of International and Tribal Affairs (OITA). Their contributions enriched the NLTP program, providing attendees with valuable insights and inspiration.

Throughout the NLTP, participants engaged in various sessions tailored to their professional development needs. These sessions included Executive Professional Development, a Student Program, a Veterans Program, and plenary sessions such as Transformation through Leadership Development and the Executive Women's Leadership Forum. Attendees could choose from workshops in four tracks covering areas such as Military, Diversity & Inclusion/Human Resources/Equal Employment Opportunity, Career Development, and Personal Development.

On May 8th, the FAPAC DOT Chapter and the FAA National Asian & Pacific American (NAPA) employee association played a pivotal role in the NLTP by hosting a FAPAC Pre-Conference session on DEIA. The session featured notable speakers such as Aloha Ley and Dr. Minh A. Nguyen. Aloha Ley, Strategy and Planning Lead in the Quality, Integration & Executive Services Division, took the stage to discuss the importance of stepping outside one's comfort zone and provided an enlightening exploration of the meaning of DEIA. Dr. Minh A. Nguyen captivated the audience with his personal journey to the SES, whilst sharing best practices, challenges, and effective strategies for overcoming obstacles in the field.

Another enlightening segment of the session was the presentation titled "What's The Big I.D.E.A." led by the Air Traffic Organization (ATO) DEIA team of Erin Martin and Ronicsa Chambers. Erin's and Ronicsa's talk delved into topics such as understanding implicit bias and microaggressions, while also shedding light on advancing DEIA in the workplace. Furthermore, the session included a dynamic leadership roundtable discussion, featuring both managers and non-managers: Dr. Minh A. Nguyen, Aloha Ley, Peter Nguyen, Zena Huen, Kevin Le, and Annabelle Flores offered valuable insights and perspectives on driving DEIA progress within the workplace. This comprehensive and engaging pre-conference session provided attendees with a wealth of knowledge and practical guidance.

During the event, FAPAC Membership Co-Chairs Rita Lee and Thanh Trang actively recruited new talent at the FAA and Membership booths, while two other DOT employees manned the USDOT booth, furthering the organization's mission of promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A presentation, held on May 10th, that aligned with the FAPAC and AANHPI Heritage Month theme of Advancing Leaders Through Opportunity, was titled “Leveraging DEIA to Empower Organizational Competitive Advantage.” Its presenter was Robert M. Baggett, Special Agent-in-Charge, USDA Office of Inspector General. According to Mr. Baggett, who also serves as Vice President of FAPAC National, “the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has identified three key examples in its Diversity and Inclusion FAQs as to how DEIA advances social responsibility within communities, cultivates innovation, and increases the return on investment for organizations.”

First, the practices of diversity and inclusion increase an agency’s capacity to serve and protect people with different experiences or backgrounds and enhance the agency’s ability to be receptive to different traditions and ideas. Second, increased innovation is a byproduct of capitalizing on differences. Employees from varied backgrounds bring different perspectives, ideas, and solutions to the workplace that result in new products and services, challenge to the status quo, and new collaboration. Third, diversity and inclusion initiatives improve the quality of an agency’s workforce and become the catalyst for a better return on investment in human capital. One of the biggest budget items in any agency is the amount it spends on human resources in the form of salaries, benefits, training, development, and recruitment. In order to get a healthy return on investment in human capital and to maximize competitive advantage, an agency must engage in recruitment and retention efforts that focus on acquiring the best and the brightest talent.

Likewise, by providing opportunities for advancement, organizations can reduce the barriers to professional progression and consequently reduce employee turnover, whilst increasing employee engagement and satisfaction. A successful organization invests in its employees’ professional development by providing opportunities that enable the employees to refine their skills and enhance their leadership abilities. The 2023 NLTP provided a valuable framework for organizations to enhance their training in leadership, diversity, inclusion, career advancement, and management.

Story by Ranmali Fonseka



38th FAPAC NLTP Welcome Reception – Vietnamese Cultural Performance on May 8th. Photo submitted by Thong Vu.



FAA booth at NLTP. From left to right are Kevin Le (FAA); Mary-Jo Marlow (DOJ); Rita Lee (FAA); Barbara Holston (DCSA); FAPAC President Fahmida Chhipa (USDA); and Thong Vu (FAA). Photo submitted by Thong Vu.



FAPAC Uniformed Services Awards Ceremony – US Coast Guard on May 10th. Photo submitted by Thong Vu.



On May 10th FAPAC VP Robert Baggett (USDA) presents Leveraging DEIA to Empower Organizational Competitive Advantage. Photo submitted by Ranmali Fonseka.



Executive Women's Leadership Forum on May 11th. From left to right are Dr. Minh Nguyen (FAA); FAPAC President Fahmida Chhipa (USDA); Dr. Ngozi Butler-Guerrier (NOAA); Rear Admiral Shoshana Chatfield (USN); Thuy Ho (DOJ); Jane Nishida (EPA); and Katelyn Choe (DOS). Photo submitted by Thong Vu.