

Taking Action for Racial Equality in A/E/C

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SMPS Purpose and Goals for the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Task Force

Purpose

The purpose of this task force is to suggest initiatives and strategic objectives to the board of directors and staff to increase awareness of and support diversity, equity, and inclusion in the membership, marketing profession, and our members' firms.

Goals

SMPS aspires to be a leader on this matter for our members, among our peer groups, and in our professional community. We will have diverse leadership structure, staff, and membership; we will create a supportive environment for people of color; we will offer tools to make change in our organization, profession, and industries.

In 2003, SMPS issued its first diversity statement,¹ which came out of the work of a prior task force created for this purpose. Since that time, various members, chapter leaders, board members, and staff have recognized the need for SMPS to enhance its diversity and inclusion efforts.

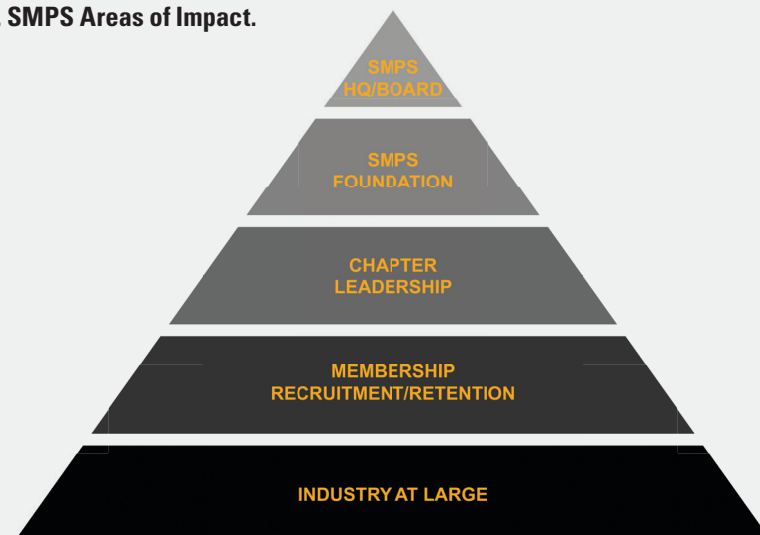
While already in the works, 2020's "summer of reckoning" catapulted the need to formally organize a concerted DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) effort at the Society level.

In July 2020, the Society released a call for volunteers requesting applications from members interested in serving on the new SMPS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force. Over 70 members applied, with 25 selected to include a mix of race, age, geography, gender, and sexual orientation. This mix would ensure the value of varying perspectives that each task member brings to the group through their life, professional, and personal experiences.

The task force first met in September 2020 to create an initial space for members to begin to develop the comfort and trust essential to broach the difficult work the group will face. While the DEI focus is an operational change for SMPS, it's imperative to move the Society forward.

In subsequent meetings, critical areas of impact for the work of the group were discussed, with five focus areas being 1) industry overall, 2) membership recruitment and retention, 3) chapter leadership, 4) board/staff, and 5) foundation. (See Figure 1. SMPS Areas of Impact.) As the task force considered how diversity, equity, and inclusion intersect the five work areas, location-based, demographic, and legislative/political differences emerged. Based on this, the committee divided into regional workgroups to separately consider, develop, and prioritize action items for their geographic areas to define recommendations that will be collectively presented, on a quarterly basis, to the Society board for policy and implementation considerations.

Figure 1. SMPS Areas of Impact.





Private project, San Francisco, CA.
M Moser Associates and Principal
Builders. ©Emily Hagopian
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Clarifying Objectives

This task force has been challenged with defining direction and developing action-based recommendations to positively disrupt the A/E/C industries. They acknowledge and optimistically embrace the discomfort this work requires and recognize that the outcome will benefit all. Success depends upon identifying and acknowledging individual biases and the A/E/C industries' role in contributing to institutional, systemic, and structural racism. We cannot move towards a more just and equitable future without examining the past.

Some examples of privilege and exclusion that the A/E/C industries must face are exposure to careers in the built environment, being a stakeholder with a seat at the table, and deciding how and who has access to specific knowledge.

Evaluating cultural competency within our chapters and firms requires that we lean into the necessary discomfort to enable us to recognize blind spots and disrupt our industries' homogenous makeup. As marketing and business development professionals, we have the power to shape the ways our chapters, firms, and organizations amplify marginalized voices and ensure our industries reflect the broader society we serve.

'Original 2003 SMPS Diversity Statement

SMPS embraces and promotes diversity in our organization, which includes our differences, mutuality, and similarities. We recognize that our diversity is reflected by our different people and firms. We believe our varying ethnicities, cultures, genders, ages, levels of experiences, physical abilities and other differences benefit us as individuals and as an organization. In SMPS, we will promote programs and activities that espouse our beliefs and increase awareness, understanding, recruitment and participation of diverse persons and firms.

Tackling the Work

The task force will strategize and develop ideas for implementation at multiple levels.

Immediately Actionable Items

- Defining messaging
- Establishing strategic partnerships with other industry organizations and service providers
- Utilizing preferred personal pronouns in all SMPS communications

DEI Efforts Underway

- Recrafting the 2003 SMPS diversity statement
- Modifying the SFE/CPE guidelines and chapter operations manuals
- Developing SMPS-owned DEI resources
- Evaluating our role in recruiting a more diverse workforce—HBCU engagement/scholarship program

Industry-Impacting Efforts

- Encouraging collaborative partnerships with minority-owned firms
- Expanding internship opportunities
- Developing career paths leading to elevated leadership roles

- Ensuring marketing materials reflect the diversity of people who experience the built environment

The task force will work to define measurement metrics to quantify the impact and ensure change is achieved and not just discussed. Justice and equity are prerequisites to achieving diversity and inclusion; more importantly, equity requires a sustained, concerted effort. Ultimately, the task force seeks to foster awareness and cultivate an actively anti-racist, inclusionary organization through actionable policy, and operational and programming shifts.

SMPS is assuredly and uniquely positioned to "Transform Business Through Marketing Leadership," particularly in terms of equity, representation, diversity, and inclusion. This task force's role in propelling the Society and the A/E/C industries forward requires recognizing privilege and deconstructing biases, while acknowledging and addressing our industries' role in contributing to inequalities and systemic racism. As the task force generates ideas, we hope that all SMPS members will embrace new efforts and programs to better our industries by cultivating allyship and dismantling racism. ■



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