

**LG Professionals Magazine Article**  
**California Manager Exchange –**  
**Samantha Charlton - Governance, Risk & Corporate Planning Manager**  
**Willoughby City Council**

In February, 2019 I had the privilege to travel to California, USA as the recipient of the LG Professionals USA Overseas Manager Exchange. The theme of my tour was to study community engagement and governance in the smart city approach.

The management exchange is structured in two components. I had the opportunity to visit six different cities to learn from, and exchange ideas on my selected area of study and I also attended the 2019 League of California Cities, City Manager's Conference.

My trip started with a bang with my first host Council, City of Beverly Hills. Arriving on the Friday morning, there was not time for jet lag as I was met by my host, Laura who home hosted me for a few nights and it was straight off for hair and on to the red carpet that night for the Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce Chinese New Year Celebration. It was fascinating to get a glimpse of how the other half live with a number of multi-million-dollar vehicles on display, including a Bugatti Veyron.

My next host council was the City of Monrovia led by their energetic City Manager Oliver Chi. Monrovia is a small community at the foothills of the San Gabriel mountains in northern Los Angeles with a population of 38,000 and is famous for the hot-tub bear who came down from the hills and frolicked in the hot-tub of a resident's property. Monrovia features an historic "Old-Town" city centre that has very limited parking. The City has taken a different approach to solving this problem by introducing the "[Go Monrovia](#)" scheme. The completely revamped Monrovia Transit model, leverages the strengths of the ride-share provider Lyft, in partnership with the City's dial-a-ride operator, to provide fast and affordable transportation all throughout Monrovia so that residents and visitors alike do not have to battle for parking.

From Monrovia I moved on to the nearby beautiful City of Arcadia, and was hosted by their inspirational City Manager Dominic Lazaretto. Dominic and his wife home hosted me for the next three nights opening their home to me and making me feel very welcome. Dominic is an experienced City Manager and a keen participant in the California League of Cities. I was able to talk extensively with Dominic about his work as co-chair of the League of Cities Talent Development Initiative. The talent initiative project was a 2-year project undertaking significant research that led to the release of two outstanding resources for local government. The project research report [Talent 2.0: A Modern Approach to Attracting and Retaining Top Talent in Local Government](#) and a [Best Practices Compendium: Recruitment, Retention and Organizational Culture](#). Both documents would be an ideal resource to any council in NSW as we face the same talent shortages in our sector.

From Arcadia I moved on the much bigger City of Pasadena. Also, in the San Gabriel Valley of northern LA, Pasadena is home to more than 141,000 residents. Being a larger council, I was able to explore in detail approaches to governance and internal audit, including their learnings from a \$6.4m embezzlement case that led to an innovative data mining approach to identify irregularities as early as possible. Pasadena also showed me their [Open Data Portal](#). It is a community platform for exploring and downloading open data, building apps, and engaging to solve important local issues.

The Open data portal demonstrates Pasadena's commitment to transparency, engagement and collaboration within the community. It provides a forum to obtain the community's assistance and involvement, to help Pasadena continue to grow and develop into a safe, vibrant, and liveable City.

My last stop in Los Angeles was the vibrant and energetic City of West Hollywood, or WeHo as the locals call it. WeHo won the American Planning Association Technology Division's Smart Cities Award for their Smart City Strategic Plan. [WeHo Smart City](#) is a series of initiatives that holistically weave technology into the fabric of the City of West Hollywood to enhance quality of life. The City has established an Innovation Division to focus the City's efforts to find creative solutions to the issues their residents face.

That was the end of my time in Los Angeles and I enjoyed a ride on the Pacific Surfliner Train heading south out of LA to my next destination, San Diego where the League of California Cities, City Manager's Conference was held at the beautiful Intercontinental Hotel on the shores of San Diego Bay.

However, I had one last visit before the conference and that was to the City of San Diego. This is a council that dwarfs anything in NSW, serving a population of more than 1.4 million residents. I had a very informative discussion with the City Audit team, who have an astonishing 22 employees. Through performance audits, financial audits, and special investigations, the Office of the City Auditor provides essential information to assist the City Council in its decision-making process.

City of San Diego is well regarded as a leader in the smart city space and innovation. An interesting approach they have undertaken, in recognition of the value of data is to introduce a Performance and Analytics Department. This department partners with other City departments to simplify the customer experience; champion data-informed decision making and promote a culture of continuous accountability and improvement.

I cannot possibly detail in one article all that I learnt during my two weeks in California, however the most common theme in relation to smart cities, is that community engagement in a Smart City must focus on the benefits to the individual – not the technology. From discussions with various teams during my visit, a key message that is particularly relevant to NSW local government as we begin our "smart city" journey is don't be sold solutions to problems that you do not have. Buying a gadget or a technology is not the key to innovating for your community it is actually solving their issues and problems. Data analysis is the base on which a smart city is built on.

I would encourage every member to consider applying for the manager exchange, either to USA or NZ. You learn a lot, but it is also personally challenging to fly half way around the world and expose yourself new people and new experiences. I could not have got as much as I did out of the exchange without the assistance of a number of Members of LG Professionals who had previously undertaken the California exchange as they were able to put me in contact with some great colleagues in LA who helped me build a fruitful and worthwhile itinerary for my council tours.