

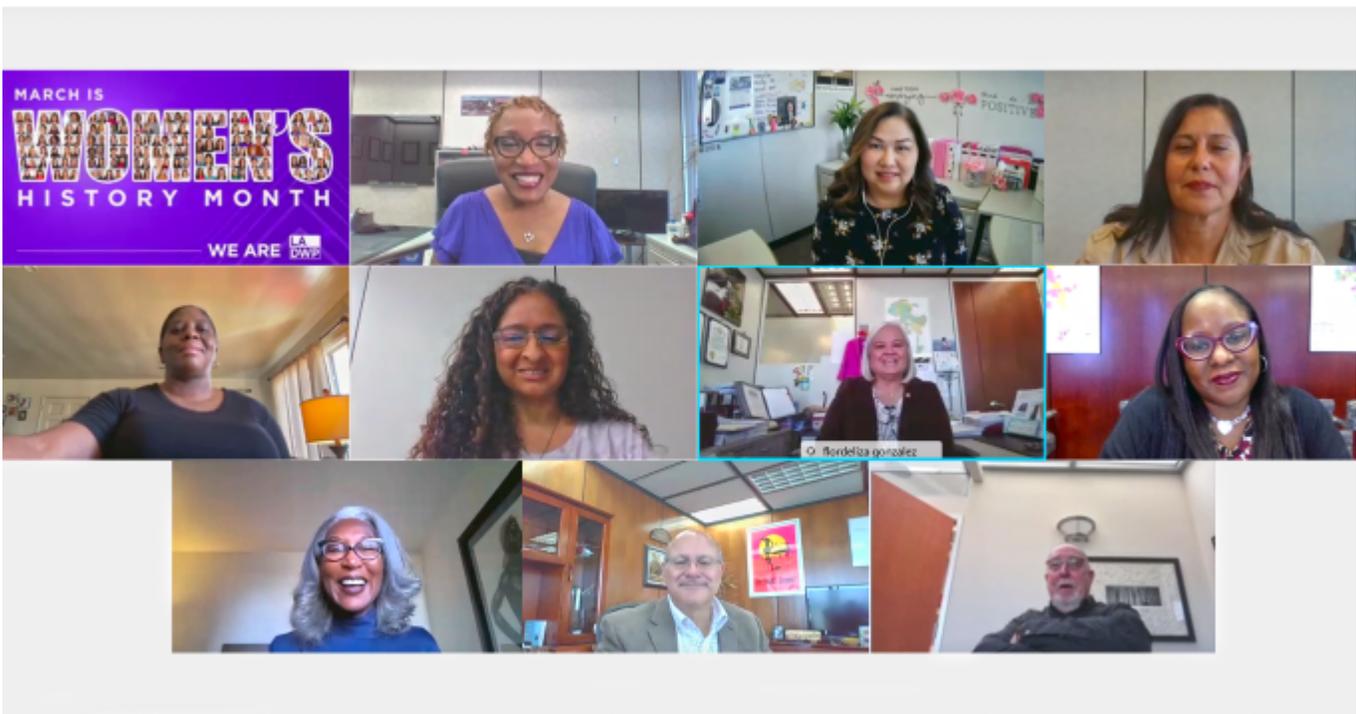


[Empowering Women of LADWP](#)

By Paola Adler

LADWP's first-ever Women's Empowerment Panel highlighted the successful careers of six inspiring female employees from different job classifications working in the field and the office. Their stories showcased how LADWP has helped support the 2,470 women working at the Department, as well as the challenges that women in the workplace face as they balance work and life responsibilities.

[\[Watch a video recording of the panel\]](#)



About 270 employees heard from six panelists about their unique career paths and more during the Women's Empowerment Panel. Top row, from left: Winifred Yancy, Connie DeGuzman and Diane Rojo. Middle row, from left: Alicia Dickerson, Erika Jaramillo, Flordeliza Gonzalez and LaTanya Bogin. Bottom row, from left: Cynthia McClain-Hill, Martin L. Adams and Brian D'Arcy. (Image by Jason Cleanthes)

Women empowering each other—serving as role models and mentors—has been one of the biggest

benefits LADWP's efforts to raise awareness of women's issues and foster a more supportive culture. "I admire the women who work at LADWP because we help each other. We do study groups, mentorships, promote leadership. When I was taking exams, people would help me with mock interviews. They would push me to do better," says Principal Clerk Utility Connie DeGuzman, who participated in the virtual panel on March 17, 2021 to celebrate Women's History Month.

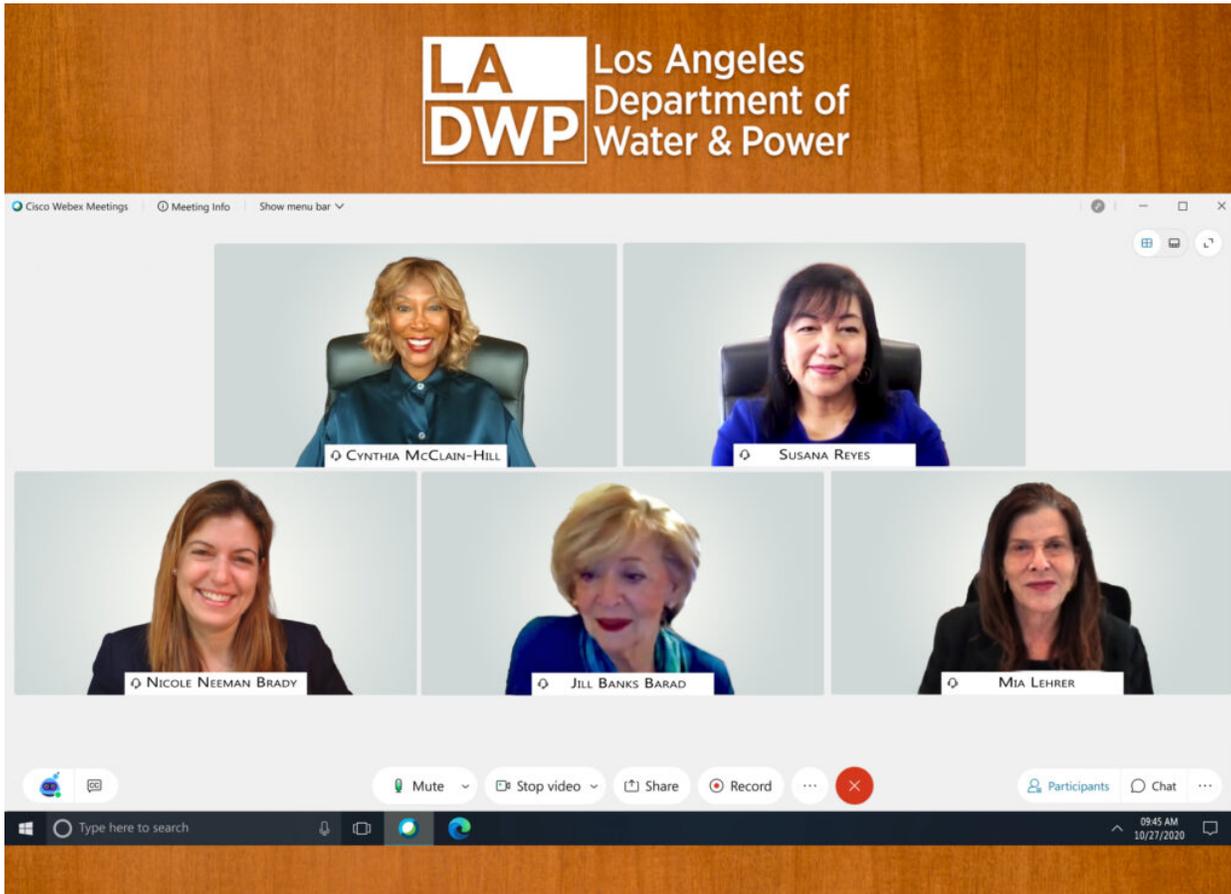
About 270 employees joined in the WebEx event, hosted by LADWP and IBEW Local 18. Along with DeGuzman, panelists included Utility Executive Secretary and Retirement Board President La Tanya Bogin, Maintenance & Construction Helper Alicia Dickerson, Supervising Water Service Representative Flordeliza Gonzalez, Commercial Service Supervisor Erika Jaramillo and Senior Gardener Diane Rojo. The panel was moderated by Director of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs and Interim Racial Equity Officer Winifred Yancy, and also featured remarks from Board President Cynthia McClain-Hill, General Manager and Chief Engineer Martin L. Adams and IBEW Local 18 Business Manager Brian D'Arcy.

During the panel, the speakers shared how they navigated challenges and harnessed their skills and talent to accomplish their goals. The panelists shared their unique career paths, contributions and advice for other employees. All of the panelists expressed happiness as an LADWP employee. Jaramillo noted, "My career here at LADWP has been amazing. I ended up at LADWP by coincidence, and I'm very thankful for that opportunity. I expected to be here six months to a year and 25 years later, here I am. So, I'm very fortunate."

Beyond their own hard work, several of the panelists mentioned ways LADWP directly supported their career journeys through programs, policies and work culture. Commenting on the benefits of LADWP's informal culture of mentorship, DeGuzman said, "I want to say thank you to all the women who have paved the way for me and for all of us who work here, in a company that is predominantly male." More formal organizations, like LADWP's Society for Women Engineers, also offer networking and mentoring opportunities to its members.

Both DeGuzman and Jaramillo were thankful for LADWP's generous tuition reimbursement program, which helped them further their education and advance in their careers while also providing for and taking care of family members. "I was able to obtain my degree in Business Management, although it took me some time to get there because I was taking care of my daughters. Once I finished school, I applied for every position or project that I could," said Jaramillo. "There is no other place that would give 100 percent tuition reimbursement, and it's one of the best benefits I received from the Department," said DeGuzman.

The panelists were also motivated to succeed by supervisors and women in leadership positions at LADWP. Women have increasingly been elevated to leadership and upper management roles at the Department in recent years, with women occupying over half of those positions. Three of the Department's seven executive team members are women: Senior Assistant General Manager - Power System Engineering and Technical Services Reiko Kerr, Chief Financial Officer Ann Santilli and Senior Assistant General Manager of External and Regulatory Affairs and Chief Sustainability Officer Nancy Sutley. And for the first time in LADWP's history, all commissioners serving on the LADWP Board of Water and Power Commissioners are women. Bogin commented, "To have an all-female Board, that is a huge accomplishment." Dickerson added, "I've been inspired by women who have started at the bottom and risen up."



LADWP’s all-female Board of Commissioners has inspired many women employees.

Event partner IBEW Local 18, which represents most LADWP employees, supports many leadership and training programs to empower women at LADWP, including the Joint Labor Management Task Force. Assistant Business Managers Lilly Calvache and Shawn McCloud, who helped coordinate this event, both advocate for and mentor all female employees at the Department. “As women, we have to support each other so we can become tomorrow’s leaders,” said Calvache. “Mentoring is so important because it helps us pass on the baton. I was mentored by a female supervisor, and I looked up to her and learned so much from her. Now I work to pass information and expertise on to others.”

Though women have made strides within many fields at the Department, work continues to create more equity in jobs considered non-traditional for women, such as skilled-craft positions. Just over 1.5 percent of LADWP employees in these types of jobs are women. LADWP has partnered with IBEW Local 18 to address this issue through the Utility Pre-Craft Training (UPCT) program, which allows interested workers to receive skilled craft training, counseling and job experience that can lead to stable, good-paying careers in the utility industry, with a particular focus on women and minorities.

Two of the panelists, Dickerson and Rojo, are graduates of the UPCT program. Rojo had switched careers later in life, and the UPCT program provided the resources to work at LADWP. “Without this program, I would not be here where I am now,” she said. “I started off as an apprentice with no experience. I really appreciated the UPCT program because it helped me learn how not to be complacent, and how to apply myself,” said Dickerson.

A frequent challenge that the panelists mentioned was balancing life and career as working mothers

and caretakers. "As a woman, a wife and a mother, your job does not end at work," said Gonzalez. These "second jobs" meant that some of the panelists had to put off career development or advancement until their children grew up or caretaking needs lessened. Gonzalez continued, "Promotion was not an option for me - I waited until my children were in high school before I promoted." "I put off tuition reimbursement for so long because I had my daughters. I was raising my kids - being at home and taking them to events so that I wouldn't have to rely on other people to take care of them. I put off my education to do that," said Jaramillo.

Some participants also shared that, as female employees, they felt pressure to prove their worth to their male Department colleagues to earn respect, especially in work environments that were traditionally dominated by men. Moderator Yancy remembered, "As a Student Design Engineer, I climbed towers, not because I actually wanted to but because the guys in my group did and I had to gain their respect. They never asked me to, but in our minds, we think we need to do that to 'gain respect.'"

Following the discussion, McClain-Hill and Adams asked the attendees what LADWP could do to better support women in the workplace. Over 30 attendees submitted their ideas anonymously. Responses focused mostly on three areas: career development, workplace conditions and work-life balance.

To work to address these concerns, McClain-Hill and Bogin have partnered to create an LADWP Women's Council, which will debut in summer 2021. The Council will be comprised of LADWP female rank and file employees, along with IBEW Local 18's McCloud and Calvache, who are interested in creating and championing programs and initiatives that support the professional growth and leadership development of women at LADWP, as well as provide work-life balance and supportive workplace conditions.

"We accept as given that we have to struggle and balance these issues on our own and just make everything work," said McClain Hill. "As we continue to look at how we increase the gender diversity at this Department, it seems to me a missing element is to really look at workplace practices that could be adjusted in ways that would just make it easier for women to work here."

McClain Hill added that women bear the brunt and the responsibility for everything: childcare, doctor's appointments, school visits, all of it. "Unless workplaces begin to recognize that impact, it is going to be a limitation on what we can achieve," she said.

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