

ULI Women's Leadership Initiative
Scholarship Essay
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Participating in the 2014 ULI Fall Meeting provided me an unparalleled opportunity to experience two of the hallmarks that distinguish the Urban Land Institute as the premier global real estate development and land use organization: mentorship and leadership.

Mentorship

As one of ten recipients of the Women's Leadership Initiative (WLI) Scholarship, I was given access to the WLI Steering Committee meeting. The steering committee meeting left an indelible impression on me. At the industry events I attend, men regularly outnumber women ten to one. Recognizing that the real estate development industry continues to be male-dominated, the Urban Land Institute has made a deliberate and concerted effort to attract, retain, and raise the profile of women in this industry. The women attending the steering committee meeting provided excellent examples of women who have advanced in a variety of fields, including law, finance, and development.

At the meeting and reception that followed, I had an opportunity to connect with peers and role models from around the country about what it takes to succeed, advance, and lead. I had interesting discussions with executive-level women of color about the unique challenges they face. I chatted with fellow award recipients about the issues we grapple with at this stage of our personal and professional lives, such as balancing work and family life and navigating workplace politics.

Through the WLI Scholarship program, I was also partnered with a designated mentor. In just a few short days, I developed a wonderful relationship with my mentor, who is the only female partner in her Houston-based law firm. She helped identify my strengths, gave guidance from her unique perspective, and provided recommendations on people to contact about my areas of interest. We have already reconnected since returning home from the Fall Meeting, and we plan on reconnecting again at the Spring Meeting.

Leadership

The WLI Scholarship program connected each participant with a mentor that specializes in their area of interest. For me, the highlight of the Fall Meeting proved to be participation as a guest in the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Council. This council was particularly compelling for me as an infill developer and planning commissioner. At the reception and subsequent council day, I spoke at length with industry leaders from around the country who work in topics that fascinate me. I learned a great deal about creative public/private financing strategies, the challenges of significant redevelopment projects, and the role of infrastructure and transit in retail and residential development.

After one panel that had significant lessons for the key development issues of my region, I approached the president of a New York-based development company to thank her personally. I explained that her insights alone made my trip from Sacramento to New York City worth it. Certainly her discussions about having a long-term commitment to the redevelopment of a former railyard offered lessons applicable to my professional life. Equally important, she spoke candidly as a working mother of three also manages a \$5 billion project. I ended that day feeling inspired by the potential of the projects I am working on.

Although I only described one notable speaker, I was engaged in every single topic I attended. The conference topics covered a wide breadth of development issues, and yet each panel included experts with real-world experience in the topics being covered. When I returned home, I told my colleagues at work and my local district council that attending the conference was fascinating and transformative. I am already making plans to attend upcoming conferences and increase my involvement with ULI.