



## **MEMBERSHIP SURVEY RESULTS**

**AND**

## **WHY DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION ARE RELEVANT AND IMPORTANT TO THE CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROFESSIONALS AND THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE**

On behalf of the California Association of Environmental Professionals (AEP) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, many thanks to everyone who participated in the survey and has been following the progress of the DEI Initiative. The AEP Board committed to advancing a DEI Initiative in 2020 (for more information, please see: <https://www.califaep.org/dei.php>). In making a commitment to pursue a DEI Initiative, the AEP leadership team considered several questions:

- Is the membership of the AEP representative of California demographics and the communities served by environmental professionals?
- Are there barriers to AEP membership for the diverse individuals statewide who engage in the environmental profession?
- Does the AEP create a safe and welcoming space for the professionals engaged in the range of environmental practice?
- Is the AEP perceived as providing a safe and welcoming atmosphere for all aspiring, practicing, and recently retired environmental professionals irrespective of race, ethnicity, country of origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, and physical and mental status?
- Is the AEP leadership representative of the membership and the individuals engaged in the profession?

With little or no available data to address these questions, the AEP and DEI Committee determined that it would be important to undertake three critical steps to advance the DEI Initiative: (1) retain a professional consultant; (2) conduct a survey; and (3) consider DEI in all aspects of management and operation of the organization. Through a competitive process, Castillo Consulting Partners (Castillo), led by managing Principal La Mikia Castillo, was retained.

### **Mission**

*To enhance, maintain, and protect the quality of natural and human environment; encourage and carry on research and education for the benefit of the public and concerned professionals in all fields related to environmental planning and analysis; improve communication and advance the state of the art among people who deal with the environmental planning, analysis and evaluation*

*process; and improve public awareness and involvement in the environmental planning, analysis, and review process.*

### **AEP Adopted Public Policy Program**

Several key goals and policies from the adopted Public Policy Program, that are consistent with the DEI Initiative are provided for the benefit of the reader:

- *We recognize that diversity and inclusion make our organization stronger and AEP welcomes and encourages all environmental professionals to participate in our organization.*
- *Supporting environmental justice in our practice through the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.*
- *Develop ways to attract people of color to our profession through various means including, but not limited to, participation in career fairs at the high school and college levels, and through offering scholarships and internships.*
- *Adoption of our Diversity and Inclusion Initiative to promote diversity and equity in our profession.*
- *AEP supports and promotes inclusive communities offering various transit options and housing opportunities at all income levels.*
- *Carefully evaluate the broader implications of project-specific bills and project-specific exemptions to ensure they do not have unintended consequences to disadvantaged communities.*
- *Support CEQA streamlining measures that promote the development of affordable housing in existing urban areas.*
- *Support environmental justice, access to affordable housing, and promotion of economic opportunities within disadvantaged communities.*

### **Membership Survey**

In coordination with Castillo, the DEI Committee, and AEP leadership, a survey was developed seeking quantitative and qualitative input from the membership. The survey was released in May 2022 and Castillo prepared a report of the survey results ([Report](#)), which are available on the AEP website (<https://www.califaep.org/dei.php>). The data demonstrates that there are many opportunities available to engage a more diverse cross-section of the State's practicing environmental professionals, to promote equity in the development of environmental professionals and the communities served by those professionals, and for each environmental professional within the AEP to commit to overcoming inherent biases and to foster and sustain a truly inclusive professional organization. AEP members are encouraged to read the Report and reflect on the findings. The AEP leadership team looks forward to discussing the Report findings and engaging in a strategic plan to advance the DEI Initiative.

## ***The Relevance and Importance of DEI to AEP and Environmental Professionals***

The DEI Committee was charged with communicating the importance of integrating DEI into all aspects of the planning, organization, and delivery of services. The simple answer is that respecting and appreciating diversity, ensuring equitable treatment of all people, and inviting all aspiring, practicing, and retired environmental professionals is the right thing to do, in our society and for all peoples everywhere. Conserving the natural and built environment is no less important than the protection of the people who depend on the environment for their health, livelihood, and well-being. Adoption of the DEI Initiative is identified as one of the primary goals of the adopted Public Policy Program and is consistent with many of the goals and policies, as noted above.

The concept of equality is inherent to our democracy, but one that our nation has often failed in its achievement. The gap between the AEP's commitment to equity and the reality of life in local communities where citizens experience violence based on race, ethnicity, country of origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and ability is far too wide.

Although California is among the most culturally diverse places in the world, it is not immune to systemic discrimination. The ability of environmental professionals to promote mutual respect within the profession, to serve as agents for positive change, and to best serve communities and facilitate equitable compliance with environmental regulations, requires an awareness of inherent bias. Environmental professionals engage with communities who are affected by policies, programs, and projects. The power of the AEP to affect positive change is optimized through a commitment to DEI. Diversity improves the quality of problem-solving by creating an opportunity for people from different backgrounds—including those affected by existing and proposed policies, programs, and projects evaluated as environmental professionals—to have a voice in the process and makes our organization, the profession, and ultimately society stronger. Focusing on equity affects positive change by evaluating the root cause of social inequalities that occur within community, such as income gap, gender inequality, health care, and social class, and using our role as environmental professionals to ensure that there is justice, impartiality, and fairness within procedures, processes, and distributions of resources and opportunities. The ability to promote inclusion requires consideration of the historic barriers to inclusion, and the actions that each of us can take to foster sense of belonging within the organization. By committing to DEI, the AEP challenges itself to ensure that all past, existing, and potential environmental professionals feel respected and welcomed irrespective of their race, ethnicity, country of origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental ability, and/or socioeconomic status.

Thank you, again, for responding to the membership survey and supporting the AEP's commitment to better understand membership needs, where it is now and where it is going. The AEP leadership team welcomes your thoughts and comments related to the DEI Initiative and the survey report. The AEP looks forward to your continued input and participation as the DEI journey continues, with the next step of developing a strategic plan to guide AEP efforts going forward. Comments can be sent to [DEI@califaep.org](mailto:DEI@califaep.org).