

AIA MN Committee on Equity in the Built Environment

Meeting Minutes

November 17, 2021 at 8:30 am CT

Present: Isaac Karley, Kaitlyn Schalow, John Dwyer, Ananth Shankar, Stan Ross, Becca Staley, Imani Mosher, Paul Bauknight, PaviElle French

Discussion question: what gets in the way of you working toward greater equity in the built environment?

John: starting from behind in the academic world

Kaitlyn: the traditional design process and how ingrained it is in our profession right now

- community engagement process - single male architect doing design upon the community
- the IPD process doesn't allow for meaningful community engagement because it pushes a quicker design process

Ananth: Lack of diversity in the profession and in the corporate board rooms

Isaac: for white-led organizations, they seem to share a perspective that it is a zero-sum game, not the idea that we all do better when everyone is given opportunity and a seat at the table

Stan/Imani: lack of representation is because of the lack of pathways to the profession

Ananth: students may not really understand the architecture profession as well as they understand other professions

Paul: how do you give ppl opportunity when selection processes are weighed so heavily toward firms who are large, have an established portfolio

Isaac: I wonder if sometimes we get too caught up in being architects and need to remember to be more collaborative with other stakeholders and more willing to create community-centered solutions, even if it's not a building

Kaitlyn: it seems that urban planners have a better understanding of the systemic impacts of racism, so working with them more as well as landscape architects

Ananth: the pay for the amount of education architects need to put in is not worthwhile

Paul: in order to build trust with a community it takes time, and we say we want to build that trust but we don't want to invest the time to do it, because there is pressure to complete the project quickly

How does society see the value of architects? How do we express that value? How do we communicate that our value is important?

John: community and technical colleges present an effective entryway into the profession that is more affordable. These types of schools are better at making their students job-ready by the time they graduate, and 60% of students graduate with no debt.

The system of higher ed is broken - the cost of it is growing at an unsustainable pace

Isaac: there does seem to be a shift in what cities are looking for when they put out RFQs for projects - they seem to be changing their systems and processes to be more equitable and inclusive

Kaitlyn: how do white-led firms authentically collaborate with BIPOC firms when we're working in marginalized communities?

- Paul: you should work with BIPOC firms all the time, not just when you are working with a marginalized community

Themes arising from today's discussion:

- Pathways to the profession, diversifying the profession
- Changing the way we are perceived and valued by the public
- Engagement with communities and delivering outcomes that they need
- Systems (the design process, IPD, selection processes)
- Expanding the tent - allowing people into the processes who may not have the 'right' training or credentials but have the expertise and skills
 - expanding the definition of architect to include other deliverables, not just a building (how many people actually will build a building in their lives?)

Craig Wilkins, in *The Aesthetics of Equity*, talks about this conversation and how it ties to architecture; Seiku Cook also talks about this challenge

Kaitlyn: How does the white, euro-centric nature of the architectural canon impact the way we design and create?

- John notes that in his classes he and students are discussing the way that architectural language is so white, male-centered. How can we find a new language that is not so exclusive?
- Archispeak in itself creates a big barrier for clients/end users

Kaitlyn wonders - are there other associations/groups having discussions similar to the ones we are having here?

- Paul: yes, other groups ARE having these conversations

How do we think of the pipeline and youth outreach as a system? We need to establish more of a stepped system (like youth sports) to stay with students throughout their K-12 career instead of treating youth engagement as a one-off