

2019 LAF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION SURVEYS

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), which research suggests are integral in business and design practices, are sometimes hard to understand and therefore hard to support through practice and policies according to two 2019 surveys conducted by the Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF).

The survey results affirm that the landscape architectural discipline is concerned with DEI but largely sees the demographics of hiring pools as the main issue. However, firms were also interested in contract language and human resources tools that might help them to better embody diversity, equity, and inclusion in their workplaces.

As shapers of the built environment, landscape architects wield great power that can affect how individuals experience space and place. Respondents recognized how the discipline impacts these experiences with 87% of individuals surveyed and 100% of firms surveyed responding “yes” when asked if DEI were important to the profession.

Capacity organizations within landscape architecture began a collective effort to address diversity within the discipline in 2015. The Landscape Architecture Foundation, along with the American Society of Landscape Architects, the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture, the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Bureau, and the Council of Landscape Architectural Registration Boards signed on to a joint statement that set bold goals for achieving demographic diversity among landscape architects.

“We understand that being well-versed in diversity, equity, and inclusion is a core competency for landscape architects,” said LAF CEO Barbara Deutsch, FASLA. “We want to know what opportunity there is for capacity organizations like ours to offer support to individuals and firms. We are looking to understand what resources are needed to support inclusive work environments, remove barriers, and create opportunities for landscape architects throughout their careers.”

Landscape architecture is not the only design discipline reckoning with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The American Institute of Architects, the American Society of Civil Engineers, and the American Planning Association have all made public statements and put programmatic resources behind efforts to increase diversity and promote equity and inclusion within their ranks.

WHAT ARE LAF'S KEY TAKEAWAYS?

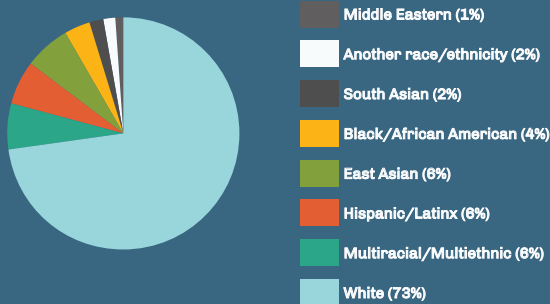
Informed by LAF's own values, survey analysis suggests:

- Landscape architects and firms overwhelmingly value DEI but note that additional resources are needed.
- The discipline of landscape architecture as a whole should work toward building trust with women, people of color, LGTBQ people, and people with disabilities in our ranks.
- People may feel comfortable sharing their whole identity in their workplace, but not when working with certain clients or in specific regions. Firms should ensure there is an open dialogue on issues that may come up in these situations.
- There appear to be barriers to licensure for designers of color. The discipline should work to identify underlying causes and develop resources to promote accessibility.
- Most firms considered the educational pipeline to be their main barrier to achieving DEI, but few had formalized policies that would promote an equitable and inclusive workplace. Firms should develop policies and promote equity and inclusion to attract and retain diverse designers already in the discipline, regardless of who they see in the educational pipeline and their offices today.
- Most firms provided internal mentorship programs to support emerging designers in building relationships in the workplace as well as the knowledge and soft skills needed for leadership.

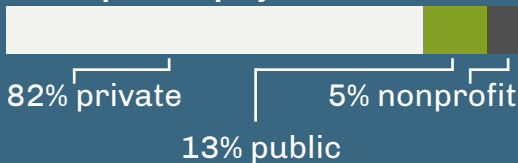
WHO TOOK LAF'S DEI SURVEY?

LAF received 551 responses by sharing the individual survey widely through its email list and social media and by conducting outreach to firms, ASLA chapters, and self-organized landscape architecture interest groups.

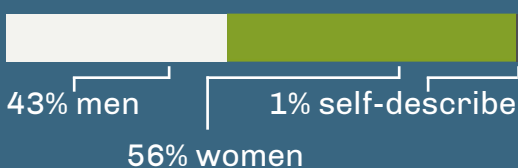
Participant racial demographics



Participant employment sector



Participant gender demographics



The average age of participants was **43 years old**. The youngest participant was **22** and the oldest was **83**.

FINDINGS: INDIVIDUAL SURVEY

The survey found broad support for DEI with 85% of respondents reporting familiarity with the concepts and 87% agreeing that DEI is important to landscape architecture. Only 58% of respondents perceived their workplaces to be diverse while 50% of respondents said there were barriers to diversity in their workplace.

LAF also asked LGBTQ individuals if they felt comfortable being out in the workplace, and, for the most part, respondents said yes. Comments showed that this may be partially dependent on where they are working and with whom they are working. For example, if a designer is working on a project in a country that is unfriendly toward the LGBTQ community, they may feel the need to hide that part of who they are.

White respondents reported an average of 7-9 years of experience while people of color reported an average of 4-6 years.

By looking into the relationships between different variables, the survey findings offer some potentially powerful insights into the state of the discipline.

First, older respondents reported higher rates of licensure. This relationship is not surprising as licensure is a process that requires a certain amount of experience, preparation, and testing with costs associated. Experience and financial resources are generally more available to older individuals. Even after receiving licensure, there are further demands on time as licensed landscape architects must maintain a certain number of continuing education hours each year.

More interestingly, white respondents had significantly higher rates of licensure (16%) than respondents of color, even when controlling for age. The rest of the survey does not offer any insight as to why this might be. However, this difference may demonstrate the need for resources that promote greater access to licensure for landscape architects of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. A future survey should also include questions on socioeconomic status and student loan debt to identify the effect these factors might have on licensure.

Respondents were also asked a number of questions about their workplace experience and culture. There were strong correlations between employer trust and age, gender, race, LGBTQ identity, and disability status. The data suggested

that older straight, white men who do not have disabilities had the most trust in their employers while women, people of color, younger individuals, LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities all reported lower trust on average. Individuals who identified with two or more of the above labels experienced a dip in trust for each identity. This suggests that it may be beneficial for firm leadership to place extra effort on engaging and building trust with employees who are different than themselves.

17% of respondents reported feeling alone in their identities at their workplaces to some degree.

When asked whether their firms had expertise in the area of DEI, women and those working in the private sector reported less belief that their workplaces were skilled in these topic areas. Race did not appear to play a significant role, but this may be because the analysis considered people who are not white as a single broad category because there were not enough responses from each group to be able to find a significant result. LAF recognizes that all people of color do not share a single experience and may have different perceptions of their workplace's DEI work (and other outcomes). In order to run individual analysis on each group, LAF would need a significantly larger number of people to respond to the survey with at least 50 responses from each racial group.

Finally, the survey revealed that capacity organizations need to continue to expand and share their DEI work. About one-third of respondents were familiar with the American Society of Landscape Architects's DEI programs and initiatives and about one-fifth were familiar with LAF's DEI work. In order to make sure that any resources developed from this survey reach those whom they would benefit, it is important that individuals see capacity organizations within landscape architecture as having an understanding of DEI and track record of working together on these issues.

ABOUT LAF'S DEI SURVEYS

What:

LAF designed one survey for individuals that included a number of Likert-type questions that asked about personal values, workplace culture, and feelings of belonging.

LAF designed a second survey for firms that focused on firm demographics and yes/no questions with the opportunity for respondents to provide comments.

When:

LAF launched the DEI surveys on August 8, 2019 with an announcement to email subscribers and the commencement of outreach for the firm survey. Both surveys closed at the end of September.

Respondents:

500+ landscape architects and designers responded to the individual survey. LAF reached these respondents through broad outreach to its own networks and through individuals and organizations sharing the survey to their own networks.

49 firms responded to the organizational survey. LAF reached these organization through targeted outreach to leadership that ensured that only one response was recorded for each organization and that it was recorded by an individual with access to necessary policy and demographic information.

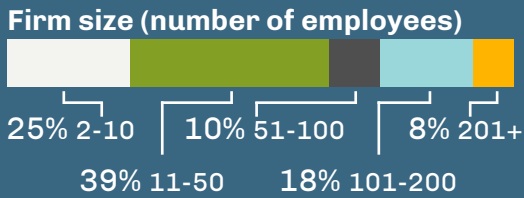
Geographic Representation:

42 states plus Washington, DC and Puerto Rico were represented in the individual survey.

21 states plus Washington, DC were named in the firm survey while some respondents simply reported they had a number of US offices.

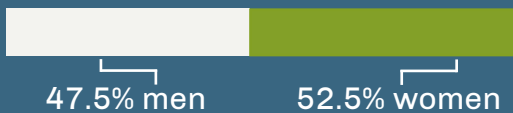
WHICH FIRMS TOOK LAF'S DEI SURVEY?

LAF reached out to over 100 firms and received 49 responses.



In total, firms surveyed employed more than **1,600 landscape architects** who were involved in an average of **93%** of firms' projects.

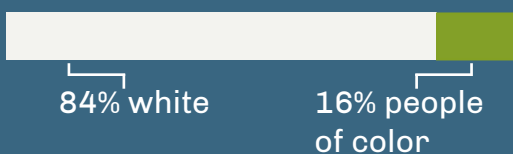
Overall gender distribution in firms



Gender representation in firms' senior leadership



Racial representation in firms' senior leadership



On average, employees worked at participant firms for nearly **7 years**.

FINDINGS: FIRM SURVEY

It was clear that responding firms valued DEI with all of them agreeing on the importance of DEI. Throughout responses, firms pointed to structural issues within the discipline, repeatedly citing a lack of diversity in the hiring pool and educational pipeline as the primary barrier to progress, something that organizations within landscape architecture are already beginning to address. In addition to this overarching theme, responses showed an overall encouraging effort to promote DEI in the profession, as discussed below.

3 out of 4 firms (76%) reported that their clients placed importance on the diversity of project teams.

Acknowledging a problem is the first step to addressing it and a majority of firms surveyed (57%) did so, reporting they felt that there were barriers to improving diversity in their organizations. First, firms identified larger structural issues within the profession. Some respondents pointed out that the overall pool of designers graduating each year is not very diverse. Turning internally, some respondents mentioned that there is diversity among more junior staff members but that management remains largely white and male. These answers pointed to time as a barrier, as it will take time for those entering the profession to move from school to practice and on into leadership.

Other respondents expressed that they were interested in hiring international students but that the visa process was complicated and often did not return the desired outcome. Finally, just a single respondent pointed out the importance of acknowledging our own internal biases as a barrier to promoting DEI.

65% of firms surveyed had internal mentorship programs to help shepherd emerging designers into leadership.

Many respondents (63%) reported their firms had codified a commitment to DEI in some way. The ways in which each organization undertook this commitment varied based on their capacity and need, from including DEI in the firm's stated values to creating a Diversity Advisory Council or staff role to oversee DEI efforts. Of those respondents who did not cite a specific commitment, many still responded that their organizations promoted an inclusive culture.

Some firms cited their small size as the reason they did not have many codified policies. Some respondents cited Equal Employment Opportunity statements as a codification of their commitment. While it is true these statements demonstrate a commitment to DEI, they are also required by Equal Employment Opportunity Commission law and offer an opportunity for firms to build their own commitments and actions from this foundation.

In terms of policies that firms are currently employing, a number of respondents mentioned family-friendly policies. LAF specifically asked about flex time (71%), remote work (75%), and paid parental leave (65%) while additional responses spoke about company culture and priorities. Policies supporting racial diversity, on the other hand, seemed less prevalent. 1 in 5 respondents (21%) reported that their workplaces engaged in unconscious bias training, and 6% offered employees workplace affinity groups, which employees participate in based on a shared identity such as race, gender, or sexuality. Some of these policies are more applicable in larger-sized firms.

A number of respondents recognized the role youth engagement plays in building the educational pipeline with 44% reporting they conduct K-12 outreach.

The survey ended by asking what support would be helpful to promote DEI in firm management, practices, and project work. Respondents cited the need to grow the educational pipeline and encouraged capacity organizations to pursue this through scholarships and outreach. It was also suggested that capacity organizations put out a baseline resource defining DEI and explaining what progress might look like so that all firms could have a foundation from which to build programs and policies that match their capacity and needs. Respondents also requested that results from this survey be published in a variety of formats that can be used for reference along with examples of success promoting DEI within landscape architecture and related disciplines.

WHAT ARE LAF'S NEXT STEPS?

LAF held a DEI training for its Board of Directors and staff. These leaders came together to discuss issues and challenges and left with new knowledge, strategies, and resolve to promote DEI in their own firms and organizations. LAF will share their stories, successes, and lessons learned to offer examples and inspire action.

For individuals and firms, LAF will soon publish a **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resource Guide** on lafoundation.org. This guide is a starting point to help readers understand the importance of DEI in education, management, and design. It will also include external tools to move from understanding to action.

LAF will also be launching **DEI-focused Take Action campaigns**. These campaigns will offer discrete steps readers can take to promote DEI in their workplaces and in the profession more broadly. LAF will also continue to publish **Perspectives** interviews, which highlight landscape architects in diverse roles and from a variety of backgrounds, and its **Equity & Inclusion in Practice** article series, which shares how others are making changes within their organizations.

LAF's DEI Task Force will continue to review individual comments from both surveys to identify additional opportunities to develop relevant tools and resources.

If you have suggestions or stories of impact you would like to share, please reach out to:

rbooper@lafoundation.org

WHAT TYPE OF ANALYSIS WAS USED FOR THE SURVEY?

To ensure that analyses would be reliable, LAF first cleaned the dataset, removing cases that were missing responses to variables of interest. Respondents from outside of the United States and Canada were removed because there were not enough responses to come to meaningful conclusions about the cultures of other countries.

Demographic data was directly collected from participants. In collecting responses about race and ethnicity, LAF allowed respondents to choose as many identities as they felt applicable to themselves. If respondents chose more than one option, LAF created a multiracial/multiethnic category to show these choices.

To identify correlations in the data, LAF used IBM SPSS. This software allowed LAF to conduct a number of multiple linear regressions. These regressions were used to reveal whether different variables might have an effect on certain outcomes, including experiences related to the workplace and company culture.

For open-ended responses such as those asking what resources respondents might find helpful, LAF conducted a qualitative analysis, identifying themes among participant responses.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to LAF's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force, LAF's Board of Directors and Board Emeritus, and the American Society of Landscape Architects for their support in the development of these surveys. Thank you as well to the chapters, firms, individuals, and organizations that participated and helped to share the surveys widely.

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