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## More and Better: Increasing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Planning

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Urban planners carry an important responsibility to society and communities. They influence how space is used and ultimately experienced. Those designs are not always equitable and inclusive, however. Entrenched institutional and structural forces that stretch far beyond planning have made one's place of residence just as important as education, income, and family background to quality of life.

For example, data show that zip codes matter more to one's health than genetic code; people's overall health and longevity are greatly influenced by where they live (Graham 2016). One street can divide an affluent community from a severely disinvested and underserved neighborhood, as is demonstrated by the differences between the areas north and south of Delmar Boulevard in St. Louis caused by a history of segregation (Figure 1). Where and how people live—and how that contributes to their overall health and wellness—is not just a medical issue

but a societal issue. The ways in which cities have been and will be designed play a critical role in this.

Overcoming old-school institutional and structural practices used to design cities requires new approaches to urban planning with intentional approaches to seeking diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I). There are many ways to approach this work, but the primary—and perhaps the most critical—is within the profession.

DE&I in the urban planning profession is a conscious approach toward creating meaningful diversity and understanding and actively working toward equity and inclusion within the planning field. How this looks in practice will vary, but the desired outcome is a workforce empowered to drive planning processes that help reduce the disparities that exist across communities.

This *PAS Memo* discusses the opportunities and challenges of making DE&I a regular and critical component of the urban planning profession. It explores the significance of DE&I in urban planning, shares the perspectives of planners on the subject, and offers practical ideas for planners to implement, including efforts by the American Planning Association (APA) to support this work. This *Memo* is not meant to serve as an exhaustive detailing of the challenges facing the profession, but rather as an invitation to a larger discussion.

### The Challenges of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Over the years several terms have been used to describe efforts to prevent discrimination and provide an equitable playing field for underrepresented groups who have experienced historical mistreatment and denial of opportunities. In the 1960s, "equal opportunity" and "affirmative action" emerged as efforts representing fair treatment and favor for those from current and historically oppressed groups. In the 1980s, organizational leaders moved away from approaches like affirmative action and began to refocus their attention on "diversity management," a move toward integration and as-



Figure 1. The "Delmar Divide" in St. Louis. Courtesy Health Equity Works.

simulating underrepresented populations within the majority (Friedman and Ditomaso 1996).

Fast forward to today, when diversity, equity, and inclusion have become common buzzwords. However, the difference between the meaning of these terms and the buzz around them requires clarification. Together, DE&I signifies collective efforts to intentionally create environments of access and fairness that are free from exclusion. DE&I represents deliberate efforts to confront what is oftentimes an elephant in the room: historical and current forms of discrimination that have kept many populations left out, excluded, and unwelcomed in societal processes.

The buzz around DE&I has largely focused on increasing representation, usually on the basis of race or ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability status. However, the reduction of DE&I to buzzwords is detrimental to each respective concept and its importance to society. The vagueness or lack of understanding around each concept means that each can be skirted and true action and resources not placed behind them.

This was demonstrated in a 2019 report of survey results of 234 chief diversity officers from the Standard & Poor's 500 cohort (an index of the 500 largest publicly traded U.S. companies) designed to understand chief diversity officers' roles, needs, and potential. The researchers found that while large companies developed positions to enhance DE&I, these positions were underresourced in terms of funding and data. Further, diversity and inclusion strategies were disconnected from overall business strategies, and company leadership wasn't fully on board (Paikeday et al. 2018).

In a report published by the International City/County Managers Association (ICMA) about the recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations in local government, similar challenges were revealed (Smith 2019). Local government leaders endeavoring to incorporate DE&I throughout their hiring and retention practices found internal challenges and institutional barriers through hiring practices that hadn't been updated or that removed qualified candidates from the hiring pool because of unnecessary job requirements. Other internal challenges were found in working across units with human resource departments, which acted as a hindrance to DE&I work. Reasons for this were not completely clear, but participants suggested internal struggles about roles, lack of understanding of DE&I, and unwillingness to modify hiring practices.

### **Drilling Down Into DE&I**

Although often mentioned together, diversity, equity, and inclusion are different concepts with their own respective relevance and importance. The ability to pull apart and distinguish the difference between the terms is critically important for effective DE&I work, as effective goals and strategies cannot be set for concepts not fully understood. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are different yet interconnected ideas.

#### ***Diversity***

*Diversity* is the presence of difference within a given setting. The presence of difference in a system aids in greater productivity, problem solving, enriched perspectives, and efficiency.

In nature, biological diversity, or biodiversity, is important for ecosystem productivity and sustainability. For example, greater species diversity—which includes the number of species present and their abundance, composition, and interactions—improves continuity and longevity of ecosystem processes (Chapin et al. 2000). In general, the same principle applies to group settings, such as workplaces and communities.

Usually, diversity is invoked to boost numbers of people of color or women within an organization. In the business world, the “business case” for diversity has been that hiring individuals from underrepresented populations contributes to the organizational bottom line (Robinson & Dechant 1997; Herring 2009; Slater et al. 2008). Diversity is connected to helping organizations communicate better with underrepresented populations to enhance profits. This shapes a narrative that diversity is important only if there is a financial incentive, diminishing the true intention of having mixed groups of individuals that can provide a wealth of experiences and perspectives to a situation, which can, in turn, produce better outcomes. Several scholars have denounced this argument as it treats diversity as merely means to an end (Noon, 2007, Zanoni et al. 2010; VanDikj et al. 2012).

Moving beyond the singularly focused business-case argument is necessary to understand and work through the complexities of the many ways in which diversity is needed. True diversity is not created simply by increasing the numbers of individuals from underrepresented populations in an organization, but by empowering those individuals to reach their full potential.

The significance of reaching one's full potential is key in understanding DE&I because it speaks to the second concept, equity. While equal employment legislation and affirmative action helped boost diversity within organizations, they did not help modify the experiences of newly invited individuals and groups (Mor Barak 1999, 2011). Underrepresented populations still experienced discrimination, exclusion, disinvestment, and numerous inequities. This demonstrates that equity, as its own concept, is necessary.

#### ***Equity***

*Equity* is giving attention to the advantages and disadvantages that exist among groups and individuals, correction of the inequities identified, and provision of access to resources and opportunities needed.

When discussing equity, Norman Krumholz, planning director at the City of Cleveland between 1969 and 1979, and his colleagues noted, “Equity requires that government institutions give priority attention to the goal of promoting a wider range of choices for those Cleveland residents who have few, if any, choices” (Krumholz, Cogger, and Linner 1975; Brown 2015, 1). What these planners understood is that problems experienced by the city's poorest and most discriminated against could not be achieved by urban planning alone but required taking a critical approach to the inequities present in the structures that precluded them from thriving (Krumholz, Cogger, and Linner 1975).

Equity is different from diversity. Diversity invites others in, but equity modifies practices to support inclusion and flourishing. This is why the distinction between diversity and equity is so important. Diversity is largely numbers-driven. It is easier to gauge and apply metrics to. Equity, on the other hand, is largely values-driven.

The fact that inequities exist and are pervasive through various communities is understood. However, it is harder for people to decipher what is equitable because those definitions are based on social, emotional, physical, and psychological values; as a result, needs and solutions are much more difficult to determine. As it is easier to take aim at issues with clear-cut, tangible solutions, diversity becomes the lower-hanging fruit, while equity is neglected.

### **Inclusion**

*Inclusion* is all about individuals feeling welcomed, valued, and involved. As with equity, inclusion is not a natural derivative of diversity. The act of inclusion seems simple: involve others. However, there is much more to it.

Inclusion is about experiences and how those experiences contribute to a person's ability to fully be involved. For example, a group of people can be invited to attend the same discussion session, but power dynamics can emerge on the basis of language, occupation, level of education, race, and socioeconomic status that preclude individuals with the least power from being truly involved. Enhancing inclusion means asking the right questions and remaining vigilant for dynamics that deter involvement.

### **Significance of DE&I in Urban Planning**

To fully understand the relevance of DE&I in urban planning, an honest identification and assessment of why there are so many nondiverse, inequitable, and noninclusive communities is needed. Most cities share an abhorrent history of discrimination, displacement, and outright racism by local governments—and in urban planning practices.

As writer Diana Budds (2016) states, “Cities are complex organisms shaped by myriad forces, but their organization bears the fingerprints of planners and policy makers who have shaped them for decades.” In planning, long histories of moving people in and out of areas to solve problems while creating more problems in the process exist. In cities with long legacies of housing discrimination and segregation, the remnants of those acts are still present today.

An example is the cyclical effect of *redlining*, a practice in which individuals are directly or indirectly denied services due to neighborhood attributes such as race, ethnicity, and immigration status (Aaronson, Hartley, and Mazumder 2019). Today, redlining still affects those communities through poorer health outcomes, lower rates of home ownership, and higher rates of poverty and segregation. In a 2019 *Governing* study of black-white segregation in midsize cities of downstate Illinois, researchers found clear-cut segregation in neighborhoods that mirrored past segregation, along with several other negative outcomes for people of color: severe disparities in household

incomes between black and white households, very high black poverty rates, and extremely segregated schools (Vock, Charles, and Maciag 2019).

In cities across the country from the 1950s through the 1970s, many black families were pushed out of their already disinvested communities to make way for schools, highways, and large business developments (Badger 2015). Present societal realities that reflect social inequality in the spaces people live, work, and play, as well as the current political climate, make DE&I a relevant topic.

Social justice is undeniably intertwined with urban planning. It is ingrained in the professional work and ethics of planners. The American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct states that planners shall seek “social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration” (APA 2016, A.1.f). However, the how and when of this work, and whether it is even happening, is unclear. What is clear is that there are opportunities to begin.

### **Perspectives from the Field**

Opportunities to make strides in DE&I within urban planning are vast. While challenges exist, the planning field is filled with thoughtful planners interested in the future of the profession's approach to DE&I and social justice.

The author interviewed seven planners of differing specialties, regions, demographics, and backgrounds who have a unifying commitment to DE&I and urban planning. They offered their perspectives on DE&I in the profession, organized below into the following themes: the understanding of DE&I among planners, the representativeness of urban planners to the communities they serve, and the lack of pipelines into the profession.

### **Misunderstandings Abound When It Comes to DE&I**

Interviewees agreed that a general misunderstanding or lack of understanding of DE&I is present among planners. Because the three concepts are almost always mentioned together, their individual meaning and significance are often conflated.

Giovanita Tiarachristie, senior neighborhood planner at the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development and co-chair of the APA New York Metro Chapter Diversity Committee, notes, “People have no idea that they mean different things . . . people understand that these are issues but lack knowledge of what they mean.”

Tiffany-Ann Taylor, deputy director of the New York City Department of Transportation's Office of Freight Mobility and co-chair of the APA New York Metro Chapter Diversity Committee, discussed diversity and inclusion as two concepts that play off one another. She notes that people tend to associate diversity with race, but “it means many other things.”

According to Julia Elmer, PhD, AICP, an urban planner and consultant in Cincinnati, “Diversity, equity, and inclusion are not synonymous. Diversity is the range of people who could be at

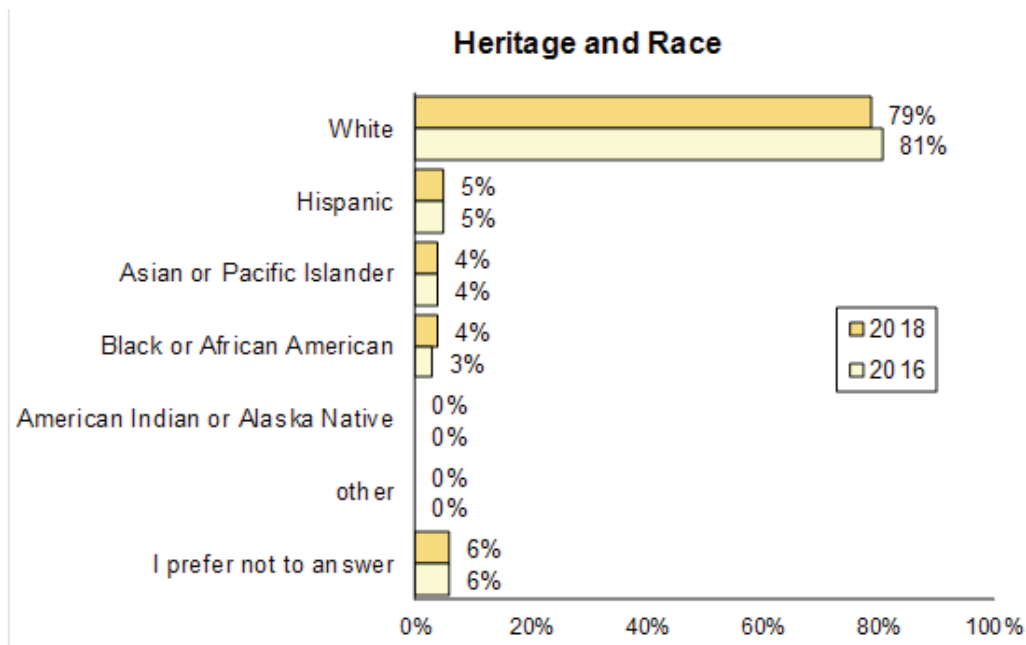


Figure 2. Race data from APA's 2018 Salary Survey of 6,770 full-time planners (APA 2018).

the table. Inclusion means that everyone there can speak and is valued."

Elmer finds that, of these three concepts, equity is the most misunderstood and most challenging because it is a process: "You must build a culture of equity. Until you've brought together a diverse group of people, you may not know what it's going to take to correct imbalances and build processes that give everyone in that group access to the same opportunities for growth. Planning remains a stubbornly white profession, so we still have to work intentionally to build diversity and inclusion within our ranks if we are aiming for equity amongst ourselves and in the communities we serve."

### ***Planners Are Not Representative of Their Communities***

In PAS Report 593, [Planning with Diverse Communities](#), the authors highlight the shifting demographics in the United States to a majority-minority nation by 2045, when more than half of the country's population will be made up of minorities (Garcia, Garfinkel-Castro, and Pfeiffer 2019). But changes within communities are not likely to result in changes in the urban planning profession without deliberate efforts to include others.

Planning has a long history of being a largely white and male profession. Even today, the "typical" planner, based on the 6,770 respondents to APA's 2018 Planners Salary Survey, is a 42-year-old white male, and as Figure 2 shows, respondents were largely white (APA 2018).

Greg Griffin, a PhD candidate at the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture in community and regional planning and an associate research scientist at the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, notes that "planning is not representative."

He continues, "There is an inverse problem in the profession when you have people working as planners that are not repre-

sentative; it poses another barrier to engagement. It creates a barrier to how they do their job."

However, planners recognize the needed shift to greater diversity. Devayani Puranik and J.M. Rayburn, senior planner and planner, respectively, at the City of Dublin, Ohio, both noted that increasingly within the profession there is a greater appreciation of diversity as well as more attention being paid to the lack of diversity.

Tiarachristie notes the lack of representation in her home state of New York: "Two-thirds of the population in New York City are made up of people of color, but 71 percent of planners in the area are white." Elmer argues that this is "highly significant because urban planning is shaping communities ... Until planners represent the communities they operate in, then there is always going to be an issue."

The lack of representativeness is felt not only locally but at planning events such as APA's National Planning Conference. At the 2017 conference in New York City, Taylor and several of her colleagues noticed that most participants were white and felt that social justice issues such as race and criminal justice were not discussed. From her perspective, equity was treated as a niche topic separate from other important planning issues.

Taylor recalls, "I was really annoyed because I was walking around the center and no one look[ed] like me. There [were] barely any African American, female, or young people on panels or attendees that looked like me." She continues, "I was so angry about it that I put on my own conference" (the *Hindsight* conference, described later in the article). The fact that Taylor experienced the event as isolating and nonresponsive to DE&I speaks to the need to make planning more inclusive, and APA is taking steps to encourage and support DE&I within the profession, including at the national planning conference (Figure 3, p. 5).



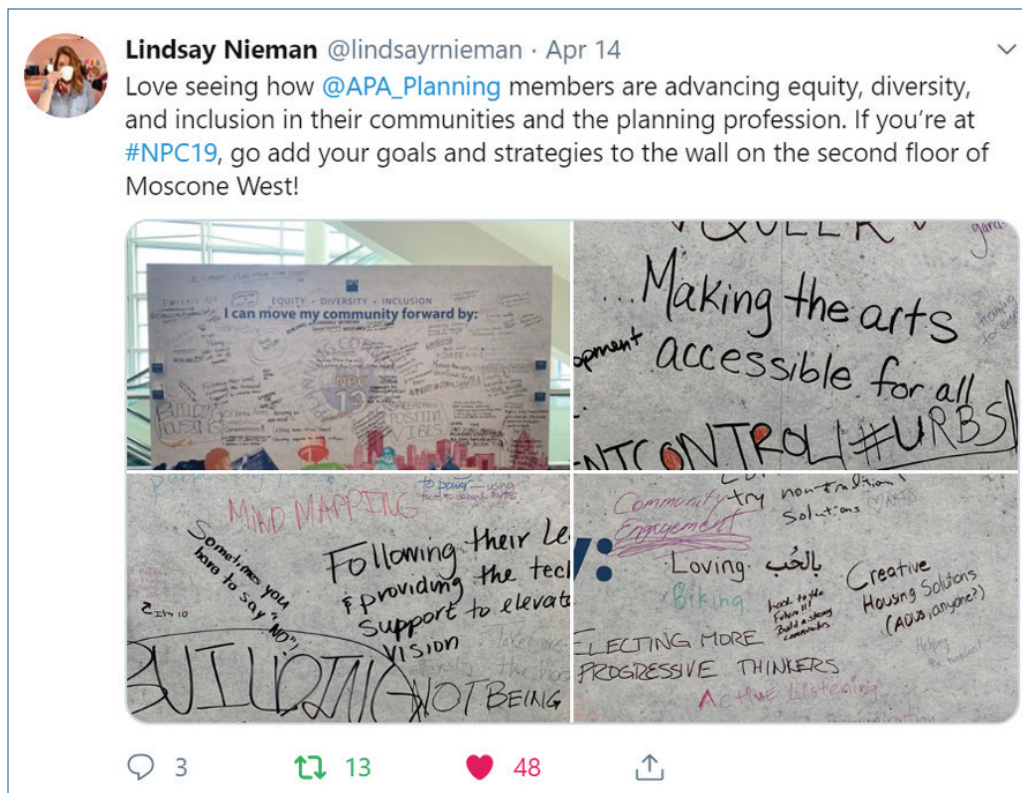


Figure 3. Tweet from APA staff member Lindsay Nieman highlighting the “equity wall” at the National Planning Conference 2019 (APA)

### *Pipelines into the Profession Are a Problem*

Finally, pipelines into the profession that would contribute to DE&I within planning are lacking. The problem is twofold: urban planning is generally not well known among youth, and people of color are not being specifically recruited to join the profession.

Elmer notes that among the challenges to diversifying the profession, “Pipeline is number one. We’re not training diverse groups of planners. Planning has an identity crisis. Most students who are entering college have no idea what planning is or what planners do. Those students we do manage to reach and attract to our major will eventually enter into a profession that remains overwhelmingly white. As we continue to recruit more diverse cohorts of planning students, we must work simultaneously to cultivate intentional hiring processes and mentorship opportunities that make it crystal clear how much we value diversity within our profession.”

Most of the planners interviewed for this article were in college and pursuing another degree before learning about the planning field. Taylor recalls, “I didn’t even know it was a profession until last semester in college. I was introduced much later, as were several of my colleagues.”

According to Tiarachristie’s master’s thesis, “Elephant in the Planning Room,” of over 300 planners in the New York Metro area surveyed, the majority didn’t learn about planning as a profession until the later years of college. Those that found out earlier were mostly white and learned about the profession through social connections (e.g., a relative or neighbor was a planner). Tiarachristie’s personal experience with displacement

and loss led her to study environmental and social justice, through which she learned that urban planning was an important profession to enter and reform from within.

In addition to the lack of recognition, indirect messaging about the planning profession can discourage young adults from pursuing this field. Some of those messages include exclusion and a lack of visible ways in which urban planning makes a difference in the community. Further, young people are not exposed to urban planners, especially ones that look like themselves.

In fields such as nursing, policing, and teaching, research has demonstrated that youths’ impressions of fields they can pursue are often grounded in exposure to the profession and seeing others like them that have succeeded. For an example from a related profession, a 2015 report found that among 29 films from the last 80 years that depict architects as lead characters, only one depicted a black architect (*Jungle Fever*, 1991) and one depicted a white female (*One Fine Day*, 1996). The other 27 films portrayed architects as white males between the ages of 30 and 40 (Griffin and Yang 2015, 4.4).

Intentional efforts to recruit, train, and employ individuals that differ from the typical planner archetype of 42-year-old white male takes time and attention. Further downstream are hiring practices when it comes to up-and-coming planners. Griffin notes, “Hiring practices are most important. It cascades with how we work with the community. [But] focusing [only] on hiring practices is also narrow minded. You can look upstream and downstream. Upstream it can be hiring students, which is absolutely critical. The makeup of our students in the field is critical. This is the pipeline. This is our opportunity to

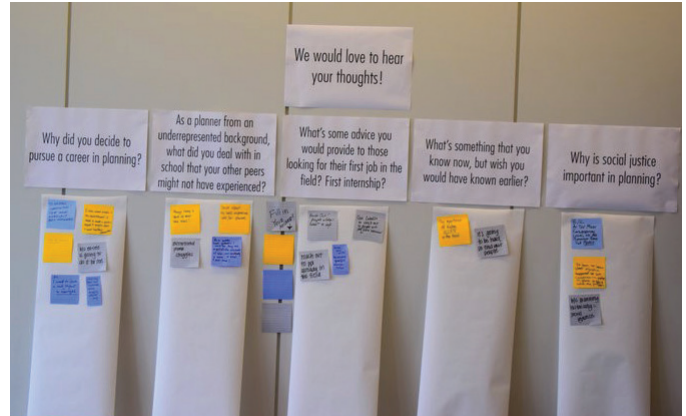


Figure 4. The Hindsight conference focused on issues of diversity and equity in planning. Photos courtesy Hindsightcon.com.

impact.” Griffin suggests recruiting students from high schools to begin changing the profession.

### Action Steps for Planners

There are several directions planners can go when committing to the true meaning and individual meanings of DE&I. Some may focus on hard numbers related to diversity, while others might seek to build equity in their planning process as an organizational priority. No matter the path, planners should endeavor to set one for themselves and encourage their organizations to do so as well. The action steps outlined in this section are not exhaustive nor definitive, but are intended to serve as initial ideas.

#### Create It!

DE&I efforts are expansive. There is a lot to be done and there is much individual planners can do. Where there are not developed opportunities, planners can create new opportunities.

Creating something new might seem unnecessary or cumbersome, but this might be needed. Shaking loose from entrenched modes of thought is important to supporting a shift in any profession. The *Hindsight* conference is a shining example of this.

With APA New York Metro Chapter Diversity Committee co-chair Giovania Tiarachristie, Tiffany-Ann Taylor developed *Hindsight: A Conference on Urban Planning through an Equity Lens*, a convening designed to increase diversity and cultural competency within the profession through offering resources, creating space to share ideas, and addressing recruitment and retention of people of color in planning (Figure 4).

In the development process of the conference, Taylor and Tiarachristie focused on changing the tone and narrative of planning conferences by taking a careful approach to a number of typical process steps, including the following:

- *Who would be presenting.* They paid particular attention to how speakers represented diversity in race, age, gender, sexuality, sector, ability, and other identities. The emphasis on speaker diversity meant diversity in topics, experiences, and perspectives to be presented.
- *How proposed workshops enhanced equity and access to women and people of color.* The expressed focus of equity and inclusion of presenters not typically invited to speak created unique workshops such as, “City Planning,

### Resources for Attaining Greater Diversity

DE&I work in urban planning is not always discussed or written about. It is important that practitioners distill successes, failures, and lessons for planners to understand what is happening across the country. The resources below discuss diversity, equity, and/or inclusion with research findings or examples of work being done in this space.

Krumholz, Norman. 1982. “A Retrospective View of Equity Planning Cleveland 1969–1979,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 48(2): 163–74.

This Cleveland planning retrospective provides insights into equity planning, which is characterized as “activist and interventionist in style and redistributive in objective,” during three different political administrations and constant pushback.

Smith, Kendra. 2019. *Beyond Compliance: Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Populations to Achieve Higher Positions in Local Government*. January. ICMA.

This recent report discusses challenges related to the hiring and retention of underrepresented populations in local government and provides examples and recommendations for enhancing this work.

Tarachristie, Giovania. 2016. “Elephant in the Planning Room: Overcoming Barriers to Recruitment and Retention of Planners of Color.” August. Thesis, Master of Science in City and Regional Planning, Pratt Institute School of Architecture.

This master’s thesis seeks to understand and illuminate the barriers to the recruitment and retention of planners of color.





Figure 5. APA Ambassador Kim Glas-Castro helps students in Palm Springs, Florida, understand and use an aerial map of their community. Photo courtesy Laura Buzzetta.

Race, and Reproduction,” “Copwatching in Gentrifying Neighborhoods,” “Linking Equity and Sustainability for a Just Transition,” and “Equitable Data Practices for Housing Justice.”

- *Location of the event.* The venue selected for the convening was the CUNY Silberman School of Social Work in historic East Harlem, a public institution in a dynamic community of color.
- *Affordability for participants.* Prices for admission were kept low: \$40 for general administration, \$20 for community groups, and \$10 for students.

In 2017, its first year, there were 28 sessions across a variety of topics and 400 participants who otherwise would not have received exposure to so many presentations and discussion on equity. In 2018, *Hindsight* was again hosted in East Harlem, largely utilized certified Minority & Women Business Enterprise vendors, and was held in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act.

### Connect with Future Planners

While developing a conference is a large undertaking, there are other ways to create valuable opportunities to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in the profession—perhaps most importantly, encouraging greater diversity within the next generation of planners.

Methods of connecting with future planners include the following:

- **Mentor, mentor, mentor!** Formal or informal mentoring relationships with youth or soon-to-be planners from various backgrounds can help boost diversity and foster inclusion. Mentors should be mindful of not perpetuating old ideals about the profession and discussing opportunities for equitable planning. APA offers several resources on [mentoring for planners](#). Connecting with local planning schools could be a promising avenue.
- **Become an APA Ambassador.** The [APA Ambassador Program](#) is a volunteer program for APA members to increase awareness about the profession (Figure 5).
- **Develop hands-on experiences.** Facilitate classroom visits and planning exercises, invite schools to visit the planning department as a field trip, or develop summer programs that allow youth access to urban planning, simulations, and planners.
- **Participate in career fairs or career days.** Seek out opportunities to do guest speaking or otherwise represent planning at local schools or community events.

Connecting with potential and soon-to-be planners doesn't have to mean reinventing the wheel, as most organizations

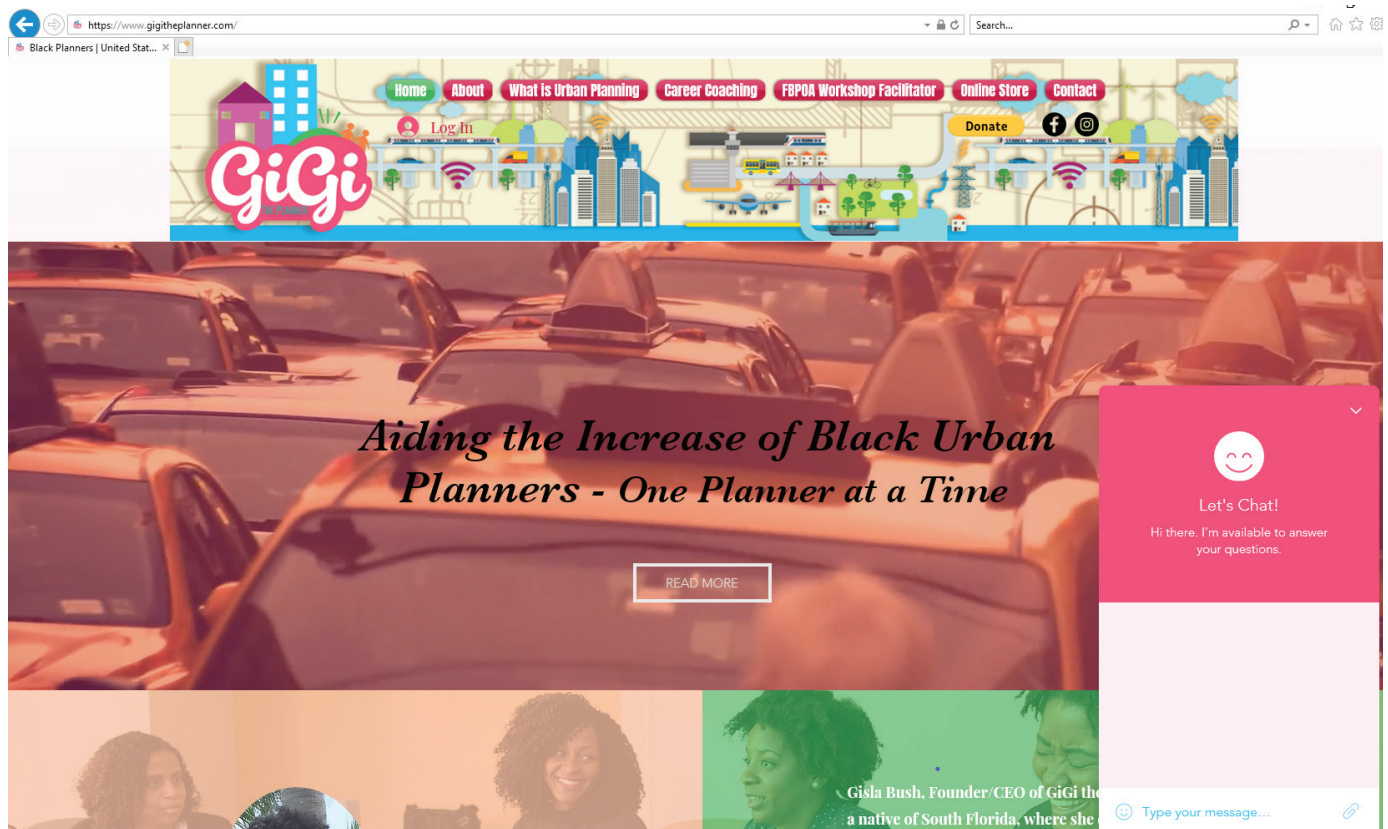


Figure 6. Gisla Augustin's Gigi the Planner website (Gisla Augustin)

perform community outreach in some way. A good place to start is to learn if this work has ever been done in your department or organization. Building off previous work or relationships is helpful, but also consider how fresh approaches can help youth learn about equitable and responsible planning.

Gisla Augustin, a planner with the City of Pompano Beach, Florida, and founder/CEO of *Gigi the Planner*, an organization whose mission is to increase the number of black planners in America (Figure 6), works with African American youth to teach them about urban planning and mentors African American students pursuing degrees in urban planning (Augustin 2019).

According to Augustin, "Who can better plan a city for blacks better than a black person themselves? People from similar demographics to community residents have the ability to plan those communities better. This is largely due to the fact that those planners are better able to understand their issues and the residents are more likely to trust someone else that looks like them versus someone from another background. Even though planners from different demographics may have good intentions, the community might be more skeptical about the work that they plan to do in their city."

She finds that having planners of similar backgrounds as the communities they are serving is better for communities and better for the city. This is not to say that planners can only plan for the communities they identify with, but it does speak to the possibility of more detailed and equitable approaches.

### *Use Your Voice and Influence to Shape Equitable Hiring Practices*

Key to DE&I is empowering individuals to be involved and reach their full potential. It acknowledges that everyone has something important to offer teams and the community. However, research has shown that everyone is not treated equally during the hiring process due to exclusionary measures both intentional and inadvertent (Smith 2019).

Exclusionary measures include elements of the job application process that cause a person to be removed from the candidate pool (e.g., exams, unnecessary position requirements, or expectations for the candidate to know something that will be taught on the job) or to voluntarily remove themselves as a candidate.

All planners can use their voices and influence to volunteer to review hiring policies and practices to ensure they align with departmental needs. This must be done in collaboration with the human resource department, but it is a worthwhile endeavor if the department is committed to DE&I. Specific items to review include the following:

- **Applicant recruitment.** Where and how applicants are recruited to apply for a position is important and linked to DE&I. Each department's recruitment practices are different. Some recruit heavily while others don't recruit at all. Understanding departmental and organization patterns is critical to understand where action should be taken to enhance DE&I.



- **Position descriptions.** Position requirements and preferred qualifications should be reviewed to assess if they help meet departmental goals or if they are unnecessary and should be modified. Parsing what one needs to be successful at the job and information that will be learned on the job is important so as not create unreal expectations.
- **Interview process.** Review the interviewing process to understand how candidates are being introduced to the department and organization. Seek to understand what biases are in the interview process. Bias can range from race and gender to university attendance.
- **Beware of “fit.”** Organizational or departmental fit is often used as a determining reason for hiring or not hiring an individual. Understand what this means for your organization and if your organization’s fit does not align with DE&I values, seek to change it.

As noted above, the pipeline into the planning profession is a particular challenge. Several planners interviewed for this article mentioned urban planning education, internship, and hiring processes as being not very welcoming to people of color, which deter them from applying to urban planning program, internships, and jobs. It is therefore very important that urban planners pay attention to how candidate pools are cultivated and new planners are hired. As Griffin states, “[Regarding] power in hiring decisions — at all levels we need to speak truth to power. It happens all the time when planners are hiring interns. We need to speak up as a profession.” Elmer recalls a colleague who reshaped an entire planning department by continually pressing hiring managers to cultivate diverse pools of applicants and ensure that they weren’t removing candidates for minor issues.

### ***Step Away from the Euphemisms; Put Meaning Behind Your Words***

The buzziness of DE&I can reduce its relevance. Instead of using these terms as buzzwords, explore what you mean and be direct about it. For instance, instead of saying, “I want to foster greater inclusion in our workforce,” consider, “I want to foster greater inclusion in our workforce and I will seek out concrete ways of doing this by ...” The shift puts more meaning behind one’s words and makes explicit the intention.

### **Conclusion**

A lack of DE&I is certainly not unique to the planning profession. However, the call for greater DE&I in urban planning carries a different burden than other professions. As author and Harvard University economist Edward Glaeser notes in his book, *Triumph of the City*, “cities are our greatest invention.” The design of the city plays a critical role in our health, sustainability, and prosperity. Pressing issues of the present and future will require more and better from us; more ideas, more effort, more diversity, more equity, more inclusion, and better ways of working together.

And planners can now look to the American Planning Association to help with this work. To support its members in seeking greater diversity, equity, and inclusion within both the planning profession itself as well as in planning efforts within

communities across the country, APA is committed to promoting more inclusive, just, and equitable communities through a planning profession as diverse as the communities it serves.

APA is creating a number of programs and resources on equity, diversity, and inclusion that all planners can use to help improve the profession and their communities. Initial accomplishments include the following:

- The adoption of a [Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#) in 2018. This sets forth an association-wide plan for how APA will better promote the understanding and practices of diversity and inclusion, both within and outside the planning community and profession.
- The adoption of a Planning for Equity Policy Guide at the 2019 National Planning Conference that establishes APA’s official stance on the issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- The designation of a “[planning for inclusiveness and social justice](#)” track at the 2019 National Planning Conference comprising 30 sessions, including the [Plan4Equity Forum](#), which took a deep dive into APA’s ongoing efforts and progress in addressing equity, diversity, and inclusion both within and outside the organization.

Planners are encouraged to track [APA’s ongoing efforts](#) in developing resources and tools to help advance equity, diversity, and inclusion for all.

This *PAS Memo* offers small action steps to beginning or enhancing the work of increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the planning profession. Planners should both individually and collectively take this work on. It is certainly not easy, but it is absolutely necessary for the betterment of the planning profession and the various communities planners serve.

### **About the Author**

Kendra L. Smith, PhD, serves as the director of community engagement at the University of Houston, College of Medicine. She is the author of the 2019 ICMA report [Beyond Compliance: Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Populations to Achieve Higher Positions in Local Government](#).

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