

Compensation

KEY TOPICS

audit
compensation philosophy
compensation policy
compensation structure
discrimination
external equity
flexible work
internal equity
merit
office housework
opportunity gap
parity
productivity
socioeconomic inequality
suppressed earnings
transparency
value of work
wage gap

Compensation issues exist throughout our profession arising from inequitable opportunities, valuation of work, and pay practices. Removing compensation gaps supports the influx, development, and retention of talent and the economic stability and growth of individuals, firms, and the profession.

This guide discusses current wage gaps in architecture, how they occur, and what their impacts are and suggests steps for evaluating, establishing, and maintaining equity and parity in compensation.



AIA



The University of Minnesota for the American Institute of Architects Equity and the Future of Architecture Committee

What is compensation?

Compensation is the sum of all tangible and intangible value provided by employers to employees in exchange for work. Employers use compensation to attract, recognize, and retain employees. Employees use it to achieve a standard of living, gauge the relative value of their work contribution to an employer and to society, and make employment choices.

Compensation in the contemporary workplace consists of three categories: direct financial compensation, indirect financial compensation, and nonfinancial compensation.

- *Direct financial compensation* is money paid directly to employees: hourly pay, salary, overtime, bonuses.
- *Indirect financial compensation* has financial value but is not paid monetarily: paid time off (vacation, sick leave, personal time), paid family and medical leave, health insurance, disability insurance, life insurance, retirement contributions, pension, stock options, profit sharing, relocation expenses, travel expenses, registration costs, educational benefits, employee services (like childcare, low-cost or free meals, counseling, legal referral, career planning, wellness plans, gym memberships), and employee perks (such as the use of laptops, phones, event tickets, vehicles, apartments).
- *Nonfinancial compensation* is value given that is nonmonetary for career building and increasing job satisfaction: *opportunities* such as plum assignments, promotions, increased decision-making and leadership responsibilities, mentorship and sponsorship, training; *recognition* through praise and awards, time with leaders, networking introductions, recommendations; *quality of experience* through workspace upgrades, more desirable tasks, flexibility, positive social exchange.

GAPS

Women in the United States earn 80 cents per dollar earned by men for full-time work.¹ That compensation in the United States is neither equal nor equitable is clearly reflected in the wage gaps that exist between almost every demographic—gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, physical ability, age—for both salaried and hourly workers, regardless of education level, occupation, or industry.² Here are additional gaps as of 2017: Compared to a dollar earned by white men, Asian women earn 87 cents, white women earn 79 cents, black women earn 63 cents, Latinas earn 54 cents; mothers as compared to fathers earn 71 cents.³ Compared to a dollar earned by Asian men, white men earn 84 cents, black men earn 64 cents, and Hispanic men earn 56 cents. Compared to people without disabilities, people with disabilities earn 68 cents, and compared to men with disabilities, women with disabilities earn 72 cents.⁴ It is estimated that gay and bisexual men are paid 10–32% less than heterosexual men, and lesbians are paid less than men but possibly more than heterosexual women.⁵

Wage gaps will not go away on their own. Looking at the gender wage gap for women as compared to men, in the United States it was near 60% in the 1960s; today it is 80%, with most progress in closing the gap occurring between 1980–98 but slowing considerably since then.⁶ Closing education and experience gaps played a large role in that convergence but no longer account substantially for the gender wage gap. Currently, the gap is smallest at the start of careers and grows largest later in careers at top pay scales.

What causes the gender wage gap? Approximately 50% of the gap is attributable to people's location in the labor market (i.e., which occupations men and women hold in which industries, at which firms they are employed, and the level they occupy in the hierarchy), 15% to experience (due to work interruptions and shorter hours for women in high-skill occupations, with wage penalties for flexible work arrangements and motherhood), and 38% to factors more difficult to attribute, relating to conventional gender roles and identity and likely stemming from bias and discrimination.⁷ For example, research shows that traits associated with each gender are rewarded unequally in the workplace, due to biased

perception of personality, risk-taking, competitiveness, negotiation, etc. Men are typically rewarded for exhibiting traits traditionally considered masculine, but when women exhibit these same traits, they are not rewarded but are often penalized for them—a “double bind.” It is important to recognize that differences in identity roles and norms both respond to and cause wage gaps, creating a feedback loop that may increase wage gaps unless interrupted.

Compensation for employees in architecture follows a similar pattern. Salary data reveals that on average, white men earn more than nonwhite men, who earn more than white women, with nonwhite women earning the least. Average salaries for men are higher than women’s at every year of experience, with average starting pay difference within a few thousand dollars, then increasingly diverging to approximately a 15% pay gap in late career. For both men and women, earnings is most commonly cited as integral to career success, and lack of compensation (in the form of pay, promotions, opportunities, professional development, and meaningful work) is the predominant reason why both men and women leave jobs in architecture or leave architecture altogether.⁸

PARITY AND EQUITY

Ideally, the value of compensation will equal the value of work (compensation value = work value); both sides of the equation must be valued as accurately as possible, with all components of each side properly weighted ($C_1a+C_2b\dots = W_1c+W_2d\dots$). The compensation equation is valid for the employer and the employee when both parties understand and agree on the accuracy of the compensation-to-work valuation, and compensation is equitable when comparable employees get the same results. Employer opinions vary but generally regard comparable employees as having similar skills, education, experience, qualifications, seniority, location, performance.⁹

Two comparable employees who do the same work for different compensation lack parity. *Pay parity* or equality in the legal sense is *equal pay for equal work*, requiring that there be no pay gap based on gender (and in some states, race or ethnicity) for any reason when comparing two people who do the same work. Currently, women are paid on average 4% less than men, and as much as 45% less, for the same role, and men are offered higher salaries than women for the same work 63% of the time.¹⁰ This type of pay inequality between demographic groups is relatively easy to determine and should be immediately addressed in every workplace, as mandated by law. (See the “Compensation Discrimination” section of this guide.)

Two comparable employees who do different work of equal value for different compensation lack equity. *Pay equity* in the legal sense is *equal pay for work of equal value*, requiring that there be no pay gap between people

of any protected group who perform work of the same value and that pay be administered fairly. Though both pay disparity and pay inequity contribute to wage gaps, the gaps overwhelmingly result from pay inequity.

Calculating equal value and determining what is fair can be difficult, with much room for error. Yet pay equity is critical for reducing discrimination and increasing overall equity, since people with nondominant/target identities often perform different work than people with dominant/agent identities (some by choice, some not), and their work is not always fairly compensated according to its value. For example, women’s employment is often concentrated in certain jobs and in certain fields, and these jobs tend to be undervalued compared with men’s jobs. The median pay for information technology managers (mostly men) is 27% higher than for human resource managers (mostly women); when more women became designers, the overall wages for designers fell 34%.¹¹

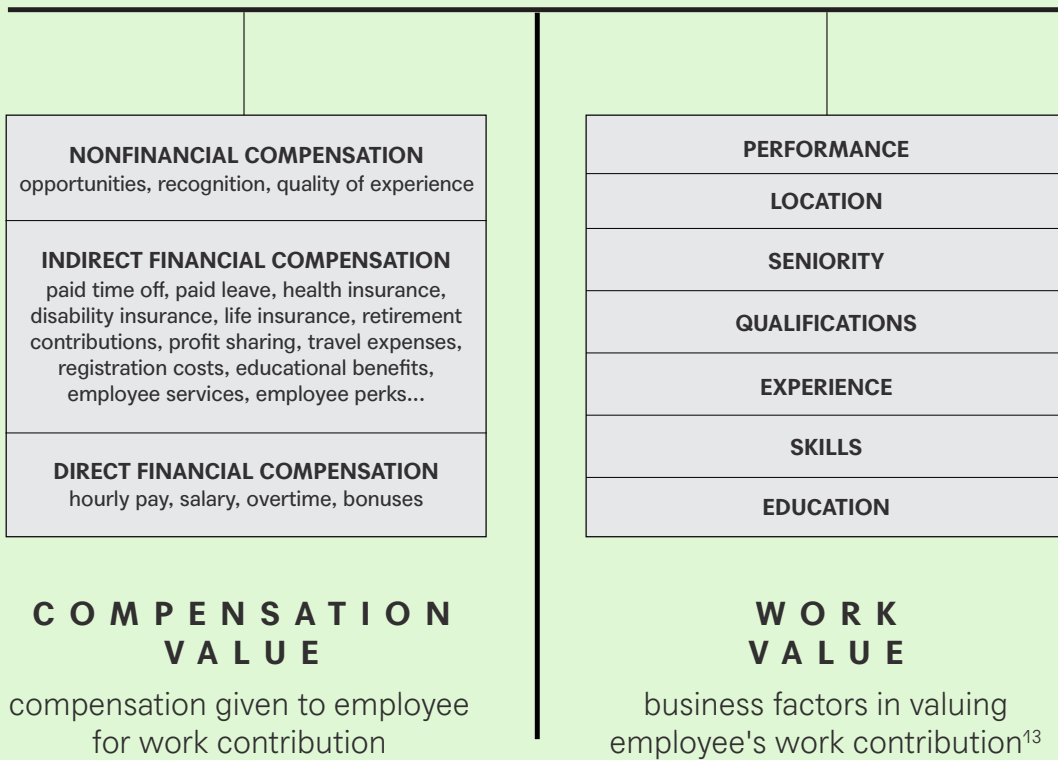
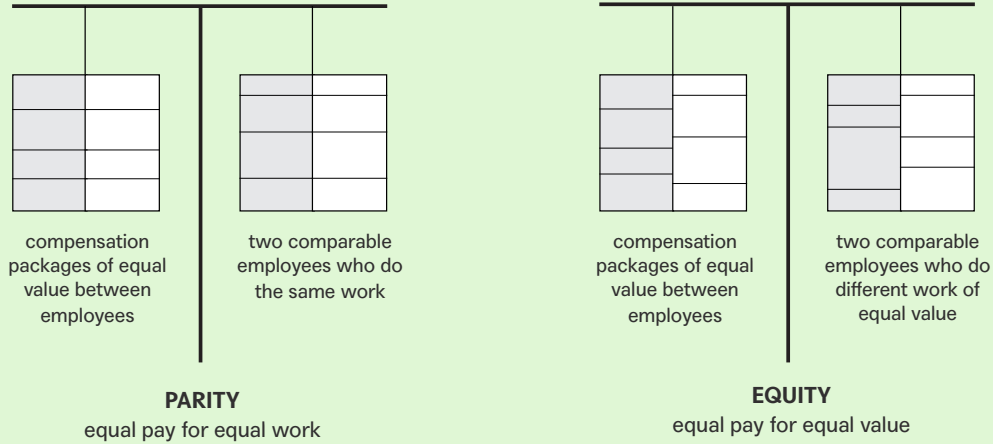
“When people are on a fast-track project, they get more work done in less time, and they don’t necessarily get paid overtime. So we need to move to a perspective of value-based fees. It’s more about how you perform.”

CEO and Owner, White, Female, 59

Within a single organization, compensation gaps occur due to inconsistent practices influenced by bias and discrimination and exacerbated by lack of transparency—only 13% of businesses with under one thousand employees are transparent with their employees about pay policies and rates, and those small- and medium-sized businesses have gender gaps that exceed the national average.¹² When looking at how to make compensation fair internally, firms also have to consider external factors to remain competitive in the market and be able to recruit and retain employees. Perceived inequity or unfairness, either internal (compared to other employees in the firm) or external (compared to employees in other firms), can result in low morale and loss of organizational effectiveness. For example, if employees feel they are being unfairly compensated, they may curtail their efforts or leave the organization, damaging the firm’s overall performance.

To address the broader institutional issue that employee roles are a predominant contributor to wage gaps—and roles are not necessarily properly valued or equitably attainable across demographic groups—there should also be a focus on fairness within the full set of employees and leaders at a firm, between the lowest- and highest-paid workers, and not just between employees at the same level. One strong measure of equity is the ratio of compensation of firm leaders to lowest-paid employees. Similarly, employee productivity at all levels that contributes to firm profits should be recognized and equitably rewarded. Acknowledging that compensation equity is related to structural imbalance, some states and cities are starting to pass pay-ratio acts to limit company-leader pay to an established numerical factor of their median worker pay.

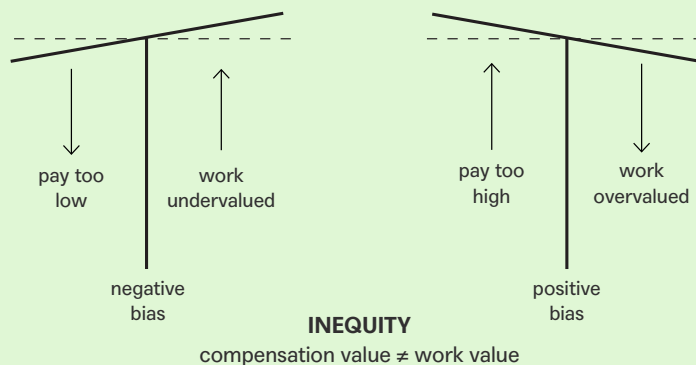
To truly achieve compensation equity, and no longer have wage gaps between any demographic groups, we must address larger societal structures to ensure that work is compensated according to its actual value to society and that there are no barriers for anyone to enter and advance in any line of work. In other words, our economy needs to become equitable. Because that is not the reality today, we can establish compensation equity as a shared goal within our profession and act to make other structures in society more just. Even so, achieving zero wage gaps does not necessarily equate to a healthy profession or nation, as simply closing gaps may not alone solve the multiple sources of inequity that created them. Compensation is not just about wages, and equity rests on vastly more than equal earnings.



COMPENSATION EQUITY SCALE

To compensate means to equalize or balance what is given with what is given back; it is a counterbalance.

For compensation value to equal work value and balance the scale for an individual employee and between employees, all factors need to be included in the weighing with the correct valuation ($C_1a+C_2b... = W_1c+W_2d...$), and be free of bias and discrimination.



Why are compensation parity and equity important?

Compensation signals the value an individual brings to the workplace, the values of a business, and the value of work within society. It is a mechanism by which the workforce makes choices and businesses operate. The soundness of this mechanism is compromised when compensation decisions are based on irrelevant characteristics rather than bona fide business factors—the relationship between value given by an employee and value returned by an employer becomes inequitable, and both parties are impacted negatively.

In architecture, this mechanism is constrained by the limitations of a commodity- and service-based business model.¹⁴ For most firms the funds available for employee pay and other benefits are relatively low in comparison to other industries. While new and better-communicated value propositions and possibly large structural changes could change the magnitude of fees for architectural work, more money in the system will not by itself solve compensation equity issues, and in some respects could even exacerbate them (think about equity issues in law, finance, tech). On the other hand, investing in diversity, equity, and inclusion can increase the value of our work, allowing gains generated to be invested back into businesses and people.

INDIVIDUALS

Self-determination · Transparency about salaries and clear links between career stage, experience, and pay help individuals make informed choices based on distinct pathways and expectations.¹⁵

Merit · Employment decisions based on merit can help level the playing field, yet bias can easily taint seemingly objective determinations of “what is good.” When merit is espoused as an organizational value, merit-based decisions and rewards without strong equitable practices throughout the firm result in more biased outcomes that favor dominant groups, a “paradox of meritocracy.”¹⁶

Job Satisfaction · Equal pay contributes to engagement, motivation, productivity, and retention.¹⁷

Financial Security · Suppressed earnings reduce one's means of securing life necessities and opportunities and for balancing work, personal, and family life. An early-career pay discrepancy magnifies over time, leading to a large lifetime pay loss.¹⁸ Cumulative gaps have significant consequences, especially for women, including fewer resources to draw on in later years.¹⁹

Debt · As socioeconomic, racial, and gender diversity in schools increase and the nation's student loan crisis balloons, the number of students with loan debt and the amount of their debts—especially for women—increases.²⁰ Lower pay scales in architecture compared to other professions make justifying staying in or even choosing to enter the profession more difficult.²¹

Caregiving · Inflexible workplaces, stereotyping, and discrimination engender neotraditional roles, leading fathers to work more hours and mothers to work fewer hours than they would like or the lesser-paid (more often a woman) to leave the workforce to provide childcare. The departure is framed as a choice, but it is most often a result of low or unequal pay and gender discrimination.²²

Quality of Life · Pay gaps diminish quality of life for singles and couples and contribute to underpaid employees' stress and physical and mental health issues.²³

FIRMS

Workplace Culture · How a firm structures its compensation system and manages internal equity (within the firm) and external equity (between the firm and other organizations) may support or impair the firm's desired culture.

Recruitment and Retention · Transparency about pay scales and demonstrated commitment to pay equity help attract and keep talent. Low pay is the third most cited reason for both men and women leaving their last architecture job.²⁴

Cost of Turnover · Considering time and money costs of turnover—offboarding, hiring, onboarding, training, and lost productivity as a new employee learns the ropes—the actual cost of losing and replacing an employee may be anywhere from 20% to 200% of annual salary.²⁵

Morale · Fair and transparent pay structures and systems send employees a positive message, contribute to productivity and commitment, and reduce absenteeism.²⁶

Employee Development · Transparency helps employees at all levels understand the business of architecture, map their role in it, self-advocate, and navigate toward leadership.

The Law · Pay discrimination subjects a firm to expensive, time-consuming, and reputation-damaging legal claims.²⁷

PROFESSION

Perception · For the profession to be trusted and to thrive, architects must be perceived as upholding high standards and contributing to a better society in which people are valued and fairly rewarded.

Diversity and Talent · Only a narrow band of society is able or willing to enter a profession with low, unstable, or inequitable pay, and talent will leave the profession for better opportunities.

Long-Term Economic Stability · The cumulative impact of underpaying employees is to create a future burden for not only individuals but society as a whole.

“There are a lot of other careers that have a better work-life balance and higher pay. These things are just essential, and until they're addressed, until real systemic change is realized, I'm worried about the profession and about our ability to be more diverse.”

Director, Business Owner, Sole Practitioner,
and Educator, White, Female, 38

Compensation becomes more equitable when...

TRANSPARENCY

the compensation program is intentional and easy to explain

all employees understand the compensation components, structure, policies

criteria are clear for pay ranges, performance pay, advancement

employees understand their current pay-range placement

leaders openly share how the compensation program relates to the business

talking openly about pay is permitted without retaliation

ALIGNMENT

the compensation system aligns with the values and goals of the business

job descriptions are accurate

onboarding and mentoring impart how to advance in the workplace

variation within pay bands and benefits exist only due to performance

audits keep compensation fair and in line with structure

discrepancies are corrected and recovered through back wages or other compensation

COMPLIANCE

employers comply with pay equity laws

firms comply with legal requirements in compensating interns

firms respect personal privacy when discussing pay

discrimination is prevented and remediated without retaliation

FAIRNESS

perception is that all employees are treated fairly

bias is monitored and mitigated

all employees have equitable opportunity for high-profile assignments, networks, clients

employees are assessed on the value of their work, not necessarily hours in seats

pay and performance evaluations use objective criteria

benefits, including leaves and flextime, are distributed equitably

Compensation Discrimination

This section is intended to introduce you to important legal information regarding discrimination but is not a substitute for legal advice. For such advice, we strongly urge you to consult an attorney.

Employees must be compensated fairly, without discrimination. Compensation that is inequitable (not meeting standards for “equal pay for equal work” and “equal pay for work of equal value”) stunts individual, firm, and profession-wide productivity and growth, undermines diversity goals and a positive work environment, puts firms at legal risk, and limits our profession’s stature.

UNDERSTAND THE LAW AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Federal, state, and professional regulations regarding compensation equity are becoming increasingly rigorous.

The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces several federal laws that prohibit discrimination in employment compensation: the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA), and Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).²⁸ State and local laws may contain additional requirements.

- All forms of compensation are covered by discrimination law (salary, overtime, bonuses, stock options, profit sharing, life insurance, vacation/holiday pay, allowances, travel expenses, benefits, etc.).
- The EPA specifically addresses pay discrimination according to sex, requiring that men and women receive equal pay for equal work (jobs that require substantially equal skill, effort, and responsibility in similar working conditions) in the same workplace.²⁹
- Title VII, ADEA, and ADA are broader and prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, sexual

orientation), national origin, age, disability, or genetic information, and whether or not a job is substantially equal or within the same workplace establishment.

- The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act amended the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by providing that the 180-day statute of limitations (or 300 days in some states) for filing an equal-pay lawsuit regarding pay discrimination resets with each new paycheck affected by the discriminatory action.³⁰
- The EEOC requires some businesses to file an annual compliance survey.³¹
- It is against the law to retaliate against an individual for opposing compensation discrimination.
- In some states, it is illegal to ask for or make hiring or compensation decisions based on an applicant’s salary history; employers may be required to provide job-specific pay-scale information to applicants and employees. Employers can be prohibited from providing less favorable opportunities or failing to provide information about promotions or advancement; employers can be required to justify differences in compensation, even differences with other organizations.³²

The AIA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct is explicit about discrimination and compensation.

- Canon I, Rule 1.401 states, “Members shall not engage in harassment or discrimination in their professional activities on the basis of race, religion, national origin, age, disability, caregiver status, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.”
- Canon V, Ethical Standard 5.1 states, “Professional Environment: Members should provide their colleagues and employees with a fair and equitable working environment, compensate them fairly, and facilitate their professional development.”³³

HAVE PREVENTION MEASURES SUPPORTED BY POLICY

It is easier and less costly to prevent than rectify compensation discrimination. Thorough review of practices and clear written policies reduce vulnerabilities.

Prevention

- Clearly communicate the requirement of nondiscrimination in compensation.
- Share written policy with all employees.
- Outline multiple ways for employees to flag compensation problems.
- Review pay structures and starting, merit, and promotional pay policies.
- Audit pay practices and correct pay disparities.
- Limit manager discretion in setting pay, monitor compliance with policies, and keep a full record of decisions.
- Fully investigate complaints, and document clear remediation of each situation.

Policy

- Define compensation parity and equity for employees.
- Curtail biased decisions, with examples of how they occur and can be prevented.
- Outline remediation measures.
- Communicate commitment to nonretaliation and confidentiality.

RESPOND TO VIOLATIONS

Handling potential compensation violations can be difficult for both the employer and employee. The preferred approach is for the employee and employer to have an open conversation based on clear information, with the employer having the opportunity to address discrepancies. Speaking up should be regarded as an opportunity for all parties to improve equity.

Individuals

- Keep a written record of your work, performance reviews, and compensation.
- Identify any documents that reflect pay differences for equal work or work of equal value.
- Talk to your manager or HR about the disparity.
- If the discrimination continues, consider writing a formal letter or filing a complaint.

“Part of why I left my first job was that my husband, who worked for the same firm in a similar position, was getting raises three times what I was getting, and I had to fight for my increase.”

Architect, White, Female, 30–40

Managers, Firm Leader, or Human Resources

- Take all concerns seriously.
- Remain neutral in judgment, and keep each matter confidential.
- Prevent retaliation.
- Conduct an investigation or audit.
- Notify employee of resulting information and action to be taken.
- Update policies as needed.

USE THE LAW AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Employees experiencing compensation discrimination are not always able to find recourse through their employers. Some firms may not have adequate compensation structures and policies in place to be able to verify if their pay practices are equitable, or they may disagree with the employee regarding how their work is valued. When internal recourse is unavailing, the following are options to consider:

- File a timely complaint with the EEOC.³⁴
- Contact your state, county, and city agencies that enforce discrimination laws, called Fair Employment Practices Agencies (FEPAs).³⁵
- Check with your state’s department of labor.
- Seek legal assistance.³⁶
- File a complaint with the AIA National Ethics Council.³⁷
- Report an issue to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).³⁸

For closely related considerations and suggestions, see the *Intercultural Competence and Compensation* guides.

Assess

TRANSPARENCY

Do all employees understand the firm's compensation system? · How does your firm communicate its compensation structure, policies, and procedures? · Do you have clear job descriptions? · Do employees know your pay bands and evaluation processes and metrics? · Are there consistent messages relating to what work is valued and how rewards are given?

How are issues addressed? · Is pay adjusted based on regular pay audits? · Are legal requirements for equal pay and nondiscrimination followed? · Do you have a process for addressing complaints?

POWER

Who determines compensation in your workplace? · Is there consensus in leadership on how compensation practices relate to the organization's business goals? · Are managers and supervisors equipped to make aligned and equitable compensation decisions? · How are employees involved in establishing or understanding the wage structure? · Are employees free to discuss compensation issues among themselves?

Who benefits from the compensation system and who suffers? · Is the ratio of pay between the highest- and lowest-paid employees reasonable? · Do the firm's and employees' values around compensation align? · How do compensation practices support everyone to do their best work? · Is there equal access to desired opportunities and benefits? How is interest gauged and availability determined?

FAIRNESS

What is rewarded? · Do you value performance over hours and determine fee structures accordingly? · Have you established guidelines for pay and opportunities for employees who use flexible options? · Does your negotiation policy ensure the final outcome is fair to all?

How is compensation determined? · Do you have a process for determining wages that is free from bias? · Do you measure required skills and effort, level of responsibility, experience, and working conditions consistently? · Is your firm's performance review process objective and fairly administered? · Are bonuses comparable for similar levels of performance? · If there are gaps and variances, are they justifiable using legitimate rationales?

CONNECTIONS

How do your business practices affect compensation? · How do your practices influence client and public opinion about the value of architectural services? · Do economic pressures (such as to lower fees to secure work or to provide employee benefits) have a disparate impact on compensation of certain employees? · How do you monitor the ways competitive practices affect equity across pay levels?

What other factors impact compensation? · Are your pay and other benefits perceived as fair when employees compare them to those of other similar organizations, and is this helping or hurting your equity goals? · How does your compensation philosophy relate to your community and culture? · Do client preferences for subjective things, like certain employee personalities or identities, divert compensation decisions from the firm's objective criteria?

Act

INDIVIDUALS

The persistence of gaps and the substantial cumulative impact of compensation on career and life make it important for employees to be aware of issues and be diligent in taking steps to help increase equity.

KNOW THE P(L)AYING FIELD

Stay on top of current compensation information as you enter and operate within the workforce.

- **Learn about the broad and complex issues in compensation** and how they relate to individuals, couples, families, firms, the profession, and society. Have a grasp on the factors that will be present as you make different choices that affect your career—education, firm, role, caregiving, outward expression of certain personality or identity traits, etc.
- **Identify employers with transparent and fair compensation practices** who will value your skills and strengths. During the negotiation process, ask about their pay structures, including pay bands for employees with your experience level, how they handle flexible time, and how they monitor pay equity; cross-check information with current or past employees of the firm. Look to see if there is diversity in all roles and at all levels and if there is high turnover. If you see a possible issue, ask and find out whether the firm has a plan to address it.
- **Know the range of pay** expected for an employee at your level, size of firm, and location. See resources like the “AIA Compensation Survey Salary Calculator,” the “AIA Compensation Report,” and “The Architecture Salary Poll.”³⁹
- **Be aware of industry and federal rules** and requirements for compensation, such as minimum wage, intern, salary, and overtime pay.⁴⁰ Sharing past pay information with a new employer can hurt you, and in some states it is illegal for employers to ask for it or consider it. (See the “Compensation Discrimination” section of this guide.)
- **Stay abreast of the compensation philosophy and policies** at your firm, especially during review periods and changes in your work situation.
- **Have open conversations with colleagues** of similar and different demographics in your firm, in other firms, and in other roles in the profession (such as specialists and consultants) about compensation details and trends for the purposes of increasing equity.⁴¹

KNOW YOUR ROLE AND BE PROACTIVE

Understanding and advocating for equitable compensation is important for you and for motivating organizations to recognize and address inequity in their compensation practices.

- **Track your own performance and development** to be prepared for performance reviews or for any concerns that may arise. Keep a record of your employment history—dates of career milestones, reviews, requests, work contributions and their value to the firm, skill development, achievements, compensation history.
- **Practice negotiation**, and do it effectively. (See the *Negotiation* guide.)
- **Learn to pinpoint and articulate your value** relative to your organization’s goals. What work are you doing that matters the most; for what work are you most likely to be rewarded? Is there equity in role and task assignment, or are there certain roles and tasks that might be undervalued because of the identity of the people who typically do them?
- **Let your supervisors and colleagues know** about your expertise and skills and your goals for development. Have conversations about the importance of compensation reflecting the value of work, which does not always correlate with the number of hours worked.

- **Make your achievements visible**, especially to your manager. This is a proven way of increasing women’s compensation.⁴² Speak up when you make contributions, and enlist allies and sponsors to support your visibility and help you advance. Learn how to write an effective self-evaluation, and ask for a promotion when you feel it is deserved.⁴³
- **Stay on top of professional development**, training, and networking to build knowledge and connections.
- **Consider saying yes to new opportunities** or new challenges that will exhibit and build the value of your work. Distinguish between opportunities that bring advancement and those that do not, such as office housework (scheduling, notes, social planning, managing documents, emotional comforting, etc.) and low-profile work.

BE AN ACTIVE MANAGER

Managers are key in ensuring that employees are equitably compensated and the organization benefits from their full potential. Employers should support managers by providing the information, tools, and training they need to effectively and equitably manage compensation. (For additional considerations, see the *Negotiation* and *Recruitment & Retention* guides.)

- **Know the skills of your employees** through direct and structured conversation with each individual, using their resume, current job description, and past work as a guide (not a limitation).
- **Discuss with each employee what their compensation expectations are** and how they align with the firm’s compensation structure and policies. Remember to consider and accommodate the different ways that different employees might communicate their expectations and your possible biases around these styles.
- **Clearly define what and how work is evaluated and valued**, and set goals with your employees that tie together work and compensation targets.
- **Have open conversations about what types of compensation different employees value**; communicate this information to management to keep the firm’s compensation philosophy relevant.
- **Listen to flexibility requests** from employees, and allow these to be tailored to the individual; discuss and decide up front how to keep compensation equitable according to value of work.
- **Assign work according to experience, talent, skills, and interest**, and give everyone access to work that lets them take risks and develop new skills.

- **Ensure that the most desirable work is assigned equitably** between employees. Discuss with other managers to identify what is lower-profile and higher-profile (career-advancing) work in your organization, regularly assess who is doing what and for how long, and analyze for demographic and supervisor patterns. Use Bias Interrupters worksheets to guide the process.⁴⁴
- **Distribute office housework equally**. Assign tasks to those in administrative support roles if possible, or rotate tasks and do not ask for volunteers. Regularly assess who is doing what and develop a transition plan for anyone unfairly burdened.⁴⁵
- **Monitor performance reviews for implicit bias**. Distinguish between and appraise actual and potential performance separately, and evaluate skills independent of personality. (Read “Identifying & Interrupting Bias in Performance Evaluations.”⁴⁶)
- **Encourage employees to promote themselves**, and set the expectation that everyone do so. Have alternatives to self-promotion for employees to share their successes, such as regular emails that list everyone’s accomplishments.
- **Give clear and honest feedback** to all employees so they have the chance to recognize and address any issues in their work or how they are being perceived or evaluated. Provide guidelines and support for employees to offer their perspective on the feedback, and remember to monitor whether culture-based expectations or biases are inaccurately reinforcing your or the employee’s assumptions.

“We’ve been looking a lot more purposefully at equity in compensation and expanding our reach into the organization so it’s not seen as just an HR thing. We’re educating our leaders about what it means—do people have unconscious biases in how they do their hiring or decision-making?”

Principal and Owner, White, Female, 60

Act

FIRMS

Compensation in architecture is a perennial issue. The depressed value of architectural services in our current society prompts firms, at times, to make tough choices in order to survive, and firm owners are in a position where those choices could directly or indirectly impact their personal quality of life and that of their employees.⁴⁷ This dilemma can make it possible for unclear and inconsistent compensation practices to arise, causing inequity. Clear and communicated policies and processes can ensure that instance-to-instance decisions are fair, aligned with the firm's equity goals, and compliant with laws and professional ethics. (See the "Compensation Discrimination" section of this guide.) Firms that commit to equity in compensation are investing in the long-term health of the business because they will attract and retain a diverse set of engaged, productive, and loyal employees.

UNDERSTAND YOUR COMPENSATION

Know your current practices and how they are working; identify issues and opportunities with a focus on equity.

- **Discuss among senior leaders** how they view compensation within the firm, why it has developed as it has, and their ideas for what it could be.
- **Gather your current job descriptions** and see if they reflect your needs and how they compare with similar descriptions in the market.
- **Locate and review current, reputable salary survey data** that is appropriate for your firm.
- **Assess your firm's current compensation system**, and evaluate what has worked well and what has not for employee engagement and performance. Consider compensation structures (array of levels) and policies (procedures for decision-making) as connected to the array of things that constitute compensation in your organization (direct and indirect monetary and nonmonetary).
- **See if there are certain compensation trends linked** to specific groups or managers within the firm. For example, are there identity groups that receive higher or lower performance ratings, pay increases, bonuses, high-profile work, etc.?
- **Evaluate whether and how wage gaps are occurring** at key points (starting pay, merit pay, promotion pay increases), especially at recognized pinch points in architecture (finding the right job fit, gaining licensure, caregiving, reduced paths forward at certain personal and career crossroads, transitions to leadership, retirement), and how they relate to your compensation structure or policies.⁴⁸
- **Examine specific decision-making protocols and practices**, such as automated changes, managerial discretion, and committee review.
- **Notice how your firm's context affects your compensation** (e.g., office locations, recruiting pool, local regulations, client relationships and expectations). Observe how your workplace culture supports or hinders compensation goals. (See the *Workplace Culture* guide.)
- **Administer a survey that allows employees to share compensation information and concerns** that may not show up through the firm's data collection (such as indirect financial compensation and nonfinancial compensation that are not recorded or tracked).
- **Ask your current and exiting employees how they perceive compensation fairness** within the firm. Welcome anonymous feedback and suggestions. Whether or not perceptions turn out to be correct or incorrect, you will be able to communicate back to employees how individual situations relate to policies, and how they are equitable, or will be.
- **Consider hiring a consultant** to evaluate and structure your firm's compensation program.

ESTABLISH A COMPENSATION PHILOSOPHY, STRUCTURE, AND POLICY

Managing compensation requires that leaders agree on how compensation is defined within the firm, what compensation should do, and where it should lead. So that the compensation program is aligned with business needs, equitable, legally and ethically defensible, easy to communicate, and perceived as fair, consider using a diverse committee to manage compensation.

- **Write your firm's compensation philosophy**—the organization's commitment to how it values its employees, with the purpose of attracting, retaining, and motivating employees equitably. Determine how you will use compensation (direct, indirect, and nonfinancial) to get the results you want. Your approach will vary according to your firm budget, regional economic conditions, and broader market forces, and in what aspects you will lead (pay more than competitors), match, or lag the market.
- **Develop a transparent compensation structure** that supports your compensation philosophy. Update job descriptions with required skills, and establish pay grades and ranges for the different work within the organization. Consider how work is assigned, how compensation is determined, and the components of nonwage compensation.⁴⁹ Know how you will determine both equal work and work of equal value.
- **Do a market value analysis** to compare your policies to those of peer firms, and check for external equity.
- **Develop compensation policies.** Include all forms of compensation, and consider how they are weighted (valued) by individuals and by the organization and if there is alignment of values. Include policies for all pay actions (starting pay, merit and promotional pay, bonuses), compensation-related decisions (part-time, flextime, opportunities), and procedures (negotiation, evaluation, audits). Establish how to determine pay differences by factors such as job responsibilities, title, time in job, part-time status, location, time with firm, education, licensure, and prior experience.
- **Ensure that your financial operating metrics relate to your equity goals.** Compare compensation equity measures to firm-wide financial performance measures—such as utilization and overhead rates, net revenue per employee, and firm profits and investment—to develop an understanding of how compensation value might be more equitably measured or allocated.
- **Update your compensation program** at least every two to five years to stay aligned with market and firm changes. It is easier and less costly to make incremental rather than significant changes.

COMMUNICATE YOUR COMPENSATION EQUITY

Transparency is a substantial means for achieving and maintaining compensation equity by ensuring equal power and accurate perception. While transparency can be an uncomfortable topic, opacity around compensation allows inequity to continue unchallenged and denies employees information they need to make prudent career and life decisions. Additionally, if employees sense inequitable compensation occurring within an organization, whether or not it is true, they will mistrust compensation practices, leading to further issues.

- **Develop a value statement** to communicate the firm's compensation philosophy, and have a written policy governing all pay decisions.⁵⁰ Discuss them with new employees during onboarding, and keep them readily available for all employees.
- **Provide clear and accurate information on the firm's pay bands** for applicants and employees so they do not have to look to outside resources to gauge what pay is appropriate. Share how the firm establishes an employee's pay and the timing and conditions for when adjustments will be negotiated. Though it is not a recommended practice, if pay history is considered in setting compensation (in states where it is legal), develop and share firm policy on how it is used.
- **Openly discuss guidelines** used for assessing and awarding performance pay and promotions.
- **Share flexible workplace policies.**
- **Announce pay and performance review dates** well in advance, and provide the date by which the firm will follow up with employees on outcomes and promotion decisions. Be clear if there will be a time period during which employees can negotiate.
- **Consistently and regularly communicate compensation information** and changes with all managers.
- **Communicate early with employees about any upcoming changes** to compensation philosophy, structure, or policies, why they are happening, and the firm's process for making adjustments.
- **Inform employees that they are free to openly discuss compensation** for the purpose of equity, without fear of retaliation.
- **Regularly audit messaging** to check that the firm's communication about advancement is bias-free.

LEAD EQUITABLE COMPENSATION PRACTICES

There are many approaches and resources for improving equity in compensation practices that can be used at different steps in the process.

- **Base salary offers on job content and the applicant's qualifications**, not on a previous salary. (In some locations, asking for salary history is illegal.) This best practice will help to decrease pay gaps profession-wide. Asking “What salary range do you expect?” is a possible alternative to asking about previous salary.
- **Consider a no-negotiation policy.**⁵¹ (See the *Negotiation* guide.)
- **Reward employees based on performance rather than on visibility** (less visibility can result from personality, fewer hours in the office, alternative work times or locations, etc.).
- **Provide flexible work time and location arrangements** (e.g., flexible hours, compressed workweeks, part-time work, job sharing, working from home, a satellite office, or on the move), which can benefit both employees and employers.⁵² Inadvertently, employees who work fewer hours per week often make a lower hourly rate for doing the same work as full-time employees—keep close attention that compensation reflects the value of work. Provide messaging to counteract the stigma sometimes associated with using a flexible arrangement.⁵³
- **Conduct regular pay audits** (annual, at minimum) to check for inequity. Include all forms of compensation, both cash and noncash (hourly pay rates, salary, overtime, bonuses, stock options, profit sharing, life insurance, vacation/holiday pay, allowances, travel expenses, benefits, etc.), check all types of decisions (starting pay, promotional pay, bonuses and profit sharing, benefits, flexibility, etc.), and use multiple analysis methods.⁵⁴ Pair audits with performance reviews if they are used to determine raises and promotions.
- **Schedule pay reviews for all employees at the same time** of year to address salaries holistically. Also review individual employee pay at key milestones, including at hiring, licensure, and promotion.
- **Monitor performance evaluations**, and track metrics according to supervisor, department, and organization. Examine patterns tied to different demographic groups (men, women, people of color) for rating-level, raise, and promotion trends, especially after a leave or during flexible work arrangements.

- **Address unjustified disparities.** Provide equity raises to increase the affected employee's compensation to the appropriate level.
- **Compensate employees retroactively** if it is determined that they have been compensated less than what is appropriate, and do so for the full period of the gap.
- **Do not allow exceptions** to your pay policies.

FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENT

Nonfinancial compensation is as important as financial compensation. Offering opportunities equitably across all types of employees helps prevent wage gaps and invests in the growth of a firm's most valuable assets. (See the *Recruitment & Retention* guide.)

- **Provide employees at all levels development opportunities** outside of their primary job function—education and training to develop new skills, time with leaders, networking, mentorship, and sponsorship—transparently and equitably.⁵⁵
- **Offer all employees stretch assignments**—opportunities aligned with their development needs and career aspirations—and a mix of experiences.
- **Announce opportunities widely**, and allow employees to gauge and express their interest, availability, and suitability for them. Watch for and flag any inappropriate assumptions—based on partial or incorrect information, stereotypes, or personal interests or preferences—of managers assigning the opportunity.
- **Make sure all employees have equal access to the resources**—time, funds, staff, information—they need to pursue their assignments and development.
- **Ensure that workers with flexible and part-time work arrangements have access** to the same opportunities and benefits, training, and promotion opportunities as other employees.⁵⁶
- **Make development a part of your organization's culture**, and remove structural barriers in your firm that impede equitable employee opportunity and growth. (See the *Workplace Culture* guide.)

Act

PROFESSION

The complexities in compensation as they relate to the economy and society make it important for groups to come together across the profession to share information and address issues.

KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING

Use a mix of resources to stay connected to the conversation. Learn what issues and problem-solving approaches are occurring within our profession and outside of it.

- **Stay up to date on issues and research in the profession** through groups such as the AIA, American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS), Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA), Equity by Design (EQxD), National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB), National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA), National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS), and the Architecture Lobby.
 - **Pay attention to the quickly changing legal landscape** around compensation addressing the lack of employee power and employer bias. Bring in outside experts to share their knowledge.
 - **Follow business-oriented sources** such as Catalyst, Deloitte, *Forbes*, Gallup, *Harvard Business Review*, Lean In, McKinsey, Pew Research Center, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), Women's Leadership Edge.
- **Establish guidelines for *equal value***—roles within architecture that have substantially similar requirements for experience or education—and suggestions on how to determine ranges of pay.
 - **Recognize employers through awards and press** for having high transparency with their employees and regular audits proving compensation equity.
 - **Encourage a diverse range of people to write about and present** on compensation topics that are important to them to share their perspective and open up discussion.
 - **Provide forums for discussion** on compensation equity between employees and firms, and with other industries.
 - **Offer professional development and social events** around current topics like pay transparency and audits, motherhood penalty/fatherhood bonus, office housework, and flexible work arrangements.
 - **Offer sole practitioners and small firms business resources** so they know how to instill equitable compensation practices as they grow.
 - **Look at how revenue can be increased across the profession** to enable firms to invest more in their employees directly through compensation and indirectly by growing their businesses.
 - **Connect with schools to share information and resources** that support learning, discussion, and advocacy around compensation topics, such as pay expectations and regulations, relevant to student interns and graduates entering the workforce.

SUPPORT COMPENSATION EQUITY PROFESSION-WIDE

Be a resource and an advocate for compensation equity throughout the profession.

- **Encourage wide contribution to national-level compensation surveys** conducted by groups like the AIA and EQxD. Consider adding a data set with a clear methodology: track, assess, and publish pay rates and other forms of compensation for different firms across geography, size, etc., paired with demographic data.

Consider

BASE PAY MATRIX

“People don’t know how to get a raise, how to get recognized—what you do to distinguish yourself and move up—other than by having the same last name as the person who runs the firm, who did not earn their keep but bypass people who’ve been there many years. We developed a base pay matrix to address some of those fundamental questions. We set up a transparent base pay for staff—three categories: designer-level, management-level, senior licensed architect staff. We value years of experience in the profession and years of experience—loyalty—with the firm, so you’re moving to the right as you go. When you get to be in a management-level position, making decisions, guiding and directing staff under you, you have higher value to the firm, so you can move up a tier. So a young person can look and see entry-level designer, \$X/hour, all the way to the top right, senior licensed architect, with twenty years experience, \$Y/hour, and all these steps in between. You see you’re not stuck making what you started with indefinitely, but you can see how to move up. We felt that was important for young people wanting to navigate through the profession but also very important for women to see that this is the base pay everybody gets at this experience level—the guy sitting next to me doesn’t make more. At the end of the year, we have discretionary bonuses based on productivity, but the base pay is clear, and people are able to chart their career.”

— Managing Partner, Firm Owner, Black, Male, 46

DISCUSS:

- How does this base pay matrix support equity between people in the firm?
- What are the strengths of this approach? What types of bias could creep in when determining and managing this pay structure and bonuses?
- What are the “fundamental questions” raised in this story? Do you think there are other policies the firm should create to help address their questions? Are there other fundamental questions that a compensation structure can address?
- Are there additional ways this firm can help employees chart their careers in the organization?
- What reasons can you think of for such low transparency (estimated at only 13% for firms under one thousand people) around compensation for employees? Do you think transparency is hard to achieve in architecture? How might transparency be increased?

Consider

LOSS OF FUTURE BENEFIT

“Architects aren’t taught to look at things from a business standpoint. When people make the decision to be with their kids, we’re not taught about the loss of future benefits. They don’t play out the scenario of staying in the workforce and advancing in their career and getting to a place, maybe, later in life when they can spend more time with their kids, when they’re more comfortable, so they can give their kids different types of experiences. The decision is very much about the present day: ‘I can only make as much money as I need to pay for childcare, so I’m going to stay home.’

For me, I’m not a stay-at-home mom, could never be one, but I don’t think there are enough people talking about the full picture of what goes into making that decision because I think it’s really hard to come back, especially if you want to stay in the profession. There are basic economics behind why some firms can’t support new parents in general—they run at zero profitability once salaries are paid, so it’s really hard to support parents who want to leave and come back and get supported as overhead while they’re gone. It needs to be a complete mind shift, which is harder to achieve than throwing money at a problem.”

— Workplace Strategist, Asian, Female, 39

DISCUSS:

- What assumptions, values, and goals might this person have that others might not share?
- What are economic factors that make it difficult to have children and progress in a career in architecture?
- What are the impacts of staying or leaving the profession?
- How might the factors and impacts vary for different demographic groups (gender, socioeconomic background/class, education, age, family culture)?
- What are different ways employees and employers can work together to balance caregiving and career progression?
- How might the business models of architecture firms evolve in order to better support caregiving?

Consider

CYCLE OF COMPRESSION

“I started at a large firm out of grad school, I was glad to have a job, I had student loans and the economy was in a downturn, and my starting pay—which I was told was non-negotiable—seemed higher than other firms. I later found out a male classmate of mine with the same experience level was started at a higher salary and had negotiated.

I was placed in a role that I was happy with at the time because it seemed good for my development, but I later realized it was a trap for women in that firm. They are rarely allowed into design roles (even though I had won design awards throughout my education), and progression in the firm outside the design track is limited because you have little contact with partners, and opportunities for recognition are few. There were annual reviews, but it became clear that if you didn't have an advocate in that room, your performance was irrelevant (my bosses were being continually laid off or fired, and I had to take on their work, which was a lot of responsibility but also meant my advocate was gone). There was no feedback on what decisions for promotion or raises were based on and no guidance on how to advance.

I resigned from the firm on good terms after five years because despite becoming licensed, being dedicated and productive with high-quality work, directing project teams on multi-million-dollar projects, managing parts of billion-dollar projects, bringing positive recognition to the firm via cultivating good consultant, client, and industry relationships...I was still at entry pay level. The reasoning I was given by a manager was that the economy was still slow—but I knew the firm was making record profits, people on my projects were receiving bonuses, including a male coworker I worked with closely at the same level of responsibility.

I also contributed a lot to the firm in trying to improve firm culture, but I saw that was not something that led to advancement. On my last day, the office head of HR pulled me aside and said if I came back, I should negotiate for a much higher salary. When I took my next job, in large part due to increased flexibility for work-life balance, I was told their policy set incoming pay based on the salary of my previous job, which locked me back into the low pay set by my prior firm.”

— Sole-Proprietor Architect and Educator, White, Female, 36

DISCUSS:

- What information should this person have known to advocate for her rights and navigate these compensation issues?
- How did lack of transparency give the employers unequal power?
- What forms of discrimination were possibly occurring?
- How can compensation systems fail to manage small-scale occurrences over time, poor management practices, and underlying philosophical issues of an organization?
- What policies could have been in place and practices shared with the employee for equitably handling negotiation and determining pay?

Consider

OVERTIME

“Leadership recently called a team meeting between me, a few juniors, and a few intermediate architects regarding unpaid overtime. The senior associate said, ‘You have to understand the profession that you entered. Architecture is not a nine-to-five profession. We cannot afford to pay you overtime, but we do need more from you. To make the next deadline, maybe you can take one day off during the weekend, but otherwise we need you here.’ The only woman in leadership on the team said, ‘It’s like when you take care of a baby: if you take care of the baby from nine to six, at six, do you just leave and let the baby die? No! This is what makes architecture fun! Because everybody is in it to do great work, not to make money!’

Someone on my team reported what was said at the meeting to HR and because she was told that her identity could not be guaranteed to be kept confidential, she asked HR to not say anything from fear of backlash from the leadership, and nothing was done. HR acknowledged that it is company policy to ‘pay overtime but only when it has been previously approved.’ And apparently, being asked by your project leaders to work overtime does not constitute prior approval. You need to ask the principal to sign off on it before you do the overtime. How convenient that the policy is, ‘Oh, you should have asked the principal before you did it. Now it’s too late.’

I did make my views on unpaid overtime clear when the project architect and I went to lunch the other week, and he tried to convince me to help him ‘motivate the others to come in to work without paid overtime.’ I suggested that the firm give us comp days if they aren’t intending to pay us. That same week they made everybody put their mobile phone numbers on a spreadsheet for ‘emergencies only,’ and the very next week, I worked fifty-two hours and decided not to go in over the weekend. On Saturday I received a text from someone ten years my senior: ‘Just a no-obligation suggestion—if you would like to assist and actually learn what I have done today to

complete the elevator lobby enlarged plan, feel free to drop by tomorrow between one p.m. to five p.m. I'll be at the office.'

Then on Monday, I received a text from the same project architect I'd had lunch with: 'You should talk to the principal about these comp days. The thing to remember is that none of this should be seen as quid pro quo on an hour-for-hour basis. It's about an organic give and take, much of that being valuable experience and knowledge gained, a great set for your portfolio, and ultimately a built project. Bean counting the hours for "fair" compensation is another attitude entirely, and not necessarily one that's fully compatible with this business. The variables and subjectivity are simply too great!'"

— Architectural Designer, Asian, Female, 29

DISCUSS:

- What are the issues exhibited in this scenario, and why do you think they are occurring? Do you think any legal or ethical bounds have been overstepped?
- What would you recommend this employee do in the short term and the long term? What are the possible positive and negative outcomes of each approach?
- How might expectations and assumptions related to working overtime and receiving overtime pay vary according to people's identities or roles within a firm?
- What are the responsibilities of employees, managers, leaders, and HR toward defining, communicating, and managing work hours and overtime?
- What effects might these types of messages and practices have on compensation equity within the firm?

Resources

COMPENSATION IN ARCHITECTURE

EQxD Metrics: Pay Equity Series (3 parts) – Annelise Pitts – Equity by Design (2017)

Part 1 - Overview

<http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/6/26>

[/eq3sh1813brgmzndknr379oy05ajam](http://eq3sh1813brgmzndknr379oy05ajam)

Part 2 - From “Equal Pay for Equal Work” to Pay Equity

[http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/7/2/eqxd-metrics-from-](http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/7/2/eqxd-metrics-from-equal-pay-for-equal-work-to-pay-equity)

[equal-pay-for-equal-work-to-pay-equity](http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/7/2/eqxd-metrics-from-equal-pay-for-equal-work-to-pay-equity)

Part 3 - Closing the Pay Gap

<http://eqxdesign.com>

[/blog/2017/7/6/9whxr744rkmmej57ggz030qm68t30d](http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/7/6/9whxr744rkmmej57ggz030qm68t30d)

Three-part series reviews the salary data from the Equity by Design survey. Part 1 describes the state of the pay gap in architecture. Part 2 discusses the primary forces that affect the wage gap. Part 3 addresses ways to close the pay gap through policies and practices.

AIA Compensation Report 2017 – AIA

[purchase required]

<https://store.aia.org/products/aia-compensation-report-2017-pdf?variant=37198724609>

Tool compares compensation data for thirty-nine architecture firm positions. Looks at trends in architectural compensation and what incentives are being offered to retain talent.

Salary Calculator – AIA

<http://info.aia.org/salary/salary.aspx>

Calculator uses salary data from the compensation tool to provide mean and median salaries for various architectural positions, considering geographic location and firm revenue.

GUIDES AND TOOL KITS

Bias Interrupters – Center for WorkLife Law

<https://Biasinterrupters.org>

Offers many tool kits and worksheets for individuals and organizations to interrupt bias. See their tool kits for compensation and performance evaluations.

Interrupting Bias in Performance Evaluations – Women’s Leadership Edge

[starting 2019, subscription provided by AIA membership]

<https://www.womensleadershipedge.org/category/webinars/>

Webinar that gives examples of how bias affects performance evaluations, which can be used to determine promotions and merit increases, and gives guidelines for developing a review process that eliminates bias.

Managing Pay Equity – SHRM (2018)

[subscription required]

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/managingpayequity.aspx>

Provides an overview of the pay gap and laws related to pay equity and offers in-depth guidelines for reviewing pay policies for fairness and for improving policies.

re:Work Guide: Structure and Check for Pay Equity – Google

<https://rework.withgoogle.com/guides/pay-equity/steps/introduction/>

Several-part guide for analyzing pay procedures—starts with an overview of pay gap and high-level goals organizations should have regarding pay policies, then provides specific guidelines for reviewing and adjusting policies that may be inequitable.

WAGE GAPS

The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap – AAUW (2018)

<https://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>

Defines the gender pay gap and what causes it and shows how it affects different demographic groups. Suggests ways to address the gap for different groups of people: individuals, employers, and the government. Offers guidelines to address gender-based discrimination at work.

Graduating to a Pay Gap – Christianne Corbett and Catherine Hill – AAUW (2012)

<https://www.aauw.org/files/2013/02/graduating-to-a-pay-gap-the-earnings-of-women-and-men-one-year-after-college-graduation.pdf>

Study of the wage gap between men and women college graduates working full time one year after graduating. Discusses the impact of this immediate pay gap and the student loan debt burden it places on women.

How to Achieve Gender Equality in Pay – The Milken Institute Review – Claudia Goldin (2015)

https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/goldin/files/gender_equality.pdf

Examines the wage gap between genders, factoring for education, age, experience, and industry. Looks at how different job structures affect the gap. Conclusion: the amount of time worked in a week affects hourly rate; those who work longer hours tend to make more money per hour as well.

The Fatherhood Bonus and the Motherhood Penalty: Parenthood and the Gender Gap in Pay – Thirdway – Michelle J Budig (2014)

<https://www.thirdway.org/report/the-fatherhood-bonus-and-the-motherhood-penalty-parenthood-and-the-gender-gap-in-pay>

Analyzes the impact of having a family on the salaries of men and women: men's salaries tend to increase with each child while women's tend to decrease.

Notes

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2. See *The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap* (Washington, DC: AAUW, Spring 2018), <https://www.aauw.org/resource/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>. See updated data on how wages vary based on many factors, including race, age, disability, education, and sexual identity and gender orientation. "Databases, Tables, and Calculators by Subject: Pay & Benefits," US Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed September, 24, 2018, <https://www.bls.gov/data/#wages>.
3. "America's Women and the Wage Gap," National Partnership for Women & Families, April 2018, <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/workplace-fairness/fair-pay/americas-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf>. Men's salaries tend to increase with each child while women's salaries tend to decrease; this is true even when accounting for variables such as experience, hours worked, and education, which suggests much of the gap can be attributed to discrimination. For more information, see Claire Cain Miller, "The Motherhood Penalty vs. the Fatherhood Bonus," *New York Times*, September 6, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/07/upshot/a-child-helps-your-career-if-youre-a-man.html?_r=0&abt=0002&abg=0.
4. US Census Bureau, "American Community Survey 1-year Estimates." accessed September 27, 2018. Data tables available from American FactFinder, <https://factfinder.census.gov>.
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8. For more information on this and other data, see Annelise Pitts, "EQxD Metrics: Pay Equity Series Overview (1 of 3)," *Equity by Design*, June 27, 2017, <http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/6/26/eq3sh1813brgmzndknr379oy05ajam>.
9. Note that a recently proposed Paycheck Fairness Act would amend the Equal Pay Act to allow employers to differentiate pay only on employee seniority, merit, and production.
10. "The State of Wage Inequality in the Workplace," HIRED, 2018, <https://hired.com/wage-inequality-report>.
11. Claire Cain Miller, "As Women Take Over a Male-Dominated Field, the Pay Drops," *New York Times*, March 18, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/20/upshot/as-women-take-over-a-male-dominated-field-the-pay-drops.html>.
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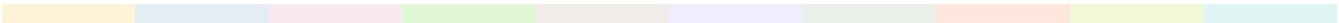
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The Guides for Equitable Practice are designed to provide resources to individuals, firms, and other groups for achieving equitable practices in the profession of architecture. The content of the Guides does NOT constitute legal advice. The Guides are NOT a substitute for engaging competent legal counsel. Ensure legal and regulatory compliance in enacting any portions of the Guides. THE GUIDES ARE PROVIDED "AS IS" WITHOUT WARRANTY OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO THE IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY, FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR USE OR PURPOSE, OR NONINFRINGEMENT. Some jurisdictions do not allow the exclusion of implied warranties, and the above exclusion does not apply to them.



Guides for Equitable Practice



Guides for understanding and building equity
in the architecture profession

FIRST EDITION
PART I - RELEASED NOVEMBER, 2018



The University of Minnesota for the American
Institute of Architects Equity and the Future of
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The Guides for Equitable Practice (the Guides) are nine independent guides and an introduction. The 2018-19 first edition of the Guides is released in three parts.

Foreword

Increasingly, architects will be called to lead efforts in finding solutions to many of our society's most pressing issues. To successfully meet these challenges, as well as the unknown challenges ahead, we must have the talent, passion, and creativity of a diverse cohort of students, professionals, and leaders.

I am pleased to present the Guides for Equitable Practice, done in partnership with the University of Minnesota and the American Institute of Architects' Equity and the Future of Architecture Committee (EQFA). The Guides are a vital part of AIA's long-term commitment to leading efforts to ensure that the profession of architecture is as diverse as the nation we serve. These Guides are an essential step toward that end. Each includes real-world-derived best practices, relevant research, and other tools to help you address a variety of employment and personnel issues about equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Broadly, these Guides will help you make the business and professional case for ensuring that your organization meets the career development, professional environment, and cultural awareness expectations of current and future employees and clients. Ultimately, we hope that these Guides will shape our shared goal of a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable profession for all without regard to race, gender, sexual orientation or identity, or socioeconomic background. It is EQFA's intent to encourage an ongoing, meaningful, and productive dialogue among all members about how best to realize the most inclusive, equitable, and diverse future for the profession of architecture.

— Emily Grandstaff Rice, FAIA
Chair, Equity and Future of Architecture Committee



Introduction

KEY TOPICS

audience
business
context
diversity
equity
ethics
framework
guides
inclusion
methodology
mobility
morality
practice
profession
research
socioeconomics

The need for achieving equitable practices in the architecture profession is increasingly clear. Yet knowing the issues at hand and how people are affected by them, how to define positive outcomes, and how to turn intent into action can be challenging. The guides provide individuals, firms, and groups a way to support informed discussion and concrete next steps.

This introduction outlines the goals, context, methodology, content, framework, and core concepts of the guides as well as key ideas on how to start.



The University of Minnesota for the American Institute of Architects Equity and the Future of Architecture Committee

What are the Guides for Equitable Practice?

The Guides for Equitable Practice are one component of a broad commitment by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) to overcome inequities and advance the profession, the careers of individual architects, and the quality of the built environment by creating more diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplaces and interactions.

The individual guides meet needs identified by the AIA and its constituents in the context of increased national attention to issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Some aspects of American culture have radically evolved in the past decade: for instance, legalization of single-sex marriage and recognition of nonbinary genders. In architecture, specifically, universal design mandates inclusionary principles reinforced by codes and regulations. However, persistent gender pay gaps as well as racial disparities evident in school achievement and in health outcomes, for example, make it clear that many aspects of culture have not changed. Increasingly, corporations have connected their own diversity and inclusion efforts to ethical reputation and increased market share. Even more importantly, research showing improved decision-making and creativity by diverse teams has increased attention on how people's differences can be leveraged to increase performance.

The AIA has long anchored the profession with policies and resources on ethics and practices, and it was logical that the Institute would sponsor the development of urgently needed guidance at this time. Many recent resources on diversity, inclusion, and equity, while not all architecture specific, are extremely valuable to anyone working in or leading the architectural profession. These guides augment those resources, translating relevant research to actionable practices that can be used in the profession.

CONTEXT

The Guides for Equitable Practice emerged from a series of AIA resolutions responding to growing awareness of equity issues in the architecture profession and the need for greater understanding of ways to improve the architecture community.

In 2015, the AIA board ratified Resolution 15-1: Equity in Architecture, which was passed by member delegates at the National Convention, calling for “women and men to realize the goal of equitable practice in order to retain talent, advance the architecture profession, and communicate the value of design in society.”¹ The resolution called for the establishment of a Commission on Equity in Architecture, which in 2017 released five areas of focus with eleven priority recommendations for “expanding and strengthening the profession’s commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion in every practice,” to be implemented by the AIA over the following three years.² The Equity and Future of Architecture Committee (EQFA) launched in 2017 to implement the recommendations and support related initiatives. To begin addressing the fourth recommendation, “Create guides for equitable, diverse, and inclusive practice,” the EQFA developed the list of topics for the guides. In 2018, the AIA issued a request for proposals to develop the guides and selected the research team based at the University of Minnesota.

APPROACH

The AIA selected our research team to create these guides for the AIA EQFA committee, which established the basic structure of topics after looking at the Australian Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice as a model. Working with AIA leadership, EQFA members, expert consultants, and other interested parties, the research team led the research, design, and writing of these guides. The views expressed, while reflective of the wide range of perspectives, are our own.

We believe architects seek to practice equitably while also harnessing the power of inclusive decision-making in their work. Translating these goals into reality can be difficult. Therefore, the guides intend to share knowledge, generate discussion, deepen self-awareness, and support organizational discovery and change around discernible and nameable concepts—thereby advancing the architectural profession to become more equitable

and inclusive, more effectively serving our communities and clients. We understand that many of the topics are complex and sometimes discussed in politically charged terms. While not ignoring public discourse, the premise of these guides is that there is nothing radical about fully valuing the contributions of people who have identities different from yours.

It was important to include in the guides both the individual level and the system level, since addressing one without awareness of the other is ineffective in the long run. To fully utilize the guides, we offer the reader four different frames through which to understand the topics and issues: internalized (for the individual), interpersonal (working with others), institutional (within institutions and systems of power), and structural (between institutions and across society).³ While readers may believe their agency is limited to what they can do for themselves or their firms, in reading these guides, additional pathways for influencing change may become apparent.

AUDIENCE

The guides are intended for individuals, firms, and other organizations within the architectural community. Though the antecedents to these guides (particularly, AIA, Parlour Guides and Equity by Design's research) were primarily gender focused, as is much of current research, the AIA's intent was that the guides should define differences broadly. Therefore, the guides include the range of identities in the profession and address the importance of acknowledging, valuing, and benefitting from the differences between them. We emphasize data about people of color and women since the research on discrimination against these groups in the workplace is substantial. At the same time, there is growing awareness and research on issues around other identities, such as gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, social class, age, and disability. For clarity, we specify where research findings are gender-specific or otherwise, and in order to start recognizing and naming differences, we use the contributors' preferred pronouns and identities in quotes and stories.

Each guide opens with an introduction that defines core topics and helps develop readers' shared understanding of them. It then presents information through several lenses to connect to readers at different stages of their careers and levels of development around these topics. Recognizing that people and groups can share similar goals but prefer different means to achieve them, we hope that the guides provide readers a resource to better learn and practice what moves you and your organizational culture forward in ways that support your values-, mission-, and vision-driven efforts.

METHODOLOGY

In regular dialogue with an EQFA project management team, the researchers developed the outlines and drafts via a thorough review of industry-wide surveys, academic research, and qualitative perspectives from a diverse group of architects and others. The team consulted several experts on the professional workplace, including Joan Williams, founder of the Women's Leadership Edge, who produced some of the resources cited in the guides. To gain a broader view of experiences and needs related to equity in the profession, and for related quotes and stories, the research team interviewed twenty-four people in-depth—half invited by AIA and half by the research team. Men and women, representing a range of race/ethnicities, ages, geographic locations, practice types, and career experiences, were asked about their own experiences with equity in the profession, changes they think are needed, and how the guides could be most useful. The team also held a workshop at the AIA 2018 Conference on Architecture during which draft content of the guides provided the basis for discussion and feedback.

Drafts were reviewed by the AIA staff, legal counsel, members of the EQFA committee, interviewees, focus groups from a component chapter (AIA Minnesota) and University of Minnesota School of Architecture students, and experts in diversity, equity, and inclusion research and training. Feedback from reviewers helped to shape the tenor, level of detail, content, and graphic style and format of the guides.

GUIDE COVER

establishes the subject, key topics, and scope

WHAT IS IT?

discusses the purpose, context, concepts, diagrams, and goals

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

presents the major impacts on individuals, firms, and the profession

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

outlines what appears when a group works toward the guide-specific equity goals

COMPLIANCE

introduces legal and regulatory information

ASSESS

offers questions to structure dialogue at different stages of development

ACT

details recommendations for action for individuals, firms, and the profession

CONSIDER

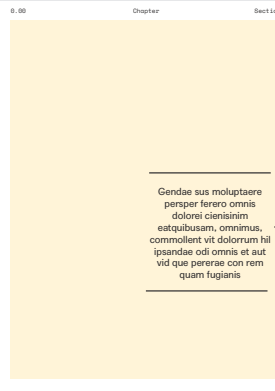
shares perspectives on common issues with questions to frame and prompt discussion

RESOURCES

collects selected books, articles, websites, and tools related to topic areas

NOTES

provides comments and citations for research sources



NAVIGATION

shows guide subject, section, and page number

QUOTES

highlight individual experiences and encourage reflection on related content

HOW TO USE THE GUIDES

The Guides for Equitable Practice include this introduction plus nine independent guides, which are structured consistently.

Within each guide, the sections can be read in sequence or discretely and can be extracted or rearranged as needed.



What is equitable practice?

Our profession can help create a level playing field for all by setting goals and taking actions that undo the structures and systems that place higher value on some people than others and that currently make the field inaccessible, uneven, and barrier filled. Diversity, inclusion, and equity are the three primary drivers that, together, can improve the field for all. Since people use the terms differently and sometimes interchangeably, we describe them here to establish shared meanings and interrelationships as you read and use the guides.

DIVERSITY

In the context of the workplace, diversity is neither inherently positive nor negative; it means that there is a mix of kinds of people present. It often implies that differences are categorized through identity markers, such as gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, color, religion, national origin, age, and disability, which have been a factor in a group's marginalization, and have thus placed them in legally protected classes. People, of course, are much more than mere categories, and there are many types of characteristics that could make a difference in the workplace. Yet it is likely that a group of people with the same identity markers will be limited in the perspectives they can bring to finding creative solutions and how well they can work with and serve others outside their group. On the other hand, if a diverse group of employees has not learned how to use their differences and mutually adapt their thinking and behavior to reach shared goals, then the "value" or benefits of their diversity will be difficult to attain.

INCLUSION

Inclusion in the workplace means creating an environment in which everyone is welcomed, respected, supported, and valued. These guides stress that inclusion is more than simply being at the table—it means that those present at the table are able to equally contribute to discussions and decision-making and have the ability to help change systems. And importantly, no one has more or less power because of a difference in identity. Yet inclusion can be tricky. People who are different from the workplace norm may minimize or downplay their differences in order to get along within the group, putting stress on those individuals and limiting the value their differences could bring to the work. Conversely, if people bring forward their differences and the group has not learned how to work effectively across differences, there will also be increased stress possibly leading to diminished outcomes. Inclusion cannot happen if a person must assimilate into the workplace culture, since the potential value of their differences is lost. Therefore, inclusion relies on mutual adaptation through which differences are embraced and negotiated. It is at this point that diversity can begin to drive superior outcomes.

“The profession is limited by the people who are seeking to become engaged in it, the people who are getting architecture degrees. It’s more important than ever that we work together in broadening that spectrum.”

Director, Business Owner,
Sole Practitioner, and Educator,
White, Female, 38

EQUITY

Equity means a condition is level and impartial. Building equity in the workplace involves acknowledging that many aspects of our society are built on an uneven playing field and in recognizing the inherent power differentials that have resulted in disparate treatment based on identity. A variety of solutions help identify and dismantle barriers to inclusion for people with different identities—there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Working to guarantee equitable treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement means identifying and eliminating barriers that have disadvantaged some groups. Addressing the question of whether to focus on achieving *equity* or *equality* for people in the profession, the guides support the view that equity is necessary to replace our current imperfect frameworks, and equality is an ideal condition, not yet achieved, that drives our goals and efforts.

“We want to make architecture an equitable place of study and practice because of the diversity of the world and cities, and we want the same voices of our clients to be within our firms.”

Professor, Administrator, and Architect,
Black, Female, 40s

Why is equitable practice important?

The cases to be made for equitable practice—moral, business, ethical, professional, and societal—all rely on bolstering practices that are inclusive of differences and equitable in approach, process, and effect. Each case may be compelling to different people and useful for motivating change within different audiences and situations. Consequently, understanding all of the cases can help build consensus in groups where many viewpoints are present.

Moral Case · Diversity, equity, and inclusion are often embraced as “doing the right thing.” This frame can be powerful in communicating the sincerity of a person’s or firm’s motives for equity work and also for spurring an individual or group toward gaining more insight into issues and learning how best to act. But the moral case on its own is not enough, and if not used within an equitable framework can lead to biased decisions. How do we decide what is “right”? What do we do if we have to choose between two mutually exclusive things that both seem “right”? Moral reasoning is difficult to extricate from social norms, and therefore, sometimes even well-intentioned actions could lead to an inequitable practice.

Business Case · The business case for diversity is a powerful driver for firm leaders. First, because diversity is becoming more prevalent both within and outside of the workplace, managing diversity poorly can be costly. Second, businesses with personnel who reflect the diversity of their market will have a competitive advantage in both marketing and quality of client service. Third, harnessing the value of diversity is a clear strategy for improving the economic growth of a business by increasing organizational outcomes related to effectiveness, performance, and innovation, such as lowered costs, increased revenue, and greater creativity.

Framing a firm’s commitment to diversity solely in economic terms can open the door to behavior that favors profit over people and may signal to employees that diversity efforts are disingenuous.⁴ Therefore, the business case for diversity depends on a well-rounded and well-managed inclusive and equitable practice. Employees, managers, and leaders need the awareness, abilities, and support to achieve it, underpinned by an agreement among senior leaders that the benefits are worth the investment.

“When you employ or manage people, you have an inherent power over those people. When people are looking to you for their livelihood and what certain activities mean to them, you as an employer and a professional have a real responsibility to know what your role is and act appropriately. You have the welfare of people at the root of your professional practice.”

Firm Founder and Principal,
White, Male, 60

Ethical Case · The ethical case for diversity is built on the premise that most people value fairness and justice: Everyone should have the opportunity to enter and work within the profession. Those practicing in architecture should have access to the same opportunities and be valued for the quality of their work. The profession should serve society fairly. Employees who value fairness care about the commitment of their organization to employees, the greater community, and the environment, and when people perceive unfairness or discrimination, their loyalty to an organization diminishes. On the other

hand, when individuals perceive that their organization's values are congruent with their own values and that it supports their well-being, they are more likely to want to be part of that organization and contribute to achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.⁵

Professional Case · The professional case rests on the belief that we should and can make our profession better through diversity, equity, and inclusion. If we do, we can expect a larger and more diverse pool of talent and can support more creativity within our work and thereby improve the quality of the built environment for more people, clarify the perception and value of the profession, spur economic growth, and increase the ability of the profession to address and adapt to new challenges.

Societal Case · The impacts of inequitable practices within society are vast, and the contributing factors numerous, making those practices feel difficult to tackle as individuals or even as a profession. Even so, we do have the knowledge and power to take steps toward diversity, equity, and inclusion that bring immediate benefit for individuals and groups and which will lead to greater positive institutional and structural change within and beyond our profession.

Act

Here are some key ideas to help you get started building equity in architecture, for use as a reference to make connections between the more detailed information and recommendations outlined in each guide. Individuals, managers, firms, organizations—we are all in this together!

- Understand what best motivates you to improve equitable practices in architecture.
 - Focus on self-awareness of your own cultural patterns and biases.
 - Increase your capacity to acknowledge, value, and work effectively with people who are different from you.
 - Try shifting your perspective or frame to test out thinking about issues in new ways.
 - Develop goals for your career, and work with others to plan steps to reach them.
 - Pay attention to common barriers in the profession that might apply to you, and learn how to avoid, navigate, or reduce them.
 - Learn what it takes to contribute to a positive workplace culture.
 - Be an advocate for yourself and for others.
 - Commit to the prevention of harassment and discrimination in the workplace.
 - Know your rights and responsibilities as an individual and employer.
 - Define and share your organization's core mission and values.
 - Understand the dominant cultural patterns of your firm and whether they are hurting or helping your diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.
 - Develop and communicate equitable policies, protocols, and practices.
 - Invest in and train managers to develop knowledge and skills to support diverse employees.
- Question, audit, and correct unfair practices.
 - Make development opportunities available to all employees.
 - Avoid making assumptions about what others are thinking, what they want, or what their motivations are—ask and listen!
 - Seek mentorship and sponsorship and provide them for everyone within, entering, and interested in the profession.
 - Actively reach out to other practitioners and groups to discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.
 - Share stories, resources, and knowledge.

Resources

ARCHITECTURAL PROFESSION

Designing for Diversity: Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Architectural Profession – Kathryn H. Anthony (2001)

Surveys and interviews of four hundred architects looking at factors that lead to discrimination and how lack of diversity hurts the professions. Recommendations for ways to change. This is a key foundational text that remains relevant today.

Diversity in the Profession of Architecture – AIA (2016)

<http://aiad8.prod.acquia-sites.com/sites/default/files/2016-05/Diversity-DiversityinArchitecture.pdf>

Summary of a survey that examined diversity in architecture, including perceptions of representation, factors impacting representation, reasons people leave the field, and job satisfaction.

Equity by Design Metrics: Key Findings from the 2016 Equity in Architecture Survey – Equity by Design (2016)

<http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/2/14/eqxd-metrics-key-findings-from-the-2016-equity-in-architecture-survey>

Summary of findings from the most recent Equity by Design's Equity in Architecture Survey, focusing on career dynamics (factors that affect perceptions throughout a career in architecture) and career pinch points (personal and professional milestones that affect career progression).

Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice – Parlour (2014)

<http://www.archiparlour.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Guide0-Introduction2.pdf>

A set of eleven guides to equitable practice focusing on gender equality in architecture in Australia: 1) Pay Equity, 2) Long Hours, 3) Part-Time Work, 4) Flexibility, 5) Recruitment, 6) Career Progression, 7) Negotiation, 8) Career Break, 9) Leadership, 10) Mentoring, 11) Registration.

Structural Inequality: Black Architects in the United States – Victoria Kaplan (2006)

Voices of twenty Black architects describing lifelong discrimination, marginalization, and pervasive racism in the profession, as well as their ways of navigating. Book addresses larger structural issues in architecture that currently make disadvantage inevitable.

DIVERSITY

American Association of People with Disabilities

<https://www.aapd.com/advocacy/employment/>

The work of this advocacy organization includes information and resources on employment.

Diversity Matters – Vivian Hunt, Dennis Layton, and Sara Prince – McKinsey (2015)

<https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/business%20functions/organization/our%20insights/why%20diversity%20matters/diversity%20matters.ashx>

Business case draws connection between diversity, performance, and increased profitability.

How to Get Men Involved with Gender Parity Initiatives – Elad N. Sherf and Subra Tangirala – HBR (2017)

<https://hbr.org/2017/09/how-to-get-men-involved-with-gender-parity-initiatives>

Asserts that men avoid involvement in gender-parity efforts, although they have relevant experience and can benefit directly; encourages positive, supportive action. Broadly applicable to the creation of equity initiatives that include stakeholders beyond those most directly affected.

Only Skin Deep: Re-Examining the Business Case for Diversity – Deloitte Point of View (2011)

https://www.ced.org/pdf/Deloitte_-_Only_Skin_Deep.pdf

Aimed at organizations interested in the business case for diversity. Expands the demographic definition of diversity to include the diversity of ideas that comes from multiple backgrounds and experiences.

Out and Equal Workplace Advocates

<http://www.outandequal.org>

Nonprofit dedicated to LGBTQ workplace equality.

Fact sheet · <http://outandequal.org/2017-workplace-equality-fact-sheet/>

Best practices · <http://outandequal.org/20-steps/>

Why Diversity Matters – Catalyst (2013)

http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/why_diversity_matters_catalyst_0.pdf

Summary of Catalyst diversity studies makes the business case for diversity: improving financial performance, leveraging talent, reflecting the marketplace, building reputation, and group performance.

GENERAL RESOURCES**Catalyst**

<https://worklifelaw.org/>

Researches many topics related to diversity, equity, inclusion in general and in relation to specific underrepresented groups. Resources to help companies better understand the issues; case studies and tools to help with implementing changes.

Center for WorkLife Law

<https://worklifelaw.org/>

Provides tools and resources around the topics of women's leadership, families, and bias.

Bias Interrupters · <https://biasinterrupters.org/>

Offers many tool kits and worksheets for individuals and organizations to interrupt bias.

Women's Leadership Edge ·

<https://www.womensleadershipedge.org/>

Wide array of tools to help organizations support, advance, and retain women employees: parallels in engineering and law.

CEOs Action for Diversity and Inclusion

<https://www.ceoaction.com/>

CEO members pledge to advance diversity and inclusion. Actions taken by each company and the outcomes are catalogued.

Deloitte

https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/topics/value-of-diversity-and-inclusion.html?icid=left_diversity

Variety of articles with perspectives and insights on business and leadership topics. The company pioneered equitable practices.

Gallup

<https://www.gallup.com/home.aspx>

Collection of tools and services to assist companies in data collection and analytics, including culture, employee engagement, and diversity.

Harvard Business Review

<https://hbr.org/>

Succinct articles summarize research on business topics including equity, diversity, and inclusion from a variety of sources.

Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity

<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/>

General overview of implicit bias and comprehensive annual reviews of current research into implicit bias across many fields.

Lean In

<https://leanin.org/>

Focused on empowering women to achieve their goals through organizing women's peer groups, public awareness, and education.

Pew Research Center

<http://www.pewresearch.org/>

Research looks at issues, attitudes, and trends through social science research.

Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)

<https://www.shrm.org/>

Thorough array of resources for any size employer, tools include legal compliance and a variety of human resources topics.

Notes

1. Wanda Lau, “The AIA Establishes a Commission on Equity in Architecture,” *Architect Magazine*, December 17, 2015, https://www.architectmagazine.com/practice/the-aia-establishes-a-commission-on-equity-in-architecture_o.
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3. Race Forward, Appendix to *Race Reporting Guide*, June 2015, https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/Race%20Reporting%20Guide%20by%20Race%20Forward_V1.1.pdf.
4. “Business-Case Arguments for Diversity and Diversity Programs and Their Impact in the Workplace,” Military Leadership Diversity Commission, February, 2010, <http://diversity.defense.gov/Portals/51/Documents/Resources/Commission/docs/Issue%20Papers/Paper%2014%20-%20Business%20Case%20Arguments%20for%20Diversity%20and%20Programs.pdf>.
5. Kristen P. Jones, et al., “Beyond the Business Case: An Ethical Perspective of Diversity Training,” *Human Resource Management* 52, no. 1 (January–February 2013): 55–74, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/hrm.21517>.

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Intercultural Competence

KEY TOPICS

agent identity
assumptions
bridging
capacity
culture
discrimination
dominant culture
explicit bias
implicit bias
intercultural development
mindset
nondominant culture
norms
stereotypes
target identity

To grow the value of diversity in our profession, we must develop inclusive, equitable workplaces in which unbiased, culturally aware thoughts and actions guide our practice.

This guide outlines the importance of increasing intercultural competence and reducing bias in the US architecture workplace against people with nondominant identities—such as people who are women, immigrants, disabled, unmarried, LGBTQ, young and old, less educated, or of certain races, ethnicities, religions or socioeconomic classes—and recommends actions for doing so.



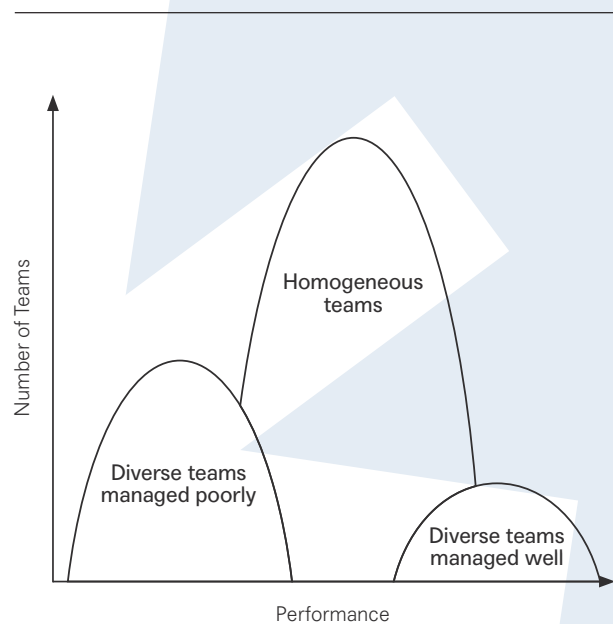
The University of Minnesota for the American
Institute of Architects Equity and the Future of
Architecture Committee

What is intercultural competence?

Increasingly, organizations are seeing the value of workplaces where differences are recognized as strengths that contribute to reaching common goals. This inclusiveness is important for how all individuals within a firm work together, and it also matters for how a firm and its employees connect with individuals and groups outside the firm.

Diversity in architecture—varying the identity mix of employees and leaders—is being encouraged to improve the profession, by bringing different perspectives and ways of thinking into our work and by better reflecting clients and end users. Yet diversity on its own is only the presence of difference. Even when groups are diverse, the dominant culture still holds power (for example, a firm with half men and half women leaders does not guarantee that women’s input is equally considered or influential). The value of diversity comes in what is done with it—we do disservice to our profession to call for diversity alone. For differences to have a positive impact, people must have the skills to work across and gain from heterogeneity.

Mixed groups are more productive, creative, and innovative than homogeneous groups if they have developed the capacity to leverage what everyone has to offer. Without this ability, diversity in some situations may even be detrimental—mixed teams can clash, leading to the perception that they make things “harder” or “not worth it.” The important question in this context is: how can we best support diverse teams to work well together and thus improve results?



TEAM PERFORMANCE AND DIVERSITY

Research has shown that well-managed homogeneous teams outperform poorly-managed diverse teams while well-managed diverse teams outstrip all others.¹

How do we build an inclusive environment where differences have a positive impact? Developing intercultural competence—an individual’s or group’s ability to function effectively across cultures—is one way to address this need.² Intercultural competence is the capacity to shift perspective and behavior so as to bridge cultural differences in order to reach identified goals. Intercultural competence is not an innate ability or a strength of certain personality types or group makeup, it is a developmental capacity. Just like learning a language, it is a skill that is developed over time with practice, by anyone who chooses to make the effort.

Because the ability to function across cultures is not generally taught and personal experience varies widely, people differ in their capabilities to recognize and respond effectively to cultural differences and commonalities. According to a leading assessment tool for intercultural competence, the Intercultural Development Inventory, the developmental continuum spans mindsets from monocultural to intercultural. Each person's level of competence for engaging differences and commonalities can be improved through active practice.³ Competence orientations (and what to practice) are divided into five stages:

- denial - one misses the presence of difference (practice noticing difference)
- polarization - one judges difference (find commonalities or pride)
- minimization - one de-emphasizes difference (practice self-awareness)
- acceptance - one deeply comprehends difference (practice action)
- adaptation - one has the capacity to effectively bridge differences (practice defining role, goal, core values)

Currently, a majority of people (about 60%) are in a transitional “minimization” mindset in which they can recognize differences but focus instead on commonalities to maintain their own or the dominant group's comfort or to survive as a nondominant group member within a dominant group. To learn to acknowledge, appreciate, and analyze differences as well as commonalities and to use them effectively toward identified goals—rather than shy away from differences—one needs to first develop self-awareness about their own culturally learned thoughts and behaviors. Then, one can begin to more deeply recognize and appreciate cultural differences with others in perceptions and practices and, with practice, be able to shift perspective and behavior in authentic and culturally appropriate ways according to context and goals.

CULTURE

To build individual and group capacity to work effectively across people's differences, it is essential to understand culture. Culture is the shared patterns in a social group that determine appropriate behavior and help us make meaning of our environment.⁴ We work within and negotiate culture all the time, whether or not we are aware of it. Every group or organization has a dominant culture and possibly subcultures.

A common way of understanding culture is with the model of the “cultural iceberg.” Cultural aspects that are visible or explicit are represented by the part of the iceberg above water—just the tip of the iceberg. Elements of explicit culture are things that are commonly

“At its core it's really about making sure people are having conversations with people who are different from them. You can teach tools, but unless people are actually meeting people and building those relationships, a tool is just a tool.”

Licensure Candidate and Recent Graduate,
South Asian, Male, 26

easy to perceive, such as how people dress, the language they use, types of spaces they create, types of foods they eat, etc. The unseen or implicit aspects of culture exist below the water line; they are what can sink the ship of a relationship or endeavor if they are not understood and can affect the ability to communicate and work toward shared goals.⁵ Examples of implicit culture are subconscious and unconscious attitudes toward body language (Is it polite to shake hands? What's a good handshake?), gender roles (Is it more appropriate for a man or woman to be a stay-at-home parent?), work ethic (Is someone more committed if they work certain hours of the day?), etc. (For more on the cultural iceberg and how to see culture in your team, group, or organization, refer to the *Workplace Culture* guide.)

IDENTITY

In addition to culture, it is also important to understand identity and how it works. Everyone's identity has multiple facets, both inherent and chosen—race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, presumed social class, religion, age, abilities, family roles, etc. Identities can be clearly expressed or discerned (such as an obvious physical disability or conforming gender) or can be more internalized and difficult to see (such as a hidden disability or sexual orientation). Even though identities are social constructions, they are very real, given the value and meaning ascribed to the presence or absence of certain identity markers. It is a natural tendency of the human brain to categorize experiences to make meaning of ourselves and our surroundings.

Context determines how we judge—make meaning—out of identity markers. Identity markers, such as the color of someone's skin or their apparent gender, have been ascribed different meanings and values in different cultural contexts. For example, some cultures consistently defer to the knowledge of elders, while others applaud youth and dismiss the contributions of those over a certain age. Whichever identity is the “norm” (recognized by seeing who is favored in systemic

outcomes) is considered the dominant identity of that culture. Whichever is the minority, or “different,” is considered the nondominant identity. Whether or not an aspect of our identity feels dominant depends entirely on our specific cultural situation. For example, if you are a thirty-year-old architect in a firm led by thirty-six-year-old partners, being young is a dominant identity. But if you are a thirty-year-old architect in a firm led by partners mostly over fifty, being young is a nondominant identity.

In addition to situationally impacted identity (dominant and nondominant), there are the concepts of target and agent identities. A *target identity* is a social-identity group that is discriminated against, marginalized, oppressed, or exploited by someone of the dominant culture or dominant culture’s system of institutions. An *agent identity* is an identity that has advantages by birth or acquisition and knowingly or unknowingly receives unfair benefit or privileges over members of target groups.⁶ Target and agent identities are determined by large-scale context (such as countries) and therefore remain more constant across daily situations than dominant and nondominant. In broad cultural contexts, like the United States as a whole, systemic outcomes illustrate the preference for certain identities over others. For example, being male is a preferred/agent identity and being female is a target identity in the United States. A variety of examples show preference for males—men are more likely to have higher salaries, more likely to have a job in the C-Suite, are less likely to be sexually harassed—reflecting the myriad ways in which men are valued as “more than” women.

In terms of how target/agent and dominant/nondominant identity relate, first consider that in the United States, being African American is a target identity and in most architecture firms, it is also a nondominant identity. In a firm that is predominantly African American or led by African American leaders, being African American is the dominant identity group. Even so, because the firm practices in a white-dominated profession and society, being African American would remain a target identity both within and outside of the firm.

In the United States (and therefore in the US architecture profession), target groups include women, people of color, poor or working-class people, LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, people without a college degree, immigrants, etc. Agent groups include men, white people, owning-class (having enough assets to pay basic bills without having to work), heterosexual individuals, people without disabilities, people with a college degree, US-born citizens, etc. Most people possess both target and agent identities, and it is crucial to understand that many people have an agent identity in our profession whether or not they want it. Having one or more agent identities does not mean that you knowingly or purposefully use your identity unfairly over members of target groups, but nonetheless you benefit from this privilege whether or not you are aware of it. Awareness of advantages that

stem from agent identities is the first step in learning how to use your identity to become an ally.

BIAS

In the process of increasing intercultural capacity through expanded awareness and skills, culturally learned biases are recognized, understood, addressed, and minimized. Bias can be explicit or implicit, and both occur at the level of the individual, group, and institution.

Explicit bias occurs when one is conscious of their prejudices and attitudes toward a certain group. For example, explicit negative bias when expressed could be hate speech toward someone for a sexual orientation or could be overt institutional racism such as race-based housing discrimination.⁷ People are more likely to express explicit bias when they perceive a threat to their well-being and may justify unfair treatment toward individuals of that group when they believe their bias to be valid. Social norms against prejudice help people consciously control behavior that expresses their explicit biases, but their biases may remain. When explicit bias is present, emphasizing commonalities between groups or recognizing a common group identity that includes the target group can help reduce initial tension, and making contact with persons from the judged group can begin to build trust. Yet it is important to then go beyond highlighting commonalities to see and appreciate differences between the groups.

Implicit biases are the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner, are activated involuntarily without awareness or intent, and can be either positive or negative.⁸ Nonetheless, it is important to take responsibility for our implicit biases—once we know we may have them, they are no longer always unconscious. For example, imagine Frank, who explicitly believes that women and men are equally suited for careers outside the home. Despite his egalitarian belief, Frank might nevertheless implicitly associate women with the home more than the workplace (due to dominant-culture messages, such as advertisements or women being paid less than men for their work), and this implicit association might lead him to have biased behavior, such as trusting feedback from female coworkers less, hiring men over equally qualified women, or assigning more career-advancing projects to men.⁹ Once Frank learns about bias, he is responsible for recognizing and interrupting it in his own decisions, but in the workplace, he does not need to manage it completely on his own; policies, protocols, and practices should provide him with support to help prevent biased decisions, check his decisions for bias, and provide an opportunity to make corrections.

Biases are conveyed to us by culture, politics, social settings, laws, major events, and mass media. Even those who are disadvantaged by these biases may perpetuate them because they are socially ingrained via the dominant culture. It can be easy to deny unintentional

bias precisely because it is often invisible or goes unaddressed. However, when we acknowledge that we are all receiving messages about who is and is not “acceptable” or “competent,” we can begin to notice, name, and reprogram how we receive that information. Going further, we can investigate our instincts to uncover where we learned certain values, thoughts, and behavior, and monitor, adjust, and improve how we share new messages that do not inadvertently reinforce dominant-culture frameworks.

“People have to get comfortable with the uncomfortable and have the right facilitation approach, acknowledging where there is tension in the room. Set the stage at bias trainings so people know they may hear things they don’t like but are there to learn.”

Principal and Owner, White, Female, 60

Many types of implicit bias are common in the workplace.¹⁰ Some of them include:

- anchoring bias (tendency to rely on the first observation or piece of information available)
- affinity bias (bias toward people like ourselves)
- attribution bias (bias in evaluating reasons for your own and others’ behaviors)
- blind spot (identifying biases in others but not in oneself)
- confirmation bias (seeking information that confirms pre-existing beliefs or assumptions)
- conformity bias (biased caused by peer pressure)
- halo effect (thinking everything about a person is good because you like that person)
- in-group bias (perceiving positively people who are similar to those in the group)
- out-group bias (perceiving negatively people who are different from those in the group)
- perception bias (inability to make objective judgments about members of certain groups because of stereotypes)

Bias can affect how we perceive all facets of identity: race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical traits and ability, religion, geography, immigration status, family and marital status, education, socioeconomic class, accent and vocabulary, introversion/extroversion, etc. The impact of implicit bias can lead to inequity in almost every aspect of a business, from recruiting, hiring, onboarding, assignment opportunities, evaluation, promotion, compensation, and leadership composition to everyday behaviors and group culture.

To avoid biased outcomes, simply trying to be fair has limited effectiveness compared to first learning concrete, effective strategies to reduce the influence of bias and then adapting them to your work in the practice of architecture.¹¹ The likelihood that bias may influence thoughts and actions increases under several conditions:

- during certain emotional states
- where there is ambiguity
- if social categories are easily recognizable
- when the effort put into thinking is low
- under pressured circumstances
- when there is a lack of feedback¹²

For example, feeling angry will increase one’s biased judgments against stigmatized individuals, even if the emotion is not related to the situation.¹³

Thoughtful, thorough, and multifaceted strategies to address conscious and unconscious biases and build intercultural capacity create an environment in which individual and group attitudes and behaviors and institutionalized practices can be queried and improved.

Listening to people’s unique experiences and perspectives can be a powerful tool, helping you question and examine your own assumptions about a person or a situation. It also provides a way to reframe your perspective of a situation to understand it from another’s vantage point. The following *Experiences and Perspectives in Architecture* invites you to begin listening, questioning, and reframing. Even if it is uncomfortable, try asking people questions about their experiences working in the profession and what was important to them about those experiences. In listening to what they have to say, practice finding both the commonalities and the differences to your own experiences and identities.

EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES IN ARCHITECTURE

The following perspectives are responses to the questions: What stereotypes, bias, or discrimination do you anticipate, worry about, or have experienced in the architecture workplace, based on which of your identities? How does this expectation or experience affect you or cause you to alter your thinking or behavior?

“I have been very fortunate to have enjoyed and experienced firsthand all of the advantages bestowed on an educated, professional, white male. My workplace experience has been positive and always associated with my ability and experience, never tied to any other identifiers. It allows me to assume that those who meet me are evaluating me, my firm, and our work and are not considering any other factors in selecting or working with us.”

Firm Founder and Principal, White, Male, 60

“I am most concerned about being typecast by my race and gender in a way that diminishes my voice and experience as an individual with her own opinions. I wish that others (such as white males) would speak up more about issues related to gender and racial equity. I feel a responsibility to champion this cause, but I also care deeply about other things. If more white men would add their voices to equity issues, it would provide more space for minorities and women to spend time on other issues that are often more highly regarded by the academy, practice, and society at large.”

Professor, Administrator, and Architect,
Black, Female, 40s

“The most significant biases toward me are for being female and Asian, and then sometimes looking young. When I sense that someone is engaging with me as if I were in my twenties, I mention that my son is in seventh grade. Or if I feel like they are reacting differently to me because I’m a woman, I might try to be less assertive—or more assertive. And then sometimes I just say, ‘Screw it. I’ll be whomever I want to be and you can take it or leave it.’”

Firm Owner, Asian, Female, 45

“I have not experienced any bias that I can remember. This causes me to go out of my way to be clear, open-minded, and generous to those who I work with, teach, or serve.”

Firm Owner and Principal, White, Female, 53

“I worry about white fragility and having the uncomfortable conversations. A quote from Dr. Robin DiAngelo: ‘Our socialization renders us racially illiterate.’ When you add a lack of humility to that illiteracy (because we don’t know what we don’t know), you get the breakdown we so often see when trying to engage white people in meaningful conversations about race.”

Principal and Owner, White, Female, 60

“I have experienced gender bias. It encourages me to empower others regardless of their demographic.”

CEO and Owner,
White, Female, 59

“I have experienced racial and gender bias. I do more than needed (overcompensate) in terms of performance and limit social interactions to what is absolutely necessary.”

Educator, South Asian, Female, 50s

“I see an increase in bias against older generations, both male and female, and because of it, we are losing experienced individuals and the firm’s important legacy.”

Principal and Owner,
White, Male, 45–50

“I am acutely aware that I have to excel at all times. I cannot have a bad day publicly.”

Managing Partner and Firm Owner,
Black, Male, 46

“As a woman, I worry that when I speak up in meetings, it can be construed as being too mouthy. I am frequently interrupted, and my ideas are often wrongly attributed to the men in the room. When men speak up, they are seen as powerful contributors and leaders. Some of the ways this affects me is that I may hold back from sharing ideas/thoughts, and I have decided not to coauthor works with others (studies show women receive less credit for coauthored work than males), risking not seeming like a team player. I also worry that 1) as a wife/mother, it is assumed that I am not the primary breadwinner and thus do not need raises/promotions, 2) since my partner earns more than me, my career trajectory/earned income/impact potential is less important, and 3) I am judged on my accomplishments, whereas men are evaluated for their potential. The way this affects me is I tend to underestimate the value of my contributions, both in terms of appropriate earned income and effective execution of shared vision/objective.”

Business Owner, Sole Practitioner, and Educator,
White, Female, Gen-X

“I can’t think of any obvious incidents of bias or discrimination. For me, the incidents are more like microaggressions. After years and years, these add up along with my experiences outside the profession (which are much more obviously discriminatory).”

Architect, White, Male, Gay, 38

“I am concerned about bias based on my race, religion, and appearance (I have long locks). With low numbers for African American professionals, there are fewer opportunities for me and my peers. It makes me work from a position of disadvantage. I have to be very proactive and very hopeful that I am provided opportunities. It is an undue pressure and only through the intervention of allies can this be overcome. Navigating basic office politics devoid of racial bias is difficult enough, let alone having to self-advocate for chances to contribute and perform new roles. It makes me have to master my flaws and sharpen my skills above and beyond what is required of my peers in order to achieve a level playing ground.”

Senior Project Manager, Black, Male, 41

“Every day I worry about not being ‘good enough’ and being seen as inferior to my fellow male coworkers. It’s not so much a fear as it is a worry because I have experienced being seen as such. It’s usually about tone and choice of phrasing, for instance, ‘I need you to get this done by the end of the day, do you think you can handle it?’ And if not the choice of phrasing, it is definitely the tone that triggers these thoughts. Because I think that way, I have been known as the overachiever in many different settings due to trying to be the best and not be seen as inferior or less than.”

Architectural Designer,
African American, Female, 25

“Being Native American, I experience the stereotypes that we all live in teepees, are not educated, live off the government, and don't pay for health care and taxes. We need to educate others about who we are and that we can be traditional and live in an urban environment.”

Owner, Principal-in-Charge, and CEO,
Native American, Female, 35–40

“Worrying about how you will be seen or treated can be detrimental to someone's career development as it could lead to less participation or involvement if a workplace is perceived as noninclusive or apathetic. For example, I worry about gender stereotypes in situations if I'm not considered for a particular project or task or invited to meetings. I always try and consider if I am letting my own fear of discrimination impede me from stepping up.”

Architectural Associate, American Indian,
Hispanic/Latina, Female, 27

“Even though English has always been my primary language, sometimes people struggle to understand my accent or (occasionally) assume that I am not fluent. While this doesn't really stop me from achieving, sometimes people misunderstand what I say and I have to elaborate. I find myself having to restate or reword what I say. Sometimes, I spend a lot of energy thinking about how I should pronounce something or phrase something so that I can get my meaning across.”

Licensure Candidate and Recent Graduate,
South Asian, Male, 26

Why is intercultural competence important?

Bias—explicit or implicit—creates circumstances that impede working relationships, lead to exclusion, contribute to unfair advantages of certain groups, and limit the benefits of diversity, inclusion, and equity. As the architecture profession and its clientele become more diverse and design processes engage more stakeholders, individuals and firms will work in an array of contexts with different cultural patterns. Cultural awareness, or a lack of it, is shown to affect psychological, behavioral, and performance outcomes at all organizational levels.¹⁴

While many professions struggle with bias and effective communication across difference, in the architectural profession there are some particular challenges—white male-dominated structures, the trope of the hero-architect, and the exercise of extreme criticism, among others—often at odds with today’s collaborative practices, desire for work-life balance, and increasingly diverse backgrounds of practitioners.

INDIVIDUALS

Behavior · Assumptions and biases of all kinds, both overt and subtle, affect the behavior of individuals and those around them. Bias-driven behaviors left unchecked will undermine other behaviors that are meant to be guided by decisions that are intentional, goal-directed, and values-aligned.

Decisions · Bias and cultural norms shape how groups determine what is appropriate, including defining the “right” decisions. Project teams who desire conformity or harmony may succumb to groupthink, with members less inclined to question one another or explore innovative alternatives.

Power · Bias reinforces inequitable power structures and dynamics between dominant and nondominant groups and contributes to an uneven playing field where gaps are created, reinforced, and amplified over time.

Health · The stresses of communication difficulties, misconceptions, and uncertainty negatively affect mental and physical health and tend to have a disproportionately large impact on nondominant members. Increasing intercultural competence can help level the playing field by spreading the discomfort evenly and, for all in the long run, can help decrease emotional exhaustion and increase psychological well-being by lowering the anxiety of working with others.

Performance · Building intercultural capacity supports optimism and the ability to regulate emotions (e.g., lower anxiety, frustration, contempt) when working across lines of differences, increasing clear communication, trust, and strong relationships for creative problem solving.¹⁵ Furthermore, a firm climate in which diversity is valued cues individuals to improve their performance in intercultural contexts.

Networks · Intercultural competence enhances the ability to connect more effectively with a broad range of colleagues, clients, and stakeholders and develop genuine friendships, authentic working relationships, and innovative cohorts.

FIRMS

Recruitment and Retention · Intercultural competence is shown to increase effectiveness in meeting diversity and inclusion goals in recruiting and staffing.¹⁶ When a workplace's stated values of diversity, equity, and inclusion are consistent with workplace behaviors, individuals are more likely to be attracted to it, stay, and recommend it to others. In addition to discrimination, harassment, or even violence, the accumulation of even small slights (often resulting from implicit bias) contributes to talent leaving firms and the profession.

Teamwork · Interculturally competent teams exhibit high levels of cooperation within and beyond their group and are likely to frequently share ideas with those who are culturally different.¹⁷

Leveraging Diverse Teams · Cultural differences have the potential to either hinder or help effective teamwork, team creativity, and performance. Diverse teams might take longer to arrive at solutions, especially initially, but their solutions can be more relevant and valuable when they build cultural patterns that incorporate a greater range of perspectives and ideas.¹⁸ “Slow down to go fast.”

Leadership Potential and Effectiveness · Intercultural competencies include many of the most valued leadership skills, such as providing a sense of safety and belonging, openness, encouraging learning and individual growth, empowering others, and maintaining high ethical standards.¹⁹ A manager's cultural awareness can lead to more fruitful client and partner relationships.

Markets · Performance in working with diverse partners and clients improves when cultural awareness is higher firm-wide, and especially across management. Intercultural capacities and skills allow firms to work successfully with multiple types of clients in a variety of locations.

Capacity for Change · Intercultural competence builds the capacity of individuals and groups to consistently, effectively, and authentically adapt, including the ability to shift perspectives and behaviors in order to drive toward shared goals.

PROFESSION

Community Engagement · For individuals with sufficient cultural self-awareness, a key method for increasing intercultural competence is to learn about diverse groups through sustained, interactive civic engagement. Not only can diverse local groups benefit from working with firms that are interculturally effective, but the firms, in turn, build capacity for tackling challenges with a broader scope of clients.

Quality of Built Environment · The ability of our profession to include the cultural needs, values, and practices of diverse groups in the practice of architecture is a key factor in improving the built environment for people across race, gender, class, abilities, etc.

“Whenever I speak to women, what I tell them is that they don't have to act like a man, think like a man, behave like a man, design like a man to be in the profession. In fact, it's important they do not. The profession needs their perspectives because their perspectives are different. And for African Americans, Latinos, young people, it's important for the profession at large to embrace and capture their thinking to become more relevant and more needed by society.”

Architect as Association Manager,
White, Female, 60-ish

Our workplace increases intercultural competence when...

AWARENESS

everyone identifies and takes responsibility for their attitudes and biases

individuals actively listen to each other

individual differences, perspectives, and communication styles are acknowledged

individuals' preferred names and pronouns are known and honored

identity groups openly communicate how they are misunderstood or made to feel accepted

reasons for individual or group disengagement are explored

DEVELOPMENT

cultural self-awareness is explored to notice, address, and mitigate biases

the firm supports inclusive and balanced dialogue

diverse teams and their leaders receive support for holding complex conversations

employees set goals for increasing their capacity to navigate cross-culturally

the firm offers intercultural learning opportunities

marginalized employees and groups are appropriately reconnected to the organization

COMPLIANCE

unlawful discrimination of any kind is not tolerated

business practices are analyzed for discrimination

INFLUENCE

communication patterns and discussions reflect multiple cultural perspectives

challenges are resolved using a variety of approaches

cultural differences are bridged by adapting strategies

individuals with different levels of intercultural competence cross-mentor

successfully managed, culturally aware diverse teams are more cohesive and creative

groups form to discuss and advocate for specific diversity, inclusion, and equity strategies

Discrimination

This section is intended to introduce you to important legal information regarding discrimination and suggestions for maintaining a discrimination-free workplace but is not a substitute for legal advice. For such advice, we strongly urge you to consult an attorney.

Interactions related to the practice of architecture may be unethical or unlawful if they reflect either intentional and unintentional discrimination. Reducing bias and increasing intercultural awareness and opportunities for open communication in the workplace can help prevent discrimination. All forms of discrimination—whether or not they meet legal standards of discrimination—have serious, negative consequences for individuals and firms, and undermine the ethical standards and ideals of our profession.

UNDERSTAND THE LAW AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

In the United States, federal law prohibits discrimination in certain contexts against someone on the basis of sex (including gender identity, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), race, ethnicity, religion, nation of origin, age, disability, genetic information, or military service.

In the employment arena, both disparate treatment (intentional and generally directed at a specific individual or individuals) and disparate impact (unintentional) employment discrimination against these protected groups are prohibited.²⁰ Most states have additional laws prohibiting discrimination, which often include protected classes beyond those recognized at the federal level. Educational institutions are governed by Title IX, which prohibits discrimination in education based on gender and ensures equal opportunity on the basis of sex. Furthermore, all discrimination laws prohibit retaliation against employees who have engaged in “protected activity,” meaning that they have complained of actions they believe in good faith to be discriminatory or they have supported another employee in pursuit of such a claim.

The following are some key details regarding employment discrimination and claims:

- Disparate or adverse impact is discrimination that occurs when an employment policy or practice, which at face value appears to be neutral, has a disproportionately negative effect on a protected group.
- Disparate impact can result from systemic discrimination (patterns of behavior, policies, or practices that are part of structures of an organization that create or perpetuate disadvantaged persons).
- The vast majority of individual employment discrimination claims are brought under the disparate treatment theory, where an adverse employment action (for example, a failure to hire, demotion, denial of promotion, or termination) is alleged to have been based, at least in part, on the employee’s membership in a protected class.
- Employee selection procedures—especially testing, education requirements, physical requirements, and evaluations of work samples—as well as pay and promotion policies and practices are typical topics for disparate impact claims.
- At the federal level, an employee asserting a claim of discrimination must first “exhaust administrative remedies” before they can file a claim in court. This requires that the employee first file a charge of discrimination with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and obtain a right-to-sue letter. Some state discrimination laws have a similar exhaustion of remedies procedure, but many do not require this administrative step.
- Claims are usually decided based on the statistical analysis of data.
- If a policy or practice in question causes a disparate impact, the employer must show that it is both job related and consistent with business necessity.
- Retaliation claims are asserted in a large percentage of discrimination cases. Retaliation claims can be challenging for employers to

defend—there is often an issue of fact as to whether the employee’s prior complaint played some role in the employer’s ultimate adverse employment decision.

- For the reason above, employers are strongly advised to carefully document their employment decisions and to take seriously all internal complaints by employees, thoroughly investigating and documenting the outcome of the investigation.

The AIA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (2018) is explicit about discrimination:

- Canon I, Rule 1.401 states, “Members shall not engage in harassment or discrimination in their professional activities on the basis of race, religion, national origin, age, disability, caregiver status, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.”
- Canon V, Ethical Standard 5.1 states, “Professional Environment: Members should provide their associates and employees with a fair and equitable working environment, compensate them fairly, and facilitate their professional development.”
- Canon V, Rule 5.101 states, “Members shall treat their colleagues and employees with mutual respect, and provide an equitable working environment.”²¹

“I was interested in a leadership position at a firm that was opening a new office. The only reason they could give me for not being selected was they couldn’t see me fitting in the back room, which was all men. (All the women on staff were administrative.) They were concerned they ‘wouldn’t be able to cuss,’ and it would change the dynamic if a woman were there. The partner called and was super-apologetic but said he couldn’t change the mindset of the leadership.”

Workplace Strategist, Asian, Female, 39

For closely related compliance considerations and suggestions for preventing and responding to violations, see the *Workplace Culture* and *Compensation* guides.

Assess

AWARENESS

Where is each person starting from with respect to bias and cultural self-awareness? · Do employees have the time and resources to learn about bias and become aware of their own biases? · How are implicit and explicit attitudes affecting performance? · What psychometric tests and guidance are offered for employees geared toward individual development and team building?

What biases and intercultural tendencies are dominant in your organization? · Has your firm done an assessment of all employee experiences of intercultural competence and bias in the organization? · How do implicit attitudes and common patterns of behavior affect the workplace? · Are groups working together to address bias and build intercultural competence? · Is it recognized when employees of nondominant cultures are expected to tailor their behavior to that of the dominant culture?

DEVELOPMENT

How are you interrupting bias and building intercultural capacity? · How does your firm determine what needs to be addressed and who gets to contribute? · What are your diversity, equity, and inclusion goals? · What metrics and benchmarks are used for evaluating change? · Do you form diverse project teams that accurately represent current and prospective client, user, and community perspectives?

Is intercultural thinking developed as a framework for awareness? · In addition to fostering an individual's awareness of the organizational culture (procedures, policies, norms, systems), is the firm supporting employees in increasing knowledge of the values, social interaction norms, patterns, etc. of different cultures? · Are cultural perspective-taking skills (determining relevance of situational cues within cultural context) taught to detect, analyze, value, and consider others' points of view? · How deeply are you learning about the cultures of clients and their stakeholders?

INFLUENCE

Can employees shift their perspective and behavior in a variety of cultural contexts? · What intercultural communication skills (imparting and receiving information cross-culturally) and culturally aware interpersonal skills (in showing respect and tact, negotiating with people, building relationships and rapport) are exhibited? · Does the workplace benefit from employees who can culturally adapt (maintaining positive relationships by modifying one's behavior to respect others' values or customs in the pursuit of clear goals)?

Is increased intercultural capacity cultivated at all levels? · Are the organizational vision and core values, as well as mutual interactions and idea exchange between peers and leaders, informed by cross-cultural learning and understanding? · What measurement and adjustment cycles are in place to guide evaluation and development? · How are you preparing team and firm leaders to respond to comments critical of individual or firm intercultural competence? · Are firm leaders and employees sensitive to perceptions about diversity, equity, and inclusion in architecture and actively working to improve them?

Act

INDIVIDUALS

Everyone can contribute to disrupting cultural patterns that subjugate or exclude certain groups, creating a level playing field for marginalized professionals within our current frameworks and increasing the capacity to bridge across differences.

BUILD CAPACITY FOR NOTICING AND NAMING CULTURE AND BIAS

Awareness of cultural patterns that result in the reinforcement of a hierarchy of human value is the first step toward interrupting those patterns and acting in alignment with your values.

- **Increase your cultural self-awareness.** What parts of your identity are you most aware of, and how did you learn about what your identities mean in terms of your value and the behaviors and interests you are expected to have? What differences between yourself and others have made a difference in your various life contexts? What parts of your identity are within or outside the dominant culture, and what does that mean for advantages or disadvantages you have experienced?
- **Learn how bias works,** what your own biases are, where bias occurs in the workplace, and its effects. Build your conscious awareness by taking assessments such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT) and the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI).²²
- **Build relationships**—get to know people who are different from you, and deepen your general knowledge of other cultures. This will help counter stereotypic associations in the mind and provide new information upon which to draw. At the same time, practice noticing and unpacking the impact of regularly espoused stereotypes.
- **Be aware of stereotype threat:** the risk of unconsciously conforming to negative stereotypes about one's own group, especially at critical moments of performance, such as during interviews and presentations.²³
- **Become aware of your organization's current cultural patterns.** What are the norms? How have particular perspectives and behaviors been assigned meaning? What has been determined appropriate and inappropriate? Who decided and how? How are your current patterns serving or inhibiting your ability to get closer to your goals? (See the *Workplace Culture* guide.)
- **Practice cocreating shared meaning.** The more diverse individual worldviews are, the more differences there are in values and filters, and this can make communication difficult.²⁴ For instance, if one person views the success of a project as completing a perfectly coordinated drawing set, another person as maintaining a cohesive and happy team, and yet another as achieving a certain margin of profit, agreeing on the goal of a project might be difficult. Think of communication as a process, and keep in mind that context greatly influences what the interaction means to each person, how the individual might react, and their preference for how to coordinate with others. Develop protocols with your colleagues to help start a positive pattern of asking questions that deepen understanding and relationships.
- **Become an attuned listener,** and attempt to understand the culturally rooted perspectives others may be using—slow down, notice, and unpack assumptions you may be making and ask questions to grasp the full picture of a situation without judgment. This takes practice!
- **Actively consider multiple perspectives** when you are faced with an “out of the norm” circumstance, behavior, or pattern. One method for this is D.I.V.E.: *Describe* (describe what you hear or see), *Interpret* (think of several interpretations for it), *Verify* (possibly ask others if your interpretations seem correct, but watch out for groupthink or dominant cultural perspectives that back up what you were already thinking), *Evaluate* (evaluate interpretations according to what you and others value).²⁵
- **Seek feedback from colleagues or mentors** to gauge if your past behavior or performance has been perceived as fair, if you consistently and effectively bridge differences, and what could be improved.

KNOW YOUR ROLE AND BE PROACTIVE

Understand your position within your group and how the role you play supports you in taking action to improve any situation. It is important to recognize both your positional power based on the dynamic of your organization as well as the power afforded by the facts of your identity. Both are real and have an impact on how you can be an effective agent for values and goal-driven change.

- **Learn to be effective in your communication and interactions.** Communicate thoughtfully and try to receive meaning as it was intended. Remember that intent does not equal impact, and use the Platinum Rule: treat others the way they want to be treated.
- **Investigate your instincts—learn how to correct and interrupt your own biased thinking and actions.** Even our instincts were developed (often subconsciously or unconsciously) because of our experiences with cultural patterns: we have been told or shown what we are supposed to be afraid of, what to value, etc. Practice changing your automatic reactions by making positive associations with nonmajority groups, negating stereotypes, and affirming counterstereotypes.²⁶ Engage with role models who you respect and who confute stereotypes, ideally through doing meaningful work together. In situations where a stereotype related to another person's identity might affect decisions, reduce negative bias by imagining or viewing images of admired people who have a similar identity.
- **Learn when and how to interrupt bias when it is directed toward you and others** by engaging in role-playing scenarios with others. Advocates with dominant and/or agent identities can play an important role by being an ally. Interrupting bias, prejudice, and harassment can have a profound impact.
- **Develop conflict fluency.** Remember your goal throughout a situation, and focus on determining what it will take to manage the conflict rather than being right. When multiple perspectives are understood, you are more likely to come up with a

“Have the courage to say something if necessary. If a woman is being disrespected or not acknowledged, sometimes it just takes somebody to step up and say or do the right thing. Sometimes it's just about courage.”

Partner and Founder, White, Male, 48

variety of different ways to approach both challenges and opportunities. Set a constructive tone, and ensure the goals you are driving toward are clear. Increase your capacity to sit with discomfort, and continually check your assumptions.

- **Learn how to frame bias interventions as constructive opportunities.** Aim to respond without embarrassing the person you are questioning and without damaging your own reputation or relationships in the group. By assuming the best intentions of everyone involved, you can act clearly without judgment and use the evidence available to support gentle but direct observations, questions, and suggestions.
- **Experiment with and assess bias interventions in order to improve** both individual effectiveness and team effectiveness. Observe and discuss how the intervention felt, what worked, and what you want to try differently. Develop an apology protocol to establish an agreed-upon way for receiving feedback and making amends.

BE A GOOD MANAGER

Managers are essential for growing and maintaining a positive set of intercultural practices that are inclusive and fair for all employees. A myriad of different solutions and interventions can be tried to work toward an equitable workplace.

- **Cultivate protocols and patterns for staff to build practices of individually and collectively navigating discomfort** in an open and supportive atmosphere, which will allow needed but uncomfortable conversations to occur. To have courageous conversations, stay engaged, expect to experience discomfort, share your lived experience, and know that closure may not be reached.²⁷
- **Foster multicultural teams to understand, incorporate, and leverage their differences** to perform at high levels. One method is for the team to use the framework of M.B.I.: *Map* (describe team member differences and their impacts), *Bridge* (communicate taking into account differences), *Integrate* (bring together and leverage differences).²⁸
- **Create an open, dynamic process for making decisions** that impact others, since explicit dialogue can be more helpful than assuming shared meaning, values, and goals. Articulate your own goals and reasoning, and include other perspectives before committing to the decision, rather than after. This helps you evaluate your thought process and also provides others with a clear view on your logic and an opportunity to provide additional information. When receiving information that will be used for making decisions, take notes so that you are able to go back and review rather than rely on memory.

- **Learn to interrupt bias, especially in key situations** when bias consistently occurs and does damage to individuals and organizations. In general, do not exacerbate the impacts of bias by calling attention to demographic differences at critical moments, as doing so will likely affect the performance of employees with nondominant identities.
- **Enforce agreed upon meeting protocols**, since in meetings, people of color, women, and others from nondominant groups (such as noncitizens, people with disabilities, people without college degrees) tend to be interrupted more often than men. It is preferable to develop protocols together as a group for what works best in your culture to foster inclusivity—consider having a no-interruption policy, sharing the agenda before the meeting, or assigning people specific parts to lead. After meetings, allow people to continue to contribute in case they were not able to do so during the meeting because of bias, and, outside of meeting times, talk to anyone who consistently interrupts others.
- **Respect everyone’s personal lives and responsibilities when determining job assignments**, without judging based on your personal views. Do not make assumptions about hours, assignments, or type of work they can or want to do. Make sure no one is carrying an unequal burden of work, whether or not they have a spouse or children.
- **Discuss upcoming parenthood productively.** Congratulate the person to extend support, and talk through leave policies and transition plans. Do not communicate disapproval or judgment that expresses any personal hardship or inconvenience you or the business will have.
- **Assume and plan for workers of all genders and sexual orientations to take parental and other types of leave** at any stage in their career, and work with firm leadership to make full, partial, or intermittent leaves available. Remember that different people and groups caretake, parent, heal, and grieve differently. Discuss any concerns the employee has, and upon their return from leave, continue to offer career-advancing opportunities regularly. (There is a cultural pattern in the United States of undervaluing and penalizing women who become or are parents.)
- **Be aware of tokenism**, and guard against competition between people with similar demographics for limited advancement options. Remember that changing the mix of people (diversifying) is just one part of the path toward equitable practice. It is sometimes assumed that the presence and contributions of any nondominant-culture hire will automatically fix things. However, just because someone is part of a nondominant

cultural community does not mean that person is not subject to upholding dominant-culture perspectives, beliefs, and expectations.

- **Seek to determine if bias might be involved when you perceive a stressed relationship between individuals.** An illustration: when people from underrepresented groups attain more advanced roles, they can have unfair expectations of others in the same underrepresented group. If they had to unfairly work harder and/or assimilate to dominant culture to advance, they may expect the same of those working their way up. For example, women leaders or managers can sometimes be especially hard on other women.²⁹
- **Make sure that certain groups are not required to demonstrate greater loyalty** than others in order to be recognized or to advance.
- **Ensure that everyone receives the same level and quality of staff support**, as at times members of underrepresented groups receive less support. Give clear direction to staff and pay attention, investigate issues, and adjust any related systems as needed.

“I was the only woman in a coordination meeting, and when the agenda came to my scope of work, I spoke up to add information to the discussion. An older male turned to me and said, ‘When you’re fifty and a man, then you can speak.’ Everyone laughed but me. He came by my desk later and put his hand on my shoulder and said with a grin, ‘Hey, I was just joking, you know.’ He never asked me what I thought, or how I felt. In retrospect, I can see how occurrences like this have impacted my understanding of identity and career.”

Architect and Educator, White, Female, 36

Act

FIRMS

Engaged firms can effect change at a structural level. Bias is currently embedded in dominant cultural patterns, values, and frameworks, and bias will continue if dominant culture is left unchanged. Therefore, in rebuilding new bias-free structures through both individual and systemic actions, firms have the ability to put in place new cultural patterns, cocreated through equitable and inclusive practice, and significantly aid firm-wide and broader industry-wide change.

UNDERSTAND YOUR INTERCULTURAL CAPACITY AND BIASES

Investigating all aspects of your organization for bias and identifying ways to increase intercultural capacity will reveal opportunities for change and support shared commitment toward achieving your diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.

- **Take a detailed inventory of your organization's patterns and practices**, coming to a shared understanding of your organization's current culture. (See the *Workplace Culture* guide.)
- **Conduct a review of your organization to screen for bias**, and look especially for signs of systemic bias impacting people of color and women. Include written and visual materials (such as your website, personnel policies, and benefits) in your review, since written information often feels like the agreed-upon rules of your organization's cultural values and practices.
- **Run regular audits of diversity, and administer climate surveys** or other tools to inventory how systemic barriers are impacting traditionally marginalized groups. (For review and audit suggestions, see the *Workplace Culture* and *Compensation* guides.)
- **Hold focus groups with employees with nonmajority identities**. Ask what barriers they face at work, and gather suggestions for how to improve perceptions and behavior. Follow through with targeted actions, and adjust as you learn what works and what does not. If possible, consider hiring an expert for this work.

- **Inquire into the impact of the firm's current decision-making processes**, and examine how they are in or out of alignment with your diversity, equity, and inclusion goals (ask who is present, who is absent, how is that determined, if processes are used inconsistently, etc.). Look for sources of stress in decision-making processes. For example, when there is not enough time to make decisions, it is more likely that judgments will be biased because one cannot thoroughly review and process information.

COMMUNICATE YOUR CULTURE

- **Cultivate a shared understanding of the organization's mission and core values**. Include the firm's commitment to intercultural capacity as integral to the firm's activities and decision-making.
- **Insert positive cues into your communications to reinforce an equitable culture**. Make it clear that the organization values diversity and that it considers the capacity to bridge cultural difference to be a key leadership competency. This can help increase trust by signalling to nonmajority individuals that the firm is serious about authentically including a myriad of voices, perspectives, and cultural practices.³⁰
- **Increase the feeling of social belonging in the firm** by ensuring that all are welcomed and are receiving the cues they need to feel that it is genuine.³¹
- **Convey that nondominant groups are seen and valued** by reflecting diverse identity groups in your choice of art, food at meetings, inspirational stories, room names, etc.³²
- **Publicly recognize individuals** who, through their actions, exhibit commitment to increasing the value of diversity and equitable practices.

LEAD YOUR CULTURE

- **Increase the representation of nondominant groups** in your organization at all levels. (See the *Recruitment & Retention* guide.)
- **Consider the role of dominant-culture identities in your policies and practices.** For example, if events or approved days off are currently based on Christian holidays, find ways of recognizing dates that are significant to different cultural and ethnic groups to foster inclusion and engagement and reduce misinformed or inaccurate perceptions.
- **Create an inclusive workplace for transgender and gender-nonconforming employees.** Have established policies and practices relating to gender-identity and presentation-based discrimination, benefits access, record keeping, facilities access, dress codes, and self-identification. In addition to a pronoun policy, make it a norm to offer and ask for pronoun preferences rather than making assumptions based on how you perceive someone's appearance (such as in interviews and email signatures or during onboarding or introduction processes). Allow gender-inclusive pronouns, such as *they, them, theirs, zee, here,* and *hir*, as well as no pronouns for those who request you only use their name.³³
- **Structure processes in which there is discretion in making decisions to flag and minimize bias** (candidate selection, hiring, role appointment, compensation, promotion, partnership, etc.). Establish and gain precommitment to criteria (to prevent them being redefined based on desires or biases), remind people of criteria, and hold decision-makers accountable.³⁴
- **Provide intercultural learning opportunities** to foster personal interactions with diverse groups of people with time built in for individual and group reflection. Opportunities could include a lunch-time session with someone inside or outside the organization who wants to share how their identities have impacted the way they view the world and how they are perceived and treated by others; visits to other spaces, places, and leaders with diverse identities and approaches; or a design collaboration sequence with people from different communities.
- **Offer effective training programs and coaching** in implicit bias and intercultural competence.³⁵ Have training on shared protocols in your firm for nondominant groups to bring feedback and for how your team commits to allyship across multiple lines of difference.
- **Develop the capacity of individual managers to listen and lead.** Create a peer-review process to provide feedback to managers on areas of bias related to important decision-making.
- **Appoint a person or group to check bias and champion intercultural capacity building** (including opportunities to learn, reflect, and try out new patterns of thinking and behaving). Provide protocols for how and under what circumstances the firm would seek mediation or conflict-management expertise internally and externally.

Act

PROFESSION

Increasing the inclusion and value of the diverse people and leaders in the profession requires a conscious, concerted approach. This section speaks to practitioners who are involved with architecture groups, societies, and organizations outside of their firm, such as schools and the AIA.

KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING

- **Create focus groups** (ideally professionally facilitated) that span across organizations and types of practitioners to discuss common issues within the practice of architecture and architecture workplaces.
- **Bring in outside experts to share their knowledge and expertise** on bias and intercultural capacity building in the workplace.
- **Visit or reach out to professional groups in other locations** to ask for and offer new perspectives and strategies on issues important to your group, and attend conferences and other events that bring your group new relationships, learning, and practice.
- **Stay aware of issues and research** in bias and intercultural competence. Follow sources such as American Association of University Women (AAUW), Catalyst, Cook Ross, Cultural Intelligence Center, Great Place to Work Institute, *Harvard Business Review*, Kirwan Institute, Lean In, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), and Women's Leadership Edge (WLE).

ENGAGE CULTURE AND BIAS PROFESSION-WIDE

- **Practice diversity, equity, and inclusion in your own organization**—have staff and leadership reflect the broad constituency that the profession is striving for. Consider what qualifications and processes you have developed to help you recruit and retain board or committee members who span a variety of differences.

- **Create opportunities for authentic relationship building** across a variety of identities. This is especially important for members of small firms who may feel more challenged in building a diverse staff.
- **Hire experts to hold workshops** about the impacts of ability, class, race, gender, and sexuality on bias and cultural patterns in our field, both historic and current. Reach leaders to speed up the process of systemic change.
- **Assemble best practices for reducing bias, and develop concrete strategies** for catching and interrupting identity-driven bias, discrimination, harassment, and violence. Be explicit about the bias to be addressed and try to use profession-specific scenarios on how to do it step by step.
- **Recognize employers and individuals** through awards and publications for building intercultural capacity and minimizing bias in practice.
- **Publicly highlight a diverse range of types of work by practitioners with nonmajority identities**, such as architects of color, women, and those with a disability. Organize a long-term plan to portray accurate, bias-free, nontokenizing, and equitable representations in the media.
- **Work with architecture programs to support diversity and intercultural competence in the profession**, through initiatives such as secondary school outreach and early career mentorship. Use inclusive, equitable practices when interfacing with administrators, faculty, and students, and cultivate cultural and identity awareness in interactions between the academic and practice communities.

Consider

I SAW IT OVER AND OVER

“I worked at a number of firms of varying sizes, primarily larger (40–500). At larger firms in my experience, there is very, very little diversity. The people of color who were hired were generally hired for clerical, receptionist, mailroom positions—that kind of stuff. I was only one of two black people working at any given time at any firm that I worked at. There were very few Latino/Chicano folks, if any, and very few Asian architects.

So my experience in those situations was always: You feel like an outsider. You are not generally the first person picked for promotion and for opportunities. You’re usually bypassed for somebody who is white and male, with a certain look. Even though that person may not know anything or do much work, that person is generally given credit for a lot of work that the team comes up with and lands on an upward track.

That sends a message to people who don’t look like that particular white male young employee that that’s the hierarchy. Even though you may be doing the work or be smarter or have better ideas, it doesn’t matter. There’s an understanding that this is the type of person who’s going to advance in the profession and that you’re supposed to be a cog in the wheel and let this person take the credit for whatever ideas and productivity come out of the teams. I saw that over and over again.

It was obvious to everybody this is how things work in this industry. I knew I was going to have to start my own practice if I was going to live up to my fullest potential, that I wasn’t going to get the opportunity to really demonstrate my ability at the level that I was capable of.”

— Managing Partner and Firm Owner, Black, Male, 46

DISCUSS:

- What is being seen over and over? What types of bias are at play in this story?
- What protocols could lead to consistent noticing and naming of how race, gender, etc. are affecting work and work culture?
- What are ways to ensure an employee with a nonmajority identity is recognized as and feels like an equal member of the organization?
- How could the recipients of privileged treatment respond in such situations?
- What are potential strategies for more accurately determining and rewarding contributions within teamwork?
- What is the broader cycle we are seeing here, and what could change to interrupt and dismantle it?

Consider

WHERE'S THE ARCHITECT?

“I was an intern at a firm when I was in graduate school. It was a [minority-owned] firm. We were in a meeting, and we had other engineers in our meeting. At one point the engineer said we needed coffee, and everyone looked at me and said, ‘Are you going to make us some coffee?’ and I looked at them and said, ‘I don’t know how to make coffee.’ They were shocked that I didn’t know how to make coffee. They thought my role was to be the secretary, take minutes, and wait on them. ‘I don’t drink coffee. But if you’d like I’ll get someone to make coffee.’

Culturally, when people look at me, they expect women in my culture to know how to cook. When I say, ‘I don’t know how to make coffee,’ I get the ‘you’re worthless’ kind of look. My parents never taught me how to make coffee, but give me something to build, I can do that. Now that I’m an architect, every time I go onto construction sites, I hear, ‘The architect’s here, the architect’s here. Where’s the architect?’ They look at me, ‘But you’re a woman.’ I think, ‘What do you expect an architect to look like?’ I think they expect a male in all black, in a suit walking the construction site. They’re shocked and don’t know what to say. Even with other women, when I go to meetings they’ll say, ‘Where’s the architect?...But you’re a woman, and you’re so young.’”

— Owner, Principal in Charge, and CEO, Native American, Female, 35–40

DISCUSS:

- What is the role of bias and the role of intercultural competence in these scenarios?
- Who is asked and expected to do office housework (e.g., taking minutes, cleaning up after meetings, planning parties) and why? How might doing office housework affect career progression, and how could it be handled fairly?
- How can a person who is not recognized or respected as an architect by consultants, contractors, clients, etc., prepare and respond to unfair behavior or expectations? What can they do if their response does not break through someone’s bias or spur a change?
- What is the responsibility of other people in these situations? In what ways could an advocate help?

Consider

SPEAKING WHILE FEMALE

“I didn’t feel the glass ceiling at the lower levels; people were thrilled to have me....I was the only woman leader in my local organization. They were so excited to have my help and perspective, but the higher I went, the more challenging it sometimes became. When I joined the [influential elected group of architectural leaders], I was thirty-eight, which was really young for the group.

I will never, ever forget this: I had spent the first several meetings sitting quietly because I was so nervous and intimidated. It was mostly men, fifty-two people. We were talking about the structure of the organization, and I said, ‘To me, it would make sense if the VPs were aligned with the main areas of responsibility in the organization.’ The then head of the organization said ‘that was the dumbest thing’ he’d ever heard. Ten minutes later, another person, who was a man, said exactly the same thing, and it was accepted, voted on, and passed unanimously. It was appalling that the head of the organization would treat a group member that way. I had trained myself not to cry or show emotion; I cried for two hours in my hotel room. I was so angry and so hurt. The head of the organization called to apologize the next week, but he never really understood why it was a problem.”

— Architect and Association Manager, White, Female, 60s

DISCUSS:

- What biases are present in this story? Who is responsible?
- Could this woman have advocated for herself in this situation? If so, how?
- In what ways could other group members have intervened during or after the meeting? What could be done to help prevent a situation like this?
- How might you intervene when you see an idea co-opted? Would you feel comfortable interrupting the situation by saying, “I’ve been thinking about that point ever since [name] said it. I’m glad you brought [her] idea up again.”?
- How can you better ensure that the perspectives of people with nondominant/target identities are sought, included, and valued in mixed-identity groups?

Consider

SIMPLE-MINDED

“I went to [a historically black university], so the people who taught me architecture looked like me. Someone from your culture makes architecture a reality for you; you connect to it. It’s not a foreign thing that you’re never allowed to reach, it becomes attainable. A professor who joined the faculty came in with a different mindset. We were having crits, and he made a comment on a Latino guy’s design that I will never forget. He said, ‘There’s a difference between a simple idea and a simple-minded idea.’ We were all upset, and we complained, and the professor had to apologize to the students the next day. ‘Destroy to rebuild’ doesn’t play well in every community. People understanding cultural differences is another thing.”

— Senior Project Manager, Black, Male, 41

DISCUSS:

- What cultural differences do you think are at play in this situation?
- What is the difference between a simple idea and a simple-minded idea? What stereotype does “simple-minded” evoke in American culture? Why would saying “simple-minded” be upsetting in this context?
- What does “destroy to rebuild” refer to in this story? How does it relate to dominant US and architecture culture? What might be other cultural perspectives?
- How could the new professor have navigated this situation more effectively?
- How could this group determine critique protocols and practices for what is appropriate and communicate them to new reviewers?

Resources

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AND BIAS

A Conversation on Race – New York Times (2017)

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/your-stories/conversations-on-race>

Series of videos features conversations with people of many different races to demonstrate a variety of experiences of people in the United States.

Cultural Competence: The Nuts & Bolts of Diversity & Inclusion – Mercedes Martin and Billy Vaughn – Diversity Officer Magazine (2018)

<http://diversityofficermagazine.com/cultural-competence/cultural-competence-the-nuts-bolts-of-diversity-inclusion-2/>

General overview of cultural competence and what is required for effective cultural competence training, including the framework for training and levels of cultural competence.

Everyday Bias: Further Explorations into How the Unconscious Mind Shapes Our World at Work – Howard Ross - Cook Ross (2014)

https://cookross.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/everyday_bias_thought_paper_021615_FINAL.pdf

Overview on what unconscious bias is, why it happens, and why it is important, including research that has been done on ways unconscious bias is prevalent in the workplace. The second half of the report has ways to recognize and address unconscious bias.

Implicit Bias Review and Annual Reports – Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity (2016)

<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/>

General overview of implicit bias and comprehensive annual reviews of current research across different fields. Includes research in assessment and mitigation.

TOOLS AND TOOL KITS

Bias Interrupters – Center for Worklife Law

<https://biasinterrupters.org/>

Tool kits and worksheets for individuals and organizations to interrupt bias.

Building Culturally Competent Organizations – University of Kansas

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/culturally-competent-organizations/main>

Part of the Community Toolbox, a set of chapters that provide actionable steps to improve community-building skills. Chapter 27 focuses on cultural competence; section 7 describes what a culturally competent organization is and lists several ways to build cultural competence.

Catalyst Resources

What Is Unconscious Bias?

<https://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/what-unconscious-bias>

What Is Covering?

<https://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/what-covering>

How people attempt to combat and minimize the impact of negative bias on themselves.

How to Combat Unconscious Bias

https://www.catalyst.org/system/files/combating_bias_leader.pdf

https://www.catalyst.org/system/files/combating_bias_individual_1.pdf

One-page infographics for leaders and individuals.

Flip the Script

<https://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/flip-script>

Offers alternatives to harmful language in the workplace that reinforces negative stereotypes and hampers individual authenticity. Recommended language regarding race and ethnicity, LGBTQ, women, and men.

Be Inclusive Everyday

<http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/be-inclusive-every-day>

Series of infographics, overviews, and ways to combat unconscious bias.

Diversity Toolkit: A Guide to Discussing Identity, Power and Privilege – University of Southern California (2017)

<https://msw.usc.edu/mswusc-blog/diversity-workshop-guide-to-discussing-identity-power-and-privilege/>

Group activities to facilitate discourse about diversity challenges: identity, power, and privilege.

Implicit Association Tests – Project Implicit

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

Several different categories of implicit association tests for individuals to evaluate their level of implicit bias.

Some categories include race, gender, disability and sexuality.

Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) – Mitchell Hammer

<https://idiinventory.com/>

Assessment of intercultural competence. Test evaluates mindsets on a scale from monocultural to intercultural: denial, polarization, minimization, acceptance, adaptation.

The 6-D Model of National Culture – Geert Hofstede

<https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/>

Six fundamental dimensions of cultural differences between nations. A useful framework for diagnosing difference and conflict and bridging gaps.

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The Guides for Equitable Practice are designed to provide resources to individuals, firms, and other groups for achieving equitable practices in the profession of architecture. The content of the Guides does NOT constitute legal advice. The Guides are NOT a substitute for engaging competent legal counsel. Ensure legal and regulatory compliance in enacting any portions of the Guides. THE GUIDES ARE PROVIDED “AS IS” WITHOUT WARRANTY OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO THE IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY, FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR USE OR PURPOSE, OR NONINFRINGEMENT. Some jurisdictions do not allow the exclusion of implied warranties, and the above exclusion does not apply to them.

Workplace Culture

KEY TOPICS

acculturation
alignment
assimilation
climate
culture change
engagement
firm structure
goals
harassment
patterns
policies
practices
sexual harassment
transparency
values

Workplace culture affects every aspect of the work we do, and everyone is responsible for it. Questioning why things are “just the way we do things in our firm” or “just the way we do things in architecture” brings change to ways of thinking and doing, and, ultimately, to systems that advantage some individuals and groups while disadvantaging others.

This guide outlines the importance of understanding and managing workplace culture and offers strategies for how to start the process, establish goals, and bring about change.



The University of Minnesota for the American Institute of Architects Equity and the Future of Architecture Committee

What is workplace culture?

Workplace culture is the tacit—unspoken—social order of an organization, the shared patterns that determine what is viewed as appropriate behavior of individuals and the group and help us make meaning of our collective environment. Its implicit and explicit systems define how an organization works in practice, regardless of what is written policy or stated intent. (For more on culture, see the *Intercultural Competence* guide.)

The concept of culture in organizational contexts arose in the late-nineteenth century and expanded in the mid- and late-twentieth century with the recognition of group behaviors that develop around shared work.¹ Societal changes require that workplace cultures evolve for businesses to thrive, and how a workplace chooses to do so, in turn, impacts societal trends. What is understood as *workplace* today is becoming more complex with the expanding number of physical and virtual environments where people work, as well as the increase in the number of diverse types of people with often ambiguous or quickly changing roles.

Overall, the ideal workplace culture is both *strong* and *healthy*. Building a *strong* culture depends on two things: one, having a *clear* culture that everyone can articulate; two, continually *aligning* staff and processes with that culture. Building a *healthy* workplace culture depends on the *engagement* of its people, which deepens when diverse needs and thoughts are recognized, included, and influence decision-making. Factors in a workplace interact in such complex ways that it can be hard to track the effects of any one change—think of creating a *clear, aligned, and engaged* culture as incrementally designing those factors into a parametric system. Relationships between elements become intentional, so that when something in the workplace is changed, other related factors shift appropriately. Otherwise, without a *strong* workplace culture, changes in a business are difficult and tedious to implement. Additionally, without a *healthy* culture, changes are more likely to have an inequitable

impact across the group and could inadvertently advantage those with dominant identities (e.g., men and white people) at the expense of others.

ARCHITECTURE WORKPLACE CULTURE

There is no single ideal workplace culture: the place, people, and goals of every firm are different, and consequently, the culture of every firm is different. Since the ways in which diversity, inclusion, and equity are addressed within a workplace are directly tied to its goals and culture, it is vital for firm leaders and employees to both understand their goals and become more aware of current objective and subjective cultural patterns driving perception and behavior in their firm.

How do we begin to discuss workplace culture in architecture? Building off of the cultural iceberg model introduced in the *Intercultural Competence* guide, we can start with what is easily seen above the surface (objective culture) and then explore patterns that are most often developed and reinforced below the surface (subjective culture).

“Listen and be aware of your team because ‘it’s always been done this way’ is dangerous.”

Principal and Owner, White, Male, 45–50

Because there are so many cultural elements that are “just the way things are in architecture,” discussing them only generally across the profession can lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes. Yet for the purpose of spurring further thinking and discourse, we will detail some examples of dominant culture patterns as they are currently understood within the field—formed and perpetuated by architectural education, publications, workplaces, professional groups, and the everyday language and behaviors of many architects.

Like the tip of the iceberg, patterns of objective dominant culture are relatively discernible: when asked to picture a stereotypical architect, many people will think of an affluent white male, dressed in black, perhaps with interesting glasses; when asked to picture a stereotypical architecture workplace, people with some familiarity with architecture will envision an open studio with workstations and a pinup space where words like *fenestration* or *typology* are used and long hours are the norm. Like the submerged portion of the iceberg, patterns of subjective dominant architecture culture are numerous, more difficult to discern, and vary considerably according to person and place: when asked what the architect's attitudes are toward service, some will answer "client driven" and others "society driven" or "environment driven," etc.; when asked about the architect's attitudes toward control, some might unconsciously sense that the architect values individual influence more than teamwork or vice versa.

The examples of objective and subjective dominant culture in the following *Architecture's Cultural Iceberg* diagram will not be the same for most firms, and there will be many other cultural patterns not listed that are specific to particular offices. Consider the ways you might categorize and define a practice and what each signals to you in terms of who works there, how they work, what they believe in, what work they do: sole practitioner, collaborative studio, partnership, research consultancy, design office, atelier, boutique, small practice, large firm, minority owned, A&E, corporate, three letter, local/national/international, multidisciplinary.

You can use the *Architecture's Cultural Iceberg* diagram as a starting point for recognizing and naming patterns and associated meanings within your current workplace practices. It can help to consider a point of view from outside the firm—what kind of culture would you expect from your firm's name and how it presents itself to the public? And how might your message be received differently by people based on their vantage points and expectations? It can also help to look at instances when people were reprimanded for their behavior—what did they do that was deemed "inappropriate" and how could that evaluation change based on a different cultural expectation? (For additional questions, see the "Assess" section of this guide.)

Workplace culture affects every way we think and act in relation to our work, which is why it is important to know what it is and to manage it. Culture merits the same attention we give to core aspects of our business, such as design and accounting. As architects, we know that building and maintaining something requires the integration and coordination of many things. A workplace is no different, and attending to culture is like designing and operating a building with regard for its inhabitants.

"When do people feel relaxed and calm in a working environment, and when are they pretending to be someone their boss or client wants them to be?"

CEO and Owner, White, Female, 59

STEREOTYPE: a preconceived and oversimplified idea about a group that attributes characteristics to all members of that group without acknowledging their differences; to fix or perpetuate in an unchanging form

OBJECTIVE

seen shared culture
(you can see or point to...)

artifacts we produce · sketches, models, drawing sets
behaviors we recognize as valuable · critique, working long hours, moonlighting
common dress · in black, with interesting glasses
language we often employ · façade, massing, jury
tools we use · X-ACTO knife, modeling software, 3-D printer
spaces we inhabit · arrays of desks and usable wall surfaces, open storage for books and materials
narratives we share · famous architects being odd or difficult
traditions we continue · pinups, competitions, awards

SUBJECTIVE

unseen shared culture
(attitudes, expectations,
assumptions toward...)

age · the young are inexhaustible and do not know very much; the middle aged gain responsibility after years of hard work and paying dues; older architects are repositories of knowledge to be respected
authorship · individuals are the creative force on projects; teamwork is used for production
body language · attention is directed toward the artifacts of architectural representation in the room; projecting confidence and authority means you can work on job sites and with clients
class · architects distinguish themselves from working-class laborers (e.g., contractors/builders); privilege or lack of privilege is not overtly addressed
commitment · staff members have to be available when needed; staff who take advantage of flexible workplace options are less interested in advancement
core values · the work of the profession is important; positive change can occur through the built environment
education · higher education is necessary and valued; status is attached to program and degree type
ethnicity · most architects are white; architects from underrepresented groups are different
gender roles · men are ambitious and assertive; women are supportive and nurturing
money · opportunity and achievement are more important than income; fees are too low to do good work and compensate people well
parenthood · nonparents can work late hours; fathers are dependable, mothers struggle
personality · a person's personality determines their role; self-promotion is necessary to advance
types of work · part-time work has lower status than full-time work; "domestic" or office-help tasks are done by women
work assignments · interns should receive growth opportunities; work is assigned according to firm, not employee, needs; staff who can do detailed work should do production
relationship to authority · most architects follow rules; the avant-garde buck or undermine authority and power
roles · architects are polymaths (artist, technologist, inventor, scientist); those in design roles are visionaries, all other roles are support
speaking · the person with the most power in the room does the most talking; intellectual expression signals status
ways of working · different generations use different tools; heads go down for long periods to meet deadlines
work ethic · good design takes a lot of time and iteration; personal sacrifice is necessary at certain points during a project and career

ARCHITECTURE'S CULTURAL ICEBERG

Examples of dominant culture's patterns or assumptions of "appropriate" in the architectural profession in the United States.

Notice which aspects of the example stereotypes could be limiting for some individuals or groups in a workplace setting and that might impede the ability of architects across identities to contribute and do their best work.

Why is workplace culture important?

Workplace culture is fundamental to an organization, yet it is complex and must be understood and effectively managed for a business and its employees to thrive. In the process of managing workplace culture, issues and opportunities related to diversity, equity, and inclusion can be linked with specific aspects of the organization—structure, values, physical artifacts, communication, behavior, etc.—and can lead to actions that are aligned and consistent with both values and goals.

INDIVIDUALS

Engagement · Culture is “just the way we do things around here”; engagement is “how people feel about the way things work around here.” Engagement is key to healthy culture, and lack of engagement signals problems in the culture. Moreover, highly engaged organizations are more successful.²

Trust · Working effectively with others requires trust, and different people need different actions and activities in order to build and maintain that trust. Increasing trust increases psychological safety, shifting behavior from survival mode in which analytical reasoning shuts down to “broaden-and-build” mode in which strategic thinking is stimulated.³ High levels of trust are necessary for teams to meet ambitious goals.⁴

Recruiting · When culture is clearly aligned with business goals and values, it can attract “the right fit” and lead to high engagement, yet it is important to understand how to determine fit without perpetuating bias and exclusion. Other concepts to consider include “culture add” and “values fit,” which can increase diverse-applicant numbers and employee referrals for new candidates who support the inclusive strategic direction and equitable culture of the firm.⁵

Productivity · Positive workplace environments (caring, respectful, forgiving, inspiring, meaningful) support individual productivity. Negative environments (lack of transparency, trust, agency, teamwork, physical and psychological safety, reasonable work hours, health insurance, job security) lead to stress, significantly increasing health-related costs (heart disease, high blood pressure, depression) and disengagement (absenteeism, errors, accidents).⁶

Retention · Alignment of an individual’s values with company values is a top predictor of an individual’s satisfaction with the workplace culture, while negative workplace culture leads to an almost 50% increase in voluntary turnover—and turnover costs (recruiting, training, lowered productivity, lost expertise, lowered morale, etc.) are high.⁷ A cocreated inclusive culture means more loyal employees, aiding in retention.

“As long as you have strong core values you’re striving for every day, your team will deliver. It’s not about the free ice cream and the ping-pong table; culture is about whether everybody knows what they’re doing and what they’re working for. It takes effort, not a quote on the wall.”

Principal and Owner, White, Male, 45–50

FIRMS

Firm Structure · An organization's structure and its culture are interdependent; they develop in tandem, and changing one will affect the other.⁸ Firm leaders can make positive and intentional changes to culture by considering their structure (hierarchical or horizontal) and vice versa; maintaining consistency between the two ensures employees and clients will be able to adapt to change.

Explicit and Implicit Messaging · What management intends may not be what employees perceive. Formal written and spoken materials and informal day-to-day language and behaviors in an office can either support or subvert a positive internal culture and may also affect how it is viewed externally. Dominant culture patterns that feel exclusionary to some people may unintentionally come through in some messaging, yet such instances can be opportunities to build awareness and curiosity around underlying patterns that could be better aligned with intentions.

Strategic Planning · “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.”⁹ The economic stability and growth of a business relies on good business strategies; however, a strategy can only succeed if there is a culture in place that supports it. Culture is particularly important during times of change, such as leadership transition and succession.

Risk · Workplace cultures that lack basic ethics and legal compliance are at risk. Formal guidelines can help mitigate bad behavior, but they are often not enough to prevent or stop it. Policies and practices work best when they reflect a strong and healthy culture; otherwise, if they are not consistent with other messaging, they might be viewed as irrelevant, or even as obstacles, to achieving business goals.¹⁰

Marketing · A distinct culture with aligned branding gives a business competitive advantage in attracting and retaining employees and clients and helps increase operational efficiency and quality. If your brand purpose and goals are understood by employees, then they are able to reinforce them in their work.¹¹

Clients · Clients will bring their own culturally informed biases, beliefs, and expectations to bear on the working relationships and outcomes of a project. Employees with greater intercultural awareness have greater capacity to bridge potential cultural differences between client and firm and evaluate choices that may impact the firm's values and practices.

PROFESSION

Architecture Culture · Increasing the ability of a larger number of firms and other groups in architecture to clearly see and manage their own cultures will help raise the bar for our collective architecture culture, increasing equity across the profession.

Perception · Identity and brand are quick to be damaged and slow to recover; therefore, for the success of each workplace and the profession as a whole, it is crucial to actively manage culture and how it is perceived internally and externally. An organization that is known for a culture of equitable inclusion will be better positioned to attract and retain talent with diverse experiences and identities and to fulfill the needs of a range of clients and partners and the building industry.

We have a strong and healthy workplace culture when...

CLARITY

the workplace culture is deliberately shaped

100% of people in the organization can describe its culture

clients are aware of and can connect with the firm's values

COMPLIANCE

risks are controlled to protect workers from physical harm

the work environment is supportive, not hostile

harassment is not tolerated and has clear consequences

ALIGNMENT

values and goals of the business align with the workplace culture

language and behaviors reinforce positive culture

onboarding and ongoing training teach how to be effective within the workplace

messaging is consistent from leadership, managers, human resources

leaders and employees work together to assess and guide culture

TRUST

everyone is respected and interacts respectfully

everyone is heard when sharing their perspectives

some risk-taking is allowed

mistakes are managed, not punished

problems are met with curiosity, not blame

work environment is engaging, not threatening

success is a win-win outcome

ENGAGEMENT

social relationships are fostered

everyone takes responsibility for a positive culture

leaders model empathy and compassion

leaders are seen as fair and able to forgo self-interest

the meaning of work is emphasized

retention is high, absenteeism is low

employee and client referrals are common

Harassment

This section is intended to introduce you to important legal information regarding harassment but is not a substitute for legal advice. For such advice, we strongly urge you to consult an attorney.

Workplace harassment interferes with an individual's work performance, career, and well-being, creates a negative work environment, undermines equity goals, puts firms at legal risk, and damages our profession's reputation. Culturally, there is an increasing expectation in all workplaces that sexual and other forms of harassment be prohibited; legally, harassment based on an employee's membership in a protected class is prohibited. Creating and maintaining a workplace culture in which employees are empowered to speak up about issues of concern helps prevent harassment.¹²

It is important to note that even though there have been laws and policies in place, the pervasive nature of sexual harassment in US workplaces is of concern and necessitates digging into cultural practices and patterns, including exploring how gender and power impact what workplaces are like for women and feminine-presenting people. A significant percentage of architecture professionals, approximately two-thirds, report having experienced sexual harassment at work, on a jobsite, or in another location. Within this group, 85% of women and 25% of men indicate they have been harassed, yet only 31% reported it to HR or a manager and fewer than .05% filed a lawsuit or claim with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).¹³ Even though the #MeToo movement is often portrayed in the media as a white and/or wealthy women's issue, it is not. It spans gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, household-income levels, disability, age, and regions.

While a one-time offensive touch, remark, or behavior might not violate federal or state laws, such behavior can lead to the creation of a hostile work environment if left unaddressed. Regular workplace training is an important tool to help employers ensure safe and harassment-free workplaces by educating employees as to conduct expectations and empowering them to raise

concerns before a hostile environment is created. It is also important that firms develop ways to retain employees affected by harassment, appropriately address employees who harass, and provide support to all involved for healing, making amends, and rebuilding trust.

UNDERSTAND THE LAW

Federal law makes it illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of sex (including gender identity, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or military service, and most states have additional laws prohibiting discrimination in the workplace. (Educational institutions are governed by Title IX, which addresses equal opportunity in education, including the right of all students to be free from sexual violence and sexual harassment.) Unlawful harassment is a form of discrimination that can be directed at an individual based on any protected characteristic. The following are some key details regarding sexual (and other forms of) harassment and claims:

- Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct that is offensive, intimidating, or threatening and is directed at an individual or group because of their sex.
- There are two types of sexual harassment: "quid pro quo" (real or implied promises of preferential treatment for submitting to sexual conduct or threats of retribution for refusing to submit) and "hostile work environment" (interfering with one's ability to do their job due to unwelcome conduct of a threatening, offensive, or sexual nature that is directed at the individual).
- While quid pro quo harassment is necessarily sexual in nature, a hostile work environment is not limited to sexual harassment but can be created when offensive or intimidating conduct is directed at an individual or group of any protected status.
- A legally actionable hostile environment involves conduct that is either severe or pervasive. A severe incident could be a one-time event such as an assault; pervasive harassment can occur as a result

of less significant events that occur repeatedly over time.

- Unlawful harassment can be physical (for example, physical conduct that is sexual in nature or gestures that are physically threatening), verbal (for example, derogatory or explicit comments of a sexual nature or that denigrate a racial or religious group), or visual (for example, pictures, images, cartoons, or posters).
- Unlawful harassment can occur between employees inside or outside of the physical work premises (such as during business travel or a visit to a client site) and during or outside of working hours (such as at an employer-sponsored social event or happy hour).
- Any individual who is connected to the employee's work environment can be considered a harasser (for example, other employees, clients, customers or vendors).
- Employers can be held liable for unlawful harassment committed by both employees and nonemployees (if an employee is impacted).
- Complainants are legally protected from retaliation when they raise harassment complaints in good faith.¹⁴

HAVE PREVENTION MEASURES SUPPORTED BY POLICY

To focus on prevention, establish adequate knowledge and reporting processes.¹⁵ Written policy is essential to help guide employee and manager actions and to help safeguard firms from harassment liability. But remember, harassment is illegal, and a firm can be held accountable whether or not it has an anti-harassment policy.¹⁵

Prevention

- Be clear that harassment will not be tolerated and that there are clear consequences.
- Develop a written policy that is discussed with and signed by every employee.
- Have multiple pathways by which individuals can report incidents.
- Mandate recurrent, engaging training.
- Fully investigate claims, and have clear remediation.

Policy

- Define harassment to your employees.
- Prohibit harassment, with examples of how it occurs and how to respond.

- Outline disciplinary measures (e.g., written warning, coaching, demotion, termination).
- Communicate your commitment to confidentiality.

RESPOND TO VIOLATIONS

Appropriate and timely responses help protect everyone involved in a harassment scenario. The best course of action, if available, is to use formal complaint procedures within the workplace; this ensures that employers have the opportunity to stop harassment and are held accountable. It can be difficult to speak up about harassment, but doing so will help workplace harassment come to be seen as a social issue rather than just an individual's problem.

Individuals

- If possible, address the situation immediately with the harasser; make it clear that you find the behavior unacceptable and that it must stop.
- Write down the incident with the date, time, a factual account, and names of any witnesses.
- Report the incident to your manager, your manager's supervisor, or to HR. (See also the "Use the law" section of this guide.)
- If harassment continues, consider writing a letter to the harasser stating the facts of what has happened, how you object to their behavior, and what you want them to change; save a copy of the letter.

Managers

- Take all complaints and concerns seriously.
- Suspend judgment and remain neutral toward the complainant and respondent. (Many factors, such as physiology, culture, and power dynamics, can bring harassment complainants and respondents to act or speak in ways that are counter to behavior that you might personally expect.¹⁶)
- Immediately report the incident to HR or a firm leader.
- Take action to make the complainant's workplace safe and to prevent recurrent conduct or retaliation.

Human Resources or Firm Leader

- Advise the complainant and respondent of the situation's seriousness.
- Notify police if there is alleged criminal activity.
- Arrange an investigation and report to company officials.
- Notify the complainant and respondent of actions to be taken and oversee the actions.

USE THE LAW

Unfortunately, those who are harassed cannot always depend on their workplaces to adequately address a harassment situation. Given the prevalence of small firms in the profession, many firms do not have a dedicated human resources professional on staff, or may not even have an anti-harassment policy. Such situations may result in an employee facing workplace harassment having no one from whom to seek redress. In some firms, a highly visible leader may be a harasser who, due to his or her power and control over the organization, is essentially immune from recourse. And even if there are anti-harassment policies in place, long working hours may lead to situations in which professional rules of behavior are transgressed. Finally, some firms are quick to apply a one-size-fits-all remedy to anyone accused of harassment, and they fail to fully investigate such claims to arrive at findings that are based on the unique facts, evidence, and witness credibility. It is important that alleged harassers be treated fairly and equitably in this process as well and that firms do not rush to judgment without fully and carefully investigating the allegations and reaching well-reasoned findings.

The following are options that employees subjected to workplace harassment can explore, even in the absence of workplace policies or procedures that effectively address such concerns:

- File a timely complaint with the EEOC if your employer has fifteen or more employees.¹⁷
- Contact your state, county, and city agencies that enforce harassment laws, called Fair Employment Practices Agencies (FEPAs), which often cover smaller-sized companies.¹⁸
- Check with local government for county and city human-rights agencies that have a complaint procedure for enforcing local discrimination ordinances.¹⁹
- Action should be taken to file a complaint promptly following the discrimination or harassment, often within 180 days of the last discriminatory act. (Statutes of limitation vary per agency and jurisdiction.)
- Seek legal assistance from a private lawyer or a legal aid organization.²⁰

For closely related considerations and suggestions see the *Intercultural Competence* and *Compensation* guides. For how to file a complaint with the AIA National Ethics Council, see the *Compensation* guide.

Assess

CLARITY

Can 100% of employees describe your workplace culture? · Are there groups that cannot? · How does the organization communicate its culture? · Are there recognizable subcultures, and do they coexist or conflict? · Does employee conduct align with the organization's values and goals?

How do you negotiate diversity in your workplace? · Does your firm recruit for diversity, then onboard for sameness? · For an employee to be the "right fit," what differences are allowed and supported, and in what aspects is it expected that one adopt the firm's culture? · Are you asking people to assimilate (lose important differences) or acculturate (retain important differences) in relation to dominant-group thinking and behavior?

TRUST

What behaviors are rewarded? · How are behaviors that contribute to a positive workplace culture supported, evaluated, and recognized, and are all employees enabled to perform them? · Are there new behaviors that can be encouraged and rewarded? · Are people held equally accountable for their actions?

How are issues managed? · Is it safe for all employees to take risks, ask for help, and learn from their mistakes? · Are problems communicated and discussed, and is there time and support offered to address and learn from them?

POWER

Who shapes culture in your workplace? · What are the attitudes and behaviors of leaders, and do they align with the business strategy? · Is there a consensus on priorities, and are leaders equipped to lead? · Can you increase opportunities for more people with different identities, experiences, and positions to contribute to decision-making that helps shape culture?

Who benefits from the culture, and who is disadvantaged? · Does the culture support everyone to do their best work? · How do the values of the organization relate to those of different individuals, and what are the behaviors through which individual and collective values can be demonstrated? · Does your culture prize some aspects of work (for example, design) over others, causing you to undervalue people who make significant contributions in other areas?

CONNECTIONS

How do cultures of your clients affect your firm culture? · Do you recognize the full range of cultural identities or workplace cultures of your clients? · Are you engaging their cultures effectively in all communications? · Do the needs and values of clients play a role in how teams are managed or individuals are treated? · If so, are those client needs and values congruent with your firm's culture?

What other cultures impact your workplace culture? · Is there a legacy culture at your firm that helps or hinders goals for your future culture? · Which local, regional, and national communities do you engage with? · Is there an architecture school or program with which you have close ties and whose culture might affect yours? · Do you pay attention to generational and social changes and adapt to them?

Act

INDIVIDUALS

Each person in a firm contributes to its culture and has the ability to reinforce or question it.

KNOW THE CULTURE

Make culture part of your exploration when seeking and starting a new job or when reconsidering your current workplace.

- **Identify employers with cultures that you can support.** Research their policies and discuss their culture in your interview and negotiation processes.
- **Read onboarding materials, and observe the “rituals” and unspoken rules** that keep the office running. Ask for clarification and tips from peers and supervisors to verify your assumptions, and ask for feedback on your cultural integration during your first months on the job.
- **Be aware of how your own values, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations relate** to the culture of your workplace. Similarly, learn about the cultures that other employees bring to work by asking questions and listening, and consider what their context means for them within the office culture.

KNOW YOUR ROLE AND BE PROACTIVE

Your relationship to your firm culture is important for your career and for those connected to you.

- **Understand project, team, and firm goals** and how to collaborate with peers and superiors to achieve those goals. Have in place a plan for being a positive actor within your team and firm culture.
- **Engage in or instigate team initiatives** during the workday and outside of the office.
- **Look for opportunities for growth.** Consider forming an employee interest group around a topic that is important to you.²¹ This, in turn, can contribute to your development as a leader in your firm.

- **Look for things you can personally change.** Consider whether you may be contributing to an aspect of your firm’s culture that you believe is negative and work to correct it; when an issue is outside your control, make constructive suggestions rather than complaints.
- **Understand your personal boundaries as well as your rights** according to office policies and employment law. When you see or experience something that runs counter to them, speak up. For example, if there is a culture of long work hours at your firm, assess what that means for you and how to navigate it. If you feel or see negative effects, discuss them with your supervisor along with what changes can be made individually or firm-wide. Also, talk with other team members about work hours—how to guard against competition to put in the most number of hours and to value one another’s work on quality rather than hours put in.
- **Consider finding a different work situation that might be a better fit** if there is an aspect of your firm’s culture that significantly diverges from your values and seems immutable.

BE A GOOD MANAGER

Managers—those with responsibility for others—are central in shaping and guiding culture in the workplace.

- **Create the conditions for physical and psychological safety** in your group. Encourage those you manage to speak up, and foster trust by becoming familiar with who they are and relating to them individually.
- **Know your own leadership style** and how it fits with your firm’s culture.
- **Stay connected,** and foster social connections within your team.
- **Show empathy,** and make a sincere effort to help others. Your team members will be more likely to do the same.

Act

FIRMS

Each group of people that forms a workplace has the opportunity to produce a unique, robust, and positive culture. Whether a firm is just starting out or decades into its practice, the shared patterns that determine appropriate behavior within the group can support or hinder business goals.

UNDERSTAND YOUR CULTURE

Every step in managing your firm culture involves knowing what it is and how it works.

- **Outline your firm's mission and purpose**, including values, goals, and strategies, and how they align. Use this sentence to check for misalignment or mixed messages: “We *say* that ____, but when we ____, or when we don't ____, we're conveying ____.”
- **Ensure that senior leaders have a common understanding** of the existing company culture and what they want it to be in the future. Use structured discussion, a culture-alignment tool, or a consultant to measure the degree of alignment between individual leadership styles and organizational culture to determine the impacts leaders have.
- **Observe your firm structure**—the way your firm organizes and coordinates its work—and how it supports (or could better support) worker engagement and satisfaction and design and profitability goals.²² Consider ownership and management structures (how decisions are made, who the gatekeepers are, how communication happens), as well as team structures (studio, matrix, market sector, gig, distributed) and the project delivery models you employ.
- **Look for unintended consequences**—for example, notice if there are subgroups that are linked to higher or lower performance. Learn the career pinch points for different demographic groups, and evaluate what your firm structure and culture do to exacerbate or alleviate problems. (Pinch points in architecture include finding the right job fit, gaining licensure, caregiving, reduced paths forward at certain personal and career crossroads, transitions to leadership, and retirement.²³)
- **Assess how your organization's context** (time, place, market) affects your culture, including the norms and values of your local/regional/national cultures, client cultures, or a legacy culture.
- **Learn from your employees.** Organize open discussions, and welcome anonymous feedback and suggestions for change. Conduct exit interviews, using a reputable party outside the firm to foster candidness.²⁴
- **Administer culture surveys** (focus on values) and climate surveys (focus on attitudes and perceptions) about project management, staff roles, transparency, collaborations within teams and with consultants and clients, etc.
- **Create and administer a regular review process.**
- **Incorporate metrics into feedback loops** to enable everyone to integrate the firm's values into their performance goals.
- **Consider hiring a third-party consultant** to evaluate your firm culture and structure.

COMMUNICATE YOUR CULTURE

Everyone needs to understand the core values and accepted behaviors, best practices, and activities of their workplace. Have multiple ways for employees to learn about your firm's culture and changes.

- **Communicate your culture formally and informally.** Provide an onboarding program, an employee handbook, and mentoring. Share information and firm stories in break areas, newsletters, and social events.
- **Help managers to continually orient to firm culture**, especially when change is occurring, and when seeking effective ways to lead employees in aligning with business goals.
- **Provide opportunities for employees to celebrate** aspects of your firm culture.
- **Audit messaging regularly** to check for bias-free and inclusive language.

LEAD YOUR CULTURE

Workplace culture is affected by a variety of factors, but it is shaped by firm leaders establishing accepted attitudes and behaviors.

- **Tackle the problems and opportunities you see** in your firm culture; poor practices will not right themselves. Change can be uncomfortable, especially for those who have had a strong hand in forming the firm. Seek opportunities to hold up a mirror in order to understand if firm patterns reflect one's personal ways of thinking or doing and if they currently support the goals and work of the larger team.
- **Think holistically** about how every strategy or decision relates to your culture; be ready to adjust one to maintain alignment with the other. Be careful to look at impacts across every group in the firm—what might benefit one person or group might come at the expense of another.
- **Focus on improving practices that make it difficult for underrepresented groups** to enter and sustain employment within the profession, as well as have an equal voice and equal opportunities for advancement—practices such as long work hours and assignment of office tasks and part-time or flexible work (which have significantly greater impact on women at certain points in their careers). Also look at norms around licensure, pay, mentorship/sponsorship, promotion, and leadership that affect all underrepresented groups in architecture.
- **Know that good management is key.** Have the right metrics in place to hire or develop skilled managers, and give them the training and resources they need to lead great teams.
- **Have more diverse leadership** to help set inclusive workplace culture from the top. Your culture guides who becomes leaders, and it is likely that leaders will perpetuate the culture in which they advanced. Therefore, to robustly build diversity where it is lacking, change must take place in the culture itself, rather than by changing the behaviors of the diverse individuals you wish to promote. This transformation is most successful when the top leaders agree on the need for change, and hold themselves accountable for progress.²⁵
- **Empower culture champions** or ambassadors to demonstrate by example what it looks like to embody the firm's culture or desired culture—based on how they do their work and balance their professional and personal life—and highlight the contributions of employees who help to create a positive cultural climate.

FOCUS ON ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is a key factor in a healthy workplace culture.²⁶ Creating a culture of engagement begins with leadership and is reinforced through open and consistent communication. There are concrete ways to support employee engagement and improve performance based on treating employees as active participants in their (and the company's) future and in supporting them to perform their best. (For more on engagement, see the *Recruitment & Retention* guide.)

- **Provide a structured onboarding program** (a six-month process is recommended) to integrate new employees into the firm's culture and reduce high turnover, which detracts from office culture.²⁷
- **Clarify work expectations**, and outline how each part of the work is meaningful and relates to advancement. Acknowledge employee accomplishments, both professional and personal. Share the company goals and achievements with employees, and invite employees to participate in discussing the firm's future strategy.
- **Provide employees with the resources needed** to do their work, and provide ongoing feedback, mentorship, and professional development opportunities.
- **Support social relationships** in the workplace. In addition to all-team meetings, plan different kinds of social events that resonate with and work for different people; ask those who do not attend what they would like to do as a group. Consider what spaces in the office foster socializing and how they might attract more participants. Create wellness challenges or other group activities.²⁸
- **Encourage managers to establish connections** with new employees from day one, and hold managers accountable for their team's engagement and how it relates to group performance.²⁹

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: the level of an employee's commitment to an organization and its goals

Act

PROFESSION

No individual, firm, or school can enact profession-wide cultural shifts on its own. Local, regional, and national professional organizations, including AIA chapters, have an important role to play and are vehicles for understanding, communicating, and advocating for positive workplace cultures. By getting involved, individuals looking to support change in their workplace can broaden their lens and have their voice heard beyond the boundaries of one firm.

KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING

Factors that affect workplace culture and ways of looking at it are continually expanding and changing.

- **Stay up to date on thought and research** on the architecture profession published in journals and through groups such as the AIA, American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS), Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA), Equity by Design (EQxD), National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB), National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA), National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS), and the Architecture Lobby.
- **Look for sources that offer perspectives different from your own experience**, attend professional events that are outside of your comfort zone, and ask people about their experiences.
- **Conduct your own research** through surveys or case studies on a topic important to your group or community, and share it with others.

SUPPORT POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE PROFESSION-WIDE

Every contribution to local and national questions can make an impact.

- **Seek out ways to work with and through national organizations**, bringing change from within and building upon existing infrastructure.

- **Discuss, write about, and present** on topics important to your group to open up the conversation for new ideas and joint efforts both within the group and with a broader audience.
- **Offer professional development**, creative opportunities, and social events around current topics like flexible work, harassment, and gender identity in the workplace.
- **Connect with schools, faculty, and students to model and help instill positive workplace culture practices**, such as work hours and expectations. Share what to be aware of when entering the workforce or engaging with practitioners and firms to better prepare everyone to be active and effective in culture change.³⁰

LOOK BEYOND ARCHITECTURE

Learn what issues and problem-solving approaches are occurring in other professions and industries, and ask what might be relevant for improving the current and future practice of architecture. Workplace frameworks are continually evolving as societies change; use a mix of resources to stay connected to the conversations.

- **Bring in a diverse range of outside experts** to share their knowledge on workplace issues, and discuss your thoughts afterward as a group on possible impacts and whether or not action should be taken.
- **Follow business-oriented sources** such as *Harvard Business Review*, Gallup, Forbes, Deloitte, McKinsey, Pew Research Center, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), Catalyst, Great Place to Work Institute, Lean In.
- **Be aware of discussions and resources developed by other parts of the building industry** through groups like the AIGA (the professional association for design), Associated General Contractors (AGC), Construction Owners Association of America (COAA), Construction Users Roundtable (CURT), Lean Construction Institute (LCI).

Consider

MANAGING CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS

“I remember having a commitment on Wednesday nights that required me to leave at 6:30 p.m., and consistently, the receptionist would say I was going part-time. The office, many times, had the expectation we would work on Sundays, so even weekends people felt like they needed to participate or you’re not being collegial or part of the group. I understand that, and yet I found a way to make choices and prioritize what I wanted, so that while it involved many ‘walks of shame,’ leaving earlier than everybody else, it also made me feel empowered to know that I’m somebody who gets their work done and you can rely on, yet you might not want to come to me on a Thursday at 7:00 p.m. with a deadline for the next morning. I found a way to be very happy in that office, but it wasn’t easy.”

— Director, Business Owner, Sole Practitioner, and Educator, White, Female, 38

DISCUSS:

- What is objectively occurring in this story, and what assumptions might you and those within the story possibly be making? What questions would you ask to determine a well-informed recommendation as a way forward?
- What stereotypes or biases could “walk of shame” relate to in terms of this person’s identities? What might the receptionist’s statement say about her expectations for full-time work and her role in the office? Does “going part-time” sound like a negative comment?
- How might a person with a different mix of identities perceive the same situation or possibly be treated differently by others when exhibiting the same behavior? Why?
- If you were to ask different people in this firm what the appropriate and inappropriate number of hours worked in a week should be, do you think there would be a consistent answer? What does “working hard” look like, and who gets to decide?
- How could this type of culture impact employees working toward licensure, with caregiving obligations, who have certain disabilities, or have different value systems? Who might this type of culture keep out of the firm? Would there be value to the firm to be inclusive of a greater range of employees with a greater need for flexibility in when, where, and how they work?
- In what ways is communication happening within this story? What might this person discuss with her colleagues and manager about changes around work times and perception? How could the firm clarify their values related to employee work times and clearly communicate expectations of how much time should be put toward work, when work happens, and how commitment is evaluated?

Consider

PROVE IT AGAIN

“Watching other women, I noticed that their responsibility wasn’t acknowledged in the same way as their male colleagues’. At the end of the day, there was a glass ceiling at that office for women who wanted to become a principal. During design pinups, the work I was doing was scrutinized and questioned more than the work of my male colleagues—I had to support my design argument more. This was different from what I experienced in school. It was noticeable within the staff: a tendency among male designers to question women’s work more than their own work or other men’s work, sometimes bringing the woman to tears. At some point you realize that’s not how you want to practice, and that was why people left.”

— Architect, White, Female, 30–40

DISCUSS:

- What types of biases are occurring in this story?
- Why do you think her experience in the workplace was different from her experience in school?
- What are the direct and indirect consequences of the behavior of the men designers for the women designers and the firm? Do the men designers have a responsibility to correct their behavior and its repercussions?
- What strategies could the women designers or men allies use in these situations?
- What might be changed culturally and structurally within the firm to prevent this, and how?
- Do you think the glass ceiling at the firm is related to women’s designs being more scrutinized? If so, how? What effects might this have on the health of the business?
- In what other situations do some people have to prove their competence more than people of dominant groups? Have you noticed double standards within your work context, and if so, are there certain identities to which they seem connected?
- How do these types of workplace cultures affect the profession?

Consider

HE TOUCHED ME

“The first thing to improve in architecture must be sexual harassment. My experience wasn’t aggressive; it was everyday encounters. The office was in a region where the culture is for men to kiss women on the cheek, but certain practices crossed the line. Design principals would touch my side or pat the small of my back. I once peeled someone’s fingers off my side and said, ‘Could you just not touch me?’ I was catcalled in the corridor. It was supposed to be funny, but over time it’s harmful. It affected what I wore, where I would stand; it creates a background of noise in your head in what’s already a difficult job. It became distracting and otherwise unprofessional. There wasn’t anyone to talk to about it and no HR, and I eventually left to work at a different firm, as have other women. [The firm I left] has since formed a kind of HR committee to address the issue, but it’s not really working. I don’t know what I would have done differently. Now I feel like I can speak up for myself, but brand new out of school working for a fancy design firm, I didn’t feel like I could speak up—I might have been fired or switched to a team that wasn’t as strong in design.”

— Architect, White, Female, 30–40

DISCUSS:

- What type of harassment might this constitute? (Quid pro quo or hostile work environment? Severe or persistent?)
- How can a workplace and its employees distinguish between behavior that is harmless or harmful, regardless of the intention?
- What role might cultural context play within the culture of this firm? How could that be managed?
- Is there anything the woman could have done differently in order to prevent being harassed? Why do you think harassment continued after she directly and verbally asked for inappropriate behavior to stop?
- What courses of action might be advisable to her before, during, and after the incidents?
- To whom might she have been able to report? What should happen once someone in the firm is notified of the incidents, in terms of both the specific harassment scenarios and firm-wide? What should the woman do if the harassment continues after she reports it?
- How are the employee and the firm undermined by the behaviors of the design principals?
- Do you think the HR committee is a good idea? What could it do to most effectively help prevent future harassment in the firm? What other approaches could the firm take besides forming and calling upon the committee?

Consider

BEING AN OPENLY GAY ARCHITECT

“In twenty-plus years of practicing architecture, I’ve only spent six months working in a large, commercial firm. Very early on it became apparent that I did not fit with the company culture. While I was a white male—enough to give me a leg up—I was openly gay in a very straight male culture. There were no overt actions or comments. However, I never fit into any of the cliques within the company. I wasn’t married. Didn’t have kids. Didn’t have a history of infidelity. I simply did not fit, and today, the leadership in the company is still exclusively white, male, and straight.

After this, in the early years with my prior firm, we were struggling to gain a foothold in the market. A local gay realtor recommended joining the local LGBT chamber of commerce as a means of creating some visibility within the community. One of my partners made it clear from the start that I would be responsible for maintaining activity within the organization because they were—as she put it—“your people.” Her idea of funny took an ironic twist when she had to attend the chamber’s orientation lunch because I had been up all night working on a deadline and was too tired. However, in eight years of being members (the membership was dropped when I exited the firm), my two partners attended a total of two events, and every other activity was left to me.

As a firm owner, being an openly gay architect has provided me with some opportunities I might have missed otherwise. I worked with an older gay couple to create a new house they could enjoy when they they could enjoy when they retire. I was approached because they wanted to work with an LGBT architect—both for their own comfort and to support the LGBT community. I mentioned this to one of my partners, who commented that their decision felt a little discriminatory given the number of straight architects. Perhaps with a little too much glee, I was happy

to point out that there was no national nondiscrimination law that included sexual orientation—either gay or straight—and she would have to accept that.”

— Architect, White, Male, Gay, 50

DISCUSS:

- What stereotypes do you perceive within these stories? Is discrimination occurring? Does it have a positive or negative effect? Is it unlawful?
- What type of dominant group patterns at the large commercial firm might have kept him from feeling it was a fit? Do you think it would have been possible for the firm to make changes to increase his feeling of inclusion? How could the firm have communicated to this employee that it was important to the group that he feel included in the company culture?
- How do you think this man interpreted the actions and responses of the female partner? What other information would you want to know in order to better evaluate people's behaviors in these situations?
- Are there situations when it is an appropriate strategy for partners to divide up their outreach to specific communities? What factors should be considered in making this decision? What does it communicate internally or externally if the partners do (or do not) take this approach?
- Are there recognizable differences between small firm and large firm cultures that affect people with nondominant identities? Which identities? What are the differences?

Consider

DIVERSE CLIENTS

“My client base represents a very successful, high-end, sort of high-net-worth group. It is not socioeconomically diverse, but about a third of our clients are people who identify as gay or lesbian. It’s been interesting for me because when we bring young people in they’re often startled—many come from suburban backgrounds, go to large land-grant universities where the same set of stereotypes are reinforced, so coming into an environment where you work with, engage with, and earn a living from accomplished people in open relationships, with children, it can be a shock for them. I’m really proud we have clients who are different in some ways from our staff because it says a lot about how we’re able to engage and embrace and work with clients. I have a lot of pride in that aspect of our practice.”

— Firm Founder and Principal, White, Male, 60

DISCUSS:

- What are the different aspects of identity that you notice are recognized by the speaker in this story? Do you think he is making assumptions about different identity groups? Should those assumptions be discussed, and if so, how, and toward what goal?
- How might the firm support the young employees who are shocked when they begin working with gay or lesbian clients? What are the ways to prepare employees to work with diverse types of people?
- What do you think might be contributing factors for this firm’s successful relationship with a gay and lesbian client base? What might those factors say about the firm’s culture?
- If the firm sought to expand their client base to include people with other types of differences (e.g., race, class, age, ability), what might be several strategies they could try?
- Do you think that the client’s possible differences in ways of thinking or doing might have an affect on the firm’s culture? If so, how?

Consider

SHE'S SO HOT

“A woman professor came to our city to speak at convention. All the men around me said, ‘Wow, she’s hot, look at that.’ Since I was in a leadership position, and they were right behind me, I turned around and said, ‘You have to stop, you can’t do this right now.’ They were somewhat chastened, but the gist of all the chatter—after an amazing presentation—was ‘she was hot, I’d watch her lecture any time.’ It comes up over and over again when we’ll be discussing speakers—‘Let’s get her back again.’ I look at those guys, and I say it to them sometimes, ‘You’ve got daughters. How would you like if your daughter came and the main takeaway was how attractive or unattractive she was?’ It’s a way men are able to compartmentalize their thinking... if you bring it around to things that are important to them and can identify with, they can reorganize their thinking.”

— Firm Founder and Principal, White, Male, 60

DISCUSS:

- What does this story reveal about bias and the diversity within this group?
- What did this leader do well, and what could be improved? What other arguments could be used to help the men respect the woman speaker? Does the reference to daughters perpetuate the perception that women need to be protected by men?
- What could someone not in a position of power, male or female, do in this situation? Since not speaking up implies consent, one option is to quickly say something to deflate the conversation, like “Whoa! Those comments are silly!” The topic can then be gently resumed at a later time with the individuals, either on your own or with an ally: “Hey, what you said the other day made me uncomfortable, can we talk about it?” What other options are there?
- How could this “locker room” talk be stopped, either with individual action or through a change in culture?

Resources

FIRM CULTURE

Be Inclusive – Catalyst

<https://www.catalyst.org/be-inclusive>

Variety of resources provide tools, perspectives, and information on building an inclusive work environment for all employees.

Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement: Optimizing Organizational Culture for Success – Society for Human Resource Management (2015)

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/business-solutions/documents/2015-job-satisfaction-and-engagement-report.pdf>

Based on a survey of six hundred people, the research summarizes the key factors that lead to job satisfaction in the following categories: career development, employee relationships in management, compensation and benefits, and work environment.

Great Place to Work Institute

<https://www.greatplacetowork.com/>

Research, certification, publications, and speakers on the characteristics of “great places to work” for all.

Organizational Culture and Leadership – Edgar Schein (5th ed., 2016)

Foundational text addressing the elements of culture and the role of leadership in creating change at different stages of organizational life.

The Research Is Clear: Long Hours Backfire for People and for Companies – *Harvard Business Review* – Sarah Green Carmichael (2002)

<https://hbr.org/2015/08/the-research-is-clear-long-hours-backfire-for-people-and-for-companies>

Analysis of studies that show working longer hours does not increase productivity and leads to high stress levels and poorer health. In addition, overworked employees have more difficulty interacting with each other, make more mistakes, and generally lose sight of the bigger picture. All of these together reveal a point beyond which working more hours eliminates the benefits.

Room at the Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture – Denise Scott Brown (1989)

<http://www.mascontext.com/issues/27-debate-fall-15/room-at-the-top-sexism-and-the-star-system-in-architecture/>

A personal account illustrating the legacy of architecture’s “star system” that attributes designs, ideas, and work to the most famous leader in a firm. Scott Brown writes, “The star system, which sees the firm as a pyramid with a designer on top, has little to do with today’s complex relations in architecture and construction.” Still relevant to how the profession is seen, how firms are structured, and how architecture is evaluated.

HARASSMENT

Sexual Harassment:

What Employers Need to Know – Catalyst (2018)

<http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/sexual-harassment-workplace-what-employers-need-know-0>

Infographics that show how employers can address sexual harassment, including guidelines for preparation, prevention, and response. Also includes recommendations to address workplace culture issues surrounding sexual harassment.

What Do I Need to Know about Workplace Harassment – US Department of Labor

<https://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/crc/2011-workplace-harassment.htm>

Guidance information for compliance with sexual harassment laws, including definitions and reporting of sexual harassment, when harassment violates the law, and how to report.

Workplace Harassment Resources

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/workplace-harassment-resources.aspx>

A collection of resources for companies; includes guides for compliance and policies, training, investigation, and research.

Notes

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14. The full federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission appear at <https://www.eeoc.gov/employers/index.cfm>. Consult with an employment attorney or advisor to stay current on state and federal law.

15. Orient yourself with more extensive guidance on procedures for harassment policies and responses. See “Sexual Harassment Policy and Complaint/Investigation Procedure,” Society for Human Resource Management, May 24, 2018, [subscription required] https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/policies/pages/cms_000554.aspx. See also Susan M. Heathfield, “Sexual Harassment: How to Prevent and Address Sexual Harassment in the Workplace,” The Balance Careers, March 22, 2018, <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/sexual-harassment-1918253>.

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20. If you intend to litigate, look for a lawyer early in the process. There are resources for locating legal help through different groups: for victims of sex discrimination, see the National Women’s Law Center, <https://nwlc.org/legal-assistance/>; and for transgender and LGBT resources, see the “Additional Help” page on the National Center for Transgender Equality website, <https://transequality.org/additional-help#legal>.

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Compensation

KEY TOPICS

audit
compensation philosophy
compensation policy
compensation structure
discrimination
external equity
flexible work
internal equity
merit
office housework
opportunity gap
parity
productivity
socioeconomic inequality
suppressed earnings
transparency
value of work
wage gap

Compensation issues exist throughout our profession arising from inequitable opportunities, valuation of work, and pay practices. Removing compensation gaps supports the influx, development, and retention of talent and the economic stability and growth of individuals, firms, and the profession.

This guide discusses current wage gaps in architecture, how they occur, and what their impacts are and suggests steps for evaluating, establishing, and maintaining equity and parity in compensation.



AIA



The University of Minnesota for the American
Institute of Architects Equity and the Future of
Architecture Committee

What is compensation?

Compensation is the sum of all tangible and intangible value provided by employers to employees in exchange for work. Employers use compensation to attract, recognize, and retain employees. Employees use it to achieve a standard of living, gauge the relative value of their work contribution to an employer and to society, and make employment choices.

Compensation in the contemporary workplace consists of three categories: direct financial compensation, indirect financial compensation, and nonfinancial compensation.

- *Direct financial compensation* is money paid directly to employees: hourly pay, salary, overtime, bonuses.
- *Indirect financial compensation* has financial value but is not paid monetarily: paid time off (vacation, sick leave, personal time), paid family and medical leave, health insurance, disability insurance, life insurance, retirement contributions, pension, stock options, profit sharing, relocation expenses, travel expenses, registration costs, educational benefits, employee services (like childcare, low-cost or free meals, counseling, legal referral, career planning, wellness plans, gym memberships), and employee perks (such as the use of laptops, phones, event tickets, vehicles, apartments).
- *Nonfinancial compensation* is value given that is nonmonetary for career building and increasing job satisfaction: *opportunities* such as plum assignments, promotions, increased decision-making and leadership responsibilities, mentorship and sponsorship, training; *recognition* through praise and awards, time with leaders, networking introductions, recommendations; *quality of experience* through workspace upgrades, more desirable tasks, flexibility, positive social exchange.

GAPS

Women in the United States earn 80 cents per dollar earned by men for full-time work.¹ That compensation in the United States is neither equal nor equitable is clearly reflected in the wage gaps that exist between almost every demographic—gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, physical ability, age—for both salaried and hourly workers, regardless of education level, occupation, or industry.² Here are additional gaps as of 2017: Compared to a dollar earned by white men, Asian women earn 87 cents, white women earn 79 cents, black women earn 63 cents, Latinas earn 54 cents; mothers as compared to fathers earn 71 cents.³ Compared to a dollar earned by Asian men, white men earn 84 cents, black men earn 64 cents, and Hispanic men earn 56 cents. Compared to people without disabilities, people with disabilities earn 68 cents, and compared to men with disabilities, women with disabilities earn 72 cents.⁴ It is estimated that gay and bisexual men are paid 10–32% less than heterosexual men, and lesbians are paid less than men but possibly more than heterosexual women.⁵

Wage gaps will not go away on their own. Looking at the gender wage gap for women as compared to men, in the United States it was near 60% in the 1960s; today it is 80%, with most progress in closing the gap occurring between 1980–98 but slowing considerably since then.⁶ Closing education and experience gaps played a large role in that convergence but no longer account substantially for the gender wage gap. Currently, the gap is smallest at the start of careers and grows largest later in careers at top pay scales.

What causes the gender wage gap? Approximately 50% of the gap is attributable to people's location in the labor market (i.e., which occupations men and women hold in which industries, at which firms they are employed, and the level they occupy in the hierarchy), 15% to experience (due to work interruptions and shorter hours for women in high-skill occupations, with wage penalties for flexible work arrangements and motherhood), and 38% to factors more difficult to attribute, relating to conventional gender roles and identity and likely stemming from bias and discrimination.⁷ For example, research shows that traits associated with each gender are rewarded unequally in the workplace, due to biased

perception of personality, risk-taking, competitiveness, negotiation, etc. Men are typically rewarded for exhibiting traits traditionally considered masculine, but when women exhibit these same traits, they are not rewarded but are often penalized for them—a “double bind.” It is important to recognize that differences in identity roles and norms both respond to and cause wage gaps, creating a feedback loop that may increase wage gaps unless interrupted.

Compensation for employees in architecture follows a similar pattern. Salary data reveals that on average, white men earn more than nonwhite men, who earn more than white women, with nonwhite women earning the least. Average salaries for men are higher than women’s at every year of experience, with average starting pay difference within a few thousand dollars, then increasingly diverging to approximately a 15% pay gap in late career. For both men and women, earnings is most commonly cited as integral to career success, and lack of compensation (in the form of pay, promotions, opportunities, professional development, and meaningful work) is the predominant reason why both men and women leave jobs in architecture or leave architecture altogether.⁸

PARITY AND EQUITY

Ideally, the value of compensation will equal the value of work (compensation value = work value); both sides of the equation must be valued as accurately as possible, with all components of each side properly weighted ($C_1a+C_2b\dots = W_1c+W_2d\dots$). The compensation equation is valid for the employer and the employee when both parties understand and agree on the accuracy of the compensation-to-work valuation, and compensation is equitable when comparable employees get the same results. Employer opinions vary but generally regard comparable employees as having similar skills, education, experience, qualifications, seniority, location, performance.⁹

Two comparable employees who do the same work for different compensation lack parity. *Pay parity* or equality in the legal sense is *equal pay for equal work*, requiring that there be no pay gap based on gender (and in some states, race or ethnicity) for any reason when comparing two people who do the same work. Currently, women are paid on average 4% less than men, and as much as 45% less, for the same role, and men are offered higher salaries than women for the same work 63% of the time.¹⁰ This type of pay inequality between demographic groups is relatively easy to determine and should be immediately addressed in every workplace, as mandated by law. (See the “Compensation Discrimination” section of this guide.)

Two comparable employees who do different work of equal value for different compensation lack equity. *Pay equity* in the legal sense is *equal pay for work of equal value*, requiring that there be no pay gap between people

of any protected group who perform work of the same value and that pay be administered fairly. Though both pay disparity and pay inequity contribute to wage gaps, the gaps overwhelmingly result from pay inequity.

Calculating equal value and determining what is fair can be difficult, with much room for error. Yet pay equity is critical for reducing discrimination and increasing overall equity, since people with nondominant/target identities often perform different work than people with dominant/agent identities (some by choice, some not), and their work is not always fairly compensated according to its value. For example, women’s employment is often concentrated in certain jobs and in certain fields, and these jobs tend to be undervalued compared with men’s jobs. The median pay for information technology managers (mostly men) is 27% higher than for human resource managers (mostly women); when more women became designers, the overall wages for designers fell 34%.¹¹

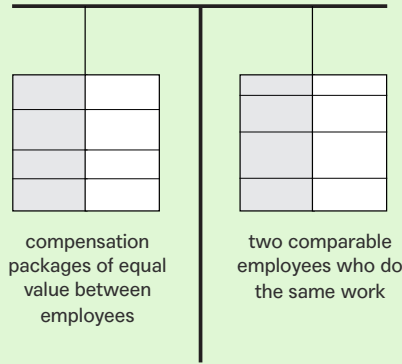
“When people are on a fast-track project, they get more work done in less time, and they don’t necessarily get paid overtime. So we need to move to a perspective of value-based fees. It’s more about how you perform.”

CEO and Owner, White, Female, 59

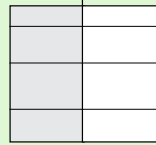
Within a single organization, compensation gaps occur due to inconsistent practices influenced by bias and discrimination and exacerbated by lack of transparency—only 13% of businesses with under one thousand employees are transparent with their employees about pay policies and rates, and those small- and medium-sized businesses have gender gaps that exceed the national average.¹² When looking at how to make compensation fair internally, firms also have to consider external factors to remain competitive in the market and be able to recruit and retain employees. Perceived inequity or unfairness, either internal (compared to other employees in the firm) or external (compared to employees in other firms), can result in low morale and loss of organizational effectiveness. For example, if employees feel they are being unfairly compensated, they may curtail their efforts or leave the organization, damaging the firm’s overall performance.

To address the broader institutional issue that employee roles are a predominant contributor to wage gaps—and roles are not necessarily properly valued or equitably attainable across demographic groups—there should also be a focus on fairness within the full set of employees and leaders at a firm, between the lowest- and highest-paid workers, and not just between employees at the same level. One strong measure of equity is the ratio of compensation of firm leaders to lowest-paid employees. Similarly, employee productivity at all levels that contributes to firm profits should be recognized and equitably rewarded. Acknowledging that compensation equity is related to structural imbalance, some states and cities are starting to pass pay-ratio acts to limit company-leader pay to an established numerical factor of their median worker pay.

To truly achieve compensation equity, and no longer have wage gaps between any demographic groups, we must address larger societal structures to ensure that work is compensated according to its actual value to society and that there are no barriers for anyone to enter and advance in any line of work. In other words, our economy needs to become equitable. Because that is not the reality today, we can establish compensation equity as a shared goal within our profession and act to make other structures in society more just. Even so, achieving zero wage gaps does not necessarily equate to a healthy profession or nation, as simply closing gaps may not alone solve the multiple sources of inequity that created them. Compensation is not just about wages, and equity rests on vastly more than equal earnings.



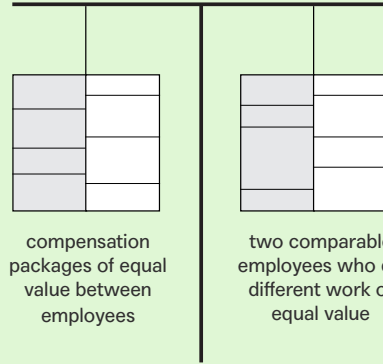
compensation packages of equal value between employees



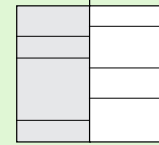
two comparable employees who do the same work

PARITY

equal pay for equal work



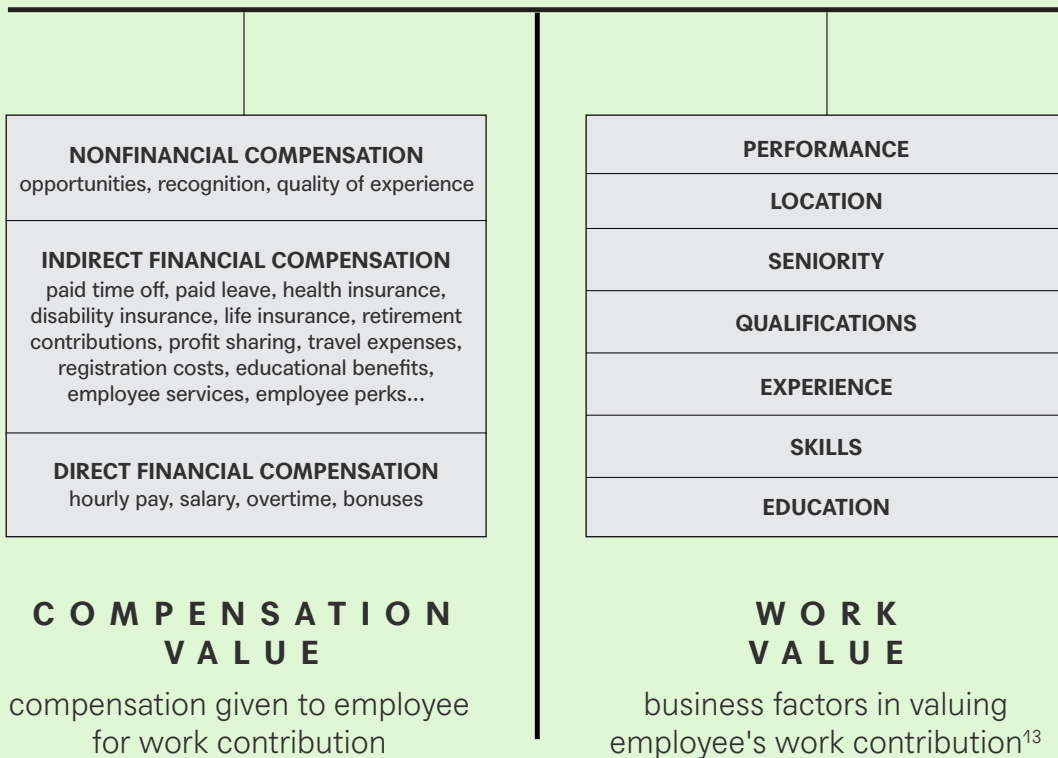
compensation packages of equal value between employees



two comparable employees who do different work of equal value

EQUITY

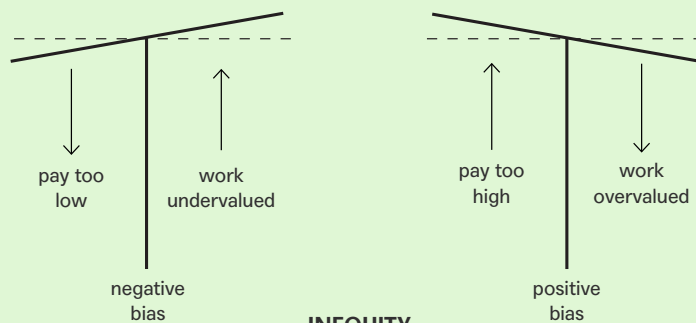
equal pay for equal value



COMPENSATION EQUITY SCALE

To compensate means to equalize or balance what is given with what is given back; it is a counterbalance.

For compensation value to equal work value and balance the scale for an individual employee and between employees, all factors need to be included in the weighing with the correct valuation ($C_1a+C_2b... = W_1c+W_2d...$), and be free of bias and discrimination.



negative bias

positive bias

INEQUITY

compensation value ≠ work value

Why are compensation parity and equity important?

Compensation signals the value an individual brings to the workplace, the values of a business, and the value of work within society. It is a mechanism by which the workforce makes choices and businesses operate. The soundness of this mechanism is compromised when compensation decisions are based on irrelevant characteristics rather than bona fide business factors—the relationship between value given by an employee and value returned by an employer becomes inequitable, and both parties are impacted negatively.

In architecture, this mechanism is constrained by the limitations of a commodity- and service-based business model.¹⁴ For most firms the funds available for employee pay and other benefits are relatively low in comparison to other industries. While new and better-communicated value propositions and possibly large structural changes could change the magnitude of fees for architectural work, more money in the system will not by itself solve compensation equity issues, and in some respects could even exacerbate them (think about equity issues in law, finance, tech). On the other hand, investing in diversity, equity, and inclusion can increase the value of our work, allowing gains generated to be invested back into businesses and people.

INDIVIDUALS

Self-determination · Transparency about salaries and clear links between career stage, experience, and pay help individuals make informed choices based on distinct pathways and expectations.¹⁵

Merit · Employment decisions based on merit can help level the playing field, yet bias can easily taint seemingly objective determinations of “what is good.” When merit is espoused as an organizational value, merit-based decisions and rewards without strong equitable practices throughout the firm result in more biased outcomes that favor dominant groups, a “paradox of meritocracy.”¹⁶

Job Satisfaction · Equal pay contributes to engagement, motivation, productivity, and retention.¹⁷

Financial Security · Suppressed earnings reduce one's means of securing life necessities and opportunities and for balancing work, personal, and family life. An early-career pay discrepancy magnifies over time, leading to a large lifetime pay loss.¹⁸ Cumulative gaps have significant consequences, especially for women, including fewer resources to draw on in later years.¹⁹

Debt · As socioeconomic, racial, and gender diversity in schools increase and the nation's student loan crisis balloons, the number of students with loan debt and the amount of their debts—especially for women—increases.²⁰ Lower pay scales in architecture compared to other professions make justifying staying in or even choosing to enter the profession more difficult.²¹

Caregiving · Inflexible workplaces, stereotyping, and discrimination engender neotraditional roles, leading fathers to work more hours and mothers to work fewer hours than they would like or the lesser-paid (more often a woman) to leave the workforce to provide childcare. The departure is framed as a choice, but it is most often a result of low or unequal pay and gender discrimination.²²

Quality of Life · Pay gaps diminish quality of life for singles and couples and contribute to underpaid employees' stress and physical and mental health issues.²³

FIRMS

Workplace Culture · How a firm structures its compensation system and manages internal equity (within the firm) and external equity (between the firm and other organizations) may support or impair the firm's desired culture.

Recruitment and Retention · Transparency about pay scales and demonstrated commitment to pay equity help attract and keep talent. Low pay is the third most cited reason for both men and women leaving their last architecture job.²⁴

Cost of Turnover · Considering time and money costs of turnover—offboarding, hiring, onboarding, training, and lost productivity as a new employee learns the ropes—the actual cost of losing and replacing an employee may be anywhere from 20% to 200% of annual salary.²⁵

Morale · Fair and transparent pay structures and systems send employees a positive message, contribute to productivity and commitment, and reduce absenteeism.²⁶

Employee Development · Transparency helps employees at all levels understand the business of architecture, map their role in it, self-advocate, and navigate toward leadership.

The Law · Pay discrimination subjects a firm to expensive, time-consuming, and reputation-damaging legal claims.²⁷

PROFESSION

Perception · For the profession to be trusted and to thrive, architects must be perceived as upholding high standards and contributing to a better society in which people are valued and fairly rewarded.

Diversity and Talent · Only a narrow band of society is able or willing to enter a profession with low, unstable, or inequitable pay, and talent will leave the profession for better opportunities.

Long-Term Economic Stability · The cumulative impact of underpaying employees is to create a future burden for not only individuals but society as a whole.

“There are a lot of other careers that have a better work-life balance and higher pay. These things are just essential, and until they're addressed, until real systemic change is realized, I'm worried about the profession and about our ability to be more diverse.”

Director, Business Owner, Sole Practitioner,
and Educator, White, Female, 38

Compensation becomes more equitable when...

TRANSPARENCY

the compensation program is intentional and easy to explain

all employees understand the compensation components, structure, policies

criteria are clear for pay ranges, performance pay, advancement

employees understand their current pay-range placement

leaders openly share how the compensation program relates to the business

talking openly about pay is permitted without retaliation

ALIGNMENT

the compensation system aligns with the values and goals of the business

job descriptions are accurate

onboarding and mentoring impart how to advance in the workplace

variation within pay bands and benefits exist only due to performance

audits keep compensation fair and in line with structure

discrepancies are corrected and recovered through back wages or other compensation

COMPLIANCE

employers comply with pay equity laws

firms comply with legal requirements in compensating interns

firms respect personal privacy when discussing pay

discrimination is prevented and remediated without retaliation

FAIRNESS

perception is that all employees are treated fairly

bias is monitored and mitigated

all employees have equitable opportunity for high-profile assignments, networks, clients

employees are assessed on the value of their work, not necessarily hours in seats

pay and performance evaluations use objective criteria

benefits, including leaves and flextime, are distributed equitably

Compensation Discrimination

This section is intended to introduce you to important legal information regarding discrimination but is not a substitute for legal advice. For such advice, we strongly urge you to consult an attorney.

Employees must be compensated fairly, without discrimination. Compensation that is inequitable (not meeting standards for “equal pay for equal work” and “equal pay for work of equal value”) stunts individual, firm, and profession-wide productivity and growth, undermines diversity goals and a positive work environment, puts firms at legal risk, and limits our profession’s stature.

UNDERSTAND THE LAW AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Federal, state, and professional regulations regarding compensation equity are becoming increasingly rigorous.

The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces several federal laws that prohibit discrimination in employment compensation: the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA), and Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).²⁸ State and local laws may contain additional requirements.

- All forms of compensation are covered by discrimination law (salary, overtime, bonuses, stock options, profit sharing, life insurance, vacation/holiday pay, allowances, travel expenses, benefits, etc.).
- The EPA specifically addresses pay discrimination according to sex, requiring that men and women receive equal pay for equal work (jobs that require substantially equal skill, effort, and responsibility in similar working conditions) in the same workplace.²⁹
- Title VII, ADEA, and ADA are broader and prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, sexual

orientation), national origin, age, disability, or genetic information, and whether or not a job is substantially equal or within the same workplace establishment.

- The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act amended the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by providing that the 180-day statute of limitations (or 300 days in some states) for filing an equal-pay lawsuit regarding pay discrimination resets with each new paycheck affected by the discriminatory action.³⁰
- The EEOC requires some businesses to file an annual compliance survey.³¹
- It is against the law to retaliate against an individual for opposing compensation discrimination.
- In some states, it is illegal to ask for or make hiring or compensation decisions based on an applicant’s salary history; employers may be required to provide job-specific pay-scale information to applicants and employees. Employers can be prohibited from providing less favorable opportunities or failing to provide information about promotions or advancement; employers can be required to justify differences in compensation, even differences with other organizations.³²

The AIA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct is explicit about discrimination and compensation.

- Canon I, Rule 1.401 states, “Members shall not engage in harassment or discrimination in their professional activities on the basis of race, religion, national origin, age, disability, caregiver status, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.”
- Canon V, Ethical Standard 5.1 states, “Professional Environment: Members should provide their colleagues and employees with a fair and equitable working environment, compensate them fairly, and facilitate their professional development.”³³

HAVE PREVENTION MEASURES SUPPORTED BY POLICY

It is easier and less costly to prevent than rectify compensation discrimination. Thorough review of practices and clear written policies reduce vulnerabilities.

Prevention

- Clearly communicate the requirement of nondiscrimination in compensation.
- Share written policy with all employees.
- Outline multiple ways for employees to flag compensation problems.
- Review pay structures and starting, merit, and promotional pay policies.
- Audit pay practices and correct pay disparities.
- Limit manager discretion in setting pay, monitor compliance with policies, and keep a full record of decisions.
- Fully investigate complaints, and document clear remediation of each situation.

Policy

- Define compensation parity and equity for employees.
- Curtail biased decisions, with examples of how they occur and can be prevented.
- Outline remediation measures.
- Communicate commitment to nonretaliation and confidentiality.

RESPOND TO VIOLATIONS

Handling potential compensation violations can be difficult for both the employer and employee. The preferred approach is for the employee and employer to have an open conversation based on clear information, with the employer having the opportunity to address discrepancies. Speaking up should be regarded as an opportunity for all parties to improve equity.

Individuals

- Keep a written record of your work, performance reviews, and compensation.
- Identify any documents that reflect pay differences for equal work or work of equal value.
- Talk to your manager or HR about the disparity.
- If the discrimination continues, consider writing a formal letter or filing a complaint.

“Part of why I left my first job was that my husband, who worked for the same firm in a similar position, was getting raises three times what I was getting, and I had to fight for my increase.”

Architect, White, Female, 30–40

Managers, Firm Leader, or Human Resources

- Take all concerns seriously.
- Remain neutral in judgment, and keep each matter confidential.
- Prevent retaliation.
- Conduct an investigation or audit.
- Notify employee of resulting information and action to be taken.
- Update policies as needed.

USE THE LAW AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Employees experiencing compensation discrimination are not always able to find recourse through their employers. Some firms may not have adequate compensation structures and policies in place to be able to verify if their pay practices are equitable, or they may disagree with the employee regarding how their work is valued. When internal recourse is unavailing, the following are options to consider:

- File a timely complaint with the EEOC.³⁴
- Contact your state, county, and city agencies that enforce discrimination laws, called Fair Employment Practices Agencies (FEPAs).³⁵
- Check with your state’s department of labor.
- Seek legal assistance.³⁶
- File a complaint with the AIA National Ethics Council.³⁷
- Report an issue to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).³⁸

For closely related considerations and suggestions, see the *Intercultural Competence and Compensation* guides.

Assess

TRANSPARENCY

Do all employees understand the firm's compensation system? · How does your firm communicate its compensation structure, policies, and procedures? · Do you have clear job descriptions? · Do employees know your pay bands and evaluation processes and metrics? · Are there consistent messages relating to what work is valued and how rewards are given?

How are issues addressed? · Is pay adjusted based on regular pay audits? · Are legal requirements for equal pay and nondiscrimination followed? · Do you have a process for addressing complaints?

POWER

Who determines compensation in your workplace? · Is there consensus in leadership on how compensation practices relate to the organization's business goals? · Are managers and supervisors equipped to make aligned and equitable compensation decisions? · How are employees involved in establishing or understanding the wage structure? · Are employees free to discuss compensation issues among themselves?

Who benefits from the compensation system and who suffers? · Is the ratio of pay between the highest- and lowest-paid employees reasonable? · Do the firm's and employees' values around compensation align? · How do compensation practices support everyone to do their best work? · Is there equal access to desired opportunities and benefits? How is interest gauged and availability determined?

FAIRNESS

What is rewarded? · Do you value performance over hours and determine fee structures accordingly? · Have you established guidelines for pay and opportunities for employees who use flexible options? · Does your negotiation policy ensure the final outcome is fair to all?

How is compensation determined? · Do you have a process for determining wages that is free from bias? · Do you measure required skills and effort, level of responsibility, experience, and working conditions consistently? · Is your firm's performance review process objective and fairly administered? · Are bonuses comparable for similar levels of performance? · If there are gaps and variances, are they justifiable using legitimate rationales?

CONNECTIONS

How do your business practices affect compensation? · How do your practices influence client and public opinion about the value of architectural services? · Do economic pressures (such as to lower fees to secure work or to provide employee benefits) have a disparate impact on compensation of certain employees? · How do you monitor the ways competitive practices affect equity across pay levels?

What other factors impact compensation? · Are your pay and other benefits perceived as fair when employees compare them to those of other similar organizations, and is this helping or hurting your equity goals? · How does your compensation philosophy relate to your community and culture? · Do client preferences for subjective things, like certain employee personalities or identities, divert compensation decisions from the firm's objective criteria?

Act

INDIVIDUALS

The persistence of gaps and the substantial cumulative impact of compensation on career and life make it important for employees to be aware of issues and be diligent in taking steps to help increase equity.

KNOW THE P(L)AYING FIELD

Stay on top of current compensation information as you enter and operate within the workforce.

- **Learn about the broad and complex issues in compensation** and how they relate to individuals, couples, families, firms, the profession, and society. Have a grasp on the factors that will be present as you make different choices that affect your career—education, firm, role, caregiving, outward expression of certain personality or identity traits, etc.
- **Identify employers with transparent and fair compensation practices** who will value your skills and strengths. During the negotiation process, ask about their pay structures, including pay bands for employees with your experience level, how they handle flexible time, and how they monitor pay equity; cross-check information with current or past employees of the firm. Look to see if there is diversity in all roles and at all levels and if there is high turnover. If you see a possible issue, ask and find out whether the firm has a plan to address it.
- **Know the range of pay** expected for an employee at your level, size of firm, and location. See resources like the “AIA Compensation Survey Salary Calculator,” the “AIA Compensation Report,” and “The Architecture Salary Poll.”³⁹
- **Be aware of industry and federal rules** and requirements for compensation, such as minimum wage, intern, salary, and overtime pay.⁴⁰ Sharing past pay information with a new employer can hurt you, and in some states it is illegal for employers to ask for it or consider it. (See the “Compensation Discrimination” section of this guide.)
- **Stay abreast of the compensation philosophy and policies** at your firm, especially during review periods and changes in your work situation.
- **Have open conversations with colleagues** of similar and different demographics in your firm, in other firms, and in other roles in the profession (such as specialists and consultants) about compensation details and trends for the purposes of increasing equity.⁴¹

KNOW YOUR ROLE AND BE PROACTIVE

Understanding and advocating for equitable compensation is important for you and for motivating organizations to recognize and address inequity in their compensation practices.

- **Track your own performance and development** to be prepared for performance reviews or for any concerns that may arise. Keep a record of your employment history—dates of career milestones, reviews, requests, work contributions and their value to the firm, skill development, achievements, compensation history.
- **Practice negotiation**, and do it effectively. (See the *Negotiation* guide.)
- **Learn to pinpoint and articulate your value** relative to your organization’s goals. What work are you doing that matters the most; for what work are you most likely to be rewarded? Is there equity in role and task assignment, or are there certain roles and tasks that might be undervalued because of the identity of the people who typically do them?
- **Let your supervisors and colleagues know** about your expertise and skills and your goals for development. Have conversations about the importance of compensation reflecting the value of work, which does not always correlate with the number of hours worked.

- **Make your achievements visible**, especially to your manager. This is a proven way of increasing women’s compensation.⁴² Speak up when you make contributions, and enlist allies and sponsors to support your visibility and help you advance. Learn how to write an effective self-evaluation, and ask for a promotion when you feel it is deserved.⁴³
- **Stay on top of professional development**, training, and networking to build knowledge and connections.
- **Consider saying yes to new opportunities** or new challenges that will exhibit and build the value of your work. Distinguish between opportunities that bring advancement and those that do not, such as office housework (scheduling, notes, social planning, managing documents, emotional comforting, etc.) and low-profile work.

BE AN ACTIVE MANAGER

Managers are key in ensuring that employees are equitably compensated and the organization benefits from their full potential. Employers should support managers by providing the information, tools, and training they need to effectively and equitably manage compensation. (For additional considerations, see the *Negotiation* and *Recruitment & Retention* guides.)

- **Know the skills of your employees** through direct and structured conversation with each individual, using their resume, current job description, and past work as a guide (not a limitation).
- **Discuss with each employee what their compensation expectations are** and how they align with the firm’s compensation structure and policies. Remember to consider and accommodate the different ways that different employees might communicate their expectations and your possible biases around these styles.
- **Clearly define what and how work is evaluated and valued**, and set goals with your employees that tie together work and compensation targets.
- **Have open conversations about what types of compensation different employees value**; communicate this information to management to keep the firm’s compensation philosophy relevant.
- **Listen to flexibility requests** from employees, and allow these to be tailored to the individual; discuss and decide up front how to keep compensation equitable according to value of work.
- **Assign work according to experience, talent, skills, and interest**, and give everyone access to work that lets them take risks and develop new skills.

- **Ensure that the most desirable work is assigned equitably** between employees. Discuss with other managers to identify what is lower-profile and higher-profile (career-advancing) work in your organization, regularly assess who is doing what and for how long, and analyze for demographic and supervisor patterns. Use Bias Interrupters worksheets to guide the process.⁴⁴
- **Distribute office housework equally**. Assign tasks to those in administrative support roles if possible, or rotate tasks and do not ask for volunteers. Regularly assess who is doing what and develop a transition plan for anyone unfairly burdened.⁴⁵
- **Monitor performance reviews for implicit bias**. Distinguish between and appraise actual and potential performance separately, and evaluate skills independent of personality. (Read “Identifying & Interrupting Bias in Performance Evaluations.”⁴⁶)
- **Encourage employees to promote themselves**, and set the expectation that everyone do so. Have alternatives to self-promotion for employees to share their successes, such as regular emails that list everyone’s accomplishments.
- **Give clear and honest feedback** to all employees so they have the chance to recognize and address any issues in their work or how they are being perceived or evaluated. Provide guidelines and support for employees to offer their perspective on the feedback, and remember to monitor whether culture-based expectations or biases are inaccurately reinforcing your or the employee’s assumptions.

“We’ve been looking a lot more purposefully at equity in compensation and expanding our reach into the organization so it’s not seen as just an HR thing. We’re educating our leaders about what it means—do people have unconscious biases in how they do their hiring or decision-making?”

Principal and Owner, White, Female, 60

Act

FIRMS

Compensation in architecture is a perennial issue. The depressed value of architectural services in our current society prompts firms, at times, to make tough choices in order to survive, and firm owners are in a position where those choices could directly or indirectly impact their personal quality of life and that of their employees.⁴⁷ This dilemma can make it possible for unclear and inconsistent compensation practices to arise, causing inequity. Clear and communicated policies and processes can ensure that instance-to-instance decisions are fair, aligned with the firm's equity goals, and compliant with laws and professional ethics. (See the "Compensation Discrimination" section of this guide.) Firms that commit to equity in compensation are investing in the long-term health of the business because they will attract and retain a diverse set of engaged, productive, and loyal employees.

UNDERSTAND YOUR COMPENSATION

Know your current practices and how they are working; identify issues and opportunities with a focus on equity.

- **Discuss among senior leaders** how they view compensation within the firm, why it has developed as it has, and their ideas for what it could be.
- **Gather your current job descriptions** and see if they reflect your needs and how they compare with similar descriptions in the market.
- **Locate and review current, reputable salary survey data** that is appropriate for your firm.
- **Assess your firm's current compensation system**, and evaluate what has worked well and what has not for employee engagement and performance. Consider compensation structures (array of levels) and policies (procedures for decision-making) as connected to the array of things that constitute compensation in your organization (direct and indirect monetary and nonmonetary).
- **See if there are certain compensation trends linked** to specific groups or managers within the firm. For example, are there identity groups that receive higher or lower performance ratings, pay increases, bonuses, high-profile work, etc.?
- **Evaluate whether and how wage gaps are occurring** at key points (starting pay, merit pay, promotion pay increases), especially at recognized pinch points in architecture (finding the right job fit, gaining licensure, caregiving, reduced paths forward at certain personal and career crossroads, transitions to leadership, retirement), and how they relate to your compensation structure or policies.⁴⁸
- **Examine specific decision-making protocols and practices**, such as automated changes, managerial discretion, and committee review.
- **Notice how your firm's context affects your compensation** (e.g., office locations, recruiting pool, local regulations, client relationships and expectations). Observe how your workplace culture supports or hinders compensation goals. (See the *Workplace Culture* guide.)
- **Administer a survey that allows employees to share compensation information and concerns** that may not show up through the firm's data collection (such as indirect financial compensation and nonfinancial compensation that are not recorded or tracked).
- **Ask your current and exiting employees how they perceive compensation fairness** within the firm. Welcome anonymous feedback and suggestions. Whether or not perceptions turn out to be correct or incorrect, you will be able to communicate back to employees how individual situations relate to policies, and how they are equitable, or will be.
- **Consider hiring a consultant** to evaluate and structure your firm's compensation program.

ESTABLISH A COMPENSATION PHILOSOPHY, STRUCTURE, AND POLICY

Managing compensation requires that leaders agree on how compensation is defined within the firm, what compensation should do, and where it should lead. So that the compensation program is aligned with business needs, equitable, legally and ethically defensible, easy to communicate, and perceived as fair, consider using a diverse committee to manage compensation.

- **Write your firm's compensation philosophy**—the organization's commitment to how it values its employees, with the purpose of attracting, retaining, and motivating employees equitably. Determine how you will use compensation (direct, indirect, and nonfinancial) to get the results you want. Your approach will vary according to your firm budget, regional economic conditions, and broader market forces, and in what aspects you will lead (pay more than competitors), match, or lag the market.
- **Develop a transparent compensation structure** that supports your compensation philosophy. Update job descriptions with required skills, and establish pay grades and ranges for the different work within the organization. Consider how work is assigned, how compensation is determined, and the components of nonwage compensation.⁴⁹ Know how you will determine both equal work and work of equal value.
- **Do a market value analysis** to compare your policies to those of peer firms, and check for external equity.
- **Develop compensation policies.** Include all forms of compensation, and consider how they are weighted (valued) by individuals and by the organization and if there is alignment of values. Include policies for all pay actions (starting pay, merit and promotional pay, bonuses), compensation-related decisions (part-time, flextime, opportunities), and procedures (negotiation, evaluation, audits). Establish how to determine pay differences by factors such as job responsibilities, title, time in job, part-time status, location, time with firm, education, licensure, and prior experience.
- **Ensure that your financial operating metrics relate to your equity goals.** Compare compensation equity measures to firm-wide financial performance measures—such as utilization and overhead rates, net revenue per employee, and firm profits and investment—to develop an understanding of how compensation value might be more equitably measured or allocated.
- **Update your compensation program** at least every two to five years to stay aligned with market and firm changes. It is easier and less costly to make incremental rather than significant changes.

COMMUNICATE YOUR COMPENSATION EQUITY

Transparency is a substantial means for achieving and maintaining compensation equity by ensuring equal power and accurate perception. While transparency can be an uncomfortable topic, opacity around compensation allows inequity to continue unchallenged and denies employees information they need to make prudent career and life decisions. Additionally, if employees sense inequitable compensation occurring within an organization, whether or not it is true, they will mistrust compensation practices, leading to further issues.

- **Develop a value statement** to communicate the firm's compensation philosophy, and have a written policy governing all pay decisions.⁵⁰ Discuss them with new employees during onboarding, and keep them readily available for all employees.
- **Provide clear and accurate information on the firm's pay bands** for applicants and employees so they do not have to look to outside resources to gauge what pay is appropriate. Share how the firm establishes an employee's pay and the timing and conditions for when adjustments will be negotiated. Though it is not a recommended practice, if pay history is considered in setting compensation (in states where it is legal), develop and share firm policy on how it is used.
- **Openly discuss guidelines** used for assessing and awarding performance pay and promotions.
- **Share flexible workplace policies.**
- **Announce pay and performance review dates** well in advance, and provide the date by which the firm will follow up with employees on outcomes and promotion decisions. Be clear if there will be a time period during which employees can negotiate.
- **Consistently and regularly communicate compensation information** and changes with all managers.
- **Communicate early with employees about any upcoming changes** to compensation philosophy, structure, or policies, why they are happening, and the firm's process for making adjustments.
- **Inform employees that they are free to openly discuss compensation** for the purpose of equity, without fear of retaliation.
- **Regularly audit messaging** to check that the firm's communication about advancement is bias-free.

LEAD EQUITABLE COMPENSATION PRACTICES

There are many approaches and resources for improving equity in compensation practices that can be used at different steps in the process.

- **Base salary offers on job content and the applicant's qualifications**, not on a previous salary. (In some locations, asking for salary history is illegal.) This best practice will help to decrease pay gaps profession-wide. Asking “What salary range do you expect?” is a possible alternative to asking about previous salary.
- **Consider a no-negotiation policy.**⁵¹ (See the *Negotiation* guide.)
- **Reward employees based on performance rather than on visibility** (less visibility can result from personality, fewer hours in the office, alternative work times or locations, etc.).
- **Provide flexible work time and location arrangements** (e.g., flexible hours, compressed workweeks, part-time work, job sharing, working from home, a satellite office, or on the move), which can benefit both employees and employers.⁵² Inadvertently, employees who work fewer hours per week often make a lower hourly rate for doing the same work as full-time employees—keep close attention that compensation reflects the value of work. Provide messaging to counteract the stigma sometimes associated with using a flexible arrangement.⁵³
- **Conduct regular pay audits** (annual, at minimum) to check for inequity. Include all forms of compensation, both cash and noncash (hourly pay rates, salary, overtime, bonuses, stock options, profit sharing, life insurance, vacation/holiday pay, allowances, travel expenses, benefits, etc.), check all types of decisions (starting pay, promotional pay, bonuses and profit sharing, benefits, flexibility, etc.), and use multiple analysis methods.⁵⁴ Pair audits with performance reviews if they are used to determine raises and promotions.
- **Schedule pay reviews for all employees at the same time** of year to address salaries holistically. Also review individual employee pay at key milestones, including at hiring, licensure, and promotion.
- **Monitor performance evaluations**, and track metrics according to supervisor, department, and organization. Examine patterns tied to different demographic groups (men, women, people of color) for rating-level, raise, and promotion trends, especially after a leave or during flexible work arrangements.

- **Address unjustified disparities.** Provide equity raises to increase the affected employee's compensation to the appropriate level.
- **Compensate employees retroactively** if it is determined that they have been compensated less than what is appropriate, and do so for the full period of the gap.
- **Do not allow exceptions** to your pay policies.

FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENT

Nonfinancial compensation is as important as financial compensation. Offering opportunities equitably across all types of employees helps prevent wage gaps and invests in the growth of a firm's most valuable assets. (See the *Recruitment & Retention* guide.)

- **Provide employees at all levels development opportunities** outside of their primary job function—education and training to develop new skills, time with leaders, networking, mentorship, and sponsorship—transparently and equitably.⁵⁵
- **Offer all employees stretch assignments**—opportunities aligned with their development needs and career aspirations—and a mix of experiences.
- **Announce opportunities widely**, and allow employees to gauge and express their interest, availability, and suitability for them. Watch for and flag any inappropriate assumptions—based on partial or incorrect information, stereotypes, or personal interests or preferences—of managers assigning the opportunity.
- **Make sure all employees have equal access to the resources**—time, funds, staff, information—they need to pursue their assignments and development.
- **Ensure that workers with flexible and part-time work arrangements have access** to the same opportunities and benefits, training, and promotion opportunities as other employees.⁵⁶
- **Make development a part of your organization's culture**, and remove structural barriers in your firm that impede equitable employee opportunity and growth. (See the *Workplace Culture* guide.)

Act

PROFESSION

The complexities in compensation as they relate to the economy and society make it important for groups to come together across the profession to share information and address issues.

KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING

Use a mix of resources to stay connected to the conversation. Learn what issues and problem-solving approaches are occurring within our profession and outside of it.

- **Stay up to date on issues and research in the profession** through groups such as the AIA, American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS), Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA), Equity by Design (EQxD), National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB), National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA), National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS), and the Architecture Lobby.
 - **Pay attention to the quickly changing legal landscape** around compensation addressing the lack of employee power and employer bias. Bring in outside experts to share their knowledge.
 - **Follow business-oriented sources** such as Catalyst, Deloitte, *Forbes*, Gallup, *Harvard Business Review*, Lean In, McKinsey, Pew Research Center, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), Women's Leadership Edge.
- **Establish guidelines for *equal value***—roles within architecture that have substantially similar requirements for experience or education—and suggestions on how to determine ranges of pay.
 - **Recognize employers through awards and press** for having high transparency with their employees and regular audits proving compensation equity.
 - **Encourage a diverse range of people to write about and present** on compensation topics that are important to them to share their perspective and open up discussion.
 - **Provide forums for discussion** on compensation equity between employees and firms, and with other industries.
 - **Offer professional development and social events** around current topics like pay transparency and audits, motherhood penalty/fatherhood bonus, office housework, and flexible work arrangements.
 - **Offer sole practitioners and small firms business resources** so they know how to instill equitable compensation practices as they grow.
 - **Look at how revenue can be increased across the profession** to enable firms to invest more in their employees directly through compensation and indirectly by growing their businesses.
 - **Connect with schools to share information and resources** that support learning, discussion, and advocacy around compensation topics, such as pay expectations and regulations, relevant to student interns and graduates entering the workforce.

SUPPORT COMPENSATION EQUITY PROFESSION-WIDE

Be a resource and an advocate for compensation equity throughout the profession.

- **Encourage wide contribution to national-level compensation surveys** conducted by groups like the AIA and EQxD. Consider adding a data set with a clear methodology: track, assess, and publish pay rates and other forms of compensation for different firms across geography, size, etc., paired with demographic data.

Consider

BASE PAY MATRIX

“People don’t know how to get a raise, how to get recognized—what you do to distinguish yourself and move up—other than by having the same last name as the person who runs the firm, who did not earn their keep but bypass people who’ve been there many years. We developed a base pay matrix to address some of those fundamental questions. We set up a transparent base pay for staff—three categories: designer-level, management-level, senior licensed architect staff. We value years of experience in the profession and years of experience—loyalty—with the firm, so you’re moving to the right as you go. When you get to be in a management-level position, making decisions, guiding and directing staff under you, you have higher value to the firm, so you can move up a tier. So a young person can look and see entry-level designer, \$X/hour, all the way to the top right, senior licensed architect, with twenty years experience, \$Y/hour, and all these steps in between. You see you’re not stuck making what you started with indefinitely, but you can see how to move up. We felt that was important for young people wanting to navigate through the profession but also very important for women to see that this is the base pay everybody gets at this experience level—the guy sitting next to me doesn’t make more. At the end of the year, we have discretionary bonuses based on productivity, but the base pay is clear, and people are able to chart their career.”

— Managing Partner, Firm Owner, Black, Male, 46

DISCUSS:

- How does this base pay matrix support equity between people in the firm?
- What are the strengths of this approach? What types of bias could creep in when determining and managing this pay structure and bonuses?
- What are the “fundamental questions” raised in this story? Do you think there are other policies the firm should create to help address their questions? Are there other fundamental questions that a compensation structure can address?
- Are there additional ways this firm can help employees chart their careers in the organization?
- What reasons can you think of for such low transparency (estimated at only 13% for firms under one thousand people) around compensation for employees? Do you think transparency is hard to achieve in architecture? How might transparency be increased?

Consider

LOSS OF FUTURE BENEFIT

“Architects aren’t taught to look at things from a business standpoint. When people make the decision to be with their kids, we’re not taught about the loss of future benefits. They don’t play out the scenario of staying in the workforce and advancing in their career and getting to a place, maybe, later in life when they can spend more time with their kids, when they’re more comfortable, so they can give their kids different types of experiences. The decision is very much about the present day: ‘I can only make as much money as I need to pay for childcare, so I’m going to stay home.’

For me, I’m not a stay-at-home mom, could never be one, but I don’t think there are enough people talking about the full picture of what goes into making that decision because I think it’s really hard to come back, especially if you want to stay in the profession. There are basic economics behind why some firms can’t support new parents in general—they run at zero profitability once salaries are paid, so it’s really hard to support parents who want to leave and come back and get supported as overhead while they’re gone. It needs to be a complete mind shift, which is harder to achieve than throwing money at a problem.”

— Workplace Strategist, Asian, Female, 39

DISCUSS:

- What assumptions, values, and goals might this person have that others might not share?
- What are economic factors that make it difficult to have children and progress in a career in architecture?
- What are the impacts of staying or leaving the profession?
- How might the factors and impacts vary for different demographic groups (gender, socioeconomic background/class, education, age, family culture)?
- What are different ways employees and employers can work together to balance caregiving and career progression?
- How might the business models of architecture firms evolve in order to better support caregiving?

Consider

CYCLE OF COMPRESSION

“I started at a large firm out of grad school, I was glad to have a job, I had student loans and the economy was in a downturn, and my starting pay—which I was told was non-negotiable—seemed higher than other firms. I later found out a male classmate of mine with the same experience level was started at a higher salary and had negotiated.

I was placed in a role that I was happy with at the time because it seemed good for my development, but I later realized it was a trap for women in that firm. They are rarely allowed into design roles (even though I had won design awards throughout my education), and progression in the firm outside the design track is limited because you have little contact with partners, and opportunities for recognition are few. There were annual reviews, but it became clear that if you didn't have an advocate in that room, your performance was irrelevant (my bosses were being continually laid off or fired, and I had to take on their work, which was a lot of responsibility but also meant my advocate was gone). There was no feedback on what decisions for promotion or raises were based on and no guidance on how to advance.

I resigned from the firm on good terms after five years because despite becoming licensed, being dedicated and productive with high-quality work, directing project teams on multi-million-dollar projects, managing parts of billion-dollar projects, bringing positive recognition to the firm via cultivating good consultant, client, and industry relationships...I was still at entry pay level. The reasoning I was given by a manager was that the economy was still slow—but I knew the firm was making record profits, people on my projects were receiving bonuses, including a male coworker I worked with closely at the same level of responsibility.

I also contributed a lot to the firm in trying to improve firm culture, but I saw that was not something that led to advancement. On my last day, the office head of HR pulled me aside and said if I came back, I should negotiate for a much higher salary. When I took my next job, in large part due to increased flexibility for work-life balance, I was told their policy set incoming pay based on the salary of my previous job, which locked me back into the low pay set by my prior firm.”

— Sole-Proprietor Architect and Educator, White, Female, 36

DISCUSS:

- What information should this person have known to advocate for her rights and navigate these compensation issues?
- How did lack of transparency give the employers unequal power?
- What forms of discrimination were possibly occurring?
- How can compensation systems fail to manage small-scale occurrences over time, poor management practices, and underlying philosophical issues of an organization?
- What policies could have been in place and practices shared with the employee for equitably handling negotiation and determining pay?

Consider

OVERTIME

“Leadership recently called a team meeting between me, a few juniors, and a few intermediate architects regarding unpaid overtime. The senior associate said, ‘You have to understand the profession that you entered. Architecture is not a nine-to-five profession. We cannot afford to pay you overtime, but we do need more from you. To make the next deadline, maybe you can take one day off during the weekend, but otherwise we need you here.’ The only woman in leadership on the team said, ‘It’s like when you take care of a baby: if you take care of the baby from nine to six, at six, do you just leave and let the baby die? No! This is what makes architecture fun! Because everybody is in it to do great work, not to make money!’

Someone on my team reported what was said at the meeting to HR and because she was told that her identity could not be guaranteed to be kept confidential, she asked HR to not say anything from fear of backlash from the leadership, and nothing was done. HR acknowledged that it is company policy to ‘pay overtime but only when it has been previously approved.’ And apparently, being asked by your project leaders to work overtime does not constitute prior approval. You need to ask the principal to sign off on it before you do the overtime. How convenient that the policy is, ‘Oh, you should have asked the principal before you did it. Now it’s too late.’

I did make my views on unpaid overtime clear when the project architect and I went to lunch the other week, and he tried to convince me to help him ‘motivate the others to come in to work without paid overtime.’ I suggested that the firm give us comp days if they aren’t intending to pay us. That same week they made everybody put their mobile phone numbers on a spreadsheet for ‘emergencies only,’ and the very next week, I worked fifty-two hours and decided not to go in over the weekend. On Saturday I received a text from someone ten years my senior: ‘Just a no-obligation suggestion—if you would like to assist and actually learn what I have done today to

complete the elevator lobby enlarged plan, feel free to drop by tomorrow between one p.m. to five p.m. I'll be at the office.'

Then on Monday, I received a text from the same project architect I'd had lunch with: 'You should talk to the principal about these comp days. The thing to remember is that none of this should be seen as quid pro quo on an hour-for-hour basis. It's about an organic give and take, much of that being valuable experience and knowledge gained, a great set for your portfolio, and ultimately a built project. Bean counting the hours for "fair" compensation is another attitude entirely, and not necessarily one that's fully compatible with this business. The variables and subjectivity are simply too great!'"

— Architectural Designer, Asian, Female, 29

DISCUSS:

- What are the issues exhibited in this scenario, and why do you think they are occurring? Do you think any legal or ethical bounds have been overstepped?
- What would you recommend this employee do in the short term and the long term? What are the possible positive and negative outcomes of each approach?
- How might expectations and assumptions related to working overtime and receiving overtime pay vary according to people's identities or roles within a firm?
- What are the responsibilities of employees, managers, leaders, and HR toward defining, communicating, and managing work hours and overtime?
- What effects might these types of messages and practices have on compensation equity within the firm?

Resources

COMPENSATION IN ARCHITECTURE

EQxD Metrics: Pay Equity Series (3 parts) – Annelise Pitts – Equity by Design (2017)

Part 1 - Overview

<http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/6/26>

[/eq3sh1813brgmzndknr379oy05ajam](http://eq3sh1813brgmzndknr379oy05ajam)

Part 2 - From “Equal Pay for Equal Work” to Pay Equity

[http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/7/2/eqxd-metrics-from-](http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/7/2/eqxd-metrics-from-equal-pay-for-equal-work-to-pay-equity)

[equal-pay-for-equal-work-to-pay-equity](http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/7/2/eqxd-metrics-from-equal-pay-for-equal-work-to-pay-equity)

Part 3 - Closing the Pay Gap

<http://eqxdesign.com>

[/blog/2017/7/6/9whxr744rkmmej57ggz030qm68t30d](http://eqxdesign.com/blog/2017/7/6/9whxr744rkmmej57ggz030qm68t30d)

Three-part series reviews the salary data from the Equity by Design survey. Part 1 describes the state of the pay gap in architecture. Part 2 discusses the primary forces that affect the wage gap. Part 3 addresses ways to close the pay gap through policies and practices.

AIA Compensation Report 2017 – AIA

[purchase required]

<https://store.aia.org/products/aia-compensation-report-2017-pdf?variant=37198724609>

Tool compares compensation data for thirty-nine architecture firm positions. Looks at trends in architectural compensation and what incentives are being offered to retain talent.

Salary Calculator – AIA

<http://info.aia.org/salary/salary.aspx>

Calculator uses salary data from the compensation tool to provide mean and median salaries for various architectural positions, considering geographic location and firm revenue.

GUIDES AND TOOL KITS

Bias Interrupters – Center for WorkLife Law

<https://Biasinterrupters.org>

Offers many tool kits and worksheets for individuals and organizations to interrupt bias. See their tool kits for compensation and performance evaluations.

Interrupting Bias in Performance Evaluations – Women’s Leadership Edge

[starting 2019, subscription provided by AIA membership]

<https://www.womensleadershipedge.org/category/webinars/>

Webinar that gives examples of how bias affects performance evaluations, which can be used to determine promotions and merit increases, and gives guidelines for developing a review process that eliminates bias.

Managing Pay Equity – SHRM (2018)

[subscription required]

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/managingpayequity.aspx>

Provides an overview of the pay gap and laws related to pay equity and offers in-depth guidelines for reviewing pay policies for fairness and for improving policies.

re:Work Guide: Structure and Check for Pay Equity – Google

<https://rework.withgoogle.com/guides/pay-equity/steps/introduction/>

Several-part guide for analyzing pay procedures—starts with an overview of pay gap and high-level goals organizations should have regarding pay policies, then provides specific guidelines for reviewing and adjusting policies that may be inequitable.

WAGE GAPS

The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap – AAUW (2018)

<https://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>

Defines the gender pay gap and what causes it and shows how it affects different demographic groups. Suggests ways to address the gap for different groups of people: individuals, employers, and the government. Offers guidelines to address gender-based discrimination at work.

Graduating to a Pay Gap – Christianne Corbett and Catherine Hill – AAUW (2012)

<https://www.aauw.org/files/2013/02/graduating-to-a-pay-gap-the-earnings-of-women-and-men-one-year-after-college-graduation.pdf>

Study of the wage gap between men and women college graduates working full time one year after graduating. Discusses the impact of this immediate pay gap and the student loan debt burden it places on women.

How to Achieve Gender Equality in Pay – The Milken Institute Review – Claudia Goldin (2015)

https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/goldin/files/gender_equality.pdf

Examines the wage gap between genders, factoring for education, age, experience, and industry. Looks at how different job structures affect the gap. Conclusion: the amount of time worked in a week affects hourly rate; those who work longer hours tend to make more money per hour as well.

The Fatherhood Bonus and the Motherhood Penalty: Parenthood and the Gender Gap in Pay – Thirdway – Michelle J Budig (2014)

<https://www.thirdway.org/report/the-fatherhood-bonus-and-the-motherhood-penalty-parenthood-and-the-gender-gap-in-pay>

Analyzes the impact of having a family on the salaries of men and women: men's salaries tend to increase with each child while women's tend to decrease.

Notes

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