

**EQUITY, DIVERSITY,  
AND INCLUSION  
COMMISSION**  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

January 25, 2017



**The American  
Institute  
of Architects**

# The value proposition

Equitable practice has the potential to foster success on multiple levels—equity in the workplace, plus socially just access to basic resources, healthier communities and resilient public space in our urban centers. The value proposition of equity at all these levels is rooted in empathy, transparency, education, collaboration, and trust.

The lack of equity in architectural practice and allied professions has made architects prone to lose talent to other more lucrative career paths. The factors that challenge retention include long hours, modest pay, work that is misaligned with professional goals, and lack of transparency in promotion and compensation practices.

In order to achieve equity in the built environment, the architecture workforce needs to reflect the rapidly changing demographics of those people we are charged to serve. Architecture is also susceptible to some public misunderstanding of the value or potential of what architects can bring to the table.

In terms of social impact, design has the power to inform more equitable, resilient, sustainable, and relevant built environments for the increasingly multicultural population of our nation.

Rosa Sheng, AIA  
Author, *AIA Resolution 15-1*, May 2015

# Introduction

In late 2015, the American Institute of Architects issued a call to action for the profession. After 14 months of work, the AIA Equity in Architecture Commission released a report with its recommendations for expanding and strengthening the profession's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in every practice.

The Commission and its goals were products of AIA's 2015 *Resolution 15-1: Equity in Architecture*. That resolution was born from yet an earlier industry-wide initiative, in 2014. Architectural organizations had come together then to address the concern of architects about a disproportionate mix among the profession's members.

What emerged from that 2014 effort was a study, *Diversity in the Profession of Architecture*. It examined the impact of demographics on success in the field. The intent was to create greater urgency surrounding the need for a profession that more accurately reflected the varied faces of our nation.

There has been progress in achieving that goal in past years, but there is still much work to be done. Equity, diversity, and inclusion is a priority of the American Institute of Architects. The Institute believes the need to foster a more inclusive workforce is both a professional and societal imperative.

The AIA Equity in Architecture Commission, a blue-ribbon panel of leading architects, educators, and diversity experts, was formed to meet those challenges. Following is a summary of the five "keystone" areas of focus it identified, and within those areas the 11 priority recommendations, or action items, that it selected for implementation over the next three years.

Emily Grandstaff-Rice, FAIA  
Chair, Equity in Architecture Commission

# Keystones

**Keystone** [kee-stohn]; 1. The wedge-shaped piece at the summit of an arch that holds the other pieces in place. 2. Something on which associated things depend for support: *The keystone of one's philosophy.*

**“Diversity may be both the hardest thing to live with—and the most dangerous thing to be without.”**

—William Sloane Coffin, clergyman, civil right activist

The Commission focused its work on the future implications of increased equity, diversity, and inclusion within the profession, including impact on the architecture it provides our society. It identified five themes or areas—which it called “keystones”—that would reflect those implications.

## **Leadership development**

Strongly restating the AIA’s commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion will reinforce its goal to be a leader in that societal quest. This effort needs to permeate every level of the AIA, from the Board to local chapters. It also must transcend the conventional year-to-year focus of individual leadership.

Leadership excellence action items should include EDI training; the addition of an EDI impact statement to all new Board resolutions; strategic engagement of allied organizations to share resources and develop initiatives; sufficient resources for AIA Diversity and Inclusion staff; and expressed commitments from every level of membership.

## **Firms/workplace/studio culture**

Attracting, developing, and retaining the best talent is a priority for the entire national workforce, not just architecture.

Many young and emerging professionals prefer to work in teams that reflect the global and demographic richness of our population. Plus, studies have shown that a diverse range of people creates greater innovation and creativity. Therefore, demonstrating a commitment to EDI in recruitment efforts is imperative. And, as workforce demographics change, the AIA and the profession need to plan for and embrace an expanded range of workplace models, including benefits.

## **Excellence in architecture**

Collecting data on projects that succeed through EDI. Greater recognition must be awarded to projects that honor EDI, both in the architects’ practices and in their products.

The creative ethos within an innovative team offering a variety of perspectives and priorities is a powerful force. Architecture will go beyond physical, technical, and aesthetic distinction—it will reflect awareness and empathy. It will serve the best of humanity.

## **Education and career development**

The industry-wide study, *Diversity in the Profession of Architecture*, identified gaps in the future workforce pipeline, as well as “pinch points” in career development for women and minorities.

There must be a focus on K–12 education; resources for higher education, including transitions from two-year programs to NAAB-accredited programs; a clearer path to licensure; leadership training in continuing education for under-represented groups; and support for emerging professionals and re-emerging professionals that highlights engagement and retention.

## **Marketing, branding, public awareness, and outreach**

An equity, diversity, and inclusion lens must be applied to every form of communication by and for the profession. Special focus must be made on messages that increase the visibility of underrepresented groups and expand practice opportunities. Visual images used in communications vehicles should be carefully considered for their representation of the face of the profession.

In addition, continued emphasis should be made on how architects contribute to communities through cultural engagement and volunteerism.

Guided by these five keystones, the Commission developed 32 recommendations for action. Then, using an impact analysis process, it narrowed the list to 11 priority recommendations for near-term implementation.

## Priority recommendations for action

### **1. Make equity, diversity, and inclusion a core value for the Board of Directors**

The AIA Board of Directors and Strategic Council should consider equity, diversity, and inclusion among the evaluation criteria for future actions. Those actions include resolutions, business items, and member-led initiatives that make the AIA an even more relevant and socially-conscious organization. By consistently considering EDI, the Board and Council will ensure that future efforts are evaluated for their societal impact and ability to bring people together.

### **2. Measure and report how EDI permeates the AIA**

As well as embracing EDI as a core value, the Institute must measure and report how that value is influencing demographics, behavior, attitudes, awareness, retention, recruitment, culture, and engagement within the AIA. The Commission urges that compilation of the data start with AIA staff, volunteers, and elected and appointed leaders on national, regional, local, and component levels.

### **3. Launch EDI training for AIA volunteers and components**

In order to elevate awareness of the societal and business case for greater equity, diversity, and inclusion in the profession of architecture, the Commission recommends that the Institute create customized EDI training for AIA volunteers and leadership. This could be a combination of in-person sessions at large AIA events such as the AIA Conference on Architecture, Grassroots Leadership Conference, and Knowledge Leadership Assembly; materials and guides for interested groups to facilitate local sessions; and on-demand learning that can be used for components.

### **4. Create guides for equitable, diverse, and inclusive practice**

The Commission recommends that the Institute create and provide members and their firms with guides on best practices in observance of equity, diversity, and inclusion principles, and how those principles can be a part of any architectural practice. The guides would address such issues as career progression, work culture, leadership development, talent recruitment and more. The guides could be accessible on-demand publications.

### **5. Create a position paper on EDI and the profession**

The Institute now has extensive data on demographic trends within the profession. But it can't always answer the question of *why* those trends occur. There's a need for more specific understanding of the issues and implications in the quest for full equity, diversity, and inclusion. The Commission recommends that the AIA commission an academic study to document and research the impact of EDI in architecture. This study would rigorously analyze and interpret available data and provide qualitative evidence to support a broader knowledge base.

### **6. Develop a firm self-assessment tool**

It is the responsibility of the AIA to provide members and their firms with the means to measure their engagement with EDI principles. The Commission recommends development of a firm self-assessment tool on EDI issues. Examples of criteria to assess include EEO policies, internal and external diversity issues, scope of diversity initiatives, family-friendly benefits, and overall firm commitment. Further, it's recommended that the data be collected nationally and included in the biannual AIA Firm Survey.

### **7. Require EDI data as part of AIA awards submissions**

Based on studies within other industries, the more the profession of architecture reflects the society we serve, the better the product of our work will be. It will incorporate greater sensitivity to and empathy for cultural, societal, and environmental concerns. What's needed is more proof—a data set that illustrates the connection between equity, diversity, inclusion, and architecture excellence. The Commission recommends the collection of demographic data on teams submitting for AIA awards.

### **8. Advocate for a more accessible path to higher education**

It's been determined that creating an accessible route for architecture students enrolled in two- and four-year programs to move to NAAB-accredited programs is a successful strategy for increasing the number of under-represented individuals. The Commission recommends that the AIA advocate strongly for support of existing bridge programs, and the creation of new ones. Suggested tactics include sharing of articulation agreements among institutions, and raising awareness of bridge opportunities within under-represented communities. The Commission also recommends the Institute make an annual fundraising commitment to the Diversity Advancement Scholarship Program administered by the AIA Foundation.

### **9. Engage children with K-12 architecture programs**

Building a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive architecture workforce needs to start early. We must engage children and their families with more exposure to the profession through K-12 programs within all demographic communities. The Commission endorses the work of the AIA 2016 K-12 Task Force, and recommends that it includes EDI considerations in developing new curricula, and in its plan to enlist architects to volunteer in communities.

### **10. Tell our stories**

Increasingly, the face of our profession reflects a cross-section of America. But more needs to be done to communicate that expanding profile. The Commission recognizes the good work being done through the *I Look Up* campaign and urges the AIA to continue developing messaging that highlights the equity, diversity and inclusion within the profession. Those communications also serve to humanize and personalize architects as a welcoming community, and one sensitive to the built environment.

### **11. Ensure that AIA publications reflect EDI**

The Commission recognizes public comments indicating that visual images in AIA publications reflect limited multicultural and gender representation. It recommends that the AIA ensure that it makes broader depictions in its media of the full range of communities represented in the ranks of architects. It should also urge component publication editors to do the same—and those efforts can be celebrated through the Institute's national channels.

## Concluding comments

The thoughtful decision by the AIA to re-emphasize its commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion is more than fitting and appropriate. It is an ethical and moral obligation.

We are a profession in need of some re-design. On one hand, our member profile is improving. Studies by the Institute and other industry organizations are reporting growing evidence of EDI within our ranks.

On the other hand, as the findings of both the AIA and other groups point out—there is more work to be done.

- Women and minorities are under-represented in the profession.
- Aligned with the perceptions on representation of women, half of the surveyed women respondents report that women are less likely to achieve their career advancement objectives.
- Women and minorities say they are less likely to be promoted or compensated at rates equal to their peers.
- Minorities reported that their barriers to entering the profession included fewer education financing opportunities; a perceived low “return” on the expense of schooling; a lack of role models; and low awareness of the career path.

To be better professionals in the face of a complex world, we need collaboration and cooperation within our practices. We need innovation and ingenuity. And we need the energy and engagement of our *best* people—whoever they are, whatever their heritage, wherever they call home.

Time and again, studies by global talent management organizations have validated the bottom line: The most productive and successful businesses and organizations also happen to be the most committed to the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

As a community working to improve the world around us, we also seek a workplace free of discrimination in any form. A workplace rich with flexibility and fairness. A place where team members have a sense of pride, a sense of connection...and a sense of passion.

Our vision is more than communities transformed and enhanced by innovative architecture. It’s also a place where we celebrate, and take full advantage of, our *differences*. A rich mix of our ethnic, cultural, religious and societal influences. A place where every person can realize his or her goals.

Working with clients, we use the impact of innovative design to strengthen and transform communities, boosting their vibrancy and enhancing the quality of life they offer.

The impact of equity, diversity, and inclusion is no less powerful.

As a community ourselves, our goal must be to meet the challenge presented us by the Commission’s recommendations. If we do, we will become a model profession that is diverse, robust, responsive, and sensitive.

This is a continuing journey, one AIA members take with pride and passion. Because our work here can help change the world.

# AIA 2017 Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Statement

The American Institute of Architects, as part of the global community, champions a culture of equity, diversity, and inclusion within the profession of architecture to create a better environment for all.

Achieving this vision has a direct impact on the relevance of our profession and the world's prosperity, health, and future.



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