



Clare Martorana, CIO, Office of Management and Budget; La'Naia Jones, CIO, Central Intelligence Agency; Sheena Burrell, CIO, National Archives and Records Administration.

Latest Articles

MAR
10
2023

MANAGEMENT

CIO Panel Discussion: The Importance of a Diverse Federal IT Workforce



Three federal CIOs discuss the power of diversity to improve problem-solving, increase innovation and expand creativity as agencies tackle complex missions.



by [Erin Brereton](#)

Erin Brereton has written about technology, business and other topics for more than 50 magazines, newspapers and online publications.

► **LISTEN** 10:16

For women in IT, the road to a federal government C-suite position may involve working at multiple agencies, navigating [remote assignments](#) and honing an exceptional blend of technical expertise and leadership savvy.



Samsung Creates Secure Digital Signage Solutions For Agencies



Data Center Solutions Rise To New Challenges



FEMA Drives Better Decision-Making For Disaster Planning And Relief With Interactive Dashboard



Agencies Moving To Digital Recordkeeping Shouldn't Neglect Backup And Recovery



In recent years, several women have assumed key roles in federal technology leadership, from Space Force Chief Technology and Innovation Officer [Lisa Costa](#) to Raylene Yung, executive director of the \$1.2 billion Technology Modernization Fund. Within the [Federal CIO Council](#), which works to improve government IT practices, women make up nearly one-third of the membership.

FedTech recently spoke with U.S. CIO **Clare Martorana**, who oversees the Office of the Federal CIO within the [Office of Management and Budget](#), and two other IT leaders — [National Archives and Records Administration](#) CIO **Sheena Burrell** and [Central Intelligence Agency](#) CIO **La'Naia Jones** — about the myriad strengths that diverse perspectives bring to the federal government.

[Click the banner below to get Insider access to exclusive articles about federal IT trends.](#)

FedTech

Need to know which **emerging technology** to adopt at your agency? Become an Insider and find your solutions.

Sign Me Up!

Why Did You Choose To Work in the Public Sector?

Jones: My parents both worked in public service at various levels. I have a lot of family members in public service. For me, it provided opportunities: stability, job security and an opportunity to give back.

Martorana: I had the great fortune of working for numerous companies in the healthcare and digital healthcare sectors. [The U.S. Digital Service](#) seemed like an incredible opportunity to be able to use what I've learned in the private sector and apply it to large programs that are delivering benefits and services to the American people.

Burrell: The most important thing for me was the mission of the agencies I worked for. I started out at the [Social Security Administration](#). I loved trying to help constituents with their disability and retirement. You saw how much you could make a difference.

[READ MORE: Review the latest tech tools improving customer and employee experiences.](#)

What Type of Experience Helped You Advance in Your Career?



HARDWARE

Samsung Creates Secure Digital Signage Solutions for Agencies



DATA CENTER

Data Center Solutions Rise to New Challenges

ADVERTISEMENT



Pixel, preconfigured CDW-G, is equipped with trusted Google technology and built-in threat protection. Pixel helps sector employees securely connect and collaborate from almost anywhere.

[LEARN MORE >](#)

 Pixel for Business



Jones: Early in my career, I had the chance to serve on behalf of the [Department of Defense](#) in Japan. Living in Tokyo, going to many bases and working alongside servicemembers, I really started to appreciate and value the work we did.

Going to locations that are farther away did help me in advancing. All of your experiences, your background — they create who you are today. I started to learn more about how the mission is performed, as well as understanding what it took to accomplish the mission.

Martorana: I find IT and cybersecurity such an interesting sector to work in because every single day, we learn something new. We are trying to solve problems that are both technically and organizationally complex, making sure we have the teams in place and money allocated to do the work. With the way women approach problem-solving, IT is a wonderful career path for people who are curious and lifelong learners.

Burrell: Mentoring and coaching molded me to be able to take on higher-level positions. Renee Wynn was the CIO at the time I worked at [NASA](#). As a woman in technology, it was empowering for me to see her leading the most innovative, cutting-edge agency in the federal government. Renee opened up her network to me. She also was able to give me pointers.

I've had an executive coach throughout my career at the National Archives, as well as at SSA. I was able to take my work problems to my executive coach to look at different issues and work through them with my subordinates or peers, or even manage up.

44%

The percentage of permanent employees in the federal government who are women.

Source: The Office of Management and Budget, "Strengthening the Federal Workforce," March 2022

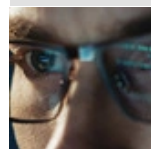
What Training, Education or Experience Can Help Women Who Are Interested in C-Level Federal Tech Roles?

Jones: All experiences are welcome because no two CIOs — really, no two positions — will have the same exact background. I started in

Trending Now



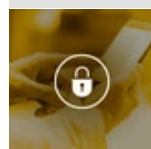
OMB Outlines Process For Federal Workers To Begin Returning To The Office



3 Key Considerations For Achieving The DOD's Zero-Trust Framework



DOD's Research Partnerships With Universities Prove Mutually Beneficial



Ransomware Attack Hits Federal Agencies

mathematics and computer science. You can never go wrong with a STEM background. It helps cultivate critical thinking, problem-solving and analytical skills, which are needed for the technical field because it is agile, always evolving and volatile in nature.

Burrell: When I was at NASA, I was a part of collaboration and partnership organizations that brought industry and government together to share ideas, think strategically and talk about technical challenges we're all facing. That experience enabled me to look at the consultants and contractors I work with now as strategic partners who can help us get fresh ideas we may not come up with on our own.

Martorana: It is really important to understand how technology is an enabler for mission activities — not just developing and designing technology because it's a buzzword or because we have the ability to do it, but really making sure we are meeting our agency mission and using technology as a catalyst for some of the change that is needed in government.

***LEARN MORE:** [The value of gender diversity in cybersecurity.](#)*

What Soft Skills Support the Technical Aspects of an Executive-Level IT Role?

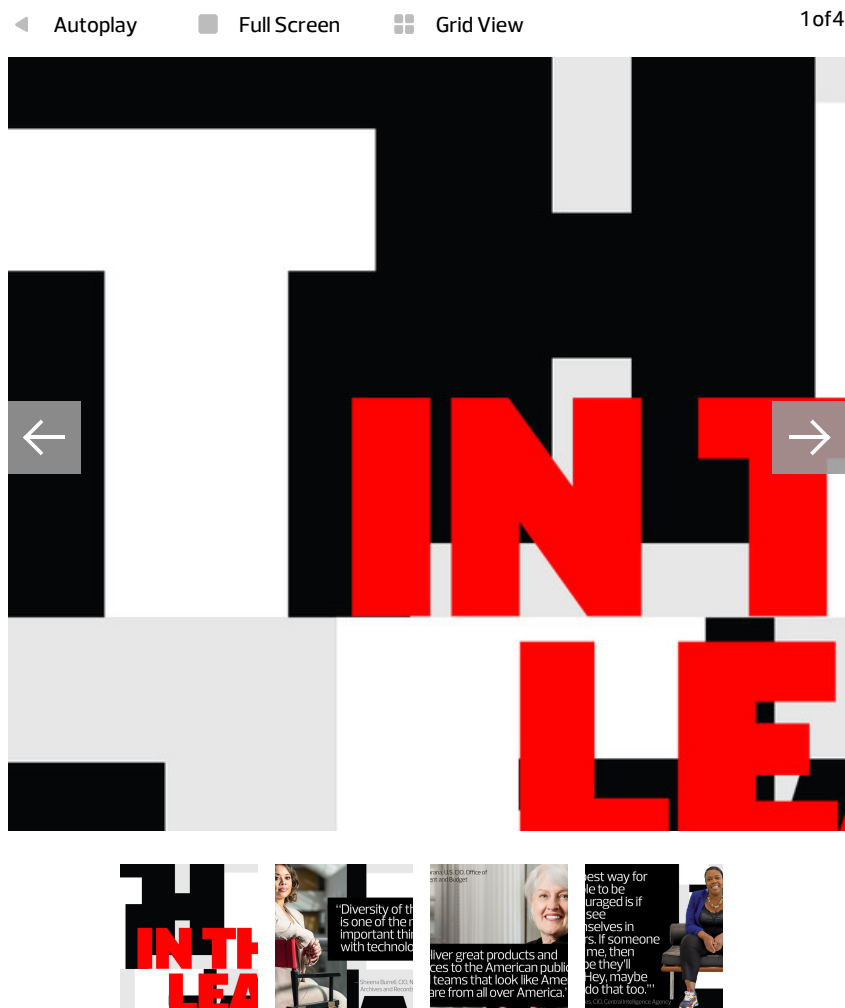
Martorana: The key skill of the roles I've had is understanding the problem we're trying to solve. My experience has been primarily with [human-centered design](#), actually interviewing the people who will potentially use a system — maybe it's a retiree or somebody filing a tax return — but also the employees who are interacting with that system, because they are part of service delivery. You can design products and services that deliver on the mission in an effective and efficient manner, so we are not just designing technology for technology's sake.

Jones: Life is all about learning and growing. Even if you have the technical background, you still need strong leadership skills: listening to people, understanding. Emotional intelligence is a big one as we progress because leadership can be challenging.

Burrell: Hard skills really help you get the job; soft skills help you keep the job. In terms of leadership roles, it's your political savviness. How do you build coalitions? How are you with getting results and leading your people? All of those things are really important.



Sometimes taking a class can make you aware of unconscious biases or sharpen your emotional intelligence. That can be really important for how you perform a job, as well as how you elevate your teams to do well.



What Can Federal Agencies Do To Help Attract Women to Tech Roles?

Martorana: Every single day, every agency I interact with across the federal government — over 400 agencies and bureaus — is working toward bringing in a diverse IT workforce. It is something we take really seriously.

We are also, across the federal government, making sure our workforce has the training and opportunities to be able to grow, to be successful and become leaders in the space to attract other people who are joining us at different times in their careers.

Burrell: In the federal government, we don't have the same negotiation within industry in terms of pay scale. But there are other

things the government can do to attract more women to technology roles, such as having women at all levels of management — as part of the interview process, [human resources](#) and your leadership team — or offering family-friendly policies. We can offer diversity and sourcing in terms of where jobs are advertised. Often, jobs are posted only on USAJOBS, but finding women tech groups to post jobs and going to historically Black colleges could help get more diversity within tech.

Jones: Representation matters. The best way for people to be encouraged is if they see themselves in others. If someone sees me, then maybe they'll say, "Hey, maybe I can do that too."

The CIA is one of the few intelligence agencies that's had a female director: our former director, Gina Haspel. If you look across the ranks, there are many, many women, more than I've ever seen, and I've been at many different agencies and organizations that have women in senior leadership positions. We have had quite a few deputy directors, a CFO, and many of our outward positions have been anchored by very strong, knowledgeable, extremely brilliant women — not just now, but for many years.



980,508

The number of female federal agency employees as of September 2022.

Source: [fedscope.opm.gov](#), Federal Workforce Data Employment Trend (Year-to-Year), December 2022

Why Is Diversity in the Tech World Important?

Jones: We all have different background experiences. We don't want everyone seeing problems in the same way. That doesn't give us a broad view; that limits and actually stifles us as far as innovation and creativity go, and in really being able to think about all perspectives, angles and viewpoints.

It's important for women and minorities to be in fields they may not commonly be in because that makes that perspective even more valuable; that may be one of the few voices that stands out. Your individuality, uniqueness, how you live, think, breathe and operate is



really your superpower, because you're the only one of you. No one else is going to analyze or solve the problem like you do.

Martorana: A [diverse IT workforce](#) is absolutely essential. To deliver great products and services to the American public, we need teams that look like America, that are from all over America. Bias can be introduced into products and services if you don't have people who represent the diversity of our population: the norms, the regions and the localities they're coming from. All of those people together help us build products that can meet every single person where they are, regardless of their abilities.

Burrell: A lot of times, when we think about diversity, people immediately — especially for tech — think about gender, but we're also talking about race, ethnicity, religion, age, education and disability status. Diversity of thought is one of the most important things within technology.

There are studies that show more diversity in tech companies tends to result in higher retention rates, lower employee turnover and great customer satisfaction. People are more comfortable and confident to share their ideas. They tend to be more innovative, productive and creative.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: RYAN DONNELL (SHEENA); GARY LANDSMAN (CLARE); COURTESY OF CIA (LA'NAIA)



Become an Insider

[Sign Up >>](#)

Sign up today to receive premium content!

More On **DIGITAL WORKSPACE COLLABORATION**

MANAGEMENT TEAM COLLABORATION TRAINING