



Inclusive by Design: Building Sustainable and Accessible Structures for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in the Construction Specifications Institute (CSI)

A Qualitative Research Study submitted by Patti Digh (May 2021)

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Executive Summary

A Greater Sense of Urgency

The world at large has attempted to first agree on its importance, then adequately address diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as a priority for many years. Public opinion, competing priorities, limited resources, denial, and fear have limited organizations' ability to adequately address this issue even as the world continues to become more diverse. While concerns about DEI should be part of every organization's DNA, fear of possible unintended consequences and lack of knowledge about best approaches have affected implementation of successful and/or meaningful implementation of strategies that convey a true commitment to advancing DEI.

In October 2019, the CSI Board approved an Ends Statement that recognizes the importance of CSI addressing diversity and inclusion: "1.4 (Professional Community) Members engage in a robust, diverse, and inclusive community of AEC professionals and related organizations." The adoption of this Ends Statement followed Board-level dialogue around DEI issues as a business imperative. CSI staff then began their work to operationalize that Ends Statement.

In the summer of 2020, much of the U.S. (and the world) galvanized around the death of George Floyd and what his death ultimately came to represent in terms of race relations in this country and abroad. His death brought about an intense social reckoning, exacerbated, and deepened by the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. In his death, and the deaths of those before (and after) that were directly attributable to racism, organizations in the U.S. found not only a real need, but also an opportunity, to stand up for what is morally and ethically right—and, in turn and more importantly (for their own sustainability and ongoing success), for what is right from a business perspective as well.

In 2020, in larger numbers than ever before, businesses, nonprofits, educational institutions, and others published public statements announcing their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The Construction Specifications Institute (CSI), under the leadership of its Board of Directors, was among those organizations publishing such a statement.

After increasing numbers of organizations published diversity statements in the wake of the Floyd murder, the question for those organizations became “what’s next?” as public outcry grew when companies’ internal work on DEI issues did not live up to the DEI statements they had created. CSI, like many other organizations, decided to operationalize their commitment to DEI by studying the issue, what other organizations are doing, understanding more fully the business case for doing DEI work within CSI (not just the moral case), and creating a direction, structure, and plan for its Board of Directors to consider as next steps.

The sense of urgency of the summer of 2020 has abated for some organizations, as is often the case, but many organizations are increasingly being held accountable by customers, members, employees, volunteers, and other stakeholders for DEI progress. That accountability standard will only continue to increase as the public makes more demands of its institutions to be diverse, equitable, and fair.

What is DEI and Why is it Important for CSI?

First, let’s define the terms that comprise DEI:

Diversity shows up in the composition of teams and organizations. Diversity really means all the ways we are different, whether that is through internal dimensions of diversity such as age, socialized and visible race, disability, nationality, gender identity,

appearance, to name a few — or external dimensions of diversity such as years of experience, fields of study, ways of thinking, or geographic location.

Equity means going beyond the question we always hear, which is “who needs to be at the table” to the deeper question of “who owns the table?” When we treat everyone *equally*, we treat everyone the same, but when we treat everyone *equitably*, we focus on individualistic needs because everyone has different needs, experiences, and opportunities. We want to eliminate any barriers to people participating fully in CSI.

Inclusion. People often say that “diversity” is an invitation to a party, whereas “inclusion” is being asked to dance. The opposite of inclusion is exclusion which refers to ways in which people feel that they are not fully accepted for who they are, are not asked for their opinions, or are not fully included in an organization.

These three things — diversity, equity, and inclusion — are important to CSI because they can drive our membership growth, the ways we can innovate in a changing world, and our ongoing relevance in the industries we represent. Not addressing DEI issues in a world that is increasingly diverse reduces our ability to attract and retain employees, members, and volunteers, it reduces our capacity to be an agile and forward-looking organization, and minimizes our relevance in an increasingly diverse society.

CSI’s Qualitative Research of Corporate and Nonprofit DEI Efforts

In the Fall of 2020, CSI examined the DEI work of 45 nonprofit and corporate (both similar and dissimilar) organizations in the U.S. to ascertain the answers to these questions:

- **What DEI vision statement have they published?**
 - What are the components of those vision statements?
 - Under whose approval were they created and disseminated?
 - Who is involved if a challenge to those statements should arise?
 - How clear is the business case in their DEI vision statements?
- **How are they demonstrating their commitment to those statements?**
 - What staffing, time, and financial resources have been allocated to DEI work in the organization?
 - Is the senior leadership of the organization actively involved in DEI work?

- Does DEI work have a “seat at the leadership table” in these organizations?
- **What products, programs, and services are in place to support those vision statements?**
 - In looking at the organization’s strategic plan, where can we find cross-departmental commitment to DEI?
 - How is the organization helping customers, clients, and members understand and make progress on DEI issues in their own companies as well?
 - What does the commitment to ongoing learning about DEI issues look like in the organization?
- **How are they measuring success?**
 - What metrics are they using to measure the effectiveness, efficacy, and results of their DEI efforts?
 - How are Boards, executives, and staff being held accountable for DEI progress?

More detailed results are shared in the full report. For the purposes of this Executive Summary, here are some of the key findings:

- 100% of the organizations researched have written, published, and continue to disseminate a “diversity statement.” This is against the 70% estimated by the American Society of Association Executives across all member nonprofit organizations.
- Increasingly, consumers and members are demanding that organizations demonstrate their commitment to the DEI statements they have published. For example, members of the American Ornithological Society made very public demands on social media that the organization change the names of 80 birds named for individuals related to racist acts in the past, citing the organization’s public commitment to diversity in the demand. This required the development of a new scientific process for bird nomenclature and is still ongoing and still very public and somewhat damaging to the “brand” of the organization.
- Corporate organizations are 3x more likely to have instituted an “office of DEI” with senior level leadership than are nonprofits because they have more financial and staff resources on the whole, and, more importantly, because the business case is more clear/delineated, with DEI work more closely related to ROI.
- The confusion of “social good” with “business good” is not as prevalent for corporations as it is for nonprofits and educational institutions, making it easier for corporate DEI efforts to be funded as core business initiatives.

- In order for nonprofits to fully integrate DEI into their body of work, the business case must be clear. It is not enough to “do the right thing.” This clarity is missing in around 45% of the nonprofits studied.
- Around 30% of nonprofits studied do not have a formal strategic plan in place for DEI efforts. They have only a DEI statement without a directional plan to institutionalize the focus.
- Data on tying executive pay to DEI goals in nonprofits was difficult to source because of HR confidentiality agreements.

Again, more detail is shared in the full report. In brief, CSI has an obligation and opportunity to be a leader in DEI measurable results for the Architecture, Engineering, Construction, and Owner (AECO) community and the association community as a whole—if it wishes to do so. The CSI Board will need to make that decision.

CSI Members and Staff Speak Up

CSI hosted five focus groups and one “idea generation” meeting in April and May 2021, to understand more clearly the feelings of CSI members and staff around DEI issues.

The five Focus Groups convened in April 2021 centered on the following questions:

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (Personal Experience)

- If you DO NOT FEEL VALUED and an ESSENTIAL part, how does that LACK SHOW UP for you?
- In what ways do you FEEL VALUED and an ESSENTIAL PART of the CSI organization?
- As a member of CSI, in what ways do you FEEL COMFORTABLE being 100% yourself?
- As a member of CSI, in what ways do you NOT FEEL that LEVEL OF COMFORT?

1) Do you feel VALUED and an ESSENTIAL part of the CSI organization?

ENTER 0

2) Have you ever faced or witnessed EXCLUSION in the workplace?

ENTER 0

3) Do you feel free to BE YOURSELF?

ENTER 0

- What kinds of "OTHERING" have you EXPERIENCED or SEEN?
- What, if any, kinds of "OTHERING" have you FACED or WITNESSED within CSI?

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (Organizational Perspectives)

- 1) How might a focus on DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) STRENGTHEN CSI's ability to ACCOMPLISH its MISSION?
- 2) How might a focus on DEI WEAKEN CSI's ability to ACCOMPLISH its MISSION?
- 3) What will SUCCESS LOOK LIKE in addressing DEI as an organization?
- 4) What are possible ways to EXPAND DIVERSITY among members and leaders within CSI?
- 5) Who are DIVERSE VOICES among CSI stakeholders that we should include in exploring our DEI commitment?

Each question card includes an "ENTER" button and a "0" response count.

The Idea Generation meeting of members and staff that followed in May 2021 focused participants' attention on the following sets of questions.

Innovate: Elevating the Profession (Vision Element 1)

What things can we focus on relative to DEI to help elevate our profession so that constituents and staff feel greater excitement with CSI?

1. What DEI-RELATED ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS do you see today that are having (or could have) an impact on elevating the profession?
2. What would be SIMPLE IMPROVEMENTS over where we are today in addressing DEI to elevate the profession?
3. What DEI-related ideas to elevate the profession might be QUICK TO DEVELOP and IMPLEMENT?
4. What DEI-focused ideas could have BROAD IMPACT in elevating the profession?
5. If we focused on the BIGGEST OPPORTUNITIES for DEI-related activities to elevate the profession, what would we try?
6. What are TOTALLY WILD IDEAS related to DEI that just MIGHT WORK to elevate the profession?

Each question card includes an "ENTER" button and a "0" response count.

What kinds of programs, products, services, or mindsets would help CSI BUILD A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE recognized by others in the construction space?

ENTER 0

In what ways can CSI become a CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and INCLUSION in the construction and/or association industries?

ENTER 0

What kinds of programs, products, services, or mindsets would help CSI BUILD A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE recognized by others in the construction space?

Comments on the topic

- Providing THOUGHT LEADERSHIP?
- Promoting BEST PRACTICES across the industry?
- Offering strong EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS?
- Advancing industry STANDARDS?
- MEASURING performance and the impact of the profession?
- Providing guidance on industry GOVERNANCE?
- Cultivating SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS within various disciplines?
- Ideas for any OTHER AREAS OR IMPACTS?

In what ways can CSI become a CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and INCLUSION in the construction and/or association industries?

Comments on the topic

- Increasing TRANSPARENCY?
- Increasing AUTHENTICITY?
- Better DELIVERING on EXPECTATIONS?
- Playing an active role in ADVANCING PROSPECTS for diverse candidates and professionals?
- Increasing OUTREACH to diverse audiences?
- Ideas for any OTHER IDEAS or IMPACTS?

Creating a Greater Sense of Belonging (Vision Element 3)

What are ideas for how an emphasis on DEI can create a greater SENSE OF BELONGING with MEMBERS, CHAPTERS, and CSI STAFF?

1. What DEI-RELATED ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS are having (or could have) an impact on creating a GREATER SENSE of BELONGING?

ENTER 0

2. What ideas to create a greater sense of belonging among DIVERSE GROUPS might be QUICK TO DEVELOP and IMPLEMENT?

ENTER 0

3. What would be SIMPLE IMPROVEMENTS to better address DEI and create a greater sense of belonging?

ENTER 0

4. What could we do to create a sense of belonging among diverse groups that would be COMPLETELY OPPOSITE of anything typical or expected from CSI?

ENTER 0

5. What are the BIGGEST OPPORTUNITIES to create belonging among diverse groups that that would broadly impact CSI members, chapters, and staff?

ENTER 0

6. What are TOTALLY WILD IDEAS related to DEI at the CHAPTER LEVEL that MIGHT WORK to create a sense of belonging among diverse members?

ENTER 0

What else are you THINKING or do you SUGGEST?

What OTHER IDEAS do you have for PROGRAMS, SERVICES, or PRODUCTS at CSI that will help us achieve these visions?

* Elevating the Profession
* Building a Center of Excellence
* Creating a Greater Sense of Belonging

ENTER 0

2. What other kinds of diversity, equity, and inclusion RESOURCES or PROGRAMS would you like to be able to access at CSI?

ENTER 0

3. Is there ANYTHING ELSE you would like to tell us?

ENTER 0

Detailed findings from these sessions are outlined in the project report. In brief, we found the following ideas were prevalent across all the focus groups conducted:

- There was overwhelming support in each Focus Group for DEI work at CSI as well as a belief that DEI work will help CSI remain relevant and grow in coming years to counter the recent declines in membership.
- DEI was seen by most participants as a business imperative for CSI and they will be watching closely to see what comes of this effort.
- One growth area identified across all focus groups was the opportunities inherent in attracting young professionals (and even younger students) to the profession.
- Those participating believe that there are barriers to full participation in CSI, particularly at the chapter and volunteer leader levels.
- There is a need to educate members, staff, and volunteers on what DEI is and how it can have a positive business impact on CSI.
- There were many ideas generated in the May “Idea Generation” session that can help build a practical and measurable set of strategies for integrating a DEI focus throughout CSI.

DEI as an Urgent Business Imperative

The benefits of a diverse workplace have been researched, identified, and proven for decades now. They include improved team performance, an easier hiring and retention process, greater creativity and innovation, a better understanding of customers, and an improved brand with increased reputation capital.

Study after study since the early 1990s has shown a high statistical correlation between diversity and business performance. Recent McKinsey research, for instance, found that companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 35 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians, while laggards in both gender and ethnic diversity are statistically less likely to achieve above-average financial returns.

The opportunity for businesses that embrace DEI as a core business imperative is increased relevance, growth, innovation, and sustainability. The risk of doing nothing around DEI is continued membership and customer decline, loss of innovation, social, and reputation capital, damage to the brand, and—ultimately—an inability to achieve the mission of the organization.

Why is DEI Important in Construction?

Specific to CSI, the built environment is created and managed by a wide range of professions, including architects, planners, landscape architects, specifiers, engineers, quantity surveyors, contractors, facility managers, and more. Professions like these that mirror the diversity of the society they serve have a much greater chance of creating a built environment that suits that society. We know this mirroring of society's demographics is not the case at present in the construction industry as a whole in the U.S. and abroad.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 9.9% of construction professionals are women, for example. In regard to race, 30.7% of professionals in the industry are Hispanic or Latino, 6.2% are black, and only 2% are Asian. While the U.S. does not collect data on LGBTQI+ representation in the workforce, we can use data collected by the U.K. for reference. In the U.K., only 2% of the construction workforce are members of the LGBTQI+ community. What makes this statistic even more sobering is that over half of them reported they felt their identity kept them from progressing in their careers. Also, 71% of them said they "heard repeated LGBT-oriented insults at work."

We know the built environment can contribute to a more equitable, inclusive, and cohesive society if the places where we live, the facilities we use, and our neighborhoods and meeting places are designed to be accessible and inclusive.

We also know that people experience the built environment differently according to who they are – their social, cultural, and economic background. The full diversity of this experience needs to be considered if all users are to be comfortable and feel that a particular space or place belongs to them. Only by having a diverse staff and leadership can companies and organizations in the construction industry, such as CSI, understand this fully.

The construction industry still has a particularly long way to go with regard to DEI issues when compared with other industries such as the wide range of medical and education fields. With the talent shortage growing more and more severe, companies now need to pursue DEI initiatives with a greater sense of urgency. This is true for CSI members in their own organizations—and it is true for CSI Headquarters in trying to attract and retain key staff.

According to a 2019 survey of "Nonprofit Diversity Practices," conducted by the Nonprofit HR Group, about 70% of all nonprofit associations in the U.S. have a diversity

statement that aligns with their Vision, Mission, and Goals. In the two years since that study, that number has likely increased, particularly given the events of the past year. CSI at present does not have a diversity statement to drive its work in this area.

This is troubling, particularly in an industry that has demonstrated inequities in access, pay, and leadership roles for women and other minorities. As noted, the dynamic race-related events of 2020 in the U.S. spurred CSI's leadership to make a public statement regarding their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and now needs to back up that statement with thoughtful and intentional action.

From these sessions, it was clear that respondents believe a focus on DEI, if woven throughout the organization, can help CSI be more vibrant, more of a leader in the AECO community, attract younger members, and be more sustainable in the long-term. In the full report to the Board, you will see the results of these focus groups and how they tie into the three priorities outlined in the CSI Vision speech that launched in 2020:

1. Elevate the Profession
2. Be a Center of Excellence
3. Create a Community of Belonging

At the June Board meeting, we would ask the Board to consider four primary questions:

1. Is moving forward with a more intentional and business-focused DEI effort a direction the Board would like to take next?
2. If so, do the current Ends and/or related CEO interpretations adequately combine to define the desired outcomes and influence related strategy and resource considerations?
 - a. If not, will the Board commit time and resources to revisit the Ends to define the desired outcome of a DEI initiative more clearly?
3. Is the Board willing to develop a CSI Diversity Statement and establish a Board-level Task Force to do so?
4. What are the short-term and immediate actions the Board can take to address DEI considerations in relationship to governance, leadership development, and experience as a CSI member?

(End of Report)