It's time to get educated on brain differences as part of your DEIA strategy.
I was really surprised to hear this statistic, and maybe you will be too: About 15% of the world’s working adults have a disability, according to the U.K.-based organization We Are Purple. And here’s a staggering number: About 80% of these disabilities are “hidden,” meaning that you likely work with someone who has a disability, and you don’t even know it.

“If we want to change the conversation around disability, we need to start by promoting truths,” Purple’s CEO Mike Adams says. “‘Not all disabilities are visible’ needs to be the starting point.”

All around the world, many organizations are working to improve their diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) strategy and culture. Let’s be frank — there are many reasons for this. In 2020 during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice was seen on a global scale. People who had long ignored the many issues related to racial injustice began to pay attention. Many of us felt helpless, not knowing what to do. Suddenly, things like diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility became hot topics in business and society. Lots of words were floating around, but not many people could really explain what they meant. If we’re being honest, many of us are still trying to educate ourselves.

It’s time we all got educated on brain differences as part of the DEIA conversation.

BY CARLA KALOGERIDIS
DEIA can be scary, and neurodivergence is one of those DEIA terms that makes some people squirm. In the broader discussion of DEIA, not as much has been said or written about neurodivergence compared to things like gender equality and racism. In simple terms, it describes people whose brain differences affect how they live and work. It can include conditions like autism, ADHD, hyperactivity, dyslexia, and dyspraxia.

While neurodivergence is not a disability or mental illness, it can be associated with them. I bring it up here because it is very often one of those “hidden” conditions that our coworkers, colleagues, and members are struggling with every day, and if we as communicators and publishers are not tuned in to that, we are cutting off many people from accessing and engaging with our association’s valuable content, which these individuals want and need.

Originally, this article was going to be about how to know if your association is putting in enough time, energy, and resources to authentically succeed in DEIA — and what it’s costing your association if it’s not being inclusive. But as so often happens when we set out to write a story, the story humbles us, puts us in our place, and takes us where it wants us to go.

A Competitive Advantage
So, after asking myself, “What is the hidden cost of not being inclusive?” I specifically began to home in on the question, “What are we losing by not actively seeking
“A constant is, ‘How do we reach our members? How do we relate to them? How do we make them hear us?’ — and this DEI convo is part of that. It goes beyond sensitivity and any sort of misguided political correctness. It is important to the way and how effectively we can reach our members. It is part of getting to know our members and making sure we are leaders in how we communicate with our members.”

“We have been using sensitivity readers for about three years now. It’s important to note that you will make mistakes because language is evolving. A term you use today may become outdated or not appropriate anymore, so everyone has to understand your commitment to DEI because we’re all human with the best intention and everyone’s learning and evolving.”

“How innovative, forward thinking, and successful will your organization be if you do not embrace the upcoming population shift and the increasing knowledge of the value of DEIA in society? We must all practice foresight. What will society look like in the future, and will your organization be around in 10 years if you aren’t tactical and deliberate in your DEIA efforts?”

neurodivergent voices for our content, editorial boards, and workforce?” — because we don’t talk about it enough.

David Aspinall is CEO of auticon US, a for-profit social enterprise that provides high-quality technology careers to autistic adults. Aspinall says 85% of autistic professionals experience high rates of unemployment or underemployment. His company helps organizations become more inclusive of neurodivergent employees by hiring talented autistic technology professionals and integrating them into client companies. Auticon helps ensure success by providing ongoing coaching and project management to support the employee and the employer.

Furthermore, about 300 of its 400 employees are on the autism spectrum, meaning auticon employs individuals from the very community it is committed to helping. It’s a fascinating business model that helps autistic employees thrive and build long-term careers while helping companies learn how to work with neurodivergent employees and create a more inclusive workplace.

“What’s amazing is that many of those traits that may have previously precluded that individual from obtaining a market-salary job — if you properly support that individual — we find that autistic traits can actually be translated into a performance advantage in the workplace," he shares.

Aspinall says organizations should not think of hiring neurodivergent employees as “doing the right thing." Instead, he encourages them to think of it as a competitive advantage. For example, neurodivergent people may have the ability to spot patterns in large amounts of data, enjoy doing repetitive tasks, and can apply themselves to a tedious process until the process is complete. “These cognitive strengths allow these individuals to look at a problem in a different way, to solve a problem in a way that a neurotypical individual may not have considered,” he explains.

Neurodiversity is an often-overlooked part of a wider discussion about diversity and inclusion. Aspinall points out, and organizations need to learn how to be neuroconfident, neurodiverse, and neuroinclusive. "We encourage organizations to have neuroinclusion central to their DEI policy," he says. "It’s only through experience that organizations understand what it means to be neurodiverse and neuroinclusive.”

He admits that there is a level of “concern and fear” around the language of neuroinclusion and neurodiversity. "Typically, we’re all naive people — we don’t want to offend. The fear of offending is the thing that I see the most that precludes people from getting involved,” he states.

The truth is, we are surrounded by neurodivergency all the time, whether we know it or not. “Every day of our life, we’re in a neurodiverse environment,” he says, “so don’t worry so much about offending — there’s only one thing to worry about, and that is inaction.”

When educating your team, he says that the best strategy is an experiential approach in a safe environment. “They need a safe opportunity to understand neurodiversity and what it means to work with neurodiverse people,” he explains, “so they realize there’s nothing to be afraid of.”

Aspinall acknowledges that there are “competing priorities” within DEIA, and he has no interest in diminishing those other priorities. “When you think about the words diversity, equity, and inclusion, it’s very easy to include the diversity of different cognitive approaches within a wider DEI framework,” he points out. “We are on the growth curve when it comes to awareness of this topic. We are starting to see it discussed more in the CEO’s office instead of only the head of DEI. We’ve seen that kind of pivot happening in organizations in the last several months, as they realize the topic of neurodiversity
5 WAYS YOUR ASSOCIATION CAN SUPPORT NEURODIVERGENCE

+ 1 Establish a clear point of contact for basic workplace adjustments. This removes one of the major barriers to people accessing the support they need to succeed at work and helps individuals feel less isolated, as they know where to go to get help.

+ 2 Ask those who report to you what they need to be motivated and successful. This helps create a diverse and inclusive culture and normalizes the idea that not everyone needs exactly the same working environment to fulfill their potential. It also gives individuals who require workplace accommodations a platform to ask for them without having to bring it up themselves.

+ 3 Offer and expect flexibility throughout the work environment. This may include remote work and flexible work hours, but also varying office setups and communication preferences. Have a camera-optional policy for video conferencing. Having this flexibility in place allows individuals to feel more comfortable, increasing their sense of belonging and psychological safety.

+ 4 Use built-in accessibility tools on major software, such as Zoom’s captioning tool, and use accessibility checkers for office software, such as Microsoft’s Accessibility Checker. Be confident that members and coworkers who use assistive technology can access your materials and meetings. Remember: You may not know who these individuals are.

+ 5 Conduct an anonymous survey as a starting point to understand how many people in your association have disabilities or neurodivergencies and what their needs may be. This will give you a sense of which initiatives to prioritize depending on what kinds of disabilities and conditions are represented.

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**Asking the Right Questions**

Maggie McGary, founder and chief strategist of McGary Digital, is a long-time member of the AM&P community who is willing to speak openly about her own neurodivergence. She was diagnosed with ADHD in her 30s. She says most people don’t understand what ADHD encompasses. “It’s not just distractibility,” she says. “It’s does belong in the wider framework of their leadership.”

So, where to start? The most important thing an association can do, he says, is to understand the needs of their organization today. “Leaders often ask me, ‘How do I recruit from this community?’ and that’s the wrong place to start. The right place to start is to understand who is already within your organization and how you can support them,” he advises. “Ask somebody who has disclosed that they are neurodistinct what it is that they need within their work environment to be productive. Understand what’s already going on within your organization before you go out into the community and recruit because you need to understand what you’re recruiting into. There’s a tendency for leaders to look outwards and look for cutting-edge ideas in their search to have a competitive advantage. But if you look inwards and understand your organization first, that’s going to inform everything that you need to do in DEI.”

Source: Excerpted from The Scholarly Kitchen’s post, “10 Quick Wins to Make Your Organization More Disability Inclusive”
regulating your emotions, time blindness, and the ability to articulate something clearly. Brain differences are invisible disabilities, and they can be very frustrating. A lot of associations don’t want to talk about it, but there is a growing dissatisfaction with the surface-level definition and approach to DEI. I have worked for and with many associations and I have many colleagues in the association world, and I have never seen any of them with a DEIA policy that goes much beyond race and sexual orientation. I know that’s starting to change, but we have a long way to go.”

McGary, who has had her own business for five years now, says she feels isolated and would prefer to be part of an organization. “My neurodivergency has kept me excluded from the workplace,” she says. “I would be in a job for a year or so and hit a wall. It’s really hard for me to concentrate in an open space, especially sitting in cubicles, so I would go to work from 9 to 5 and then come home and do my job at night because I cannot be productive in those environments. I now have tactics to work through that stuff, but my former job-hopping doesn’t look good to potential employers. It’s hard to always have to explain it.”

McGary, a self-described “marketing maniac,” says she has slowly been rebranding and is considering refocusing her business around consulting on DEIA. “The irony is that now, people whose brains work differently are starting to be considered unique and desirable,” she says. “These are unprecedented times, and the future looks different for all businesses, but especially for associations. Innovation is essential, and every organization wants out-of-the-box thinkers to help move the needle on that front. People with brain differences are the people who excel in those things and have unique capabilities that neurotypical people do not. It’s literally a strategic advantage to have team members who think and see the world differently.”

McGary has some practical advice for associations looking to improve their inclusivity. “One thing you can do is create a personal user manual with forms that everyone has to fill out,” she suggests. “Ask how a person prefers to work and communicate — at home, in an office, or hybrid. Ask, ‘What are some things you’d like us to know about you?’ Most people are just not aware of neurodiversity at all, and giving us an easy way to open up about it will settle some of the fears. Otherwise, you may totally discount someone with superb good skills just because you don’t understand how they best work or communicate.

“When I hear someone say, ‘Oh, yeah, it just wasn’t a good cultural fit,’ it’s very frustrating because I know the strengths that neurodiverse people can bring, but hiring managers need more education around that. They’re not sure what accommodations they may have to make. They’re not sure what to expect, so they just think, ‘OK, we’re just going to avoid that because it’s too risky.’ It’s frustrating to know that you are an intelligent person who really wants to work in an association, but hiring managers get stuck on what they perceive as job hopping and discount you nine times out of 10.”

McGary’s advice to association professionals who are in a position similar to hers is to always use data to help educate others about the unique skills and talents that neurodiverse employees bring to any organization, as well as the ways workplaces can be neuroinclusive. “Do the research. Be as informed as possible about your specific difference. I always give people articles from Harvard Business Review or Forbes or a Gartner study that explains the advantages of working with someone like me. Associations tend to value insights shared by those sources and want to follow those examples, so providing someone with trustworthy information can go a long way.”

CARLA KALGERIDIS is editor of Signature magazine. She worked alongside a neurodivergent colleague for many years and didn’t know it until they said something about it.
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It’s almost here! AMPLIFY 2023, AM&P Network’s Content and Marketing Summit, is rounding up content and marketing professionals from associations and nonprofits, B2B media brands, and niche publishing from June 27-28 in Washington, D.C.

We chatted with Event Chair Rob Anderson, CAE, the American Health Law Association’s senior director of publishing, about why AMPLIFY will be the professional (and who knows, maybe even personal?) highlight of your summer.
What’s new at this year’s conference?
We’re zeroing in on content and marketing strategies that really work and how to execute them. This year’s sessions will all include practical, actionable takeaways that you can deploy with your team immediately.

What makes this year’s Main Stage Talks timely and relevant?
We’ve got two sessions that we think will be useful for every attendee. Tuesday’s talk is “The Fast-Evolving Guide to Audience Engagement.” We think of audience engagement as the intersection of content and marketing. It’s about questions like where are your readers, what do they want, and how do they want it? These are things every communicator needs to understand, whether they consider themselves content developers, marketing strategists, or both.

Wednesday’s session is “IMPACT Showcase: Measuring Meaningful Progress in DEI,” in which we are celebrating the important work being done in our community, with a special focus on sharing insights that can help you further your own work to be more inclusive and equitable.

What feedback did you receive last year that influenced this year’s conference planning?
We received great feedback about last year’s AMPLIFY, but we try to raise the bar again every year. This year there will be even more opportunities to connect with other attendees and to learn from industry experts. For example:

+ **Lunchtime roundtables** will give you the chance to meet new friends with similar interests and talk about issues that you’re dealing with right now.
+ **The AMPLIFY: Connect! Lounge** space will be open for networking and making new connections throughout the conference.
+ **Exhibitors and sponsors** will be at the ready on the exhibit floor with product demos, helpful takeaways, and fun activities.

How can attendees get the most out of AMPLIFY?
This event has long been referred to as “summer camp” in all the good senses of summer camp. It’s a great place to meet face-to-face with peers that maybe you’ve only met through Zoom in recent years. It’s a chance to know you’re not alone in the challenges you face every day, and a place to find solutions that can help. Like “summer camp,” it gives you both a refreshing break and a new perspective on your daily life when you return “home.” Everyone’s excited to be together, support each other, and share and learn together. We hope to see you there!
While every part of AMPLIFY is super valuable for associations, nonprofits, B2B media brands, and niche publishing, there’s one session that you especially don’t want to miss this year — “Impact Showcase: Measuring Meaningful Progress in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).”

“Impact Showcase” will kick off day two of AMPLIFY on the Main Stage. It will highlight two winners of the inaugural 2022 SIIA Impact Awards in the Equity Awards category, which recognized individuals and teams demonstrating significant progress and identifiable achievement toward efforts related to advancing DEI.

“Prepare to be inspired, learn, ask questions, and walk away with actionable insights.”  
MARLENE HENDRICKSON

American Staffing Association’s senior director of publishing and marketing, “It’s going to be energizing. I’m excited about it.”

Hannah Glover, editor in chief of Money-Media, will speak on “Measuring Impact: How Money Media is Moving the Needle on Diversity.” Money-Media won the Team Award for a company with 100–149 employees. Additionally, two American Chemical Society (ACS) members will talk about “Fostering Inclusive Language” — Sabrina Ashwell, senior copyeditor of Chemical & Engineering News; and Racquel Jemison, ACS program manager. ACS won the Team Award for a company with 150-plus employees.

“Money-Media and the American Chemical Society are leading the charge right now in DEI in our community and are working alongside us in our associations and member circles to make a difference in this important area — and they are rightfully recognized for the work that they’ve done,” Hendrickson says. “We’ll have the opportunity to hear what didn’t go exactly right and what went really right so we can learn from them and emulate their success.”

Through deliberate and focused efforts to hire, retain, and promote employees of all genders and ethnic backgrounds, Money-Media increased its amount of ethnically diverse staff from about 10% to more than 40% in six years. Glover will explain how the team took diversity from a goal to an intentional mission, how they measure progress, and how they intend to continue to build an inclusive culture.

“We can’t have diverse voices without a diverse team,” Hendrickson shares. “You can’t make an exciting recipe with only three ingredients. What Money-Media has done is very brave and kudos to them and their leadership for walking the walk.”

As for the ACS Inclusivity Style Guide, it aims to help people communicate in ways that recognize and respect diversity in all its forms. Ashwell and Jemison will share how they created the guide and how they continue to use it to foster inclusion among staff and members. Plus, they’ll give tips for creating an inclusive language guide at your own organization.

“It’s an amazing body of work,” Hendrickson remarks. “They’ve gone out and done the hard work to provide their association members with good guidelines on how we should address our members and issues in our publications.”

AMPLIFY attendees will be able to apply these valuable lessons and tools to a wide variety of important topics covered by DEI, including race, orientation, and physical and intellectual differences.

“Understanding DEI is critical because it is an integral part of how we understand and communicate with each other,” Hendrickson notes. “From a practitioner’s perspective, we need to delve deeply and understand how our audiences wish to hear from us. It’s not just important because it’s the right thing to do, but also because it impacts our ability to communicate with our member audiences as association professionals and impacts the way we can successfully do our jobs now and in the future.”
Integrating Accessibility into Every Stage of Your Publication Lifecycle
Accessibility works best when integrated into the entire publications process — not as an afterthought. Learn about accessibility terminology and walk through a typical publication lifecycle — draft, design, and distribution — to learn where accessibility can be incorporated into your publishing or marketing process.

+ **LILIA LAGESSE**
founder and lead strategist,
Heard Creative Co.

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Podcasts allow listeners to connect with peers and hone their craft on their own schedule. At the same time, organizations can engage a broad audience beyond their membership, while generating sponsorship or advertising dollars. Join this panel discussion to hear the different approaches taken to starting up a successful podcast program by several organizations. You can do it, regardless of your staff and resources!

+ **MEREDITH LANDRY**
content manager, GLC

+ **MATT AUSLOOS**
manager of publishing,
American Health Law Association

+ **JEN HAJIGEORGIOU**
director of content strategy,
National Association of Realtors®

+ **HENRY HOWARD**
deputy director of media and communications, The American Legion

AMPLIFY, AM&P Network’s Content & Marketing Summit, is packed with two days of education, inspiration, networking, and community involvement. In addition to special main stage presentations, roundtables, speed talks, and more, you can choose from 16 track sessions and catch four of them each day. Here’s a preview of eight of the track sessions being offered at AMPLIFY 2023:
Social Storytelling in Action
The social media landscape has become increasingly crowded — you’ve seen it yourself. That’s why forward-thinking brands are turning to social storytelling — it’s what sets your brand apart from the pushy promotions and ho-hum posts. But it can be tough to find the balance between creative storytelling and your brand’s strategic goals. This session on social storytelling tactics won’t just explore why social storytelling is worthwhile, it will leave you with actionable takeaways that you can implement immediately.

+ LAURA MARZEC
content director
Imagination and The Mx Group

+ CYNDEE MILLER
senior vice president of content strategy, Imagination and The Mx Group

Build a Content-First Culture to Engage Members Any Time, Anywhere
If you create programs, products, and services with a content-first approach, audiences will find them and use them more than ever before. A content-first approach requires a new look at your organization’s culture. It takes collaborative planning and execution among your staff departments. And it puts volunteers in new roles — being ambassadors and information gatherers rather than recipients. Drawing from real-life case studies and research, this session will provide hands-on exercises so participants can create their own vision for a content-first culture at their organizations.

+ HILARY MARSH
president and chief strategist, Content Company, Inc.

Every Association Should Have a Book Publishing Strategy
Book publishing is the business of linking content to markets. Its core components parallel what many associations already do. This session will provide an overview of the parts of book publishing that associations need to understand to succeed in using longer-form content to meet members’ needs while generating non-dues revenues.

+ BRIAN O’LEARY
executive director, Book Industry Study Group

What Association Publishers Need to Know About Business Development in 2023
A recent Professionals for Association Revenue survey revealed that 86% of associations have an underperforming business development strategy or none at all. The relationship between association publishing teams and their business development counterparts is critical to media success, mission, and revenue health. In this session, learn more about the current state of business development and how you can develop your business competencies for both personal and professional growth.

+ ERIN HALLSTROM
director of digital content strategy, Endeavor Business Media

SEO for Editors: How to Optimize Your Content for Search Engines and Your Audience
Content may be the backbone of your enterprise, but if no one sees it, does it matter? In this session, B2B content strategist and search engine optimization (SEO) expert Erin Hallstrom will cover SEO best practices to set your content teams up for success. She’ll talk about how to optimize headlines, decks, and copy for a B2B or niche audiences so content doesn’t get caught in the “consumer web”; identifying which keywords to use and why keyword saturation is counterproductive; and having a better understanding how analytics and SEO work together.

+ ERIN HALLSTROM
director of digital content strategy, Endeavor Business Media

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Track Sessions Preview

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+ JEMILAH SENTER
  vice president of marketing and communications, MCI USA

+ KELSY MCCARTHY
  associate vice president of creative services, MCI USA

+ STUART HALES
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+ CAROLYN SHOMALI
  publisher, Professionals for Association Revenue

+ MARCUS MALECK
  director of global business partnerships, Society for Clinical Research Sites

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