



Q&A with Anselmo Collins, Sr. Assistant General Manager for Water System

By Jessica Johnson



Anselmo Collins, LADWP Senior Assistant General Manager - Water System in his office. Photo by Art Mochizuki

Following 28 years of experience in Water Operations, Water Engineering and Technical Services, Supply Chain Services and within Project and Construction Management, Anselmo Collins assumed the role of the Senior Assistant General Manager of the Water System in August 2021.

The Panamian-American steps into the role of overseeing almost 2,500 employees in the Water System as LADWP pushes forth developing local water supplies for L.A. and responding to a statewide drought.

Collins is the 18th steward of our water system and the second immigrant; LADWP's first Chief Engineer William Mulholland was the first, having been born in Ireland. It's an honor that he doesn't take it lightly.

Intake recently sat down with Collins, known by many as "AC," to get to know him better.

Intake: How would you describe your leadership style?

AC: I consider my leadership style to be democratic. I strive to make sure my decisions are backed by input from staff, and that there are plenty of opportunities for them to contribute. That way, I know that at the end of the day, my decision has already had buy-in and I am leading a group that knows that I listened to them. This also helps develop staff's critical thinking, and builds unity and morale. You can't lead if no one follows you and you do not have your team's interests at heart.

Intake: What are the biggest challenges for LADWP's water system?

AC: We continue to develop our local water supply. With the threat of climate change, it is now more important than ever to diversify our water portfolio. Operation NEXT is a huge project with big implications.

(Editor's Note: LADWP is making significant investments within Los Angeles city limits to reduce dependence on imported, purchased water and reduce overall consumption. In an effort to diversify supplies, we introduced [Operation NEXT](#), developed in partnership with LA Sanitation and Environment, that will allow Los Angeles to recycle 100% of available treated wastewater for beneficial reuse by 2035.)

As my predecessor Rich Harasick liked to say, Operation NEXT is our next "Mulholland Moment." We need to ensure we manage the project properly, engage the right people and make it cost effective for our customers.

Internally, the greatest challenge today continues to be the uncertainty with COVID-19. We have to continue keeping our employees safe, while creatively keeping staff motivated and engaged as we continue to telework.

Intake: What is your view on diversity in the workplace?

AC: I am a huge supporter of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. As a public agency working for the City of L.A., we recognize the importance of looking like the communities we serve. Inclusion is very important, and diversifying all parts of the Department is a good first step to get there.

Intake: When you aren't managing water, what are some of your favorite things to do?

AC: I attempt the game of golf and enjoy nature. I also enjoy wine tasting and a good Malbec.

Intake: You're stepping into the shoes of LADWP's first Chief Engineer William Mulholland, overseeing one of the largest water systems in the nation. What do you think helped prepare you for this role?

AC: What best prepared me was taking on nontraditional jobs, having well-rounded experiences and getting involved with associations to learn from peers in other utilities. I worked in six divisions, and the one I benefitted from the most was Supply Chain Services. I wasn't the technical expert in that group,

but it is where I really learned how to manage and lead. In every situation, I try to take the opportunity to learn from the role and leave it better than I found it. I want to make sure I dedicate my time and energy to working hard in that position instead of focusing on what could be the next one.

Intake: What would you tell your 18-year-old self today?

AC: At 18, I was living in Panama graduating high school, and I honestly did not expect to end up as the head of one of the largest water systems in the world. Looking back, I would say to young Anselmo: don't limit yourself, work hard to achieve your goals and find a mentor to help guide you along the way.

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