



By Brittney Sooksengdao, Assoc. AIA, WELL AP | Gensler &
Dominique Serrette, AIA | Smith Group
August 11, 2023

Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion

SESSION #6

@ Cosentino City Washington
2100 L Street NW, Washington, DC, 20009



Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

This session marks the first session in the history of the program dedicated specifically to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion. The session centers equity scaling from micro to macro; beginning at the interpersonal level, then developing equity-based design skills at the professional level, and finally enacting change at the community level. The session will ground, empower, and enable architectural leaders with skills and understanding of how to impact the practice as well as the industry to be more equitable, diverse, and inclusive.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Discover the diversity of each of our lived experiences and recognize how those differences or similarities create systems of power and privilege. Illustrate how those differences in power and privilege impact the way we design.
2. Explore an equity-centered approach to design beginning at the pre-design phase and analyze site selection, land use, client needs, and programming.
3. Apply the equity-centered approach introduced in the workshop to concept-design and programming. Develop skills to integrate more diverse and inclusive design into the design process.
4. Examine how other professionals in the industry – architectural education, law & urban planning, non-profit design, architectural practice – implement strategies in their respective fields to combat inequity and improve the community. Build confidence in the ability to create change in the architectural practice and community by recognizing avenues of impact.

PROGRAM ABSTRACT:

The Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion session centers on equity in design scaling from micro to macro. It is notable that this is the first session in the history of the program dedicated specifically to the topic of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion - an umbrella topic which has come into the mainstream lexicon of nearly all industries and society since the murder of George Floyd and subsequent wave of global protests in summer 2020. While diversity and inclusion have been prescient in society and in architectural practice for some time, summer 2020 prompted broader examination and conversations around systems of power, privilege, and inequity that remain prevalent. Equity-based thinking and design strategies are new to the broader architectural practice. Scholars in the program represent a critical mass of emerging leaders to empower with the tools to bring more equitable and diverse solutions into the architectural practice.

The session will begin with an establishing a baseline understanding of equity and diversity at the interpersonal relationship level. Scholars will then shift into applying this understanding of equity at the professional level with a 2-hour Determined by Design® Design Equity Workshop where scholars will develop tools for equity-based design skills. Finally, the session will conclude with a panel & roundtable discussion with “change-makers” in the broader industry. Scholars will leave the session educated and enabled with the skills and understanding of how to impact the practice as well as the industry to be more equitable, diverse, and inclusive.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Date: 11.August.2023

Location: Cosentino City, 2100 L ST NW, Washington, DC, 20009

Time: 12:00pm – 5:00pm

AGENDA

12:00 – 12:20	<i>Lunch & Arrivals</i>
12:20 – 1:20	Stand Up If Activity Led by Nicole Kumar, Gensler
1:20 – 1:30	<i>Break</i>
1:30 – 2:30	Design Equity® Services Advisory Workshop Led by Sequoyah Hunter-Cuyjet, Determined by Design®
2:30 – 2:35	<i>Break</i>
2:35 – 3:30	Design Equity® Services Advisory Workshop - continued Led by Sequoyah Hunter-Cuyjet, Determined by Design®
3:30 – 3:40	<i>Break</i>
3:40 – 4:55	Panel & Discussion: Change-makers Dr. Hazel Edwards, Howard University Aristotle “Ari” Theresa, Stoop Law Allie O’Neill, Neighborhood Design Center Mika Naraynsingh, Perkins & Will Moderated by Brittney Sooksengdao & Dominique Serrette
5:00	<i>Conclusion & Housekeeping</i> Brittney, Dominique & the CKLDP Executive Committee
5:15 – 7:00	Happy Hour @ Mercy Me 1143 New Hampshire Ave NW, Washington, DC, 20009

III. Speakers & Presentations

Activity #1:

“Stand Up If”

“Stand Up If” is an interactive activity that illustrates the differences and similarities of the participants. It allows participants to get to know each other and relate to one another in shared experiences. This activity incorporates 45-60 minutes of activity and discussion time. The intent is to demonstrate how there are many dimensions to a person’s lived experience beyond surface-level impressions and those variations in experiences can lead to differences in power and privilege. The opening activity serves to ground the session in recognition of our interpersonal relationships and prompt open consideration of the multitudes of lived experiences of the end-users we design for. Led by Nicole Kumar, Talent Acquisition Manager and Race & Diversity Committee Co-Leader for Gensler’s Southeast Region.



Nicole Kumar, PHR, NOMA

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Nicole Kumar, PHR, NOMA

Nicole has nearly twenty years of experience in talent acquisition. Her bachelor’s degree is in Finance from Cal State Fullerton and she’s a certified PHR (Professional in Human Resources). She has worked as both an internal and external recruiter for companies such as Volt, TEKsystems, Richmond American Homes, and Arcadis. She listens to the goals and needs of her hiring teams and prospective candidates in order to make recommendations that are a culture add. Her over arching goal is to help build high performance teams that naturally foster equity and belonging.

She currently leads Talent Acquisition for Gensler’s Southeast Region, which consists of over 800 team members located in 9 offices from Philadelphia to Miami. She also co-leads the region’s Race & Diversity Committee with Reggie Truxon, and on a part time basis she is also the Firmwide Diversity Talent Acquisition Manager. The global role has allowed her to learn about, and support, the varying diversity needs of our offices outside of the U.S. in Latin America, Europe, Greater China, Asia Pacific, and the Middle East.

Personally, she’s been married for 14 years, is a mom of two girls (11 and 8), and a dog mom to one Blood Hound, German Shepherd mix. She was born and raised in California, lived in both Southern California and the Bay Area, but now loves living in North Carolina since 2016.

Last but not least, she strives to keep the **Human** in Human Resources at the forefront of all decisions and advice.

Activity #2:

Language, Intention & Prayer: A Design Equity® Services Advisory Workshop by Determined by Design® with Sequoyah Hunter-Cuyjet

This workshop will begin with an introduction to creating equitable design concepts – as it centers around redefining a “concept” and how to push an architect’s typical approach on site analysis, site selection, programming, and pre-design in the early conceptual phase. Participants will learn the importance of research in the design process when done through an equitable lens. The second half of the workshop involves a series of group exercises. The first will utilize a three-pronged approach to intentional research including historic origins, community/neighborhood, and contemporary partners. The second will involve putting all they learned into practice; creating their own equitable design concepts and making BOLD design moves.



Sequoyah Hunter-Cuyjet

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Sequoyah Hunter-Cuyjet

Determined By Design’s Vice President, Sequoyah Hunter-Cuyjet, is a culture cultivator with a unique ability to breathe narrative into any design, capable of giving voice to community, people and places. Growing up on the Shinnecock Indian Reservation in Southampton, NY fostered her deep appreciation for nature, traditional craftsmanship and passion for design. Her father’s teachings to “be intentional with your words” allowed her to be unafraid to pause when speaking precisely and impactfully about socially-conscious design needed within the community. Her diverse art and culturally-rich background, combined with her multidisciplinary design experience, make her a force to be reckoned with and a talented design leader, as she values the experience of designing from a reference rooted in something bigger.

Having received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Arts from Sarah Lawrence College and a Master of Fine Arts in Interior Design from Moore College of Art & Design, Sequoyah has a multifaceted design perspective that strives for clarity and integrity in a way that will make you think. A creative whose reference points stem from her studies of art, literature and anthropology, Sequoyah’s expertise allows her to help partners address any project challenge and further inspires the next generation of designers.

You will not find another designer who is sharper, more intentional, or more innovative in their design skills than Sequoyah Hunter-Cuyjet. For her, every style and aesthetic has meaning and purpose – no one project is greater than the other.

Sequoyah Hunter-Cuyjet’s heritage is her foundation. She is the first Native American to graduate from Moore’s MFA program and the only Native American in the country to hold a MFA in Interior Design. Boutique Magazine recognized her as the 2020 Boutique 18 – a rising star in hospitality design. Hunter-Cuyjet is actively involved in various committees and organizations, including the Founding Member of HDAC, ASID DEI Committee (National), and the Shinnecock Planning Committee.

Hunter-Cuyjet is passionate about championing diversity within the design profession and designing spaces that uplift people through elevated experiences. She is determined to design for real people with real-world problems, using her skills and talents to make a positive impact in the world.

Activity 3:

Panel & Discussion: Change-makers

The Change-makers Panel will feature a broad range of industry leaders in equity and agents of change within the community. The diverse set of panelists will share their respective backgrounds, areas of expertise, and avenues of impact within the broader community scale of architecture and urban planning. After opening the panel learning about each of the panelists backgrounds, career paths, and areas of impact – the panel will open into a discussion with the participants focusing on how to become an “agent of change”. The panelists consist of internal and external “change agents”. This session is defining change agents as individuals committed to and actively cultivating change within their fields towards a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable society. The discussion will hopes to empower participants to become change agents within their respective career journeys and enable participants with the skills to do so.



Hazel Ruth Edwards, Ph.d. FAICP
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Hazel Ruth Edwards, Ph.d., FAICP

Dr. Hazel Ruth Edwards’ unique career has combined place-based research with planning and urban design practice and teaching. She is Professor and past-Chair of the Department of Architecture, College of Engineering and Architecture at Howard University; she is the first woman to hold those positions since architecture education was established there in 1911. Prior to joining Howard University, she taught in the graduate architecture and city planning programs at Morgan State University’s Institute of Architecture and Planning and at The Catholic University of America’s School of Architecture and Planning, where she served as director of the Master of City and Regional Planning program.

She is the co-author of *The Long Walk: The Placemaking Legacy of Howard University*, which traced the 129-year physical development of the campus as the framework for the upcoming Campus Plan. The book has led to other work focused on uncovering the planning histories of historically black colleges and universities (HBCU). In September 2023 she will begin a fellowship at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute in the Cambridge, MA where she will further explore the development of Howard University and other HBCUs amidst racialized land patterns.

She is a certified planner with the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and was elected to their College of Fellows (FAICP) in 2018. She received *Architectural Record’s* 2022 Women in Architecture Design Leadership, Educator Award. She was appointed to the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts by President Joseph Biden in June 2021 and serves as its Vice Chair.



Aristotle “Ari” Theresa
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Aristotle “Ari” Theresa

Aristotle “Ari” Theresa is a Civil Rights attorney focusing on Zoning and Administrative Law. He is principal of “Stoop Law” which is located in the Anacostia neighborhood of Southeast Washington DC. His firm Stoop Law has pioneered gentrification law, leading to the adjustment of best practices for the DC Office of Planning and for developers. In addition to his urban development and planning law practice, Mr. Theresa has taught classes in Land Use and Urban Planning, Critical Race Theory, and Urban Politics, and is currently on the faculty of American University. Mr. Theresa is a 4th generation DC resident. He is a double HBCU graduate. Graduating from Howard University School of Law in 2010 and Clark-Atlanta University in 2003.

Activity 3:
Panel & Discussion: Change-makers, *continued* ...



Mika Naraynsingh, AIA, LEED AP BD+C
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Mika Naraynsingh, AIA, LEED AP BD+C

Mika Naraynsingh is a DC licensed architect at Perkins&Will with a passion for building enclosure and façade designs. With over 8 years experience, she has enjoyed translating projects from design development paper drawings through construction administration to concrete reality. Mika has a Masters of Architecture with Real Estate certification from the University of Pennsylvania.

Mika is a socially conscious professional committed to uplifting her community. She has served on the AIA DC's Emerging Architects Committee as their Advocacy Chair from 2020-2022, the NCARB Item Development Subcommittee, and has co-founded and ran several mentorship and diversity committees across the DMV, empowering emerging professionals on their diverse paths to leadership.

As the 2022 AIA DC's Equity by WIELD Chair, Mika fueled her passion for supporting women, immigrants and minorities. Through WIELD, she envisioned and spearheaded the AIA DC's Immigrant Architect Series and later co-authored the book *City Shapers: Stories of Immigrant Designers*, offering invaluable resources to help immigrant architects succeed. Her vision for a better world won her the 2022 AIA DC's UNBUILT Washington Honor Award. Outside of her professional activism Mika enjoys a quiet life with her husband and puppy-baby Alfie, tackling a do-it-yourself renovation on their recently acquired 1940s DC home.



Allie O'Neill
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Allie O'Neill

Allie is a facilitator, strategist, designer, and leader focused on methods that build local power, create joyful places for people, and dismantle oppressive systems. Her practice merges architectural design with peacebuilding, participatory processes, and design justice. As Architecture and Community Planning Programs Director, Allie leads the Neighborhood Design Center's pro bono and community design-focused contract work. She believes in the role of design to embolden people, shape lives, and foster neighborhood self-determination.

Session 06 Organizers

the Scholars

Brittney Sooksengdao, Assoc. AIA, WELL AP



Brittney Sooksengdao, Assoc. AIA, WELL AP
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Brittney is a resolute architectural designer driven by design as a service to empower people through wellness, connection, and social equity. She is a technical designer at Gensler where she works primarily in workplace interiors and co-leads the Gensler DC office Race & Diversity committee. A daughter of Lao refugees, Brittney is a first generation college student receiving her Bachelor of Arts in Architecture from Yale University and her Masters of Architecture from Virginia Tech. Brittney thrives on understanding people and purpose. She revels in cultivating relationships to enable a successful project as a holistic designer invested in both technical and conceptual aspects of a project. Beyond her project work, Brittney is the co-founder of ARCH, a Virginia Tech grant-funded high school mentorship program that focuses on bridging the gap from high school to higher education and diversifying the creative profession. She is an active volunteer with AIA DC Architecture for Everyone: Girls Mentor Program. Outside of architecture, Brittney has been teaching as a fitness instructor for over 6 years with a deep investment in the wellbeing of her DMV community. As a designer and as an instructor, Brittney strives to make space to feel seen and empowered.

Dominique Serrette, AIA



Dominique Serrette, AIA
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Dominique Serrette is a licensed architect with SmithGroup in the Washington, DC office, originally from Trinidad and Tobago. As an architect in the higher education studio, she collaborates with university clients on innovative designs of new and renovated classroom and lab buildings. She is also a member of SmithGroup's Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) committee where she champions equitable practices in the design profession within and outside the office. Having graduated with a Master of Civil Engineering in Sustainable Design and Construction Management from Stanford University and a Bachelor of Architecture from Howard University, Dominique possesses a strong academic foundation and strives to maintain a close relationship with her alma mater, Howard University, mentoring and assisting students with their educational journey.

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