

# Leadership Profile: Ms. Sharmain Matlock-Turner is the President and CEO of the Urban Affairs Coalition

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Ms. Sharmain Matlock-Turner is the President and CEO of the Urban Affairs Coalition (UAC). She began her tenure at the Coalition in March of 1999, with a special distinction as the first woman. As the first female UAC leader, Sharmain considers being heard the toughest part of her job. With the existing unintentional bias, she endeavors to maintain a delicate balance trying to push her way in without making others uncomfortable.

Training in politics helps Sharmain to overcome the most challenging aspects of her nonprofit leadership work. In 2005, she was one of three Philadelphia nonprofit leaders selected to receive a scholarship to the Harvard Business

School's nonprofit leaders' summer program. She formerly served as Chair of the Advisory Committee for the Office of Economic Opportunity for the City of Philadelphia. She also served on the boards of the Philadelphia Gas Works and the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority. These collective experiences have strengthened her ability and confidence to make people recognize her seat at the table and value the experience and knowledge that she brings. As she said in the interview:

*"I get to understand that my value and ideas in some periods of time might be unrecognized... And I am an African American. There are more biases against that. But I never let them stand in my way. I just feel that these make me stronger and more effective."*

As for the most rewarding part her job, Sharmain emphasized that it is all about the people. Those who work in UAC and who get helped from UAC keep motivating her nonprofit leadership work. A young man who attended UAC's youth summer program later became a full-time staffer of UAC. A teenager who attended UAC's financial education workshop successfully obtained his first credit card. Many stories like these are rewarding for her.

*"Knowing that you have the power to influence how people view themselves and how they see the potential of their place in the world. That is the most rewarding thing*

*in the world. You know that you really touch people."*

UAC operates like a huge umbrella and partners with a variety of nonprofits. To manage such a complex strategic partnership, Sharmain found that the key to her role is to get to "Yes" responsibly. When some partners present a problem, she considers if UAC has the skills internally or resources externally to support solving the problem. Collaboration serves as a second crucial approach to successful strategic partnerships. Sharmain values the grassroots-level staffers and believes that the real work gets done on the ground in the communities. As the president of UAC, she views that her position is responsible for coordinating all parts to make sure the holistic system works and that UAC can make the partners' work easier and more effective.

Dealing with the diverse partners, Sharmain hoped to encourage the uniqueness of individual programs while standardizing administrative and cash management. Contrary to a factory, UAC tries to maintain the specialness of a program and strategy. Yet, Sharmain considers standardized and effective cash management as critical to avoid disruption of program progress.

As a community-rooted nonprofit, UAC has brought many crucial opportunities to communities. The organization's efforts are focused in four areas: improving life chances for youth and young adults; building wealth in low-income communities; strengthening the grassroots nonprofit

sector; and forging strategic partnerships across sectors and communities. Among the ample contributions she has made, Sharmain regarded bridging the gap between low-income communities and financial services as the most crucial opportunity that UAC brings to the communities it serves. The entirety of the work and advocacy that Sharmain and her staffers have done is to make sure that financial institutions stay connected to the low-income people at a grassroots level in communities. Sharmain remains confident that the communities that UAC serves recognizes their contributions:

*"We've got to make sure that we are touching people in the communities, so that we have a give-and-take understanding of their needs, answering some of the needs, and getting their feedback, so that we know we are working on the right track."*

Under the contemporary political recession, nonprofits face the challenge of reduced funding. Government grants comprise a major source of UAC's funding. Recognizing these challenges, Sharmain retains a positive view that the pain is shared across many places and can be overcome through many ways. She has promised not to hold back in paying the senior-level staff to ensure a stable management team. Also, she is making sure that UAC's portfolios are big and diverse enough so that they can transition some of their programs when the grants they currently receive are no longer there.

Sharmain is confident that UAC's business model has helped the 47-year old organization to live on from year to year, as well as to maintain focus on what's most important. She also considers it crucial for her to stay connected to policy makers so that UAC knows the next big ideas and how their programs either can be part of these ideas or if there is a need to redesign their projects to ensure they are part of the next big thing as well.