ACUI’s Diversity & Inclusion Self-Assessment Report

February 2019

Submitted by:
Elizabeth Beltramini, ACUI
Deepti Chadee, Texas Christian University
Alieu Darboe, Wayne State University
Keith Kowalka, University of Houston
Cathy Robinson, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Corey Williamson, Kansas State University
INTRODUCTION

In March 2018, the Board of Trustees voted to form a Working Group to conduct a self-assessment of ACUI’s Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) efforts. The working group was created with the following charge:

- Perform an internal audit of Association materials and practices, determining ACUI’s current level of action related to each of the benchmarks.
- Involve members to gauge awareness and collect qualitative data to address outstanding needs for the project.
- Liaise with the Council for Diversity and Inclusion and other component groups to collect information pertinent to the review.
- Prepare a report detailing comparisons to 2014 levels of action and provide recommendations to the Board of Trustees by February 2019.

Applications were sought in April 2018, and group members were determined in June after an interview process. The Working Group is comprised of six individuals from across the Association, including a representative from the Board of Trustees and a representative from ACUI’s Central Office. This group has been meeting since July 2018 to conduct an extensive review of the Association using the 2017 Global Diversity & Inclusion Benchmarks (GDIB): Standards for Organization across the World.

It is important to note that, the 2017 edition of the benchmarks is an update from its editions previously published. When the self-assessment of ACUI was done in 2014, that group utilized the 2011 edition. Major differences from the editions include: changes in categories and the way in which scoring occurred.

The Global Benchmarks consist of 14 different categories that are organized into four groups (foundation, internal, external, and bridging). Each category is then divided into 5 levels, with the 5th level being the “Best Practice” in Diversity & Inclusion efforts. The Working Group reviewed all fourteen categories totaling over 260 benchmarks.

The Working Group utilized the GDIB’s definitions of diversity and inclusion as a basis for this self-assessment.

*Diversity:* The variety of similarities and differences among people, including but not limited to: gender, gender identity and expression, ethnicity, race, native or indigenous origin, age, generation, sexual orientation, culture, religion, belief system, family status, socio-economic difference, appearance, language and accent, disability, mental health, education, geography, nationality, work style, work experience, job role and function, thinking style, and personality type.

*Inclusion:* How diversity is leveraged to create a fair, equitable, healthy, and high-performing community in which all individuals are respected, feel engaged and motivated, and their contributions toward meeting organization goals are valued.
According to the 2017 Global Diversity and Inclusion Benchmarks, for each category, the benchmarks are divided into five levels that indicate progress toward the best practices in that category:

**LEVEL 5: BEST PRACTICE**
Demonstrating current best practices in D&I; exemplary for other organizations globally.

**LEVEL 4: PROGRESSIVE**
Implementing D&I systemically; showing improved results and outcomes.

**LEVEL 3: PROACTIVE**
A clear awareness of the value of D&I; starting to implement D&I systemically.

**LEVEL 2: REACTIVE**
A compliance mindset; actions are taken primarily to comply with relevant laws and social pressures.

**LEVEL 1: INACTIVE**
No D&I work has begun; diversity and a culture of inclusion are not part of organizational goals.

The group did an in-depth review of association policies, processes, training material for both volunteers and staff, meeting minutes, program goals and evaluations, and communications. Additionally, the group sought out feedback from various groups through the following methods:

- Interviews with various members of the Association’s Central Office staff, to provide further understanding of processes that take place
- Listening sessions at seven regional conferences (one conference was not held)
- An Association-wide survey to 8,148 individuals that was sent November 7, 2018. The last of 736 total responses was received December 12, 2018, for a 9% response rate.
- A staff survey (January 11-18, 2019), which 21 of 21 individuals completed, yielding a 100% response rate
- A SWOT analysis with the Council for Diversity and Inclusion
- Focus groups with members from the Multi-Ethnic Professionals and Allies & LGBTQ+ Communities of Practice
BENCHMARKS

The Foundation Group: Drive the Strategy

**Category 1: D&I Vision, Strategy, and Business Case**
Covers the organization’s overall strategy and approach to D&I, including its formal articulation of the value of D&I, the requirements of managing D&I, and how D&I is embedded in the fabric of the organization.

Overall Level: 3.5 | 2014 Level: 3 (50)

**Category 2: Leadership and Accountability**
Covers the responsibilities of the organization’s leadership in shaping, guiding, and leveraging D&I. It also covers the accountability methods for leadership and for the organization as a whole.

Overall Level: 2 | 2014 Level: 4 (75)

**Category 3: D&I Structure And Implementation**
Covers the organization’s placement of staff with D&I responsibilities, their role and access. It also covers D&I Networks, their resources and placement within the organization.

Overall Level: 2.5 | 2014 Level: 3 (50)

The Internal Group: Attract and Retain People

**Category 4: Recruitment, Retention, Development, and Advancement**
Describes how the organization ensures D&I in the hiring and selection process, and whether it creates an inclusive culture that enhances professional excellence, manages, develops, and advances talent, and supports selection, retention, and advancement.

Overall Level: 3 | 2014 Level: 2.5 (37)

**Category 5: Benefits, Work-life Integration, and Flexibility**
Describes the way work is organized and the extent to which there are flexible work arrangements for employees. Gauges the benefits and services provided to employees to meet their specific needs and concerns.

Overall Level: 4 | 2014 Level: 3.6 (65)
**Category 6: Job Design, Classification, and Compensation**
Explores the way jobs are designed, classified, compensated, and assigned. Includes assessment of reward and recognition systems and the degree to which an organization is fair and equitable.

Overall Level: 3.5 | 2014 Level: 2.8 (46)

**Category 7: D&I Learning and Education**
Explores D&I awareness, skill-building training and education, and the integration of such training into the overall training and development of all employees. Explores the extent to which performance improvement and training are provided equitably to enable all employees to succeed in their careers.

Overall Level: 3.5 | 2014 Level: 2 (25)

**The Bridging Group: Align and Connect**

**Category 8: Assessment, Measurement, and Research**
Evaluates the way D&I is measured and where it is reported, whether or not the organization does research to support D&I strategies, and the organization’s assessment processes around diversity, inclusion, and organizational culture.

Overall Level: 3 | 2014 Level: 2 (25)

**Category 9: D&I Communications**
Describes how D&I is articulated, promoted, and embedded into the organization’s internal and external communication strategy.

Overall Level: 3 | 2014 Level: 2.4 (35)

**Category 10: Connecting D&I and Sustainability**
Examines the connection between D&I and sustainability initiatives, collaborative opportunities, and their integration into the organization.

Overall Level: 2 | Category did not exist in 2014

**The External Group: Listen to and Serve Society**

**Category 11: Community, Government Relations, and Social Responsibility**
Covers the organization’s efforts to engage and invest in its communities. This category also covers government relations and social responsibility, including supporting peer organizations in their D&I efforts.

Overall Level: 2.5 | Category not reviewed in 2014
Category 12: Products and Services Development
Gauges the organization's recognition of the diversity of its customer base and its effectiveness in designing and delivering products and services to current and future customers.

Overall Level: 2.5 | 2014 Level: 2.3 (33)

Category 13: Marketing and Customer Service
Surveys the organization's recognition of the diversity of its customer base and its sensitivity to the nuances of language, symbols, and images used in its distribution, sales and marketing strategies, thereby attracting and satisfying prospective and current customers.

Overall Level: 3.5 | 2014 Level: 2.7 (42)

Category 14: Supplier Diversity
This includes the processes of selecting, contracting, and interacting with the organization’s suppliers and vendors in a manner that supports and grows D&I values and goals along the supply chain.

Overall Level: 1.5 | Category not reviewed in 2014

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT
Since 2014, much has changed in society and higher education that has influenced members’ opinions about ACUI’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The last benchmarking study was conducted prior to the Black Lives Matter movement becoming mainstream; calls for corporate social responsibility in the wake of North Carolina’s HB2 “bathroom bill”; ugly rhetoric and violence such as the riot in Charlottesville, Virginia; the #MeToo movement and proposed revisions to Title IX; the momentous Supreme Court ruling on gay marriage; etc. While ACUI has accomplished much in recent years in terms of creating structures and a workforce for D&I efforts, the bar has been raised for how “leadership” and “responsibility” are defined. Therefore, while we recognize the progress that has been made, it should not be surprising that Categories 2 and 3 of the benchmarks have lower scores now than in 2014. Some of the language of the actual benchmarks has evolved, but more significantly the context of the environment in which ACUI operates has affected members’ expectations and our ability to rate the Association as proactive or progressive in these areas.
OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

TRAINING
ACUI has many innovative training opportunities for its members and staff, from Central Office staff retreats, to the Digital Badge program; however, it is the recommendation of this working group that training be standardized to include the following:

- Central Office staff should have regular trainings that include D&I topics. These trainings are recommended to be compulsory, and D&I knowledge and practice should be added to the staff performance evaluation for all Central Office staff, showing this is a priority for all involved within ACUI.
- The D&I section of ACUI 101 should be expanded to better reflect the dynamic membership and better inform volunteers as to the priorities related to this topic. This could also include the Communities of Practice and Networks (see below).
- All volunteers, regionally and at the Association level, should be directed to ACUI 101 prior to beginning any service within the organization to provide a base knowledge and common vernacular for all involved.
- All volunteer leaders, regionally and at the Association level (regional directors, community of practice leaders, etc.), should be afforded a more in-depth training to ensure they are able to support newer volunteers and guide them to ACUI 101, as well as gain the knowledge of ACUI resources available through their respective role and their specific tasks.

COMMUNICATION
Although there is a strong vision, strategy, and business case for D&I within the Association, there has been limited awareness from the membership of the efforts to pursue the vision and strategy. Communication of ACUI efforts has been identified as a significant shortcoming when it comes to D&I initiatives.

When members were asked, “Who is responsible for diversity and inclusivity efforts within the Association?” most responses referred to it as everyone’s responsibility. While there is some accuracy in that, minimal knowledge about the Council of Diversity and Inclusion as well as the Senior Diversity Professional is present. It is the working group’s recommendation to strengthen communication efforts related to D&I efforts. This can occur by establishing D&I-related terms for a stronger common language, revising a marketing and communication plan as it relates to Diversity & Inclusion (easily accessible on website, highlights within the Bulletin), and opportunities to learn more about and engage with the Council for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (see below) through webinars, face-to-face seminars, and conferences.

D&I STRUCTURE
Unfortunately, ACUI has not yet gathered evidence that demonstrates D&I is embedded in the organizational culture. While strong strategic documents and plans reflect the aspirations of the Association, the appropriate resources have not been allocated to create effective programs, accountability, and sufficient implementation of strategies outlined within the vision, mission, and strategic guideposts.
Communities of Practice/Networks
While ACUI members identify with many different identities, the current Communities of Practice structure is not serving the needs of the identity-based groups. It is the working group’s recommendation, Communities of Practice which focus on identities (Women’s Leadership, LGBTQ+, Multi-Ethnic Professionals and Allies) be transitioned into identity Networks. These Networks would work directly with the Senior Diversity Professional to ensure they have the necessary infrastructure and resources to support their membership. Along this same vein, it is also recommended that a Diversity and Inclusion Community of Practice be created that will focus on education and sharing information related to campus-based D&I work. Additionally, the working group recommends revising the standardized training for all Community of Practice and Network leaders. This training should highlight the support that is available, including what resources are available. Resources might include financial support, dedicated time at annual and regional conferences for Communities of Practice and Networks to meet, hosting pre-conferences, and opportunities to network/socialize within their groups, and allowing ACUI systems to assist with collecting data and funds.

Senior Diversity Professional
Building off of the 2014 report as well as the findings gathered by the 2019 working group, this team recommends that a full-time Senior Diversity Professional position be established in the Central Office. Within the current structure, time to dedicate to D&I initiatives appears to be significantly limited. Additionally, financial backing has been a barrier. As a result of D&I being of strategic importance to the Association, it is necessary to invest in the appropriate staffing structure to effectively implement D&I initiatives for the Association. A Senior Diversity Professional should be charged with assisting ACUI in shifting its organizational culture so that innovative programming, resources, policies, and processes that contribute positively to the culture of inclusive systemic practices. Among professional associations within higher education, ACUI has an opportunity to be a leader by hiring a Senior Diversity Professional.

Council for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
The creation of the Council for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion was a result of the 2014 benchmarking project. With its nearly four years of existence, the Council has indicated a feeling diminished purpose and function and the desire to have more intentional direction. It is the recommendation of this working group that the Council for Diversity and Inclusion be retooled for greater empowerment and capacity to provide oversight, and the name be expanded to the Council for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion. The Council should have representation within the Leadership Team to ensure that this group is a part of ongoing strategic conversations for the Association. Lastly, the working group has provided a recommendation on the composition of the Council to ensure that there is representation from various component groups within the Association as well as at-large members to provide effective balance of responsibilities.