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# A Letter from the President

## Welcome to the 2022 AIA Wisconsin Design Awards Gala!

Now in its second year, the annual awards gala allows us to celebrate the contributions that our incredibly talented, creative, and dedicated AIA Wisconsin members bring to our profession and our communities. Using the AIA's *Framework for Design Excellence* as a measure, we are truly blessed to showcase a dozen amazing projects that reflect the beauty and function of architecture, all within our profession's mission to invest in our future through equity and sustainability. We also showcase those who are the mentors of the profession, in the form of the Golden Award, which recognizes a career of distinguished service to our profession, and in the AIA Wisconsin Young Architect Awards and AIA Milwaukee Emerging Professions Design Competition Award, which show that the future of architecture in Wisconsin is in very capable hands.

But it is imperative that we ensure a continuum of great talent and dedicated professionals. So "giving back" is an essential part of the evening, as the Wisconsin Architects Foundation (WAF) with AIA Wisconsin prepare to implement the Dream Spaces scholarship program that was introduced at last year's Design Awards Gala.

We have worked closely with UW-Milwaukee School of Architecture and Urban Planning to implement this full-tuition college scholarship opportunity to increase access to architectural education for those typically underrepresented in our profession. And thanks to some extremely generous donors, at last year's Design Award Gala we raised an amazing \$40,000 toward this goal of funding a student through all the way to graduation. And it is our hope that we continue to support more students in this manner as the years go on. Please help your fellow professionals develop more equitable future for the architects of Wisconsin by donating specifically to the Dream Spaces program (at [dreamspaces.org](http://dreamspaces.org)) or by being a sustaining annual contributor to Wisconsin Architects Foundation, which has been supporting scholarships, grant opportunities, and public outreach for our profession for 70 years.

As the current president of AIA Wisconsin and recent Past-President of the Wisconsin Architects Foundation, I am humbled by the dedication of those who help support AIA Wisconsin membership. From the AIA Wisconsin staff, through those volunteers who serve the AIA at National, State, Section, or Committee levels, and those groups who support our goals as Sponsors and Exhibitors; it truly "takes a village" to make it all happen. And we are always looking for a wider, more diverse group of ideas and change makers, so be it in the form of a WAF donation or spot on a Committee, please consider getting involved.

We are in a new era for the profession of Architecture. The Awards celebrated herein, for both our tactile works and our mentorship, for our past and for our future, reinforce that we are well positioned to be the leaders that take on the local and global challenges ahead. We are all capable of doing so much more.

  
**Paul Grzeszczak, AIA**  
AIA Wisconsin 2022 President



# The Wisconsin DEI Challenge

WISCO NOMA & AIA WISCONSIN ARE CHALLENGING FIRMS TO BECOME ALLIES IN INTENTIONALLY BUILDING EQUITABLE AND EMPOWERING WORK ENVIRONMENTS FOR BIPOC PROFESSIONALS.

BY ANINA MBILINYI, AIA, NOMA;  
MARION CLENDENEN-ACOSTA, AIA  
NOMA; TARUNA GUPTA, NOMA;  
RANA MALIK, ASSOC. AIA, NOMA

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 witnessed 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 only 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, Appreciating Differences, Psychological Safety, Representation, Belonging, Development, and Decision-making.

Visit [wiconoma.com/wi-dei](https://wiconoma.com/wi-dei) for more details on joining.

## Join the Challenge

- 1 TAKE THE PLEDGE**  
The first step for your company to join the Wisconsin DEI Challenge is to take the pledge with us to improve DEI efforts in the workplace.
- 2 BECOME A PARTNER**  
The second step in aligning your company with the Wisconsin DEI Challenge is to become an annual contributing partner to Wisco NOMA during the term of your commitment.
- 3 CONDUCT THE SURVEY**  
The third step is to conduct the initial employee survey. All results are confidential and are only used for Wisconsin DEI analysis.
- 4 REPORT YOUR PROGRESS**  
The fourth step is to report your firm's progress on the Action Items.

The goal of the Wisconsin DEI Challenge is to celebrate the progress firms are currently making to foster healthier work environments. We will build on those macro changes by honing in on specific details that firms should implement to empower minorities with opportunities for advancement. The process of fostering real change is supported by the guidance and expertise of Wisco NOMA, AIA Wisconsin, and all participating firms in the DEI Challenge. The Wisconsin DEI challenge will expose you to the reality of bias, limitation, and oversight that has been the norm for too long within Wisconsin's firm culture. This is where the challenge emerges. To see real change, you must acknowledge that a real problem exists—and all those benefiting from it are perpetuating that problem. Wisco NOMA is inviting firms to engage in the Wisconsin DEI Challenge to design better, smarter, and more equitable ways to work so that everyone benefits.

### The Wisconsin DEI Challenge Team

**Marion Clendenen-Acosta, AIA, NOMA**  
Immediate Past-President of Wisco-NOMA; DEI Committee Co-Chair; Associate Principal, Kahler Slater, Inc

**Anina Mbilinyi, AIA, NOMA**  
DEI Committee Co-Chair; Senior Project Architect, Flad Architects

**Taruna Gupta, NOMA**  
Wisco-NOMA Parliamentarian; Senior Associate, HGA

**Rana Malik, Assoc. AIA, NOMA**  
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## MEET THE DEI COMMITTEE CORE TEAM



**Marion Clendenen-Acosta, AIA**  
DEI Committee Co-Chair  
Associate Principal  
Kahler Slater, Inc.



**Wekeana Lassiter**  
Project Specialist  
Kahler Slater, Inc.



**Taruna Gupta, AIA**  
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**Rana Malik, Assoc. AIA**  
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**Lisa Kennedy, FAIA**  
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**Anina Mbilinyi, AIA**  
DEI Committee Co-Chair  
Lead Project Architect  
Flad Architects

# The Wisconsin DEI Challenge

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

BY ANINA MBILINYI, AIA, NOMA, WISCO NOMA; MARION CLENDENEN-ACOSTA, AIA, NOMA, WISCO NOMA; TARUNA GUPTA, AIA, NOMA, WISCO NOMA

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 witnessed 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

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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



From left to right: Tessa Begay, Assoc. AIA; Sewta Meier, AIA; Taruna Gupta, AIA; Erik Hanock, AIA; Marion Clendenen-Acosta, AIA; Jason Pugh; Anina Mbilinyi, AIA; Michael Ford, AIA; Rafeeq Asad; Zaneta Jones

Photo courtesy of WiscoNOMA | 2021 Fall Mixer



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.

**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 Wiscoinsin DEI Challenge allies Kahler Slater, The Kubala Washatko 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 are based on BIPOC experiences in Wiscoinsin. The firms joining the challenge are working with us and together we are playing a part in leaving behind a legacy of humanity to future generations.

The goal of the Wiscoinsin DEI Challenge is to celebrate the progress firms are currently making to foster healthier work environments. We will build on those macro changes by honing in on specific details that firms should implement to empower minorities with opportunities for advancement. The process of fostering real change is supported by the guidance and expertise of Wisco NOMA, AIA Wiscoinsin, and all participating firms in the DEI Challenge. The Wiscoinsin DEI challenge will expose you to the reality of bias, limitation, and oversight that has been the norm for too long within Wiscoinsin's firm culture. This is where the challenge emerges. To see real change, you must acknowledge that a real problem exists—and all those benefiting from it are perpetuating that problem. Wisco NOMA is inviting firms to engage in the Wiscoinsin DEI Challenge to design better, smarter, and more equitable ways to work so that everyone benefits.

## The 7 Guiding Principles

**Fair Treatment**

**Appreciating Differences**

**Psychological Safety**

**Representation**

**Belonging**

**Development**

**Decision-making**

Visit [wisconoma.com/wi-dei](https://wisconoma.com/wi-dei) for more details on joining.

### AUTHORS



Anina is a Lead Project Architect at Flad Architects and Co-Chair of the Wiscoinsin DEI Challenge. She is one of the two licensed Black Women architects in Wiscoinsin with over 25 years of industry experience. Anina has devoted her career working on award-winning complex buildings that serve to improve health and save lives across the world. She is a champion of sustainability, and she is passionate about environmental justice and social justice.



Marion Clendenen-Acosta is an Architect, Project Manager and Associate Principal at Kahler Slater, with 30 years of experience working primarily on healthcare projects; which aligns with her personal and cultural creed for the sick to be nourished, the aged protected, and the infants cared for. Marion is the Immediate Past President of Wisco NOMA (2020 & 2021) and serves as the chapter's Wiscoinsin DEI Committee Co-Chair.



Taruna is a Project Designer at Groth Design Group and a 2022-23 Board Member of Wisco NOMA. She is a member of the DEI Challenge Committee and additionally serves as Co-Chair of the Events, Programming, Outreach & Social Media Committee. She is also actively involved in Women in Design Milwaukee as a Committee Member.

## Join the 2022 Challenge

BEGINS JUNE 1, 2022

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