

# SMPS Seattle | An Open Conversation About Equity, Diversity, And Inclusion

June 30, 2020 | 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

## **Breakout Group Discussion Questions**

### **1. What is your company doing to support the Black Lives Matter movement?**

- Making (1) donation per week to non-profits focused on education and the arts, posting on social media to promote that organization
  - BLACK SPACE
  - King County Equity Now
  - Hip Hop Architecture Camp
- Company matched all donations made to EDI-related causes (employee's choice) on a specific day. One-day employee donations and employer match totaled \$20,000.
- Gave all employees Juneteenth off (paid)
- Modifying PTO benefit to allow employees to choose their own paid holidays
- Focusing our support on the pipeline
  - ANEW
- Considering the audience always
- Created a DE&I committee
- Hired a DE&I consultant to audit our company
- Committed to placing a DE&I coordinator on every project
- Give employees X number of hours to volunteer for a cause of their choice.
- Give employees day off for silent march
- Some employees have formed their own internal support groups to brainstorm ideas.
- Some companies have provided a Teams DE&I Group where employees can post items of interest, links, etc.
- Many companies have not done anything because they are afraid to say the wrong thing.
- Listening to our team members and giving them space to experience the movement. Providing supportive leadership. Guiding and encouraging the conversation and letting them know that this is a long-term commitment.
- For our clients, we are acting as a sounding board; listening to their concerns and ideas, providing suggestions for the right amount of communication and pushing them to move beyond what is comfortable and easy.

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- Middle of Six got creative!



## 2. How are they talking about it internally/externally?

- We are currently more focused on internal conversations than external.
- Lots of internal conversations about what is the right thing to do.
- Weekly Open Forums for company has shifted from talking about COVID-19 to systemic racism.
- Start a Teams channel dedicated to resource materials.
- If leadership is feeling like they don't know what to do, that is a clear indicator that they may need to hire a diversity and inclusion professional AND step back and take a look at their leadership and board members and note that it is lacking people of color.
- DON'T ASK BLACK PEOPLE WHAT TO DO.... especially if you have no prior relationship with them. Black people have already had to do the work and decipher their history separately from what was taught to them. They have done the work and continue to do the work...it's time for other to start doing the work.
- But DO ask black employees if they are okay and if they need anything. Right now, many black (and IPOC) employees are feeling tired, angry, overwhelmed. Just a message of support

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and solidarity, with no expectation of a response, can go a very long way in making them feel supported.

- People are angry that nothing has been said. The quicker the messaging (internally), the better. People need to feel that they are cared about and that humanity matters to leadership (even if it's an all-white firm). Saying something- even if it's wrong or weak is an opportunity to get feedback and to learn and grow. Some firms have sent one message out about being an EOE and to encourage mentorship, etc., but taken no real stand or outlined action items. After push-back a second message went out.
- COVID-19 has forced leadership to be more flexible. Why can't they use that same flexibility to show support of the movement and put some substance behind it by doing the work in educating themselves and then outlining action items?
- If a message is posted (internally or externally), it needs to be more than lip service. It needs to have follow-up action items to be meaningful.
- If there is a follow up Open Conversation, it would be great to have a list of action items that some firms are doing.
- Conversations move forward with caution. People in our circles are "good people" who want to do the right thing and are somewhat afraid to do the wrong thing. This is a moment of realization (for many) that doing the right thing means more than being a nice person.

### **3. Should we talk about this externally at our firms? What are the challenges? Risks?**

- When sharing resources, consider if your resources are more directed to white audiences and whether that is appropriate.
- Push back comments: It will be gone soon, why say anything? Rather say nothing instead of the wrong thing.
- For those firms that have not said anything yet – is it too late?
- If something is posted externally, make sure to run it by lots of people beforehand, and not just people that think the way you do. Get multiple perspectives before posting. Your post MUST reflect your internal values and corporate culture, or it will not be believable. If it's not, don't put it out there.
- Risk/Challenge: This is a complicated topic and external communications should be created by, and/or in tandem with, senior leadership.
- Many firms risk alienating clients who might not agree with a strong antiracist message or position. Firm leaders might fear what could happen to relationships and work with these types of clients. Argument to leadership should be: "Why do we want to work with companies that don't share our values?" Making a strong statement about EDI / BLM, could help strengthen relationships with clients who DO share your values, and help differentiate you from your competitors who aren't saying anything at all.

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## 4. Is there an expectation that smaller, one-person firms share external messages?

- Not an expectation in our group.
- Messages from smaller firms feel very personal because the owners are quickly seen as the voice of that communication. In that case, it is probably “easier” to develop the message because a small firm can be faster to enact change. Don’t believe there is an expectation but there is an opportunity to add to the conversation.
- No expectation but will feel more genuine if the message is tailored to the specific work that the individual / small company does, and/or is closely aligned with that individual’s / company’s core values.

## 5. What role do marketers play in pushing for DE&I efforts in their firms?

- Help audit your expenses. What percentage of minority owned businesses are you utilizing? You can consciously take steps towards social equality by expanding opportunities.
- AEC industry lacks diversity in general, tell CEO to reach out to other CEOs (outside of AEC) and ask what they are doing at their firms. Put it back on leadership.
- It is hard to move the needle when leadership at the helm are not the same page as employees. Provide leadership opportunities to learn and connect with employees.
- While BLM is important, of course, our group feels it’s important for messaging to address all minority communities.
- Marketers are on the front line of communicating the firm’s EDI efforts through proposals and social equity reports. They might be some of the first team members to quantify where diversity is lacking and to support reporting/recruiting/tracking/retention efforts.

## 6. How do we conduct “normal” marketing during this time?

- Look at your company values. Talk about your people, your projects, your community as it aligns with your values.
- Don’t pull back. Start and Stop messaging is jarring.

## 7. How can marketing play a larger role when it comes to recruitment and HR?

- There are three Diversity and Inclusion buckets to work on: look at pipeline (invest in STEM), look at recruitment, look at retention.

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- How can we keep this from becoming just a “flavor” of the month? What is a communications strategy? Plan for a year? Longer?
- Ideas: AEC industry lacks diversity in general, tell CEO to reach out to other CEOs (*outside of AEC – see link below in Resources section*) and ask what they are doing at their firms. Put it back on leadership.
- Focus on adding value for your clients. When you share ideas, innovations, and resources that help in some way, it’s hard to go wrong with your messaging.
- Advocate for better hiring practices, such as blind resume/portfolio review (no name, no school names) so that all applicants are perceived equally. Recognize that we all have biases that we may not even be aware we have. Applicant software programs can help with this

## **8. How do we advise leadership on appropriate and sensitive social media posts / usage?**

- Not advise. Listen. The messaging should be personal to what your company culture is.

## **9. On a personal level, how are you processing the movement? Are there any resources you would like to share?**

- The comment from Emmanuel’s video about waiting to approach the mailbox until the white woman was gone so he doesn’t appear to pose a threat ... that was eye-opening.
- Our group all agreed that we didn’t realize how uninformed we truly are when it comes to BLM and DE&I.
- Don’t let your fear of saying the wrong thing hold you back from speaking out against racism and injustice. Be willing to make mistakes to do the right thing.
- Talking to those who are willing to talk. Also digging deeper to have the conversation with friends/family who don’t want to have the conversation.
- Recognize that we are all at a different point in our journey, and we need to meet people where they are to have productive conversations.

## **10. How can SMPS better support you, and provide EDI resources?**

- Hold another event on this topic/continue conversation
- Publish list of resources in your newsletter/on your website
- Invite EDI consultant to write a blog post for greater exposure to SMPS network

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## Soundbites

- Lean into your firm's values.
- Young people have an instant need for change, older staff may be more interested in the long-term change process. Communication brings the two together.
- Racism is usually folded into inclusivity trainings. Now it has become the sole focus. People (especially young people) are more interested in calling it out- standing against systemic racism.
- Always ask a diverse group to review your content.
- Look to architecture firms for content examples – they tend to be more progressive.
- Be on the right side of history. Make a strong statement.

## Resources Cited During Discussion

### Anti-Racism Resources (Curated Collection)

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BR1F2\\_zhNe86SGgHa6-VIBO-QgirITwCTugSfKie5Fs/mobilebasic?fbclid=IwAR3ArQAt0laTJhY7Ekndg0C7IUkD0AtRBUkwNfGMsArvOXFbjMiHjJuKagA](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BR1F2_zhNe86SGgHa6-VIBO-QgirITwCTugSfKie5Fs/mobilebasic?fbclid=IwAR3ArQAt0laTJhY7Ekndg0C7IUkD0AtRBUkwNfGMsArvOXFbjMiHjJuKagA)

### DEI Consultants

Archway Consulting (Black-owned) <https://www.archwayconsultinggroup.com/>

Darling Nava (Woman-owned) <http://darlingnava.com/>

Buck Davis (recommended by Danielle Gray) <https://buckdavis.com/>

1 Ummah Consulting: <http://www.1ummahconsulting.com/nehrwr.html>

### CEO Actions for Diversity & Inclusion

<https://www.ceoaction.com/actions/?Sort=Newest&categories=6684#js-filters-container>

### LET'S TALK RACE (webinar series resources page)

Resources from Danielle Gray, MBA: <https://mailchi.mp/1a51c98b5e49/letstalkrace>

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## VIDEO

Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man, Emmanuel Acho |

<https://uncomfortableconvos.com/watch>

Does MANAGEMENT need to CHANGE? What are the SKILLS managers need today?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mbfmBmSeNQ>

## FURTHER READING/LISTENING (in no specific order)

White Fragility, Robin DiAngelo PhD | <https://robindiangelo.com/publications/>

BLM Website <https://blackliveswillalwaysmatter.carrd.co/>

AIA Seattle Racial Justice Page <https://aiaseattle.org/racial-justice-resources-page/>

“The psychological impact of these public events — and the way it carries over into the workplace — cannot be overstated. Research shows that how organizations respond to large-scale, diversity-related events that receive significant media attention can either help employees feel psychologically safe or contribute to racial identity threat and mistrust of institutions of authority. Without adequate support, minority employees are likely to perceive their environments as more interpersonally and institutionally biased against them. Leaders seeking to create an inclusive environment for everyone must find ways to address these topics.”

—**Laura Morgan Roberts and Ella F. Washington**

U.S. Businesses Must Take Meaningful Action Against Racism

Harvard Business Review, June 1, 2020

End Business as Usual – Leaders Must Boldly and Fearlessly Respond to Black Lives Matter

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2020/06/18/end-business-as-usual-leaders-must-boldly-and-fearlessly-respond-to-black-lives-matter/#45b78ee4b6af>

—**Naz Beheshti**

Forbes, June 18, 2020

1619 Podcast – Nichole Hannah Jones / New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/23/podcasts/1619-podcast.html>

Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City by Antero Pietila – available at online bookstores

How to be an Antiracist by Ibram X Kendi

<https://www.ibramxkendi.com/how-to-be-an-antiracist-1>

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The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America by Richard Rothstein <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-color-of-law-a-forgotten-history-of-how-our-government-segregated-america/>

75 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice <https://medium.com/equality-includes-you/what-white-people-can-do-for-racial-justice-f2d18b0e0234>

10 Ways White People Can Support Black Coworkers <https://www.fertilegroundcommunications.com/post/ten-ways-white-people-can-support-black-coworkers>

## SMPS RESOURCES

Kim Thompkins, FSMPS, CPSM, Director of Proposals, Cumming Corporation

SMPS (Society) Incoming Director-at-Large

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<https://www.linkedin.com/in/kimthompkinsepsm/>

## SMPS MEMBER VOICES articles

Kim Thompkins – <https://www.smeps.org/a-seat-at-the-table/>

Damion Morris – <https://www.smeps.org/from-struggle-to-superpower/>

## MOVIES

Selma - From the Oscar-winning producers of 12 Years a Slave and acclaimed director Ava DuVernay comes the true story of courage and hope that changed the world forever. Golden Globe nominee David Oyelowo shines as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who rallied his followers on the historic march from Selma to Montgomery in the face of violent opposition an event that became a milestone victory for the civil rights movement. Oscar nominees Oprah Winfrey and Tom Wilkinson also star in this landmark film. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Abkka8Vf2\\_M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Abkka8Vf2_M)

Follow-up to Selma: President Obama Delivers Remarks on the 50th Anniversary of the Selma Marches <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvAIvauhQGQ>

Just Mercy - A powerful and thought-provoking true story, “Just Mercy” follows young lawyer Bryan Stevenson (Jordan) and his history-making battle for justice. After graduating from Harvard, Bryan had his pick of lucrative jobs. Instead, he heads to Alabama to defend those wrongly condemned or

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who were not afforded proper representation, with the support of local advocate Eva Ansley (Larson). One of his first, and most incendiary, cases is that of Walter McMillian (Foxy), who, in 1987, was sentenced to die for the notorious murder of an 18-year-old girl, despite a preponderance of evidence proving his innocence and the fact that the only testimony against him came from a criminal with a motive to lie. In the years that follow, Bryan becomes embroiled in a labyrinth of legal and political maneuverings and overt and unabashed racism as he fights for Walter, and others like him, with the odds—and the system—stacked against them. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7MxXxFu6fl>

13<sup>th</sup> - Combining archival footage with testimony from activists and scholars, director Ava DuVernay's examination of the U.S. prison system looks at how the country's history of racial inequality drives the high rate of incarceration in America. This piercing, Oscar-nominated film won Best Documentary at the Emmys, the BAFTAs and the NAACP Image Awards. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krfcq5pF8u8>

## ONE LAST THOUGHT

What if 2020 isn't cancelled?  
What if 2020 is the year we've been waiting for?  
A year so uncomfortable, so painful, so scary, so raw —  
that it finally *forces* us to grow.  
A year that screams so loud, finally awakening us  
from our ignorant slumber.  
A year we finally accept the need for change.  
Declare change. Work for change. Become the change.  
A year we finally band together, instead of  
pushing each other further apart.

2020 isn't cancelled, but rather  
the most important year of them all.

— *leslie dwight*