



## United in Action

By Emily M. Guglielmo, S.E., P.E., F.SEI

Some professional associations struggle to find social relevance, and optimally serve their membership. These difficulties are often the result of an inability or unwillingness to take action, the inclination to speak in silos, and the lack of aligned partners. Today's unprecedented pace of technological, social, and generational disruption particularly challenges these organizations.

I strongly believe our structural engineering associations are outliers to this traditional approach. CASE, NCSEA, and SEI recognize the enormous opportunities associated with a unified vision, coupled with joint action. The 2019 *Joint Vision for the Future of Structural Engineering* was the first tangible result of this partnership. In this document, the three organizations envisioned a future in which structural engineers are widely recognized as vital contributors to the advancement of society. The ongoing collaboration demonstrates a commitment to using a uniform voice to implement change across our profession's spectrum, from licensure to leadership training, from mentorship to messaging, from public perception to policy development.

Despite these efforts, our communities and our profession are suffering from the expanding COVID pandemic, the subsequent economic crisis, and the effects of long-term racial injustice. However, we have a choice in our response to these stressors. We can cling to past successes and manage the status quo, or we can embrace today's disruption as an opportunity to create transformative change for our associations and our profession.

Structural engineers are recognized leaders in supporting our communities following natural and man-made disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and terrorist attacks. At this moment, we have an opportunity to embrace our record of proven leadership to provide support and action in response to longstanding racial injustice and inequity. As we survey our own demographic, it is starkly apparent that our structural engineering profession does not reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.

Last month, CASE, NCSEA, and SEI jointly issued a *Call to Action* to denounce racism and commit to furthering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our organizations and the profession. While these powerful words represent a critical step to establishing a vision and a commitment to accountability, it is actions that lead to meaningful progress. With this fact in mind, NCSEA has publicly pledged to several actionable DEI goals. While our actions are currently in various stages of completion, NCSEA has made substantial progress with the following initiatives:

- Participation with SEI and CASE in the newly formed joint committee to improve professional equity and opportunity;
- Compilation and sharing of resources regarding racism, discrimination, and equity in the AEC industry;
- Preparation for unconscious bias training for all NCSEA leadership, including Board, Staff, and Committee Chairs;
- Planning for a program focused on racism, equity, and social justice in structural engineering;

- Collaboration with the NCSEA Structural Engineering Engagement and Equity (SE3) committee to report on additional dimensions of diversity, equity, and inclusion and evaluate new initiatives and programs;

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- Partnering with the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) to identify and support mechanisms to increase the diversity and quantity of engineers entering the structural engineering profession.

Real change takes significant commitment, persistence, and intention. With this in mind, NCSEA developed an action plan that sets the framework for a long-term commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We need your voice and active participation to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and fight racial injustice. I firmly believe that our associations and the structural engineering profession are well-positioned to positively impact our communities and contribute to a better future for all.

The expansion of our professional and societal influence does not mean that our associations will cease traditional offerings, such as continuing education, professional networking, and licensure advancement. However, the structural engineering profession has historically struggled to achieve visibility, to influence public policy meaningfully, or to advocate for our profession. Embracing today's challenges will result in new skills, audiences, and partners to not only advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in our profession but also improve our stature in the broader community.

As we strive for these more aspirational and impactful societal and professional goals, we realize that our voice must be loud, unified, and externally focused. More importantly, if we expect the public to listen when we speak about safer structures, improved public policy, or the value of our profession, we must also be willing to listen and respond to our communities' discussions.

Whether developing public policy, delivering consistent advocacy, or supporting social change, the commitment to progress must be consistent and present at all levels. I call on you, my CASE, NCSEA, and SEI colleagues, to join me in bold, active, and collaborative actions to transform our profession and better serve our communities. ■



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