

Recruitment and Retention

KEY TOPICS

burnout
downsizing
employee commitment
employee engagement
employee satisfaction
feedback
flexibility
meaningful work
microaggressions
onboarding
onlys
performance
pinch points
talent
turnover

SECOND EDITION
PUBLISHED DECEMBER 2020

Talent is the lifeblood of any practice, and attracting and retaining talent is essential for the health of the profession overall. Engaging all employees in equitable and inclusive practices will help to recruit and retain a diverse workforce and is an effective means to success for firms of all sizes and types.

This guide outlines the importance of recruitment and retention in architecture, describes ways that help recruit a diverse workforce, and offers strategies for retaining employees through equitable practices at the individual, firm, and professional levels.



The University of Washington for the American
Institute of Architects Equity and the Future of
Architecture Committee

What are recruitment and retention?

Recruitment is the practice of attracting new talent by actively searching for, interviewing, and hiring candidates for a firm. It is key for both continuity and expansion of knowledge throughout the profession and for generating new ideas and diverse viewpoints in the practice of design. Retention results from keeping people engaged in the workplace by ensuring that they have what they need to succeed, including access to workplace support structures that help with career advancement and maintain harmony between work and life.

Successful recruitment means finding the right match between a prospective employee and a work environment. Architects recruit based on a variety of criteria, but prospective employees are often first attracted by the firm's quality of design. While employees may be drawn and highly committed to design quality, other factors that contribute to satisfaction and sustained focus in the work environment (e.g., meaningful work, feeling valued, receiving feedback, work/life fit, values alignment, reasonable workload) are crucial for successful retention.

Without meeting these criteria, the profession is susceptible to losing employees to other fields, especially those that require less personal sacrifice or offer higher remuneration. However, due to the cyclical nature of the profession, there may be times when the pressures to meet project needs overshadow carefully planned hiring priorities. Maintaining systems and processes that are nimble, consistent, and equitable can keep both the recruiter and the prospective employee focused on values, goals, and priorities during the recruitment process.

Recruitment for diversity may mean seeking people who have different identities from those currently represented in the firm. It can be helpful to keep in mind the concept of *intersectionality*: identities are

multifaceted, and race and gender present differently as they intersect with other factors, such as physical abilities, sexual orientation, age, and socioeconomic background.

The first challenge to increasing diversity in architecture begins at the entry point—young people of color are less often exposed to architects and architecture compared to other professions, leading to lower representation in architectural education and in the pool of candidates for employment. This challenge to increasing diversity through recruitment is compounded by implicit and explicit biases at play in firm recruitment practices.¹ Furthermore, recruitment practices in architecture that seek out talent via word of mouth, personal references, or refer-a-friend schemes can impede diversity efforts as people's professional networks tend to be relatively homogeneous.²

Challenges to retention include: the volatility of the profession, which cycles between growth and downsizing, making it difficult to retain talent and to consistently ensure that there are opportunities for development; low pay relative to other professions; the culture of long hours; and the long path to full professional development. Under these pressures, it is critically important to establish policies and practices that ensure equity—creating a profession that is welcoming to all. Other factors contributing to retention are workplace flexibility, workload, control and autonomy, reward, community, fairness, and alignment of values.³ Finally, the profession attaches a high value to design, and people with nondominant identities tend to be underrepresented in design areas. An implication of this phenomenon is that these professionals are less valued or must “prove it again”—do more and better work, make greater sacrifices—to be permitted access to design work.⁴

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

It is well documented that *employee engagement*—employees having a high level of involvement in and enthusiasm for their work—has a significant impact on productivity, reduces turnover, and increases retention. It is, therefore, one of the greatest advantages a company can have.⁵ Employee engagement goes beyond what we commonly think of as employee satisfaction or employee commitment and incorporates a wide range of cognitive, behavioral, cultural, and organizational elements that can improve or hinder engagement in the workplace.⁶

- **Meaningful work:** Employees feel and hear from others that their work is meaningful (i.e., has value and significance). For architecture professionals, having meaningful work links clearly to retention.
- **Supportive workplaces:** Workplaces that are supportive and fair feel psychologically safe. Psychological safety means that employees feel that they have mutual trust with others, are comfortable sharing new ideas and being themselves without negative consequences, and believe that the tools and resources necessary for their job success are readily obtainable.⁷
- **Effective leadership:** Enthusiasm, satisfaction, and involvement with one’s work are feelings that depend on perceptions about a manager’s effectiveness. Studies on the connection between manager effectiveness and employee engagement show that work units with employees who view their manager as an effective leader are the most profitable.⁸

The 2018 Equity by Design (EQxD) survey results illustrate the importance of several of these factors.⁹ Respondents who sensed that their work had a positive impact on their community were more likely to report that they intended to stay at their firm; when asked “what is the greatest pleasure that you get from working?” the most common response was “doing interesting, challenging work that gives me a sense of accomplishment.” Meanwhile, when asked what values drive them in their careers, the most common response was “stimulation, variation, challenge.” Overall career satisfaction and feelings about whether one is in the right profession were most closely tied to respondents’ perceptions of the work that they do.

Respondents’ intentions to stay in a particular firm were most closely tied to their perceptions of that firm’s culture, including their relationships with peers and firm management. Respondents who indicated that they received one-on-one coaching and feedback at their firms were also more likely to say that they planned to stay.

“I had decided to take a break from architecture and do some labor organizing. Then my boss called and talked to me about her firm, how she was trying to diversify it and get more people with different experience together. She said that I had a really good way of communicating with clients and to other people, other architects, that she said would be beneficial, and that I would be able to grow those skills at her office. My boss would give me assignments, like if there were problems on a project that I wasn’t managing, she’d put me on communications to give the project manager extra support. I can teach others what I’m good at, and they get more comfortable with their abilities.”

Architectural Designer, Asian American, Nonbinary, Queer, 28

CORPORATE PIPELINE REPRESENTATION BY GENDER AND RACE

Percentage of employees by level in 2018. (Graphic adapted from Rachel Thomas et. al., *Women in the Workplace*, Lean In and McKinsey & Company, 2019, https://wiiw-report.s3.amazonaws.com/Women_in_the_Workplace_2019.pdf.)

	ENTRY LEVEL	MANAGER	SR. MANAGER/DIRECTOR	VP	SVP	C-SUITE
WHITE MEN	36%	46%	52%	59%	67%	68%
MEN OF COLOR	16%	16%	13%	12%	9%	9%
WHITE WOMEN	31%	27%	26%	24%	19%	19%
WOMEN OF COLOR	17%	12%	8%	6%	4%	4%

IMPACT OF INEQUITY ON EMPLOYEES

Research on how inequities can affect employees from underrepresented groups in other professions provides useful information for the architectural profession. For the most part, these findings are echoed in the AIA Diversity in the Profession of Architecture survey. While the number of men and women leaving the profession is similar, the percentage impact on women is greater since fewer women enter the profession (despite nearly equal graduation rates from schools). This is particularly noticeable for women of color.¹⁰ The primary reason for the underrepresentation of women is inequity in hiring and promotion.¹¹ Women are hired at lower rates into entry-level and managerial jobs.¹² They are also less likely to receive promotions to manager-level jobs.¹³ These discrepancies in promotion are greater for women of color, particularly Black women.¹⁴ Twice as many people of color in architecture (32%) say that they are less likely to be promoted to more senior positions than white people.¹⁵ (For more on hiring and promotion inequities and their impact on compensation, see the *Compensation* guide. For information on how stereotypes affect evaluation practices, see the *Intercultural Competence* guide.)

“I don’t know if I’m the ‘only,’ but it sure feels like it. At the same time, I’m not even the only LGBT person in my firm; there’s another person, slightly younger but who started before me. It was odd: ‘I know things about your personal life; I don’t know if you’re out at work.’ So there were unspoken things for a couple of months until I figured out he was out at work, and we could relax. ‘I’m not the only one, you’re not the only one,’ but there was a definite period when I wasn’t sure what I was allowed to say about me, or him.”

Architect,
White, Lesbian, 30s

Unconscious bias is one explanation for these discrepancies in hiring and promotion, as is access to the managerial support and psychological safety that build employee engagement and equip employees for promotion.¹⁶ For example, women receive less manager support than men in the form of resources, help in navigating organizational politics, opportunities to present their work, promotion of their contributions to others in the workplace, and socializing outside of work.¹⁷ Women also have less access to senior leaders in their company, missing out on occasions to request promotions and new work.¹⁸ These lost opportunities are compounded for women of color and lesbians.¹⁹ Results from the 2018 EQxD survey found significant differences in interactions with managers on the basis of race and ethnicity, with both men and women of color having far less access than white men and women.²⁰

Furthermore, underrepresented groups feel less psychological safety in the workplace. Sixty-four percent of women, along with half of men (particularly men of color and gay men), experience workplace microaggressions, or subtle acts of exclusion, such as having their judgment questioned within their own area of expertise and needing to provide greater evidence of their competence.²¹ Microaggression in any of its forms (indirect, intentional or unintentional, and subtle or overt discriminatory slights) can affect the work environment.²² The ability to identify microaggressions in the first place also varies. Men and women perceive overt gender discrimination at the same rate; however, women identify subtle microaggressions more often than men do.²³ Sexual harassment also remains prevalent, with 35% of women experiencing workplace sexual harassment during their career. These experiences occur more often among women in senior leadership (55%), lesbians (48%), and women in technical fields (45%).²⁴

Members of underrepresented groups are also more likely to be an “only”: that is, to experience themselves as the only one of their identity in the workplace. The experience of being the only is relatively common, particularly for people of color, women (especially lesbians), and, in some settings, gay men. Women who are only experience higher levels of microaggressions (over 80%) and are twice as likely to be sexually harassed during their career. Being an only makes it difficult to engage at work, as onlys tend to feel more scrutinized, under greater pressure to perform, and less able to talk about themselves or their lives.²⁵

When architecture firms establish support for onlys and strong cultures of engagement for all employees with target identities, they not only improve recruitment and retention (and hence the firm’s profit) but also align their firm with the discipline’s values of equity and societal benefit and, in turn, improve diversity within the firm itself.

Why are recruitment and retention important?

In the 2016 EQxD survey, the numbers of architecture employees considering leaving their firm were roughly comparable to the percent of U.S. workers who were expected to leave their jobs each year (one in four).²⁶ Yet 77% of employees who quit stated that they could have been retained by their prior company if their desires for career development, work-life fit, and manager behavior had been met.²⁷

The current business model of traditional architectural practice is closely tied to the U.S. and global economies: booms and downturns are the norm, leading to cycles of hiring and downsizing.²⁸ Mergers and acquisitions can also affect personnel practices, firm culture, and leadership.²⁹ Additionally, architectural firms increasingly compete for talent with other sectors of the building industry and with other industries that find value in architecture-trained graduates. During economic downturns, while all firms, especially small ones, experience more pressure to lay off employees, larger firms can somewhat more easily afford to shift and retain staff to soften the impact across the organization. These cycles have impacted entire generations of architects since many who graduate and enter a poor job market leave the field and do not return. For some graduates, alternative careers can be positive, and, in general, having strong nonarchitectural pathways for graduates benefits the profession. However, the choice to pursue a nonarchitectural career is arguably most positive when it is supported by the profession and intentionally included in a career plan.

It should be noted that in architecture, there are many assumptions and myths regarding concept-design work as being different or more valued than the many other types of work needed to deliver a project. Architects considering leaving the field may find that remaining in architecture in a nondesign area of practice fits their skills and interest. (See the *Workplace Culture* guide for more on this point.)

INDIVIDUALS

While recruitment can bring in new talent, how engaged that talent is once in the workplace can strongly influence business outcomes. Businesses that score in the top quartile in employee engagement have almost twice the success (measured by a combination of financial, customer, retention, safety, quality, shrinkage, and absenteeism metrics) compared to companies in the bottom quartile.³⁰ However, only 31% of employees in the U.S. and 15% of employees worldwide are reportedly “engaged.”³¹ This high lack of engagement has a serious impact on productivity and company success.

Quality of life · Engaged employees take pleasure in their work, have healthy work-life harmony, and are enthusiastic and energized. They see their workplace as supportive and fair.³² Workplace flexibility enables employees to care for their families and their health.

Meaningful work · Retaining employees after recruitment depends on employees seeing their work as meaningful and valued. Firms whose culture aligns with personal values and that provide feedback on how an employee’s work supports company goals make work more meaningful and engaging for employees.³³ (See the *Workplace Culture* guide.)

Belonging · Feeling certain that you belong is a key retention factor. For only especially, firms that support participation in affinity groups within and outside the firm provide an extra sense of belonging. Inclusive communication and work spaces, a clear onboarding process, and welcoming social events can convey an open and inclusive culture.³⁴

Safety · When employees from underrepresented groups have workplaces that are psychologically and physically safe, they are more likely to be engaged in their work and stay at the firm.

Access to resources · Retention requires providing employees with the resources they need to do their jobs. Having equitably distributed and accessible resources improves engagement.

Career building · It is important to provide equitable access to design work. Attending to employees who develop specialized expertise, and not pigeonholing them, will ensure that they continue to have choices in the types of work they do.

Pinch points · Pinch points are career phases or milestones when progress is most likely to be hindered: education, “paying dues,” attaining licensure, caregiving, and reaching the glass ceiling.³⁵ These milestones tend to occur during major events, such as changes to a family or caring for an elderly parent—responsibilities that tend to fall more on women.³⁶ In architecture, pinch points for people of color typically occur earlier, with a lack of role models and exposure to architecture, generally more difficulty in affording the cost of education, and family pressure to pursue careers with more earning potential. After employment, these pinch points take place particularly in the crucial early stages of careers when, for example, fewer people of color are promoted from production to project architect roles within the first seven years of employment, a setback that can have lasting impact.³⁷ Having employers who understand and support employees during pinch points improves retention. (See the *Advancing Careers* guide.)

Feeling valued · Effective recruitment identifies employee potential, interests, and skills. Inviting all employees, including onlys, to contribute to the organization’s collective intelligence improves retention.³⁸

MANAGERS

Workplace culture · Positive workplace cultures have enthusiastic and involved employees. Whether employees perceive management as effective and fair is a predictor of retention and a sign of a positive work culture.³⁹

Equitable feedback · Managers can ensure that they are providing a variety of feedback—formal and informal, annual and ongoing—equitably among all employees.⁴⁰

FIRMS

Cost of turnover · The cost of replacing an employee can be as much as five times an annual salary.⁴¹ Effective recruitment and retention practices improve profit.

Value of talent · A firm known for a strong workplace culture with high levels of employee engagement and equitable access to resources, support, and mentorship can attract a more diverse and talented applicant pool. Explicitly valuing all types of work, areas of expertise, and contributions promotes greater diversity.

Strong and healthy firm culture · How firms recruit and retain their employees affects workplace culture. Fundamentally, firms need to ensure a supportive work environment—for example, by preventing microaggressions that stem from bias and that, when accumulated, can cause feelings of insecurity, self-doubt, and anger and can lead to the departure of nonmajority employees. A high level of employee engagement is an indication that the workplace culture is healthy and well aligned with employees’ values.

A diverse workforce · Equitable hiring and promotion practices that address unconscious bias will help increase diversity at each level. Actively seeking a diverse talent pool will yield a greater range of potential candidates and will give more access to different perspectives, skills, and strengths.

Institutional memory · Firms that retain employees are able to preserve knowledge of past projects and lessons learned and will be more able to pass this knowledge on to current and future colleagues.

Ability to win and execute work · Many architectural projects take multiple years to complete. Firms that retain employees can provide clients with consistent points of contact and sources of knowledge over the life of a project.

PROFESSION

Diversity and talent · Not everyone is able or willing to enter a profession that requires expensive education and offers low, unstable, or inequitable pay. People from constrained socioeconomic backgrounds may find the cost of architecture school and the necessary supplies to be prohibitive (61% of whites vs. 69% of people of color). In addition, low pay makes it harder to attract students into the profession and to retain professionals who can leave for better opportunities. Respondents to the EQxD 2018 survey reported hesitating before pursuing architecture because of low salary (45% of respondents of color), long hours (25% of respondents), and the cost of the degree. White men are least likely to say that they hesitated before entering the field, while people of color and first- and second-generation college students and their parents are more likely to prefer to choose a degree in higher-paying careers.⁴²

The long path of education and time to licensure · Compared with other professions, the timeline to professional licensure and maturity is long and can be daunting.

Lack of visibility of the profession · The challenge of diversity in recruitment is often due to people not being exposed to the profession until it is too late to consider the relatively long educational and training path to becoming an architect. Many discover architecture by accident. In particular, first-generation college students and young people of lower socioeconomic status are less likely to be aware of the profession and develop the interest and determination to enter it early and assertively enough to counter family and social pressures to enter more lucrative fields.

The culture of long hours · The expectation of long workdays begins in school and continues at firms, especially, but not only, those that are perceived as having higher design standards. This demand for time tends to lead to higher-than-typical turnover and burnout. Additionally the distribution of after-hours work can be inequitable, falling disproportionately on those earlier in their careers or those without families. Yet high-quality design work and a high quality of life are not mutually exclusive. For example, some recent design award winners also cited their commitment to a forty-hour workweek for all employees.⁴³ The most recent EQxD survey finds that forty-hour workweeks tend to lead to better perceptions of work-life fit compared to longer workweeks.⁴⁴

We more easily recruit and retain employees when...

ALIGNMENT

members of underrepresented groups feel comfortable and supported when contributing to their firm's collective intelligence

firms recruit for diversity and then embrace difference

diversity and gender balance are communicated as benefiting the whole profession

the profession is known in popular culture and in broader society as open, accessible, and equitable

goals for improving firm diversity are ambitious but realistic and supported by a plan of action

COMPLIANCE

managers with hiring responsibility understand what can and cannot be asked during an interview

diversity characteristics are set as flexible but expected targets, not quotas

hiring managers are trained in and aware of discrimination laws

ENGAGEMENT

connections between satisfaction, engagement, and commitment are understood

warning signs of burnout are noticed and addressed early

all employees have equitable access to flexible policies and a psychologically and physically safe workplace

management and employees engage in relationships that support ongoing feedback

firm and employee values are aligned, improving the likelihood of positive engagement

INFLUENCE

firms reduce tokenism and work to mitigate and eliminate the experience of being the only

the process for attaining desirable opportunities is clear and open

other work responsibilities are seen as equally valuable as design

processes for promotion are designed to interrupt bias and help to advance employees from underrepresented groups toward leadership positions

Compliance

This section is intended to introduce you to important legal information and describes the mere minimum requirements. It is not a substitute for legal advice. For such advice, we strongly urge you to consult an attorney.

There are employment laws in place to ensure that recruitment and promotion are being enacted fairly and without discrimination. For instance, because it is unlawful to base hiring decisions on characteristics (sex and race) protected by federal law, recruiters must refrain from asking questions that would elicit such information. Other characteristics, such as sexual orientation and gender identity, are protected in certain jurisdictions and not others. Characteristics may also be defined differently in certain jurisdictions (“age” refers to those forty or older under federal law, for example, but refers to those eighteen or older under District of Columbia law). There are also things a firm may and may not do to retain an employee going through a life or career transition. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach for how to best recruit and retain an individual, federal, state and local laws, professional codes of ethics, and professional organizations provide guidelines and legal requirements that will help firms maintain compliance and encourage an equitable workplace culture.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

While private architecture firms are not subject to the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, they are required by law to have affirmative action programs in place when working as a contractor or subcontractor on a federal-government project. To meet the requirements of Title VII, program implementation should be documented with records regularly maintained and stored. Programs may include training, practices and policies on recruitment, and prohibitions of physical and verbal harassment.

Affirmative action policies must also comply with sex discrimination regulations (Executive Order 11246) and guidelines outlined by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs.

RECRUITMENT AND INTERVIEWING

While most experienced recruiters know that they cannot ask direct questions relating to protected classes (for example, what church do you attend?), employers should also avoid questions or discussions with applicants and employees that indirectly lead to protected topics such as:

- Were you born in the United States?
- Are you a U.S. citizen?
- That’s an interesting name—where is your family from originally?
- You have an interesting accent. Where is it from?
- How many children do you have?
- Do you intend to have (more) children?
- Who takes care of your children while you work?
- Will you need time off for any religious holidays?
- Did you ever take medical leave at your prior job?
- Did you ever suffer an injury at your prior workplace?
- I see you’re walking with a limp—what happened to your leg?
- Will you need any accommodation to perform this job? (Unless a candidate’s disability is evident or voluntarily disclosed.)
- What does your spouse or partner do for a living?

Instead, all questions during an interview should be focused on determining the candidate’s qualifications for the job in question. Thus, you may ask questions about a candidate’s job skills, prior employment, educational background, experiences with teamwork,

and other questions that relate to the specific requirements of the position. Interview data should always be stored securely and kept confidential. (See the Compliance section of the *Measuring Progress* guide.)

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

An important part of creating an equitable workplace and maintaining employee engagement is the appropriate handling of allegations and instances of sexual harassment. (For more information, see the Compliance section in the *Workplace Culture* guide.)

UNDERSTAND THE LAW AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

- While hiring employees with diverse backgrounds is highly desirable, it is unlawful to base a hiring decision on someone's protected status, even when the goal is to build a more diverse workforce. The best way to lawfully increase the likelihood of building a diverse workforce is to ensure that a wide variety of candidates with diverse backgrounds apply. Thus, employers should ensure that recruitment and outreach efforts, including job postings, on-site recruitment, etc., are being conducted in as inclusive a manner as possible. Once a diverse candidate pool exists, the likelihood of hiring qualified diverse candidates dramatically increases.
- Employers also must comply with U.S. immigration laws in connection with their employment practices. For instance, it is unlawful to employ any worker who is not legally authorized to work in the United States, and employers must carefully fulfill the I-9 requirements for verifying all employees' authorization-to-work documents within three business days of an employee's date of hire.

HAVE PREVENTION MEASURES SUPPORTED BY POLICY

- Employers should train managers and hiring authorities about discrimination and the law.
- Employers should ensure that equal opportunities are available to all employees regardless of race, gender, ability, immigration status, sexual orientation, etc.

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES THAT ARE EQUITABLE BUT FLEXIBLE FOR INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

- Provide flexible work opportunities. Allow flexible time and workplaces for employees, and ensure that these opportunities are offered fairly and effectively to everyone in the company.
- Know the minimum national, state, and local family-leave requirements. Consider not only what is minimally required but also how to go beyond minimal requirements and the process for creating and complying with these policies.

→ Be mindful to not favor women over men with regard to family-leave or family-care benefits. Leave policies that are focused on bonding with newborns or newly adopted children should provide equal benefits regardless of gender identity. All parents and caregivers need to be encouraged to take leaves for which they are eligible, to avoid creating a culture that confers higher status and career benefits to one class over another. (However, if a leave benefit is tied to disability associated with childbirth, that benefit applies exclusively to employees who bear children.)

- Consider offering a variety of financial and nonfinancial benefits, such as extra vacation, compensation time, and overtime pay.
- When recruiting new employees, consider what benefits were offered to previously hired employees. If benefits for new employees are different from previous ones, ensure that you follow equitable practices to communicate how those differences arose and whether they will be brought into alignment.
- Consider implementing a policy regarding the sponsorship of non-U.S.-citizen candidates through the work visa process, such as H-1B. Note that such processes require the employer to bear certain legal and processing expenses on behalf of the employee.

VIGILANTLY AVOID CREATING A HOSTILE WORK ENVIRONMENT

- The accumulation of microaggressions, subtle acts of exclusion, or slights—intentional or unintentional, against any legally protected or nondominant group—when severe or pervasive enough, may result in claims of discrimination or harassment. Training of both managers and employees, along with robust policies that are made widely known, provide multiple channels to register complaints and encourage bystanders to speak up, and will go a long way in promoting a harassment-free workplace.
- Keep in mind that anti-harassment policies should not only prohibit unlawful behaviors but also should set the bar higher for the conduct that the employer wants to cultivate in the workplace. For instance, while unlawful sexual harassment must be severe or pervasive to be actionable, employers should not wait until conduct rises to this level or violates the company harassment policy before taking action. Likewise, while bullying is not technically unlawful if not directed at someone based on their legally protected status, an employer's workplace policies can and should make bullying a violation of its conduct rules.

Assess

FAIRNESS

How is bias identified and mitigated in hiring and promotion? · How are résumés being screened to identify candidates without bias? · What factors are you using to select candidates? · How are you defining concepts like “culture fit”? · How do you apply these concepts consistently?

Are access and support provided in an equitable way? · Are some people benefiting more than others? · Do some people have unique needs for support or accommodation? · Is everyone receiving the support they need from their managers? · Do some people have greater access to senior mentors and sponsors? · Is your management team diverse? · How can your support structures be more equitable?

INFLUENCE

What is your firm known for? · Who do you attract? · Who are you not seeing? · Who is leaving your firm and why? · Do your exit interviews elicit genuine responses? · How do you communicate your values, culture, and priorities to job candidates and current employees? · Is there alignment between your firm’s stated culture and the day-to-day experience of working in your firm? · Do employees have opportunities to express themselves at work?

Do you acknowledge and address small slights before they accumulate? · Microaggressions, which individually may appear to be minor, can have great cumulative impact. What mechanisms, policies, or processes are used to uncover and address them as they occur? · How do you respond to those who see microaggressions as trivial?

DEVELOPMENT

Are career pinch points addressed? · Do you know when your employees experience pinch points? · Are there appropriate places to customize, support, or create general policies? · Do employees have the needed flexibility to navigate pinch points? · What are your policies on workplace and schedule flexibility? · Do these policies create barriers for caregivers? · Do these policies support employees who require more time away from the office?

Does your firm actively build pipelines? · Do you reach beyond your firm’s networks to find potential candidates? · Do you write job descriptions that attract diverse candidates? · Do you engage with communities that could benefit from architect role models? · Does that engagement include the topics that matter most to those communities? · Do you help address the barriers to entry that underrepresented groups face in architecture?

POWER

Who determines who to hire and promote in your workplace? · Are hiring decisions made by an individual or a group? · Are interviews conducted by the hiring manager or a diverse project team?

Do you have policies or processes to support your employees when clients, consultants, or partners are misaligned with your firm’s values? · In situations when your firm’s values and acceptable behaviors (e.g., collaboration, sustainability, equity) are not shared by your client, do your employees feel supported? · Do you productively engage your employees while the differences are addressed? · If there is a choice between losing the client and reconfiguring your team, are employees included in the decision? · In settings outside the office, are your employees given the tools and support to succeed?

Act

INDIVIDUALS

Practices and criteria for hiring and promotion, as well as the culture of the firm, will affect your engagement and commitment. Ensuring you receive the support, opportunities, flexibility, and psychological safety you need once you are hired will increase your engagement with the work and your commitment to the firm.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Being informed about the current considerations concerning recruitment and retention in architecture and firm cultures and practices is the first step to finding a place where you can grow in your career.

- **Know your values and priorities.** Know what matters to you at work so you can find a firm that has the environment you need. (See the *Negotiation* guide for more.)
- **Explore the full range of roles and types of work.** Seek opportunities to vary your experiences and broaden your exposure to the wide range of tasks that contribute to project design and delivery.
- **Learn about current issues in equitable recruitment and retention.** Understand how bias can affect recruitment and promotion. (See the *Intercultural Competence* guide.) Consider the range of indicators of employee engagement so you can look for them when identifying places where you want to work.
- **Talk with colleagues from other firms about their experiences.** How do their firms mitigate bias in hiring practices and ensure all employees have equitable access to the resources needed to accomplish their work? How do their firms manage microaggressions and harassment?
- **Be aware of federal rules regarding recruitment and workplace harassment.** Know what types of questions are appropriate for interviews and what types of behaviors are allowed and prohibited in the workplace.

INCREASE YOUR ENGAGEMENT AT WORK

Keeping engaged at work and having support for your career means keeping the lines of communication open between yourself and senior leaders.

- **Seek out support and mentorship from senior leaders.** If support and mentorship are not available at your firm, go to architecture networking events where you can find mentors from other firms. (See the *Mentorship and Sponsorship* guide.)
- **Avoid burnout by using flexible work options.** If your workplace values employees who are energized and excited about their work, then take advantage of vacations, flexible work time, and other benefits available to you to help you maintain your energy, insight, and desire to continue growing. If taking vacations, comp time, and paid leaves is not the norm, influence your peers to take them and do so yourself. Together you can shift the culture to one where flexibility is not perceived as a lack of commitment. (For more about flexible work arrangements, see the *Advancing Careers* guide.)

BE AN INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE MANAGER

Managers are key for ensuring that employees are receiving the mentorship and support needed to excel in the firm and in their careers. Managers need to be seen as fair in how they manage the workplace and in how they recruit and evaluate employees. Employers should support managers by providing the information, tools, and training they need to effectively and equitably recruit new talent and encourage an inclusive and equitable work culture that keeps employees engaged.

- **Neutralize bias when evaluating employees for promotion or retention.** Actively look for positive examples of employee contributions and potential, inclusive of different types of contributions. Provide evidence to support your claims during employee reviews and avoid vague terms such as “culture fit.”⁴⁵ Recognize, understand, and counteract implicit bias. For example, men are often evaluated on potential while women are evaluated on performance. Be aware of the “tightrope” (or “double bind”): the

tension between likeability and respect; see the *Compensation* guide for more information) that women, people of color, parents, class migrants, and others often walk in the workplace.⁴⁶ Whenever possible, remove subtle bias-triggering information from documents that are used to evaluate individuals, such as names on résumés, to eliminate assumptions about race, ethnicity, gender, social class, etc. (See the *Intercultural Competence* guide.)

- **Support and encourage the use of vacation time**, anticipating when it might have the most positive effect, such as after the completion of a project or other milestones. Lead by example and take vacation days, fully unplugged, to recharge and to model expectations for staff.
- **Evaluate employee engagement on an ongoing basis.** Do not wait for annual reviews to ensure that your team feels supported, motivated, and engaged. Give feedback, especially positive feedback, often. Foster ongoing dialogue with your employees to determine how to best support their needs. Consider using surveys or other data-gathering methods to track workplace climate and engagement. (See the *Measuring Progress* guide.)
- **Know what motivates each employee.** Ensure that all team members have access to work that is personally meaningful and rewarding, whether that means impact on clients and end users, opportunities to design, or personal and professional growth.

FIRMS

Equitable recruitment and retention practices improve diversity and increase employee engagement, leading to a creative and innovative workplace. They also help raise awareness of the profession and build new pipelines for recruitment of underrepresented groups.

HIRE EQUITABLY

There are many steps to building equitable hiring practices. Analyze your current practices, develop awareness of the impact of bias, and then identify where you can disrupt bias to improve workplace diversity.

- **Be prepared for questions about firm EDI**, especially if your current demographics don't reflect your goals.

“The prospective ACE students are exposed to so many great things, and we need to compete to get their attention, so we keep our graphics and social media messaging young and exciting. I think it was also easier for students to connect with us when we went out to recruit. Someone older, it was hard for them to see the next steps in their career—almost too far down the road. Someone closer in age helped them envision themselves in that position.”

Rising Firm Leader, First Generation
Mexican-American, Male, 30s

- **Remove professional bias in your hiring practices.** We often believe that people are hired based on merit alone. However, merit-based hiring is a myth.⁴⁷ Recast equitable hiring as a business issue, not as a “minority issue” or a “women’s issue.” Understand that selecting more men than women, or not actively identifying and hiring nonmajority job candidates, means the company is missing out on valuable talent and creative ideas. Consider using blind assessments during recruitment.⁴⁸
- **Think about the language used in position descriptions.** Use gender-neutral terms, such as *professional*, *motivated*, or *team-focused*. Or balance terms like *ambitious* or *driven* with other terms like *loyal* or *collaborative*. Keep the focus on job requirements, and leave out nonessentials, like preferred workday times or required experience in previous jobs, to encourage diverse applicants to recognize themselves as qualified.
- **Build hiring managers’ bias awareness and incorporate counteractive measures into hiring processes.** Increasing the awareness of bias is a first step in helping those responsible for hiring use better evaluation tools for selecting diverse talent.⁴⁹

IMPROVE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Employee engagement is essential for retaining talented employees. Implementing the measures below will benefit all employees while also encouraging greater equity, diversity, and inclusion.

- **Establish a structured onboarding program.** Structured onboarding helps all employees. Onboarding information that includes the road map to leadership can help new employees from underrepresented groups envision themselves as future leaders and partners, even when firm leadership is not diverse.⁵⁰ (For more on onboarding, see the *Workplace Culture* guide.)
- **Understand pinch points.** Understanding when career pinch points occur can help you identify when employees will need support from the senior leaders and when you should use available company benefits or policies that allow for flex time.
- **Equip employees with enough information** on compensation policies and practices for them to judge if they are fair. How people feel about pay decisions has more impact on employee satisfaction than does the pay itself.⁵¹
- **Make appreciation a part of your culture,** and make sure this value is communicated at all levels of your firm. For employees, satisfaction results first from appreciation, followed by whether they perceive their company as having “a bright future.”⁵²
- **Establish clear performance review policies.** Ensuring that employees receive feedback on their work helps make work expectations clear, provides pathways for advancement, and improves retention. For example, architects of color and women assign a much higher level of importance to having clear written criteria for promotion as a factor in their retention in the field, compared with other respondents. Annual reviews are commonly used for feedback. Ongoing feedback has even greater value, especially for junior employees, but is typically less formal than annual reviews and, as a result, may be more subject to bias. Consider formalizing processes for ongoing feedback to ensure that all employees have frequent, constructive guidance.⁵³
- **Use employee-satisfaction and employee-engagement focus groups and surveys** to better understand employee perceptions, e.g., about whether leadership is supportive and whether different opinions are respected. Make these surveys anonymous if at all possible. Gather data to measure how inclusive your workplace is and collect feedback on how to become more inclusive and equitable.⁵⁴ (See the *Measuring Progress* guide.)
- **Value all activities, not just design.** Provide equal support, visibility, and recognition to people working in all project phases. Make sure that everyone, not just women, is responsible for “office

housework,” and that there is equitable access to design responsibilities and opportunities. (See the *Workplace Culture* guide.)

- **Avoid pigeonholing** or steering professionals into stereotyped roles: women architects as interior designers or programmers, African Americans as government architects, Asian American architects as technologists.⁵⁵ Consider that stereotype threat—the conformity to negative or positive labels that results from being reminded of one’s identity group—may contribute to this funneling of people into particular roles.
- **Create workplace flexibility to support an employee’s work-life harmony.** In the field of architecture, in particular, with its long timeline for licensure and full professional development, as well as large student-loan debt, having flexibility can help employees through pinch points in their careers and aid in retaining them when they might otherwise leave for other, often more lucrative, types of work.⁵⁶

“When it came to the professional world, it took me a while to realize that I needed a few unique things. At first, I thought that if my desk were set up differently, it would make me feel like the ‘other’....One day, the two firm owners came to me and said, “What do you need for your desk?” My first reaction was to blow them off. Then I realized it’d be helpful if my keyboard and monitor were higher than a normal desk height, so I wouldn’t have to bend over to reach the keyboard. But I didn’t want my work space to look different. I drew what I wanted and had one of my colleagues take some measurements. The office then had the millworker make my added pieces from the same materials the other desks were made of; it blended in with the aesthetic of the office.”

Senior Associate Principal, White, Male,
Straight, No Left Arm, Partial Right Arm, 39

Be mindful that there are complex issues around implementing flexibility at the project team level. (See the *Advancing Careers* guide for more.)

- **Offer as wide of an array of employee benefits as you can imagine and afford.** Flexible hours and locations, access to choice projects, support in taking the Architect Registration Exam® (ARE) (materials, time, fees, bonus or promotion for passing, etc.) can help create a more desirable work situation.⁵⁷
- **Track metrics** on your firm's recruitment, retention, and engagement outcomes and make evidence-based adjustments to address problem areas. (See the *Measuring Progress* guide.)

CREATE AN INCLUSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Employee engagement depends on feeling supported. These measures will help create an inclusive environment that demonstrates respect for a diverse range of employee needs.

- **Understand the value of critical mass.** A critical mass of women and other underrepresented groups will decrease instances of any one employee feeling like the only, or a token representative of an entire group, and lead to more creative, inclusive decision-making.⁵⁸ This benefits the individual and the organization alike.⁵⁹ Use recruitment as an opportunity to reduce the instances of onlys.
- **Support cross-firm affinity groups and mentorship for onlys and underrepresented groups.** It can take time for a firm's demographics to change. Affinity groups offer mutual support for people with similar experiences, and mentors can help people navigate their careers and handle difficult situations. (See the *Mentorship and Sponsorship* guide.)
- **Create inclusive work spaces for your office and design them for your clients.** Work policies should include access to spaces such as lactation rooms, gender-neutral bathrooms, and space for prayer; the use of preferred pronouns in documents, meetings, and conversation; the selection of transgender-inclusive health insurance; and the implementation of gender-neutral dress policies.
- **Establish gender-transition communication protocols** to ensure that the roles and responsibilities are clear to the transitioning employee and to their supervisors and managers. Allow the transitioning employee to choose when and how to communicate their transition to others.⁶⁰

- **Designate people whom employees can turn to regarding sensitive or confidential matters.** Especially in firms without an HR specialist, it can be difficult to know where to go for support.
- **Maintain employee privacy regarding health and other personal information.** Be aware of laws concerning access to personal information. Limit access to this information to as few people as possible and only discuss it, confidentially, when absolutely necessary. (See more about data privacy in the Compliance section of the *Measuring Progress* guide.)
- **Provide accommodations for people with disabilities.** Accommodations can mean many things, depending on the needs of the individual. These may include physical accommodations and access to specific types of equipment or services (e.g., an American Sign Language interpreter).⁶¹ (For more on accommodations, see the *Advancing Careers* guide.)

IMPROVE DIVERSITY IN THE PROFESSION

Firms have an important role to play in expanding diversity in our field. Cooperative relationships locally and nationally will increase awareness of architecture and the visibility of the profession and help identify and overcome barriers to entry into the profession.

- **Reach beyond your personal networks** to identify potential job candidates and build a diverse pipeline. Firms often rely on the personal networks of principals and hiring managers to identify job candidates, which can lead to teams that are composed of individuals with similar backgrounds and perspectives. Firms that look beyond their networks to source candidates are able to tap into wider and more diverse talent pools.
- **Collectively develop pipelines.** Consider how your office can work with others (across your firm, with your local architecture school, local AIA components,

“The education system has to be better attuned to the fact that this is a profession worth going into.”

Principal and Owner, White, Male,
Straight, Differently Abled, 60s

other firms, or organizations) to grow pipelines for currently underrepresented groups. Although there is competition between firms in hiring, it benefits everyone in the profession for firms to work together to raise the level of awareness about the profession, remove barriers to entry, and demystify the path to licensure. Make sure that this work is rewarded and valued in your firm.

→ **Develop relationships with schools of architecture and local alumni.** Look outside of your own alumni institutions and develop relationships with local community colleges, technical institutions, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and other institutions that may be underrepresented in your practice.

→ **Develop relationships with local K–12 schools.** Launch or support efforts like the ACE Mentors and the AIA Architecture in Schools programs. Encourage members of your firm to visit local schools to talk about their work.

HANDLE DOWNTURNS AND LAYOFFS THOUGHTFULLY

During economic downturns or major reorganizations, firms may be inclined to treat employees as expendable, causing sometimes-permanent attrition in the profession.

→ **Retain talent via innovative solutions.** Larger firms with multiple offices can take steps to retain employees who are willing to relocate. Small and large firms can work with peers in their region to retain talent in the profession as a whole, for example, by offering time swaps or training to collectively pool their capacity.

→ **Be equitable and transparent about who is being laid off.** Clearly state the goals or needs for change, the criteria for decisions, and demographic information about who was laid off. Evaluate on the basis of contributions and skills, avoiding “last-in” as the primary criterion; at many firms, on average, white men will have been employed longer than people of color. Check that the downsizing would not disproportionately affect groups that are underrepresented in your office. If it would, evaluate the impact of these layoffs on any established diversity goals. An adverse-impact assessment is one way to see what effects layoffs may have on specific groups of employees.

→ **Give as much consideration and care** to how layoffs are handled as you would any other employment activities, such as hiring, performance reviews, promotions, retirement, and leaves of absence.

→ **Support former employees.** Maintain contact; provide clear policies and support regarding crediting work after the employment change, for both the firm and the former employee, knowing that future growth may result in rehiring.

→ **Plan transitions.** Map how leadership transitions will be communicated and implemented in ways that help current employees see their future in the firm.⁶²

→ **Conduct exit interviews** to gain a better understanding of why employees leave; evaluate reasons and make adjustments accordingly. (See the *Measuring Progress* guide.)

PROFESSION

Managers and firms all contribute to advancing the profession when they recruit and retain equitably, yet larger issues of diversity, inclusion, and systemic racism are best addressed at the scale of the profession. When dialogue occurs through informal or formal structures, societal-level goals can be identified and large-scale strategies for recruiting and retention put in place.

→ **Make architecture a more visible and attractive career to younger and more diverse people.**

Architectural career pathways will become more apparent when we increase awareness and understanding of the profession. Design-based engagements, developed in and with external communities, will accomplish goals beyond the projects themselves; they will make architects and architecture visible and interesting to a wider population. (See the *Engaging Community* guide.)

→ **Crack the “design egg.”** Acknowledge that the opportunity to design is a major draw to the profession, and at the same time address the perceptions that “Big-D Design” is the apex of architectural work and that there is limited access to it.⁶³ The process of design encompasses far more than drawing. Broadening the definition of design in the profession, practicing inclusive design processes, and recognizing the value of diverse design approaches help frame design as a nonexclusive thought process while maintaining its central position in the practice of architecture.⁶⁴

→ **Continue to tackle the tough issues related to institutional racism that affect recruitment and retention.** Be willing to hold up a mirror to the profession at large. Identify barriers to equity. Involve representative groups in solving the challenges. Avoid overburdening members of underrepresented groups with responsibility for naming the problems or implementing the solutions.

Consider

STARTING YOUNG

Our college class just took a study abroad trip to Dubai. It's funny because that's the place I've always wanted to travel to, and I wondered how I was going to make it. When I was in about sixth grade, there was a video I saw when I was getting a haircut. It was about the Palm Island, its grand opening, the fireworks spectacle. I thought, "I have to learn more about this place." From then on I started to notice buildings, landmarks, and I was like, "Oh wow, I have to see these structures, see the architecture." Architecture seemed like something I wanted to learn about.

My sophomore year in high school, the school offered an architecture course so you could get a better feel for what to expect in college and the field. We built a model and everything. And I was like, "This is what architecture is like—the designing, the building, the collaboration with clients." So the video of Dubai and the class I took in high school really helped pre-expose me to architecture.

Seeing the video made me geeky and want to do more. I've always had the chance to look into architecture, research it, look into different famous architects. If I'm really passionate about it, this is where I need to be. I scrapped engineering and construction. I really think the pre-exposure with the video helped a lot.

— Student, Black, Male, 20

Students are getting a lot of misinformation and are not aware of certain programs. There is a need for more information on different programs and paths. There's also a need for a great range of pathways through different programs: two-year programs, transfer programs, internships. We need to communicate that—it's all pretty veiled in the profession. If I'm a high school or middle school student trying to understand the educational paths to get through, that information isn't there.

We also noticed that a lot of schools are directing efforts toward direct recruitment. Maybe some diversity goals are related to it, but mostly it's focused on tenth and eleventh grade, and some ninth graders. We're looking to build a direct line as direct applicants to their programs. Very little is being done in fourth to eighth grade. We looked at some studies that say a lot of students have made up their minds about what they might study pretty early. For students who don't know an architect, architecture is just not on their radar.

We don't have a concerted effort nationally to tell students that might have an aptitude or interest that this is a potential for them. A lot of students might not even be considering it. Then, if they do decide they want to go into architecture, there are a lot of hidden costs that might deter them.

— Principal, Firm Owner, White, Female, Baby Boomer, Wheelchair User

DISCUSS:

- What were the things that most influenced the student to want to go into architecture as a career? What inspired you to become an architect? Have you heard stories from others about what influenced them?
- What kinds of motivations, opportunities, or pressures drive people toward or away from a career in architecture? How might this differ for different groups? How can you, as an architecture professional, promote more access to architecture? Is there anything different you would do to promote access for members of groups currently underrepresented in architecture?
- For the student speaker, the previous exposure to video about a visual spectacle with a popular culture audience was critical to opening his curiosity about the field. Are there ways you or your firm could be telling equally compelling stories to the public? What can architecture firms and institutions do to help make architecture more visible across different communities? What are things that you can do to improve the visibility of architecture in your own community?
- How can architecture be made more interesting to students in middle school? To students in high school?

Consider

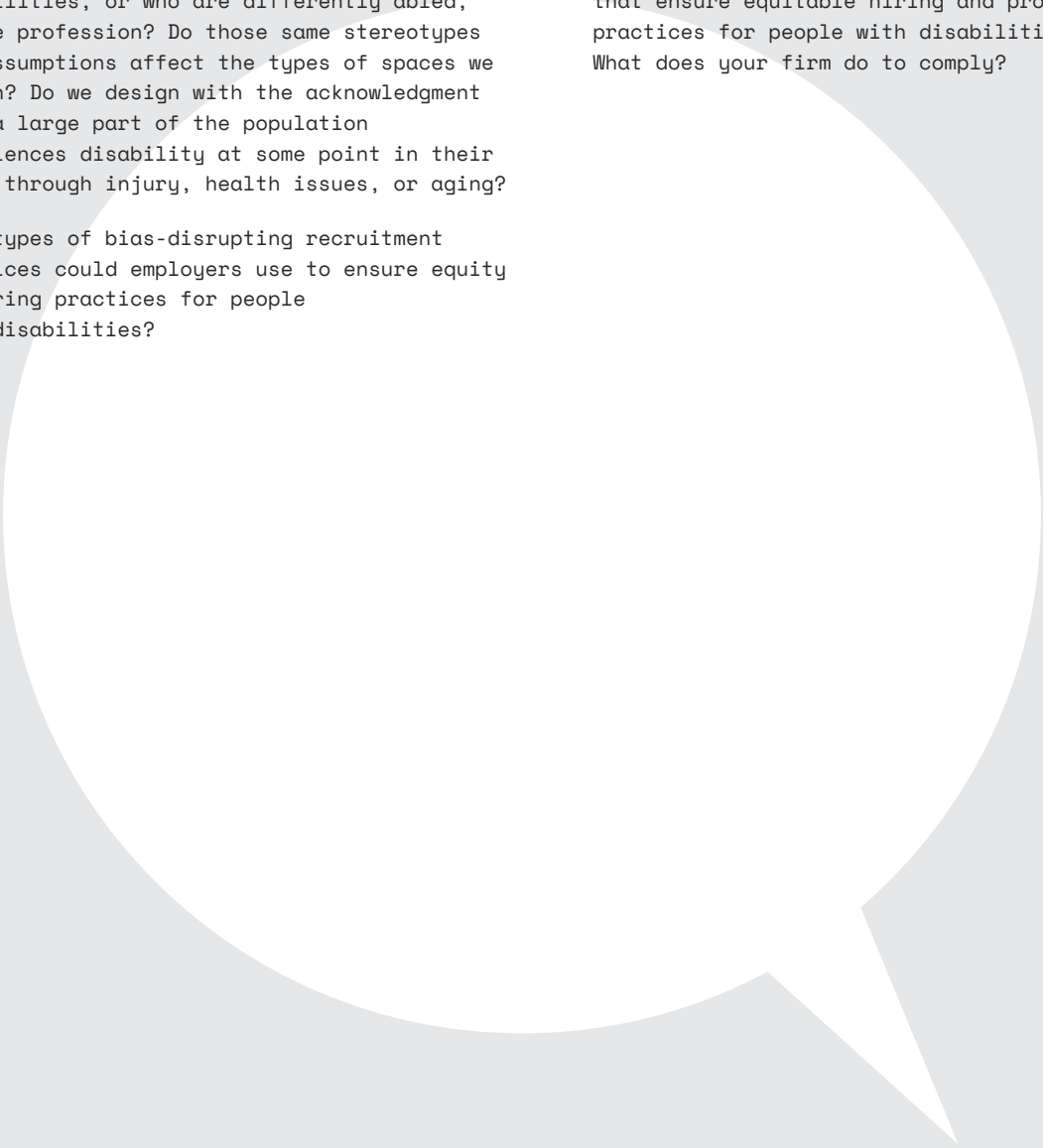
RECRUITING EQUITABLY

Before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) highlighted the idea that employment is a civil right, I was looking for architecture jobs as a fresh graduate. I used to drive around to prospective offices to see if I could get in the door. If I could, I would apply. If I got an interview, I would walk in and if the person's jaw dropped to the floor, I'd know they weren't going to consider me. I did find a few people willing to take me on, but the assumption was I would just work in the slide library. It took a lot of work for me to convince employers to let me do more—for example, I convinced one employer that I could work on tenant improvements. At a tenant-improvement project jobsite, there's a building and a floor slab, so I can roll onto that site in my wheelchair and work with the contractor. We need to help architects understand that there are a million different jobs within the field of architecture, that there's a place for everybody, and that we can each find the place that allows us to promote and use our best skills.

These days, larger firms tend to have more equitable hiring processes, which are probably more formalized, and hiring is less of a gut reaction of if we can use them or we can't. A large firm might have more opportunities, although I think any open-minded firm can find ways for someone with a variety of skills to fit in.

— Principal, Firm Owner, White, Female, Baby Boomer, Wheelchair User

DISCUSS:

- What factors might a member of a specific underrepresented group consider before applying for a position? Are there aspects of your firm that might be considered welcoming or unwelcoming by certain groups?
 - What stereotypes and assumptions are at play in architecture firms that impact people with disabilities, or who are differently abled, in the profession? Do those same stereotypes and assumptions affect the types of spaces we design? Do we design with the acknowledgment that a large part of the population experiences disability at some point in their lives through injury, health issues, or aging?
 - What types of bias-disrupting recruitment practices could employers use to ensure equity in hiring practices for people with disabilities?
 - Why does this person believe that larger firms may have more opportunities for people with disabilities? What assumptions are implied about smaller firms that make them appear less open-minded or less able to hire people with disabilities?
 - What policies and laws are in place today that ensure equitable hiring and promotion practices for people with disabilities? What does your firm do to comply?
- 

Consider

IT'S A LITTLE DAUNTING

Native Americans represent 0% of licensed architects according to the AIA. There are less than five Native American registered women architects and less than twenty Native American male registered in the United States. Most of us do a lot of networking through the American Indian Council of Architects and Engineers (AICAE) to promote and support students by connecting them to Native American professionals. We also do this with students: if we know a student who is interested in architecture, we try to connect them with the AICAE during their high school and/or college years. We reach out individually, make calls. When it's personal, people are more engaged and want to take part.

We start early on with elementary, high school, and college students, getting their interest: what is architecture and the importance of architecture and going back to their communities and serving their communities. I'm always in support of looking at the pipeline. I think when you get Native Americans, this diverse group, it's a little difficult when they're going off to college—they're so tied to their family and language and culture that when they go to school, they don't get much support on the college end. I've seen that it's hard for some of them. Where I live, the architects support the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS). I'm always pushing; I always bring up the memorandum of understanding between AIA and AICAE: we're having a job fair or a golf tournament, and local firms are supporting the AIAS, why don't you guys support the AICAE as well? And they look at me like, why would we do that? Looking at the top Native American students around the country: there are quite a few. It would be nice to get them to the conference to network. When I was a young professional in college and went to conferences, I came back inspired: you want to finish school, you know what it takes to be an architect, and that is what I want to do. For students who don't get to go to conferences, that support is not there.

At the university level, teaching the importance of indigenous architecture in their schools would make Native American students proud of where they come from and their cultural and heritage. We can all learn more about indigenous architecture that has been around for many centuries, but in school we just breeze right by it. The notion is that all Native Americans live in tepees, but they don't. There are so many indigenous structures out there that are used for many different purposes. It's something I think the schools don't really know. In my practice I always educate that we need to learn from the past to move forward to the future, and that includes this idea of indigenous design and planning. What did those structures—a lot are still standing today—what did they do that we're not doing today?

— Architect, CEO, Native American, Female, 30s

DISCUSS:

- What is it like to consider entering a profession in which you are a small minority? What do you think are some of the obstacles?
- What keeps local architects and firms from supporting the AICAE (or other nonmajority organizations, such as NOMA or NOMAS)?
- Does your firm actively build connections to nonmajority student groups? Do you focus on just one group? What benefits do to the students gain? What benefits do you gain?
- What investment do you or your firm make in the talent pipeline? Is there a collective action that your firm takes with national organizations to build pipelines for currently underrepresented groups?

Consider

INEQUITY AFFECTS RETENTION

Generally, female architects and designers are taken a lot less seriously. Most men I've worked with experience a higher level of engagement and exposure and better defined roles that let them grow; hence, they get promoted a lot faster than their female counterparts. I have many times been the only woman in the room, having the men treat me as if I'm not one of them—or guys of my age or level of experience or lower being the ones who get the right attention. For example, I was the lead on a project. We had a conference call with several people in the room: one of my principals and another person on the architecture team, a nice guy and a good colleague. I was the one in charge, but the whole time during the meeting my principal was talking to and addressing everything to my colleague—didn't even make eye contact with me. When someone on the call had a question, they addressed my colleague too. This was quite insulting to me. I was the one leading the job, but I was nonexistent.

I see this happening so often to women. We always have to work twice as hard as our male colleagues. Especially women from other countries (like me)—it's three times as hard....I'm a very responsible person. I take myself seriously, even if others don't. But emotionally and mentally, it really affects me negatively. It's very disappointing, and it seems like there's no end to it. I wonder when will there be a light at the end of the tunnel. I hoped the new generation of men would be different. But they don't care either. For them, it's as if as long as they have their own jobs, they don't care if their female colleagues don't get promotions. They stay quiet. I'm not saying they're responsible, but they're contributing to the status quo. We have good relationships, go out for coffee, work together every day, late nights together, often on deadlines, but why are they getting ahead of me so easily?

— Full-time Architect at a Large Firm, White, Female, 43

DISCUSS:

- What microaggressions did this person experience at work? How might they affect her pathway to promotion within the firm? And how might they affect her engagement in the workplace?
- What could this person's junior colleague have done to disrupt bias on the project? What responsibility did the colleague have to do anything? How would using these strategies have changed engagement for all participants?

What can firms do to ensure psychological safety for women and other underrepresented groups? Does the role of each individual employee in ensuring psychological safety change based on their level of power or their group identities (gender, socioeconomic background/class, education, age, culture, nationality, physical ability, etc.)?

- Does your firm have a way to proactively identify the negative effect that the speaker refers to? If the situation continues without change, what do you think are the risks to the speaker? What are the risks to the firm?

Consider

GIVING TALENT THE CHANCE TO SHINE

One of the things that we are committed to and have been committed to from day one was looking broadly at candidates and seeking out candidates who had talent but perhaps were not being given the opportunities to really display that talent at the firms they were working in. I would like my firm to be rooted in this base of talented folks who maybe haven't had a chance to shine. We will mentor, train them up, give them opportunities they were not going to get anywhere else. That was the basis of our targeted hiring early on.

— Managing Partner and Firm Owner, Black, Male, 46

DISCUSS:

- How do you see the continuum from recruitment to retention functioning in your firm? Is it helping people shine?
- Are equity, diversity, and inclusion explicit values of your firm, and if so, how is the firm demonstrating these values in recruitment and retention? What are you doing yourself to advance them?
- How do you identify candidates at other firms without "poaching"? Are there positive and cooperative ways that groups of firms might achieve the kinds of matches described?

Consider

CHALLENGES HIRING DIVERSE STAFF

We have tried actively to recruit a diverse population in this firm, but because of the kind of work we do, we aren't required to do so. This is a small firm, nine architects, and we largely work for private clients, so we rarely go after projects during which we would be evaluated on the diversity of our team. So when we meet and engage with young people from underrepresented groups, often we find the candidates we would most like to hire are courted specifically because of their backgrounds to work in firms that do a great deal of public work. In a city like ours, where you have three or four of the largest firms in the country and a bunch of small- and medium-sized firms, there's a tendency for those firms that are larger and do certain kinds of work to attract and retain employees who are different, other than what you would call the "majority." We have a roundtable of firms that do high-end residential, retail interiors, and we could see we're not a good microcosm of America. And it bothers me. Because we're not as attractive as other firms, perhaps, we don't get candidates from underrepresented groups. Four out of nine people in our firm are women, and one of my partners is a woman. I wish we could say we aggressively tried, but we just hire as best we can.

— Firm Founder and Principal, White, Male, 60

DISCUSS:

- What do you think the speaker means when he says his firm is not as attractive to diverse candidates? Why would it not be attractive? What could this person's firm do to attract a wider range of candidates?
- What are some of the challenges that smaller firms have when trying to attract diverse talent? What can smaller firms do to better attract a broader range of talent? What can they do to retain that talent?
- What might be some benefits to this type of firm of adding more diverse staff?
- How do some firms express that they value diversity? How are these values manifested in their daily work practices? What more could firms do to show that diversity matters?
- Have clients communicated how they measure and value your firm's diversity? Has this been a factor in winning work or being effective?
- How might regional cultural differences affect how firms approach recruitment and retention of diverse talent? What regional differences have you experienced in how firms recruit and promote talent from underrepresented groups?

Consider


ACKNOWLEDGING GENDER INEQUITIES IN THE WORKPLACE

Our firm is very young and was bought three years ago, around when I started. It used to have a very male-dominated culture—the guy at the top yelling, women answering the phones. When I started, there was a transition happening, and they were kind of attempting to get the culture to move from one extreme, but I was still asking, why are only the women answering the phone? I'd comment, "This is bull---," and they'd make some changes. But that said, it's run by three men, and they don't realize they put a lot more on the plate of a few women in the office because they know the women will get it done. The guys in the corner work on one thing and go home. And we women notice stuff that needs to get done, take it on, but still have to get our own jobs done too. I'd wonder, "Why the hell am I doing everything, and this guy's focusing on one thing in the corner?"

There are two of us who do a lot of extra marketing and administrative stuff that takes away from being able to work on architecture. At least that contribution is somewhat acknowledged where I am, and I feel lucky. It makes it better because at least I feel like I get face time with my boss, and I get appreciation, and if nothing else, I know more about how our firm functions because of those things. I'm more involved in decisions above my pay grade than I otherwise would be, decisions being made about what we're doing, why we're doing it. That makes me feel better about my future career.

— Architect, White, Lesbian, Early 30s

DISCUSS:

- How does this person describe the division of labor in her workplace? Have you experienced similar divisions of labor in your own firm? Who does most of the design work in your firm and who does most of the “office housework”? If there are divisions, how do they affect engagement and retention?
 - This person describes her firm as trying to transition from a male-dominated culture. How does this affect the way the firm will recruit differently than in the past? What would prospective employees be looking for in order to understand the trajectory of the change and the level of support needed to make the transition successful?
 - How do appreciation and acknowledgment help the speaker in this story? What impact do appreciation and acknowledgment of workplace difficulties have on engagement? Does your firm regularly express appreciation and acknowledgment for a job well done?
 - How might perceptions of women, femininity, and sexuality affect how people who identify as female are treated? Are there differences between how you think of cisgender (gender identity corresponding to one’s sex at birth) women, trans women, and/or lesbians? How do these differences play out in practice?
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Resources

IMPROVING EQUITY

16 Architects of Color Speak Out About the Industry's Race Problem – Asad Syrkett, Tanay Warekar, and Patrick Sisson – *Curbed* (2017)

<https://www.curbed.com/2017/2/22/13843566/minority-architects-diversity-architecture-solutions-advice>

Interviewees discuss barriers they have faced as architects of color and offer recommendations to improve diversity in the profession.

Disabilities in the Workplace: Recruitment, Accommodation, and Retention

– Linda Davis – *AAOHN Journal* (July 1, 2005)

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/216507990505300705>

Detailed guidance and resources for employers seeking to employ and retain workers with both temporary and permanent disabilities.

Diversity in the Profession of Architecture – AIA (2016)

<http://content.aia.org/sites/default/files/2016-05/Diversity-DiversityinArchitecture.pdf>

Summary of perceptions of factors that affect the choice of architecture as a profession, job satisfaction, and retention.

How Can Architecture Schools Increase Diversity?

– Melinda D. Anderson – *Curbed* (2017)

<https://www.curbed.com/2017/2/22/14653054/architecture-schools-diversity>

Recommendations include increasing diversity of faculty, providing mentorship and inclusion programs that support students, addressing cost concerns, and partnering with local schools to increase the visibility of architecture as a career option.

Identifying & Interrupting Bias in Hiring

– Bias Interrupters

<https://biasinterrupters.org/toolkits/orgtools/>

Resources include a worksheet that lists common bias types, how they arise in hiring, and how to prevent their influence and a guide on structuring the hiring process to prevent bias at all stages.

In Search of a Less Sexist Hiring Process

– *Harvard Business Review* (2014)

<https://hbr.org/2014/03/in-search-of-a-less-sexist-hiring-process>

An overview of why women are less likely to be hired than equally qualified men and how businesses should adjust hiring practices to be more inclusive.

The Pipeline Predicament: Fixing the Talent Pipeline

– Bentley University Center for Women and Business (2018)

<https://www.bentley.edu/centers/center-for-women-and-business/pipeline-research-report-request>

Research report on why the representation of women decreases at higher levels of leadership; issues include access to mentorship, pay inequities, midcareer issues, and bias. Offers strategies for addressing the issues, including reexamining the hiring/recruiting process, the role of culture, and supporting and developing existing talent. Focuses on women but also discusses other underrepresented groups, including people of color.

re:Work Guide: Hiring – Google

<https://rework.withgoogle.com/subjects/hiring/>

Covers aspects of hiring, including recruiting, reviewing resumes, and interviews; offers suggestions for making the hiring process fairer for candidates with different backgrounds and ways to improve the experience for job candidates.

Scholarships and Career Resources for Architects of Color – Patrick Sisson – *Curbed* (2018)

<https://www.curbed.com/2017/2/22/14669966>

[/scholarships-minority-architects-professional-resources](#)

List of programs working to help increase diversity in architecture; includes youth, college-level, and professional organization resources and programs.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

EQxD Metrics: Finding the Right Fit – Annelise Pitts – Equity by Design (2017)

<http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/12/6/eqxd-metrics-finding-the-right-fit>

Survey results from 2016 show the perception of workplace-culture fit by different groups in architecture. Fit is identified as the most determinant factor in why people stay or leave a job.

The Formula for a Winning Company Culture – Tim Wolock and Chris Martin – Payscale (2016)

<https://www.payscale.com/hr/formula-for-a-winning-company-culture>

Identifies key factors for retention and improving employee satisfaction.

Measuring the Meaning of Meaningful Work: Development and Validation of the Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale (CMWS) – Marjolein Lips-Wiersma and Sarah Wright – Group and Organization Management (2012)

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258137959_Measuring_the_Meaning_of_Meaningful_Work_Development_and_Validation_of_the_Comprehensive_Meaningful_Work_Scale_CMWS

Provides a multidimensional scale for measuring meaningful work.

Overcoming the Implementation Gap: How 20 Leading Companies are Making Flexibility Work – Duesen, James, Gill, McKechnie – Boston College Center for Work and Family (2007)

<https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/centers/cwf/research/publications/researchreports/Overcoming%20the%20Implementation%20Gap>

Offering flexible work is a way to increase recruitment and retention. This report outlines five steps for developing and implementing a flexibility policy and case studies of companies who offer flexible options.

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SECOND EDITION
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American Institute of Architects

The *Guides for Equitable Practice* were authored by research teams based at the University of Minnesota and the University of Washington led by Renée Cheng, with coauthors Laura Osburn, Nancy Alexander, and Andrea Johnson, and support from Cozy Hannula. The guides were designed by Vadim Gershman. They are published with the support of the American Institute of Architects Equity and Future of Architecture Committee.

The views expressed are the views of the authors, not necessarily those of the AIA.

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