A New Beginning, a Renewed Purpose
Expanded programing, opportunities, and initiatives offer even more growth for all of us
By Chris Okenka

Veto Power
Every vote is equal, but some votes are more equal than others
By Scott Oldham

EXCEL Awards Judges
A special thank-you to this year’s volunteer judges

The EXTRA! Award
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Casting Light Across our Associations
Inaugural Equity Award draws outstanding nominees and spotlights commitment to change
By Randy Townsend

Emerging Leaders
Celebrating the New Guard

2021 Mitch Mohanna Outstanding Achievement Award
Honoree Lou Ann Sabatier: ‘The Tenor of the Times is Extraordinary’
Hidden in the shadows and only brought out when convenient, many associations can too often find collections of neglected colleagues who have been historically encouraged to separate their honest, authentic selves from their professional lives.

Increasing discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusion have revealed those dark spaces, and many associations have demonstrated sincere commitment to those colleagues, acknowledging past and current shortcomings, developing inclusive strategies that expand participation, and welcoming previously neglected voices to comfortably be fully engaged. Because many of these approaches are designed to target the unique needs of a particular association, the experience gained along those journeys, which may inspire other associations, could be obscured.

This year, AM&P Network launched the inaugural Equity Award aiming to elevate the commitment demonstrated by the brave efforts of members and teams and shed light onto challenges and success stories that can encourage us all.

The call for nominations received an overwhelming response from across our membership, reflecting diverse approaches to prioritize DEI. *Signature* magazine proudly spotlights our winner and three other humble associations that agreed to share their stories. This year’s Equity Award winner, AGU, has been a leading organization working to expand participation and safeguard equitable practices.
“AGU is leading in many ways, but in many other ways we’re following. This isn’t an area you can innovate and leapfrog. You really have to crawl before you walk and walk before you run.”

RANDY W. FISER, CEO, American Geophysical Union

came out with some recommendations for all scientific societies based on that convening.”

Despite AGU’s 20-year legacy of DEI commitment, the geosciences remain the world’s least diverse science.

“You can’t put out one solution and just keep doing that one solution, because the world changes,” Fiser says. “We have a moment in time that we didn’t have 20 years ago with the murder of George Floyd and the pandemic. What has been uncovered in our society has allowed for this larger push at this moment than what we’ve been able to do in the past 20 years. We can’t expect this environment to be the same in 10 years or be able to do the things we’re doing now, because it’s going to change. We have to find ways to get people committed to solving these problems our society faces. It takes multiple tries to solve a complex problem.

“When people have been successful in a system that existed, they can feel threatened if that system changes and unsure about whether they’ll continue to be successful with the new diverse structures, processes, and hierarchies,” Fiser says. “That can be threatening for some people, and you have to help them move through that and refer back to that ultimate goal

American Geophysical Union
AGU supports 130,000 enthusiasts to experts worldwide in Earth and space sciences.

“A diversity of voices and experiences at the table produces the richest outcomes, and we fundamentally believe we are better as a community and an organization when there is a broad range of contributing perspectives,” says AGU CEO Randy W. Fiser. “We’re doing this because it’s our long-term commitment to say our science is better when there are more perspectives.”

“It’s a never-ending journey, and ours began around 2000 when AGU had its first diversity and inclusion strategic plan,” says Billy Williams, AGU’s executive vice president of diversity, equity, and inclusion. AGU kicked into high gear between 2013–2015 when they introduced a revised ethics policy that officially defined harassment and discrimination as scientific misconduct.

“That was a bold step for AGU, and we started convening other societies to determine what we can do and what we should be doing,” Williams says. “We
of recognizing that we are better as an inclusive science community.”

There is a measure of risk in leaning into uncomfortable DEI spaces without a map outlining the path ahead. Some critics will warn that you’re moving too fast while others will complain you’re moving too slow.

“In some areas, you’re out in front and learning as you go, but we’ve had excellent leadership that has given us coverage to take these bold steps,” Williams says. “We have also learned to share everything we do and work with partners. It’s not a competition. We want to bring others along the way, learn from them, and they can learn from us.”

“It’s important to recognize where you are, be authentic about where you are and why you’re there, and decide if you have the commitment to move forward,” Fiser says. “The DEI community will pick up on authenticity. If you’re not being authentic, it will do more damage than good. You must really own your past, own where you’re at, and own what you are willing to do moving forward. When you have those commitments to yourself, you are going to be authentic and can move into those zones, be vulnerable, and be willing to acknowledge your past and commitment. Don’t always try to be that organization that is leading. AGU is leading in many ways, but in many other ways, we’re following. This isn’t an area you can innovate and leapfrog. You really have to crawl before you walk and walk before you run.”

EQUITY AWARD NOMINEES

American Nursing Association

The American Nurses Association (ANA) is the largest association of registered nurses with over 235,000 paid members. It is the premier organization representing the interests of the nation’s 4.2 million registered nurses.

The American Nurses Association (ANA) has become a DEI champion representing a profession recognized as the most trusted profession by Gallup for 19 consecutive years. The ANA Enterprise (comprised of the American Nurses Association, American Nurses Credentialing Center, and American Nurses Foundation) represents the interests of the nation’s 4.2 million registered nurses.

ANA co-founded the National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing, examining racism within nursing nationwide and the impacts on nurses, patients, communities, and health care systems while motivating all nurses to correct systemic racism. The Commission is jointly led by ANA, National Black Nurses Association (NBNA), National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nurse Associations (NCEMNA), and National Association of Hispanic Nurses (NAHN).

When the events of the summer of 2020 unfolded, DEI was already included in an approach that incorporates advocacy, education, clinical practice, and research at all levels.

“In 2015, ANA said racism is a public health matter,” says Gregory Dyson, chief operating officer for ANA. “Most of this work was underway and is something we want to make a difference on — not just lip service. The effort moves from philanthropic to a constitutional body of work.”

ABOUT THE EQUITY AWARD

AM&P Network’s Equity Award highlights outstanding contributions to equity and inclusion in association media and publishing. Recipients are making a clear impact on their organizations and our industry through knowledge development, organizational policy, and volunteer and recruitment. These are achieved via:

+ Print and digital communications focused on association diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and discussions.
+ Efforts to make sustainable change or advance DEI commitments or goals.
+ Strengthening a pipeline to diversify membership and leadership.

“It’s not an initiative or project. It’s part of our mission and vision, and the strategic plan is how it stays embedded internally. It’s who our audience is, who we serve, and who they serve.”

Karen Somerville, vice president and general manager of education and resources, American Nursing Association
“When I ran for president of ANA, I wanted to increase the presence of ethnic and minority nurses within the profession,” says ANA President Dr. Ernest Grant. “We should be reflective of the people we care for. Part of this is to create opportunities for BIPOC communities to get nursing education. Elevate people and give opportunities.”

The key is to replicate internal actions externally and promote a healthy world through the power of nursing, says Karen Somerville, ANA’s vice president and general manager of education and resources.

“It’s not an initiative or project. It’s part of our mission and vision, and the strategic plan is how it stays embedded internally. It’s who our audience is, who we serve, and who they serve,” Somerville says. “Racism is a public health crisis that leads to other forms of illnesses we can handle, but we have to start within our profession.”

“We did a strategic planning session with the three boards, and Dr. Grant posed the question: ‘What’s not here,’” Dyson says. “We looked at ourselves and recognized there was nothing on DEI, so we included it in our strategic plan in the fall of 2019. Nothing brought together all nursing groups on this kind of scale.”

These discussions encompassed a broad examination of the ways in which DEI considerations could have profound impacts through a nursing lens, from the acknowledgment of unequal training curriculum to the recognition of disparate emergency room experiences.

“When we formed the Commission, we realized we needed to change it from different perspectives,” Grant says. “There is a perpetuation of stereotypes that has influenced the way in which people have been treated and care has been provided. When a baby is born, they are not born hating people.”

While 2020 can be viewed as a DEI awakening for many, the impact of the global pandemic added a unique challenge to the nursing profession. Like the rest of society, nurses became more “woke” and COVID data demonstrated how healthcare was disproportionately distributed and who had less access to care.

“There is no question or doubt if you look at the data and see who was dying,” Grant says. “Black nurses were more likely to be at the bedside caring for COVID patients. Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians have a higher risk of taking a financial hit because of COVID. Data show inequities all around.”

“Nurses are tired, underpaid, and overworked, but will never get tired of doing DEI work,” says Somerville. “They’ll lean into this work because it’s the right thing.”

“If you truly mean it, don’t let anything deter you,” Grant says. “Make this job No. 1. You’ll have your detractors, but you’ll have a lot more supporters. Keep going. It’s like trying to push a rock uphill, but once you get to the top of the mountain, that’s where you’re going to shine.”

The American Society of Civil Engineers

The American Society of Civil Engineers brings the global civil engineering community together, representing more than 150,000 members in 177 countries.

In 2014, staff at the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) launched the Staff Diversity and Inclusion Council (D&I Council) with a mission to foster understanding, dignity, and respect among staff and cultivate an inclusive workforce that reflects all segments of society. This staff-inspired initiative recognizes that the leadership has to be on board, but there has to be the community drive to say this is what we want. “We’ve had lunch–and–learns to discuss important topics like mental health, microaggressions, accessibility, and equity,” says D&I Council founder and chair Damita Snow. “Those events were attended by senior leadership, reflecting the importance of these engagements and topics.”
The mission of the Council is to foster understanding, dignity, and respect among staff and to cultivate an inclusive workforce that reflects all segments of society. Its goals include educating staff about how cultural competency and diversity positively impact the work environment by having workshops and other activities.

The Council is responsible for a number of activities, including a short-story club, coffee chats, REELTalk, a DEI library, and formal DEI-inspired trainings. Among their most successful activities is the annual Diversity Day, which consists of an international food tasting, a lunch-and-learn midday event with a guest speaker, and various presentations.

“We always have this event around May 21, which is the United Nations-designated World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development,” Snow says. “We are also mindful of the day we choose because we know our executive director wants to participate. If our executive director can attend, no one can say they’re too busy to attend at least part of the day.”

Nikolle Waffle, ASCE production editor, says “How do we inspire staff to engage on top of their regular obligations? I always wonder if I’m the only one thinking these things. Joining the Council showed me that it’s not just me. I bring my ideas, sometimes they work out, sometimes they don’t, and that’s OK, too. Let’s try something new and experiment.”

“A short-story club at work might sound a little silly, but it really has proven to be diversity and inclusion in action. When a diverse group of people get together to talk about topics and stories and questions of inclusion, you’re practicing empathy and appreciating your colleagues’ points of view without even realizing it’s happening. It’s very organic in that way,” says Ben Walpole, ASCE senior manager of content development.

All Council events are rooted in bringing forward our different backgrounds and are based in education. Some events are hosted by staff recruited by Council members. Other times, outside professionals are brought in. The staff involved in Diversity Day represents all levels of the organization.

“Personal success is having one new face at an event,” Snow says. “One person may bring two more people next time.”

American Chemical Society
The American Chemical Society is one of the largest scientific societies in the world. It was founded in 1876 and currently has around 155,000 members worldwide.

The American Chemical Society’s Chemical and Engineering News (C&EN) has been a champion of diversity for many years, but the lack of equity and representation in chemistry has led the publication to double down on its efforts — both within and outside of the organization.

The Trailblazers series, launched in 2020, celebrates diversity in the chemical sciences. The inaugural issue of C&EN Trailblazers — published in March 2020 to coincide with the International Day of Women in Science/STEM — was a special, double issue dedicated to women entrepreneurs. The guest editor of that issue, Jennifer Doudna, won the Nobel Prize in chemistry just a few months later for the discovery of CRISPR (gene editing technology). The second edition, February 2021, featured world-renowned chemical engineer Paula Hammond as guest editor and was dedicated to Black scientists.

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BIBIANA CAMPOS SEIJ0, C&EN editor in chief, American Chemical Society

“An issue like this can certainly influence perception — a lot of young chemists around the world will have seen the 2021 edition of Trailblazers, supported its celebration of Black excellence and, in some cases, learned about outstanding scientists they had not heard about before,” says Editor in Chief Bibiana Campos Seijo.
It took a village to produce Trailblazers. “In addition to members of the C&EN team, we contracted Black freelance writers and photographers and, of course, a guest editor who was super busy as head of the chemical engineering department at MIT,” Campos Seijo says. “Part of this project involved crowdsourcing the names of Black chemists and chemical engineers who other scientists thought we should highlight. We ran a campaign through social media and our newsletters to raise awareness and for people to nominate candidates.”

While the feedback was largely supportive, there were those voices that expressed their disapproval of the themed issues. A handful of responses said skin color is irrelevant when it comes to science and that their work should speak for itself. Other criticism says that diversity-related articles are “political,” that C&EN should concentrate on the science and stop trying to be social justice warriors.

“This commentary allows us to engage with this small group of readers and explain our point of view and why it is important to highlight the work and careers of individuals who have been and continue to be excluded from our science,” Campos Seijo says.

“Publishers can’t compel universities or companies to hire more people from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups,” says Physics Today Editor in Chief Charles Day, who nominated C&EN for the Equity Award. “But we can say why they should, and we can point out how far they need to go. Every year C&EN publishes a table that shows the diversity of chemistry faculty at the top 50 U.S. universities. There’s no discernible pattern. That gives me hope, because it suggests that individual chemists — the readers of C&EN — are making a difference at some schools. We just need all of them to step up.”

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Randy Townsend serves on the AM&P Network Association Council Advisory Board, is director of publishing operations at AGU, and editor in chief of the GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing. Conversation starters include freshwater aquariums, gardening, and grilling.