



Vallerie D. Wagner Advocate Award



"It was a combination of really being engaged in my community as a Black lesbian and having lots of friends who were Black gay men who died of AIDS." - Vallerie Wager

What motivates the first woman to receive a Master's Degree in Electrical Engineering from the Tuskegee Institute to leave a career at the acclaimed Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) to move into the world of HIV/AIDS Prevention and Education? Clearly, it was her passion for the LGBT community and her advocacy for greater inclusion, education and care that brought **Vallerie Wagner** to this place. Recently becoming the Chief Operating Officer of APLA Health & Wellness, where she manages the operation of three federally qualified health centers providing primary

medical care, oral health care, and behavioral health services to LGBT and HIV/AIDS communities in Los Angeles County, Ms. Wagner's atypical career path is a testament to the importance of living one's life unabashedly and with vigor.

A proud graduate of Southern University also, Ms. Wagner worked as an engineer at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) for 15 years, working on the Voyager and Galileo projects. Both projects better informed our view of the solar system exploring interstellar regions nothing from Earth had flown before. Also while at JPL, Ms. Wagner's name was one of a million collected and placed on the STARDUST spacecraft which visited Comet Wild 2 in 2004.

After departing JPL, Ms. Wagner entered the world of HIV/AIDS Prevention, working as the Director of Education and Social Services at the Los Angeles LGBT Center and then serving as the Chief Operating Officer at the Black AIDS Institute, the first Black HIV/AIDS policy center dedicated to reducing HIV/AIDS health disparities.

Ms. Wagner joined AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA) in 2006 as the director of health and wellness programs and became director of education in July 2007. She currently serves as the Chief Operating Officer of APLA Health & Wellness. A tireless advocate for the human rights of the LGBT community and people living with HIV/AIDS, Ms. Wagner has worked with culturally and linguistically diverse populations locally, nationally, and internationally for more than 30 years.

Better Brothers Los Angeles and The DIVA Foundation are proud to present Vallerie D. Wagner with the inaugural "**Advocate**" Truth Award.