

City of San Antonio Women's Leadership Mentoring Program

Problem Assessment

In the spring of 2013, a group of female executives in the City of San Antonio (COSA) began to discuss ways to tackle barriers preventing women from advancing in the workplace. This was sparked by the national conversation revolving around equal opportunities in the workplace, publicized through the popularity of Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In*. Additionally, research in early 2014 indicated a potential disconnect between the number of qualified potential female leaders and the number of female leaders. For instance, women were 59 percent of the college-educated, entry-level workforce and earn nearly 60 percent of the undergraduate degrees and master's degrees awarded; yet, women made up only 14.6 percent of executive officers, 8.1 percent of top earners and 4.6 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs.¹

At the same time, discussions on succession planning and leadership development were taking place as part of preparing the City for the future. As a large portion of the workforce nears retirement, it is essential to strategically identify, develop, and retain talent. One of the ways COSA has worked to address these issues simultaneously is through the Women's Leadership Mentoring Program (WLMP).

¹ Center for American Progress, "Fact Sheet: Women's Leadership Gap; Women's Leadership by the Numbers," March 7, 2014. Website: <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/report/2014/03/07/85457/fact-sheet-the-womens-leadership-gap/>.

Implemented in January 2014, the WLMP is a year-long mentoring program that matches a City female executive (assistant department director or above) with a professional-level female employee. Running for one year, the program is built upon strategic requirements, offerings, and expectations that enhance the mentoring relationship and leadership development for all participants. The programs components include: (1) speakers, workshops, and panels made up of female leaders from the community; (2) mentors and mentees meeting regularly to work on professional development goals defined from the outset; and (3) capstone group projects for mentees to apply principles and skills learned through other aspects of the program that benefit the organization and community. The multi-pronged approach works to break down a variety of barriers that exist not just for women to flourish, but to the advancement of innovative and strategic partnerships.

The foundation of the WLMP is built on five key goals:

1. Ensure professional growth and development to benefit individuals and the organization;
2. Provide an avenue for women in the organization to develop and demonstrate their leadership abilities;
3. Provide networking opportunities to enhance teamwork in the organization;
4. Promote an environment that recognizes the value of women's contributions in the organization; and
5. Create a pool of internal candidates and strengthen organizational succession planning.

Program Implementation and Cost

City Manager Sheryl Sculley, former Assistant City Manager Gloria Hurtado, and a committee of eight female City executives designed and launched the program. In November 2013, the committee invited 300 professional female employees to apply, based on their position within the City. Through a highly selective process, the organizing committee reviewed applicants' qualifications, interests, and commitment to the program's goals to select and match 42 mentees with 28 executive mentors.

Program costs are minimal with a total budget of \$4,700. Speakers are identified at no cost through partnerships and city facilities are utilized for group meetings and speaker sessions. Refreshments are purchased for meetings and speaker sessions. At conclusion of the program, certificates are provided to participants.

Results

There are both tangible results and outcomes for participants of the program and the City organization. For participants, they have the opportunity to network, learn and grow with both peers and executives. At the completion of each year, both mentees and mentors are surveyed to gather feedback on the effectiveness of the program. Each year the majority of participants respond that the program is successful at achieving its goals. Additionally, through the first two years of the program, 58 women have successfully completed program requirements. As of March 2016, the WLMP boasts an 88% retention rate of those who completed the program. Additionally nearly 15% successfully competed for a promotion either during or after completing the program. Program organizers will continue to track the long-term progress of

participants, but based on the early results as well as anecdotal evidence see that the program is having a positive impact on its participants.

For the City organization, there is a tangible impact from the implementation-ready plan resulting from the capstone project. Two capstone projects are currently implemented in the City organization. The C.O.R.E Recognition Program was designed by one of the first year WLMP project groups and focuses enhancing employee recognition within the City. The C.O.R.E Recognition Program recognizes employees and teams for meaningful contributions that go above and beyond the normal job duties.

The second project completed by one of the second year WLMP project groups was a business plan for the design and implementation of the Tricentennial Office. In 2018, the City of San Antonio will celebrate its 300th Birthday. The Tricentennial Office is tasked with developing and hosting San Antonio's 300th Birthday Celebration. Visit the Tricentennial Office's [website](#) for more information.

Lessons Learned

The largest challenge is scheduling and securing time commitment from all participants. The program's success depends on mentors and mentees making time to grow their relationships and work on professional development. Two structures are in place to address this. First, prior to the beginning of each program year, a group orientation is held to provide a program overview and outline expectations of both mentees and mentors. Second, each mentor and mentee sign an agreement to meet one-on-one monthly throughout the program year. To

accommodate participants' busy schedules, these meetings often take on many forms beyond a scheduled sit-down. Some pairs meet outside of work hours, on weekends, or even while enjoying a run on the world-famous San Antonio Riverwalk.

Another challenge is determining how to select mentees with leadership promise and pair them with mentors. To address this, the first half of the application required applicants to demonstrate their qualifications; the second half of the application allowed for the applicants to describe themselves and their goals in order to create a strong match. In the first two years of the program, a diverse committee of executives from across the organization discussed all applications at once to create the best matches possible. Based on feedback from those participants, the 2016 program year introduced a "speed matching" event. This event provided mentees and mentors an opportunity to meet and talk briefly prior to matches being made. Participants were then allowed to submit their preferences and final matches were made. Thus far, that event received positive feedback and will be continued in future years.

Now in its third year, the WLMP continues to build momentum and attract women across the organization. The strong interest and positive feedback indicate that the program has the potential to create a significant impact on both the advancement of women and development of strong future leaders for the City. We recognize that empowering women is an ongoing process. Based on feedback from participant surveys, the program will be modified as necessary for future program participants.