



New Fellow Spotlight: Felicia Marcus

William C. Landreth Visiting Fellow

Stanford University's Water in the West Program

Felicia Marcus is the William C. Landreth Visiting Fellow at Stanford University's Water in the West Program, an attorney, consultant and member of the Water Policy Group. She most recently served as chair of the California State Water Resources Control Board, implementing laws regarding drinking water and water quality and state's water rights, hearing regional board water quality appeals, settling disputes and providing financial assistance to communities to upgrade water infrastructure. Before her appointment to the Water Board, Marcus served in positions in government, the non-profit and private sector. In government, Felicia served as the regional administrator of the

Environmental Protection Agency's Pacific Southwest region during the Clinton Administration, where she was known for her work in bringing unlikely allies together for environmental progress and for making the agency more responsive to the communities it serves, particularly Indian Tribes, communities of color, local government and agricultural and business interests. Preceding the EPA, Marcus served as the president of the board of Public Works for the City of Los Angeles presiding over the department through a time of great change and challenge, including numerous emergency response situations (including flood, earthquake and riots).

In the non-profit world, she was the western director for the Natural Resources Defense Council, and prior to that the executive vice president and chief operating officer of the Trust for Public Land. Marcus also has an extensive background as a private sector and public interest lawyer, as well as a community organizer, most notably as a founder and general counsel to Heal the Bay. She has served as the director of litigation for Public Counsel, a public interest law firm; an associate at the law firm of Munger, Tolles & Olson; a visiting fellow at the Center for Law in the Public Interest; a law clerk to the Honorable Harry Pregerson (9th Circuit Court of Appeals); and legislative assistant to Congressman Anthony C. Beilenson in Washington, DC.

She has a Bachelor of Arts in East Asian Studies from Harvard College, and Juris Doctor degree from New York University School of Law.

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

Wow, where do I start? I'm really looking forward to interacting with the other Fellows, with their wealth of experience in actual public administration at the federal, state, and local level and just learning about their challenges and successes across the spectrum of agencies and issues. As Yogi Berra said, "In theory there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice, there is." There is a wealth of academic writing about public administration, but less from people who actually know what it is like to be a practitioner. I'm eager to hear the stories, and eager to contribute to academy projects with my practitioner's lens and experience.

What inspires you during these challenging times?

In these disheartening times, I have been inspired by the courage of people, even if that is just in going to work every day in essential services, or speaking up against injustice, or in acknowledging the level of privilege that so many of us have but have taken for granted. Having gone through emergencies of all kinds during stints in government, I've seen duress bring out the best and the worst in people. Every time, I see people's better angels come out more often, even as opportunists also emerge. It's easy to be disheartened by the latter, but I choose to be inspired by the former.

What do you enjoy most about the work you do?

When I've been in government, I've been honored and energized to serve, especially in all those ways that no one really sees, where you know that because you were in a given role, decisions got made that helped people that might not have been made otherwise. I've also loved strengthening organizations from within and helping them become more connected to the publics they serve while also becoming effective and strategic in how they achieve their mission. There is a lot more room for creativity and connection in government than most people realize. I love helping people see that. Now, in a more reflective stage, working from academia and as a consultant, I'm really enjoying the chance to read, learn, reflect, and write about the promising work being done all over the world to make communities better and adapt to climate change.

Who or what inspired you to work in public service?

Funny thing that. My parents were both public servants (mom a local library director and dad an informal conference hearing officer at the IRS), but I hadn't thought about following in their footsteps. Instead, I was drawn to public policymaking through working on Capitol Hill for a very thoughtful Congressman (Tony Beilenson) and then went to law school to use legal skills to influence government from the outside. I got talked into becoming Commissioner and then President of the LA Board of Public Works by the then Deputy Mayor Mike Gage and then Commissioner Kathleen Brown to put myself where my advocacy mouth had been. Mayor Bradley gave me the direction to get the department as green as I could, which was an awesome charge that led to the most amazing experience imaginable working with the great people of the department to unleash all their creative skills and desire to make LA better. That inspired me to want to do it again at the federal and state level because I learned the power of government to do good and how much I enjoyed helping career staff engage and succeed through better focus and better relationships with elected officials, the public, and other agencies.

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

Honestly, they all do. Naturally, the two categorized as "Ensuring Environmental Sustainability" (9. Steward Natural Resources & Address Climate Change; 10. Create Modern Water Systems for Safe & Sustainable Use) are right on point for my experience, but so are the challenges around social equity (5), community resilience (7), advancing national interests in a changing global context (4), and developing new approaches to public governance and engagement (3). I'm also fascinated by the challenges around the integration of AI (10) and modernizing and reinvigorating public service (2), and the others are pretty cool as well. So, I'll take the whole slate thanks.

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

Take advantage of the opportunity to do good. Find good mentors. Don't stick in a slot that looks good but has a bad boss. Explore different opportunities within the system (including different agency stints) to find the spot where you can do the most good and feel good about what you do. The price of that opportunity can be dealing with the headaches of bureaucracy and rules imposed from above and without, but it gives you the opportunity to make a difference in the world. Never forget that you serve the public. Government is not an "it," it is "us."

What was the first concert you ever attended?

The Monkees at the Hollywood Bowl. I'm thinking around 1967. My neighbor's dad was doing security and he brought us. I have no idea how he managed that but it was awesome.