

PEER KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE SERIES

# LAURA LEWIS MARCHINO

When Laura Lewis Marchino was hired as a Program Manager in 2005, she was under the direct supervision of Region 9's executive director, Ed Morlan. From the onset, he encouraged her to pursue professional development training and become engaged in national economic development organizations. His commitment to her professional growth and development included Region 9 paying for and encouraging her training as she successfully became a Certified Economic Development (CEcD) through the International Economic Development Council's (IEDC) Certified Economic Development program.

In 2007, Laura was elected to the NADO Board of Directors, a position she continues to hold today. "Being part of NADO was great for making connections to rural regions with similar programs, which was especially important when I became the Executive Director," Laura mentioned during a recent conversation about her transition to Executive Director. Laura spoke of the importance of always trying to meet someone new at each NADO event she attended, as well as at other organizations' events.

Laura was named the Executive Director in 2016, after nearly a decade of mentoring and support from Ed. When Ed retired, he was intending to stay on as a consultant and Laura was relying on having access to his experience and expertise. Unfortunately, Ed passed away soon after leaving Region 9, which was a personal and professional challenge for Laura and the organization's staff. "I'd say it was about three years before I felt I had fully learned the position, while understanding the responsibilities of each position and department at Region 9," reflected Laura.

Since becoming the Executive Director, funding for the organization has increased from \$3 to \$9 million and the staff has grown from five to twelve. Previously, Region 9 was the only area of Colorado with a separate EDD and Council of Government. The EDD is absorbing the Southwest Colorado Council of Governments (SWCCOG) that serves the same geographic area and the EDD will work to continue to align their priorities and programming.



**Region 9 Economic  
Development District of SW  
Colorado**

*Executive Director, 2016 - present  
Program Manager, 2005 - 2016*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Take the time to build trust with your Board Members and Community Leaders
- Always highlight the impact of your District to stakeholders
- Focus on your personal and professional development- there will always be competing priorities
- Tailor succession plans to the organization and individual
- The job of the Executive Director is to make everyone else successful

Laura feels that the key to her and her organization's success is its reputation and relationship in the community. She maintains close relationships with local stakeholders and members of local government. The relationships are built through trust, frequent communications and knowing individuals' communication styles and preferences.

Every year she has lunch with each board member. Region 9 maintains three office locations, which allows the organization to better serve communities within its 6,584 square miles. Laura has made sure that Region 9 shows the value of its work to stakeholders and has availed of marketing training provided through NADO. As part of this work, Region 9 produces Annual Performance Reports for each county they work with to measure their local impact.

Since becoming the executive director there has been no staff turnover. Laura continues to conduct 360 evaluations of herself and key staff including feedback from funders, the organization's board, and staff. Her contract is reviewed and renewed annually. Laura says that Ed taught her that the job of the Executive Director is to make everyone else successful.

When asked about advice for other executive directors, Laura offered that "they should continue to focus on their personal and professional development, despite the many challenges the position presents." Additionally, acknowledging how much she has benefited from attending NADO events, she recommends that others take the same opportunity, even though there will always be competing obligations back at the office. She also addressed the different challenges a new executive director would face, based on whether they were an internal or external candidate. An internal candidate should work with the existing executive director to address their existing strengths and weaknesses, ensure that they understand the entire structure of the organization, and help address how their relationship with staff will change once they're promoted. The executive director should take the time with an external candidate to introduce them to everyone, show that you're taking the time to welcome them to the organization, and build buy-in with staff and key stakeholders.

While she has no immediate plans to retire, Laura says that the Board is aware of the difficulties of finding an individual who has the leadership qualities and skillset needed. Just as she was promoted from within the organization, it is important to hire staff that have potential for growth and advancement and the potential to eventually serve as executive director.



*Serves Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, and San counties and the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribes with a population of 99,000.*

## **KEY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES INCLUDE:**

- RLF for small business gap financing
- Southwest Accelerator Program for Entrepreneurs (SCAPE)
- Administers the Colorado Enterprise Zone Tax Credit program
- Strategic planning and technical assistance for local communities, including the CEDS
- Broadband
- Transportation

Founded in 1989  
26 member board of directors; 17 represent local governments, nine represent the private sector

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