LANSING – It’s been called the Year of the Woman. Michigan voters elected women to the state’s top elected positions of governor, attorney general, secretary of state and sent a record 53 women to the Michigan Legislature.

But when it comes to the top jobs in local government, there’s a gap. A big gap. Women fill only one in every five executive-level positions such as city manager, village manager and county administrator.

A Michigan Municipal League effort that kicked off earlier this year aims to reduce that inequity.

“Women represent just 16 percent of Michigan’s local chief administrative officers, despite making up more than half the population,” said Melanie Piana, the League’s Board president and a Ferndale City Council member, in a news release.

With a $20,000 budget, the 16/50 Project has already trained 25 women in budget and finance, economic development and council-manager relations to position them to take higher positions. Gender bias was also added to training for hundreds of elected officials as part of the project’s efforts.

On Tuesday, the Michigan Municipal League Foundation will campaign for money to expand that training through a #GivingTuesday effort (https://mmlfoundation.networkforgood.com/projects/60404-givingtuesday2018) to increase the number of women as top local municipal executives.

Giving Tuesday is an annual social media event meant to harnesses seasonal goodwill for a variety of efforts. It comes after Thanksgiving, Black Friday, Small Business Saturday and Cyber Monday.

Donors for the 16/50 Project’s #GivingTuesday effort are encouraged to make gifts of $16.50, $165 or $1,650 to support training.

Amee King, the assistant city administrator in Grand Ledge, was one of the first class of 25 in the Michigan Women’s Municipal Program, which offers a four-day training session plus access to personal coaching, networking, budgeting and economic development training.

King, 50, has worked for Grand Ledge for 19 years, starting as a deputy clerk. She was promoted to assistant city administrator about 15 years ago.

“There’s always been a lot of women in municipal government, but they just aren’t in the top positions. I’m seeing an uptick in women leaders, and we want to see more,” she said.

King said she started her career working for the Michigan Municipal League.

“When I was 20 and started with the League, there were a lot of men, but there were very few women in top roles,” she said.

That’s changed over time but slowly.

King said the additional training she’s received through the 16/50 program plus recent professional training in human resources has got her thinking about advancement into a top role herself.

“I didn’t before, but I’m thinking about it now,” she said.

She sees some differences in how men and women lead.

“I think women have more compassion,” she said. “There’s nothing wrong with that as a leader.”

King will get her chance to show off leadership skills and cash in on some of the networking opportunities she’s been afforded through the Michigan Women’s Municipal Program. She said she’s heading a project to reconstruct the city airport’s runway and lighting system next year.

To donate: MMLFoundation.org/donate (http://www.mmlfoundation.org/donate/)
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