

Introduction

The need for equitable practice in the architecture profession is becoming ever clearer and more urgent. These guides provide support for informed discussions and concrete next steps to help turn intent into action.

WHY IT MATTERS

Increasingly, architects are being called to participate in solving the world's most pressing problems. Meeting these challenges, and others not yet known, will require the talent, passion, and creativity of a diverse cohort of students, professionals, and leaders.

WE ADVANCE EQUITABLE, DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE, AND JUST PRACTICE WHEN...

- we can articulate the reasons why it matters—moral, ethical, business, professional, and societal—to different listeners, in different contexts
- we recognize the many factors that impede equity and justice and that call for solutions
- we realize that the barriers are systemic and that people in leadership are particularly responsible for acknowledging them and dismantling them
- we attend to the issues at the level of individual employees, managers, firms, and the profession as a whole
- we base solutions in relevant research within and beyond the profession

ACT

Know your motivation

- Understand what best motivates you to make practice more inclusive, equitable, and just.
- Be aware of your own patterns and biases—we all have them.

Consider perspectives beyond your own

- Increase your capacity to acknowledge, value, and work effectively with people who are different from you.
- Try shifting your perspective or frame to test out thinking about issues in new ways.

- Avoid making assumptions about what others think, want, or are motivated by—ask and listen.
- Share stories, resources, and knowledge.

Equip yourself and others to make change

- Learn what it takes to contribute to a positive workplace culture.
- Be an advocate for yourself and others.
- Learn to be an ally in the movement for social and racial justice.
- Actively prevent harassment and discrimination.
- Know your rights and responsibilities as an individual and employer.

Intercultural Competence

Equitable, inclusive, and just workplaces rely on people being guided by unbiased, culturally aware thoughts and actions.

WHY IT MATTERS

The ability to navigate differences constructively helps reduce bias against people with nondominant identities—those who are women, immigrants, people with disabilities, single, LGBTQIA+, young and old, less educated, or of certain races, ethnicities, religions, or socioeconomic classes—and therefore helps them enter, stay, and advance in the profession.

WORKPLACES INCREASE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE WHEN...

- individuals actively listen to each other and acknowledge differences in perspective and communication styles
- firm leaders model responsibility for recognizing and improving their attitudes and biases
- firms support open, inclusive, and balanced dialogue
- diverse teams and their leaders receive support for holding courageous conversations
- firms offer intercultural learning opportunities

ACT

Value difference

- Become an attuned listener and consider multiple perspectives, especially if you are a member of a dominant group.
- Recognize the greater responsibility held by members of dominant groups to bridge gaps.
- Get to know people who are different from you, and deepen your understanding of other cultures.
- Communicate effectively—intent does not equal impact. Remember to use the Platinum Rule: treat others as they want to be treated.
- Actively remove barriers for those from groups that have been historically excluded or disadvantaged.

Notice and name culture and bias

- Be aware of cultural patterns that reinforce a hierarchy of human worth.
- Investigate your instincts, and practice being cognizant of and adjusting your assumptions.
- Take assessments, such as the Implicit Association Test and the Intercultural Development Inventory, to gain more insight into where you may hold biases and stereotypes.
- Practice navigating conflicts by embracing discomfort and focusing on shared meaning and goals.
- Learn how to interrupt bias when it is directed toward you and others.

Workplace Culture

Questioning the assumption “that’s just how we do things” can bring change to ways of thinking and doing and, ultimately, to systems that advantage some individuals and groups while disadvantaging others.

WHY IT MATTERS

Workplace culture—a firm or profession’s values, traditions, and ways of working, presenting, and interacting—has a profound impact on employee recruitment and engagement, as well as the communities we serve. Awareness of dominant cultural patterns, typically invisible to those in power, helps pave the way to more equitable and inclusive workplaces.

WORKPLACE CULTURE IS STRONG AND HEALTHY WHEN...

- the values and goals of the business align with workplace culture
- leaders and employees work together to assess, contribute to, and improve culture
- leaders are models of empathy, compassion, and justice
- challenging situations are met with curiosity, not blame or punishment
- time for developing relationships and collaborations is built into project schedules

ACT

Evaluate and lead your culture

- Analyze how your firm’s culture aligns—or doesn’t—with its mission, values, and goals.
- Examine behaviors: “We say that we’re committed to ____, but when we ____ or when we don’t ____, we’re conveying ____ instead.”
- Discover employee perceptions and areas for improvement via surveys, exit interviews, and conversation.
- Educate yourself about histories, social movements, and points of view that are unfamiliar or uncomfortable.
- Think holistically about how every strategy, decision, or communication relates to your culture. Consider the impact on different groups.

- Audit messaging regularly to ensure that bias-free and inclusive language is used.
- Hold leaders accountable for progress.

Focus on engagement

- Consider ownership, management, team structures and processes, and delivery models and how they support—or could better support—employee engagement.
- Provide a structured onboarding program to integrate new employees into the firm.
- Provide the resources employees need to do their work.
- Offer ongoing feedback, mentorship, and professional-development opportunities.

Compensation

How well employees are compensated for work depends on access to opportunities, the value that is placed on different kinds of work, firm pay practices, and fee structures.

WHY IT MATTERS

Compensation indicates the perceived value of one's work. Bias and lack of transparency are factors in compensation gaps. In contrast, compensation equity and parity support the influx, development, and retention of diverse talent and the economic stability and growth of individuals, firms, and the profession.

COMPENSATION BECOMES MORE EQUITABLE WHEN...

- the compensation structure is intentional and straightforward, with clear criteria for increases and advancement
- job descriptions and salary bands align; variations within salary bands are tied to clear criteria and reviewed for bias
- employees have equitable access to high-profile projects and teams
- employees are evaluated on the value of their work and not hours spent in seats
- firms and the profession invest in delivering more value to clients

ACT

Use equitable compensation practices

- Stay informed—shifts in legal and social context affect compensation.
- Consider all the forms of compensation—not only wages, but also benefits, time off, types of assignments, work location, flexibility, developmental opportunities—and ensure they are being offered equitably.
- Develop clear compensation philosophy, strategy, and structure, and share them openly with applicants and employees.
- Let employees know they are free to discuss compensation without penalty.
- Conduct regular compensation audits and employee surveys, assess trends and patterns, and update your compensation program accordingly.

Avoid bias

- Recognize that some roles and tasks may be undervalued because of the identity of the people who typically perform them; address these biases through equity in your pay structure.
- Acknowledge contributions by people of color and women to projects that specifically require their involvement.
- Monitor performance reviews for implicit bias.
- Regard negotiation as a positive skill and a way of meeting mutual goals; eliminate the penalty that members of underrepresented groups often incur when advocating for themselves.
- Distribute office housework equitably.
- Avoid repeatedly assigning lower-visibility projects or giving fewer choices to employees with target identities.

Recruitment and Retention

Engaging all employees in equitable, inclusive hiring and leadership practices helps attract, recruit, and retain a diverse workforce and leads to firm success and a healthier profession.

WHY IT MATTERS

Architecture is a profession heavily dominated by white men—especially at the most senior levels of leadership. One in four employees has considered leaving their firm, yet three-quarters of those who quit said they would have stayed if their desires for career development, work-life fit, and manager behavior had been met.

WE MORE EASILY RECRUIT AND RETAIN ARCHITECTURE PROFESSIONALS WHEN...

- firms recruit for diversity, embrace difference, interrupt bias, and promote equitably
- leaders understand that equity and diversity benefit the profession and their firms
- employees feel their workplaces are psychologically and physically safe
- employees' and firms' values align, leading to positive employee engagement
- managers know and follow laws against discrimination in hiring and employment

ACT

Attend to employee engagement

- Foster ongoing dialogue and feedback between employees and managers; don't wait for annual reviews.
- Match firm values and priorities with personal ones, and know what motivates each employee.
- Take vacation time and flexible work time and encourage others to do so; watch for signs of burnout.
- Accommodate a variety of roles and working arrangements; avoid pigeonholing people into stereotypical roles.
- Support cross-firm affinity groups and mentorship for “onlys” and underrepresented groups.

Neutralize bias

- Understand that equitable hiring is a business issue, not a “women's issue” or a “minority issue.”
- Establish processes aimed at eliminating bias in hiring and evaluation.
- Conduct exit interviews with genuine curiosity, to learn and evolve.
- Understand the value of critical mass in reducing onlys and creating inclusion.

Improve diversity in the profession

- Reach beyond your own networks to find potential job candidates.
- Develop relationships with K–12 schools, and make architecture more visible to young people and diverse populations.
- Be prepared for candidates' questions on EDI, especially if your current demographics don't reflect your goals.

Negotiation

Negotiation can support equity and inclusion when it is viewed as a collaborative process that seeks to create satisfying solutions for all parties rather than a competition between adversaries.

WHY IT MATTERS

Negotiation is an everyday event for architecture professionals, whether in hiring and promotion, contracting, community engagement, or project management and teamwork. As a learned skill that improves with practice, honest and flexible negotiating contributes to job satisfaction and employee retention, positive working relationships and office culture, and long-term firm profitability.

NEGOTIATION CAPABILITY AND OUTCOMES IMPROVE WHEN...

- negotiations consider the larger context and impact on long-term relationships
- negotiation is recognized as a useful professional skill that takes practice
- negotiators convey their interests and determine their common goals up front
- decision-makers understand the role of power in negotiations, and use their position to keep negotiations from perpetuating systemic advantage or disadvantage
- participants build bridges across intercultural differences

ACT

Learn the art and skill of negotiation

- Get training and find opportunities to practice.
- Adapt your communication style (direct or indirect, casual or formal, discursive or to the point) to match your negotiating partner.
- Know your firm's and your own objectives, priorities, flexible points, and bottom lines, as well as your backup plan (or BATNA, best alternative to a negotiated agreement).

Negotiate to build a healthy workplace

- Develop relationships with people who can make positive change, and alert them to needs for organizational improvement.
- Always communicate with honesty and integrity.

- Approach negotiations as conversations; bring a creative, optimistic attitude; seek common ground; and appreciate differences. Your stance and your firm's advocacy for justice pave the way for broader change.

Address bias

- Note that identity and culture play a role in negotiation dynamics or biases.
- Recognize that members of nondominant groups must negotiate on their own behalf more often because of implicit bias but are often perceived as aggressive when they negotiate as assertively as white men.
- Work to change inequitable policies and decision-making processes.
- Advocate for nonmajority individuals; give credit where credit is due.

Mentorship and Sponsorship

Mentors and, increasingly, sponsors (who use political capital to promote a protégé) are invaluable for career advancement; when they are seen as allies as well, they can help diversify workplaces and build inclusiveness.

WHY IT MATTERS

Trained and mindful mentorship and sponsorship can help increase an employee's self-confidence, influence, advancement, compensation, and feelings of safety—contributing to engagement and well-being. Extra attention to members of nondominant groups, who may have more difficulty securing mentors and sponsors, can lead to their greater commitment and more frequent promotion.

MENTORSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP ARE EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE WHEN...

- mentors and sponsors develop the skills and perspectives of allies and coaches—intercultural competence, listening, empathy, advocacy
- underrepresented employees have at-least-equal access to mentors and sponsors
- mentoring programs support business objectives with goals, metrics, and feedback
- participants balance power dynamics and respect confidentiality

ACT

Design relationships to work for all parties

- Whether through a formal program or informal networking, make thoughtful matches between mentors and mentees, sponsors and protégés.
- Create and revisit an explicit agreement that addresses mutual expectations, ground rules, goals, identity differences, confidentiality, and when to move on.
- When designing a formal mentoring program, confirm leaders' commitment and involve prospective mentees.

Commit to learning

- Form relationships with people who are different from you, and work to expand your intercultural competence and allyship skills.

- Both parties: be open to what you don't know and be receptive to feedback.

Overcome bias

- Mentors and sponsors: move past implicit bias to recognize and support talent beyond the usual suspects.
- Be sensitive to the extra demands that people from underrepresented groups, especially the "onlys," have on their time and attention. Don't expect people from underrepresented groups to educate others.
- Firm leaders: be receptive to the recommendations of sponsors, especially when they are expending their personal political capital.

Advancing Careers

The cultures of offices, the profession, and society influence career paths. Leaders can recognize and remove current and historical impediments, especially for members of underrepresented groups.

WHY IT MATTERS

Advancing careers is a shared responsibility. Equitable and inclusive leaders and workplaces help employees navigate challenges and find meaning and security in their work; and they impartially support their development. Results include reduced turnover, more informed planning, and a more diverse, skilled, productive, and committed workforce.

ARCHITECTURE CAREERS ADVANCE MORE EQUITABLY WHEN...

- employees perceive that the feedback, training, support, and flexibility that they need are available when they need them
- each employee has substantive work that is meaningful to them
- criteria for advancement are clear, consistent, and based on performance and results, not time in service
- workplaces accommodate an individual's workload, schedule, pacing, and location needs
- leaders endorse and encourage an array of career paths and areas of expertise

ACT

Regard career paths as lattices rather than ladders

- Recognize that goals and needs evolve—design flexible career pathways.
- Make your firm's requirements and work arrangements flexible, and allow all employees to deploy your policies without penalty.

Mitigate bias

- Be aware of how race, gender, and other characteristics can affect perceptions, performance evaluation, and your responses to requests for training, leave, and accommodations. Then take steps to address any unconscious bias.

- Encourage and support all team members to take on career-advancing challenges.

Be supportive of individual needs

- Explore what constitutes meaningful work to each employee and tailor accordingly.
- Listen to those most closely affected by social movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo.
- Watch for burnout; provide confidential support and accommodations to employees with mental-wellness, medical, and disability needs.
- Help employees build networks and find mentors and sponsors.

Engaging Community

As community needs encompass broad concerns, such as social justice and resiliency, architects will do well to learn, build trust, and adopt solutions created in partnership with those communities.

WHY IT MATTERS

Architects have a responsibility for making a positive impact on society. Equitable and inclusive community engagement builds trust between designers and community members, sustains communities, undoes past damage, and helps create functional, affordable, safe spaces. Emerging metrics link design with equity, health, and resilience, offering new ways to establish the value of architecture.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS MORE EQUITABLE WHEN...

- architects earn the trust of the community
- design teams demonstrate intercultural fluency and connect creatively with an array of community members, especially those with less power and privilege
- the project process and result fully engage the intended users from the start
- architects listen to the community's knowledge, vision, and ideas and then use their own expertise to incorporate them into the ultimate design and to correct past injustices

ACT

Engage with community members as partners

- Be active in your own community.
- View communities as cocreators.
- Understand varying communication styles, and use a variety of engagement methods to appeal to different people.
- Make your expertise intelligible through clear language and visuals.

Understand community needs

- Research the historical, cultural, political, and institutional contexts. Don't lean on community members to teach you what you can learn on your own.
- See the big picture of what has happened to communities and aim to remediate past injustice and harm.

- Discover the community's priorities; don't assume you know what is needed.

Improve community relations

- Establish relationships before discussing project specifics.
- Learn the workings and culture of partner organizations.
- Listen before designing.
- Value, promote, and reward community work by your firm members.

Speak out on matters of justice and equity

- Take concrete actions that will improve equity within the profession and also in the world.

Measuring Progress

To advance equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), set goals, build strategies, and measure progress from a baseline. Keep in mind that not everything of value can be quantified.

WHY IT MATTERS

Demographic measures of diversity in recruitment, retention, and advancement are important but are a bare minimum. Quantitative and qualitative measures of equity and inclusion—such as climate and culture, job satisfaction, employee engagement and sense of belonging, more positive and fewer negative workplace interactions, and psychological safety—provide more meaningful information.

MEASUREMENT IS MORE EFFECTIVE WHEN...

- firms and the profession at large know their EDI baseline
- leaders commit to long-term goals and tangible progress
- firm leaders and managers listen without rationalizing, even if the findings contradict their perceptions
- data are used to determine needs, develop strategies, set goals, and track progress but do not distract from other things that matter
- individual identities are protected, especially in small firms

ACT

Establish the baseline; don't stop there

- Go beyond “how many?” and analyze not only who gets hired and promoted but also who is leaving and why.
- Build hypotheses about the greatest needs for change, and design interventions to handle them over time.
- Set targets and timelines for progress.

Use equitable, sound, and confidential data practices

- Enlist diverse leaders, managers, and employees in designing solutions.
- Articulate your hypotheses precisely. Instead of just “we need to be more diverse,” look for root causes to address.

- Follow existing laws about the collection, storage, and sharing of data.
- Be clear about how data will be used, and allow participants to opt out.

Invest in sustained efforts

- Make EDI goals a visible priority. Talk about them as often as you discuss profitability. Share results widely and celebrate improvements.
- Measure how policy and program changes, such as flexible schedules, affect climate, employee satisfaction, and job performance.
- Hold leaders and managers accountable.
- Revise your metrics when goals and strategies change.