

The Wisconsin DEI Challenge

AIA Wisconsin Awards Booklet
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Wisco NOMA and AIA Wisconsin are challenging firms to become allies in intentionally building equitable and empowering work environments for BIPOC professionals.

In alignment with the National Organization of Minority Architects, the Wisconsin NOMA chapter has created the Wisconsin Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Challenge in collaboration with AIA Wisconsin. The challenge is specific to the injustices faced by BIPOC design professionals in Wisconsin. We take this responsibility very seriously and are passionate to succeed because it is a legacy we will leave behind for all future children. A legacy of humanity is more important than any other legacy.

2020 brought us together to battle Covid. During that time, it was impossible to ignore the racism and witness its impact on people of color, specifically Black people who maintain a position at the bottom of the minority group ladder in the world including corporate America. It is our hope that the use of ignorance to avoid making real micro changes will be voided with you as our allies to fight racial discrimination. The Wisconsin DEI Challenge is an opportunity for all Wisconsin design firms to play a role in making real changes instead of relying on previous macro level changes that did not advance Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in corporate America.

The role of the Wisconsin DEI Challenge core team is to help firms Activate, Educate, and Navigate the Wisconsin DEI Challenge. We will partner with the firms who choose to be our allies to figure out the best solutions to address the issues presented. We promise to be a safe place to unite, where no one is going to be judged for their honesty. We will take no offense to your questions and suggestions to ensure that we find solutions to empower BIPOC employees in the profession.

For the last year and a half, the Wisconsin DEI Challenge core team engaged with industry leader, Dr. Shalini Nag from EvidaSolve, a people, performance and culture strategist to help us further develop a defined process and strong foundation as we administer the Challenge. The most important outcome is the Seven Guiding Principles that will be shared with our allies in roundtable discussions. The Seven Guiding Principles are based on experiences shared by BIPOC architects within Wisco NOMA. These principles will assist us to find the real changes that will promote Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color within WI AEC firms and beyond. They include:

Fair Treatment – where contributors are rewarded and recognized fairly as well as opportunities awarded fairly in firms.

Appreciating Differences – where differing opinions, perspectives and even word choices especially due to language barrier are valued and respected in the work space.

Psychological Safety – where expression of true feelings, situations and challenges are encouraged with empathy, and goals implemented to help and not challenge the brave honesty.

Representation – where executive leadership, managers, and lead project architects are as diverse as the broader organization.

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Belonging – where leaders and teams genuinely care about each other and take note when Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are not included. This includes social non-work interactions where business is usually discussed that leads to promotions due to the personal connections made.

Development – where feedback is fair, consistent, candid, and growth-oriented for everyone in the firm.

Decision-making – where ideas and input from the broader team are proactively sought and considered.

We would like to thank the current Wisconsin DEI Challenge allies Kahler Slater, The Kubala Washakto Architects, Zimmerman Architectural Studios, Workshop Architects, Erdman, and our supporter HGA Architects and Engineers. There is much more to do, so on June 1, 2022, we are inviting more firms to join us to achieve these goals that were based on BIPOC experiences in Wisconsin. The firms joining the challenge are working with us and together we were playing a part in leaving behind a legacy of humanity to future generations