



New Fellow Spotlight: Geoffrey Beckwith

Director & CEO

Massachusetts Municipal Association

Geoff Beckwith is the Executive Director & CEO of the Massachusetts Municipal Association, a position he has held since 1992. In this post, Beckwith is also the President & CEO of the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association, MMA's nonprofit municipal insurance program. In 2020, Beckwith also joined the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management as a Mentor for the school's Global Organizations Lab, the capstone course for Executive MBA students.

Prior to assuming his post at MMA in February 1992, Beckwith was:

- Director, Work Environment, Environment, and Technology Policy at the University of Massachusetts/Lowell (1991-1992);
- Elected to 3 terms as a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives (1985-1991), where he served as Vice Chair of the Committee on Government Regulations, and as a member of the Committees on Taxation, Housing & Urban Development, and Natural Resources & Agriculture. During his tenure as a State Representative, Beckwith was the author of the nation's first toxics use reduction act, and was named Environmental Legislator of the Year in 1989 and Energy Legislator of the Year in 1988;
- Campaign Manager of the Campaign for Massachusetts' Future (1990);
- Lecturer in Political Science at Emmanuel College (1989);
- Assistant to the Massachusetts Commissioner of Commerce & Development (1983-1984);
- Administrative Assistant to the Board of Selectmen in the Town of Reading, Massachusetts (1982-1983); and
- Legislative Assistant in the Massachusetts House of Representatives (1979-1982).

Beckwith has served on the Board of Directors of the National League of Cities three times (2019-present, 2009-2011, and 1995-1997). He also chairs NLC's Audit Committee, and is a past member of the organization's Advisory Council, and a past board member and chair of NLC's Risk Information Sharing Consortium (NLC-RISC).

Beckwith holds an MBA degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and is a magna cum laude graduate of Boston College. He lives in Reading, MA, with his wife Dru Wood-Beckwith, a speech pathologist. They have two adult children, Calley and Sam, who also work in nonprofit organizations.

What are you most looking forward to as a NAPA Fellow?

I am looking forward to meeting new leaders, especially from state and federal government and academic institutions, and exploring practical ways that we can make progress in restoring a level of collaboration and respect in our intergovernmental system. Having worked closely with municipal leaders over the past 30 years, I am struck by how the COVID-19 pandemic has unmasked the gradual unravelling of federalism, as partisanship and polarization has driven a wedge between government officials who serve the same constituents. Ironically, I believe that more effective intergovernmental partnerships would be a political benefit to both parties, as the average resident is simply looking for good services delivered effectively and efficiently.

What inspires you during these challenging times?

I believe that the vast majority of public employees at every level, up, down and across our government have demonstrated extraordinary leadership and dedication during the pandemic. I've seen this in the cities and towns of Massachusetts, and from all of our state officials. No one "signed up" for the pandemic, but everyone I've seen and worked with has leaned in and done their part to problem-solve and protect the most vulnerable among us. There is no question that the public officials of Massachusetts have saved lives and innovated in the most difficult of circumstances.

This quiet leadership of dedication and service has been beautiful to see, even in the grimmest of times.

What do you enjoy most about the work you do?

My organization works directly with more than 2,000 local officials, including volunteer elected leaders and professional managers, and my colleagues and I get our energy from engaging with, learning from, and providing services to all of them. Their commitment to building stronger and better communities and serving their neighbors is deeply inspiring!

Who or what inspired you to work in public service?

When I was in high school, I volunteered as a microphone holder at my community's annual Town Meeting, where all registered voters spent an entire Saturday voting on the town's budget, and on zoning changes, and other local issues. It was fascinating to see first-hand that our government is really our people, and the neighbors who showed up actually had a voice and a vote in the process. I wanted to learn more, and to be part of that "when I grew up." Maybe that's why I have gravitated toward local government, where direct democracy and extreme transparency are more achievable and built into the system.

Which of the Academy's Grand Challenges resonate most with you?

Develop New Approaches to Public Governance and Engagement, probably because that's part of my day job. Increasing collaboration, partnerships and mutual respect between local, state and local leaders is a must if we want to tackle the seemingly intractable issues of climate change, sustainability, racial equity, and so much more. However, Foster Social Equity resonates deeply with me as well, because people, neighborhoods and communities will continue to suffer and struggle unless we recognize that we all have a stake in each other's future. I believe we'll never be a true land of opportunity without much greater social and racial equity.

What advice can you give to folks beginning careers in public service?

You can make a real difference, if you bring your best selves to the process, remain humble, and respect everyone. If you do that, you will have an amazing career that will bring you to unexpected places, your journey will be rewarding, and you will learn and grow every day.

What was the first concert you ever attended?

My first concert was Bob Dylan at the Boston Garden. And my second was Pete Seeger at UMass Amherst. Nowadays, it's Richard Thompson whenever he's touring nearby.