2024-2025 LAF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION SURVEYS

As designers of the built environment, landscape architects hold a profound responsibility to create spaces that are not only functional and well-designed but also equitable and inclusive. Being well-versed in the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) enables professionals to approach design with a heightened sensitivity to the diverse needs and experiences of the communities they serve. Representation matters—incorporating a variety of perspectives ensures that designs resonate with and are accessible to the widest possible audience. Embracing DEI is not merely a professional obligation but a commitment to enriching the practice of landscape architecture, fostering environments that reflect the richness of human diversity and promote social equity.

In 2019, the Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF) completed the first DEI surveys specifically for the discipline of landscape architecture, gathering data from both individuals and firms. The findings of these surveys were used to inform LAF strategy and shared widely within the profession to highlight opportunities for firms, individuals, and capacity-building organizations to effect change in their own spheres of influence. Now, LAF is building on the initial surveys to evaluate change over the preceding 5 years and investigate new questions surfaced by the original survey.

Much has changed in the interceding years (2019 - 2024), including unprecedented levels of political, social, and economic volatility. The surveys seek to understand if there have been any changes in how DEI is prioritized and enacted in landscape architecture and bring attention to programs and policies that respondents have found effective in their own work.

“Our initial survey in 2019 helped to inform the direction of our LAF Ignite program, supporting students of color with scholarships, internships, and ongoing mentorship,” said LAF CEO Barbara Deutsch, FASLA. “We want to know the changes landscape architects and firms have seen and made over the past 5 years. How can we continue to support our communities, address structural barriers, and promote inclusive design?”

Additional resources on DEI and other relevant topics can be found on LAF’s website at **lafoundation.org/resources**.

WHAT ARE LAF’S KEY TAKEAWAYS?

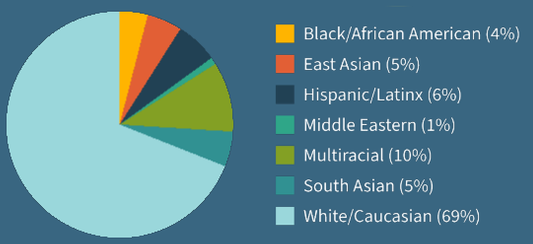
- Firms and individuals continue to value diversity, equity, and inclusion with 100% of respondents in both surveys agreeing on the importance of DEI in both the workplace and in design work.
- Individuals’ trust in the workplace has generally improved, but there is still work to be done, especially among workers with disabilities.
- Earning potential and debt load are significant factors for individuals as they consider their journey within the profession.
- The majority of individual respondents would like to see increased DEI programming in their workplaces and from capacity-building organizations.
- Most responding firms reported they have not only maintained but deepened their investments to DEI, shifting from informal commitments to more structured and accountable practices that embed these values into the core operations of their organizations.
- 64% of firms reported that DEI has become more important to their clients over the past 5 years.

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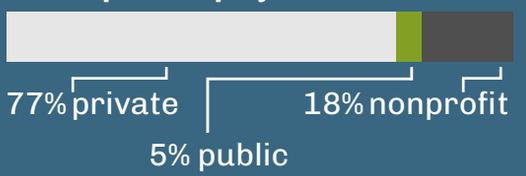
WHO TOOK LAF'S DEI SURVEY?

LAF received more than 350 responses to the individual survey from email subscribers, social media followers, and outreach conducted in-person at various events.

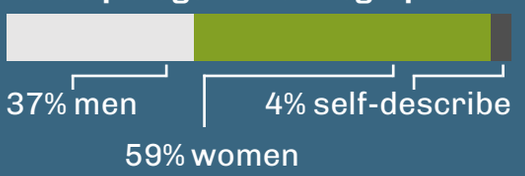
Participant demographic data



Participant employment sector



Participant gender demographics



The average age of participants was 46 years old. The youngest participant was 21 and the oldest was 92.

FINDINGS: INDIVIDUAL SURVEY

Similarly to LAF's 2019 survey, most respondents (86%) reported familiarity with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and 83% agreed these values are important in landscape architecture. Just over half (56%) said their workplaces are diverse. Compared to 2019, perceptions of workplace barriers have decreased slightly, dropping from 50% to 44%.

Regarding personal comfort, 20% of respondents identified as LGBTQ, but only 62% of those individuals reported being "out" at work. Reasons for keeping this private ranged from a desire to separate work and personal life to concerns about potential bias or discrimination. These results suggest that challenges related to representation and workplace comfort persist for the LGBTQ community.

As noted in 2019, the relationship between experience and licensure remains strong with each year of experience increasing likelihood of licensure by 18%. Based on new questions asked this year, the survey also found that debt played a notable role in the pursuit of professional certification. Those who reported that debt strongly influenced their career decisions were significantly less likely to be licensed (58%, $p < .01$). However, over time, debt concern acted as a motivating factor: for each additional year of experience, respondents with higher debt concern were 4% more likely to obtain licensure compared to those with lower concern ($p < .01$).

Debt initially acts as a barrier to licensure but later becomes a driver, motivating individuals to seek out credentials as a pathway to new opportunities.

Survey participants were also asked about their opinions and attitudes toward their workplaces. Respondents working for private companies reported 50% greater trust in their employers than those in the nonprofit and public sectors. This difference may reflect the smaller sample size of nonprofit and public sector respondents, or it could be linked to broader political dynamics. Additionally, respondents with disabilities reported 38% less trust in their workplace ($p < .05$), suggesting a need for improved accommodations and issues with workplace culture. There were no significant findings for other identity groups on the topic of workplace trust for the 2024 survey.

When asked about their employer's expertise in DEI-related topics, men were 29% more likely to agree that their firm had the skills and knowledge to be effective in these areas ($p < .05$). Race, sexuality, and disability status did not significantly affect these perceptions, though disability status approached significance ($p = .066$), with respondents rating their employers 33% lower on these topics as compared to individuals without disabilities. These non-significant results may reflect genuine improvements in workplace conditions. However, they may also be attributable to the smaller sample size relative to 2019 or to changes in the composition of survey respondents across the two survey years. As in the previous survey, race was analyzed in two broad categories—white and non-white—due to sample size constraints that make it difficult to assess differences among individual racial and ethnic groups.

Respondents who were not male and/or not white reported feeling significantly less valued as members of the workplace.

When considering the profession as a whole, 52% of respondents agreed there is a need for additional DEI programming. Older respondents were significantly less likely to perceive this need ($p < .001$) and were also less likely to be aware of current programming offered by the American Society of Landscape Architecture (ASLA) and LAF ($p < .001$). While awareness of existing programs did not directly affect whether respondents felt more programming was needed, about half of respondents were familiar with LAF programs (46%) and ASLA programs (51%).

In open-ended responses, many respondents cited a lack of awareness about current initiatives, which suggests that better communication could increase participation and satisfaction. Additional themes included calls for stronger outreach specifically to Indigenous communities, concerns about the costs associated with participating in professional organizations, and interest in expanding DEI efforts to address neurodivergence and disability advocacy.

ABOUT LAF'S DEI SURVEYS

What:
LAF's 2024-25 DEI surveys build on the initial surveys conducted in 2019.

The survey for individuals included a number of agree/disagree Likert-type questions on the topics of personal values, workplace culture, and feelings of belonging.

A second survey for firms focused on firm demographics and yes/no questions with the opportunity for respondents to provide open-ended comments.

When:
Data collection was completed from October 2024 through February 2025.

Respondents:
350+ landscape architects and designers responded to the individual survey. LAF conducted broad outreach through email, social media, and in-person solicitation at the 2024 ASLA conference. Individuals and organizations were encouraged to share the survey link with their own networks.

18 firms responded to the organizational survey. LAF reached out to firms individually to ensure responses were completed by an individual with access to necessary policy and demographic information.

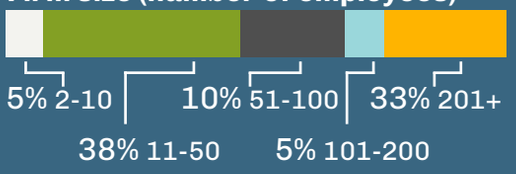
Geographic Representation:
40 states plus Washington, DC and Puerto Rico as well as a number of international respondents were represented in the individual survey.

12 states plus Washington, DC were named in the firm survey with additional respondents simply reporting multiple offices.

WHICH FIRMS TOOK LAF'S DEI SURVEY?

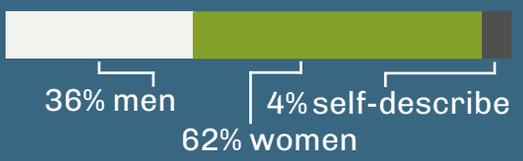
LAF reached out to more than 50 firms and received 18 responses.

Firm size (number of employees)

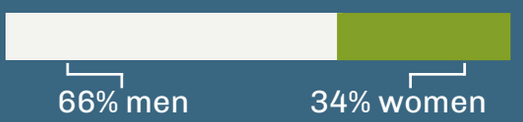


In total, firms surveyed employed nearly 1,100 landscape architects who were involved in an average of 91% of firms' projects.

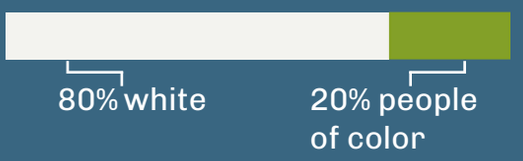
Overall gender distribution in firms



Gender representation in firms' senior leadership



Racial representation in firms' senior leadership



On average, employees worked at participant firms for more than 7 years.

FINDINGS: FIRM SURVEY

As in 2019, every firm surveyed reported being familiar with the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and recognized these values as important in the workplace. This consistent level of awareness suggests that DEI continues to be a well-established priority across landscape architecture. Over the past several years, national conversations about equity and social justice have gained significant momentum – and they have faced significant pushback. In response, many firms within the profession appear to have not only sustained their commitment to DEI but also deepened their investment in these efforts.

All 18 firms that participated in the 2024 survey operate in the private sector. Unfortunately, LAF was not able to gather responses from public agencies or nonprofit organizations during this cycle. This absence may reflect the limited capacity of these organizations to take part in voluntary surveys, especially given that many public and nonprofit sector entities are often stretched thin, managing competing demands with limited resources. It may also indicate a need for additional outreach and relationship-building to ensure that future surveys include a broader and more representative range of respondents. Despite this limitation, the participating private firms provided valuable insight into how the landscape architecture profession is approaching DEI efforts in 2024.

One-third of survey respondents indicated that, in addition to maintaining a focus on DEI, they have actively updated their commitments within the past five years. These updates included codifying policies, establishing dedicated work groups, formalizing practices, and setting new, measurable goals to ensure their work continues to evolve and remain relevant in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

Respondents reported a unanimous commitment to hold steady and continue building on how they address DEI in the workplace and project work.

When asked about the barriers they face in advancing DEI, half of the participating firms (50%) reported encountering significant challenges, especially a lack of awareness about the profession among underrepresented communities and the high cost of the specialized education required to enter the field. These challenges highlight the need for early outreach and more accessible pathways into landscape architecture careers. Still, firms expressed optimism

about their progress. A strong majority (71%) reported that their efforts to date have been successful, particularly in areas such as recruitment and youth outreach. These successes suggest that while challenges remain, intentional, targeted actions are beginning to make a measurable difference. However, it takes years for recruitment efforts to be reflected among senior leadership; firm leadership demographics on racial and gender representation are similar to 2019.

Clients place increasing value on the makeup of project teams. 94% of firms report clients seek out diverse teams, compared to 76% in 2019.

The survey also explored how clients perceive diversity and whether their expectations have shifted over time. Nearly all firms reported that the diversity of their teams was important to their clients. This trend highlights how external demand is reinforcing internal DEI priorities. Furthermore, 64% of respondents observed that diversity has become more important to clients over the past five years, while the remaining 36% reported that client interest has remained steady.

Together, these findings point to a positive trajectory for DEI in landscape architecture. Firms are not only sustaining their commitments but also expanding their work in ways that respond to both internal values and external pressures. Clients, too, are increasingly recognizing the value of diverse teams, which may further drive investment and innovation. While additional data is needed to capture the perspectives of public and nonprofit organizations, this snapshot of the private sector suggests a strong and growing alignment between professional practice, client expectations, and broader societal conversations on DEI.

As in 2019, this year's survey concluded by asking firms what types of support would be most helpful in advancing their DEI efforts in both firm management and project work. Once again, two main themes emerged: strengthening the educational pipeline and introducing landscape architecture to students earlier in their academic journeys. Respondents acknowledged progress in this area, pointing to LAF's Ignite program and ASLA's K–12 outreach initiatives as meaningful steps forward. However, firms emphasized that more work remains to be done to address systemic barriers to entry and build a more inclusive future for the profession.

WHAT ARE LAF'S NEXT STEPS?

LAF plans to continue reviewing the state of DEI within the profession by conducting follow-up surveys on a regular basis. During times of instability, these surveys may happen more frequently to better understand how LAF can best support landscape architects and respond in real-time.

To support the next generation of landscape architects, LAF will continue its work to elevate diverse voices and provide opportunities for research, leadership development, and scholarship programs, especially **LAF Ignite**. This program provides scholarship support, paid summer internships, and ongoing mentorship for BIPOC students throughout the course of their landscape architecture education. Additional scholarship opportunities are available to students from a variety of backgrounds, promoting the development of a professional workforce that reflects the people and communities for whom we design.

LAF's DEI Committee 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:

rbooher@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. 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 RStudio. 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 Committee for their support in the development of these surveys. Thank you as well to the partners, firms, individuals, and organizations that participated and helped to share the surveys widely.

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