

# PR pros must make a concerted effort for public relations to be a diverse and inclusive industry.

## Announcement from the PRSA National Diversity & Inclusion Committee

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August 1, 2017

If it's not us, then who? Each and every year, the comments are louder; the calls for a more diverse and inclusive practice are more widespread; and the need to change who enters our profession and who goes "up" the corporate ladder are proliferating.

Last week, THE City College of New York (CCNY) PR Track Director Asst. Professor Angela Chitkara released her paper, "#PRDiversity: The Struggle is Real," where she interviewed current and former CEOs of global PR agencies who agreed on the need for greater diversity and inclusion in the industry. "Attracting more people of color to the entry and senior level ranks is a priority (of the CEOs) followed by gender, particularly including more women in the senior ranks," stated Chitkara, who is a member of PRSA's National Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Committee.

"Our industry still struggles to attract young Blacks, Asians and Hispanics to pursue public relations as their career of choice, and we must work hard to get into senior positions to be able to help younger generations join the workforce and stay in the industry," says Ana Toro, APR, Fellow PRSA, chair of the D&I Committee. "How are we supposed to mentor and inspire our diverse practitioners if the opportunity doesn't come from the top? It is our responsibility to shake up the industry and demand that our hiring managers increase diversity in our teams."

But once there, many recognize the right elements need to be in place to keep our talent diverse, to nurture them, and to develop them in bigger roles and responsibilities. "That's where inclusion comes to play," Toro states.

Last year, the D&I Committee had the idea to establish diversity liaisons since they believe D&I begins in the trenches, from the ground up, where diverse members are joining and coming together. In less than three months, over 50 PRSA Chapters appointed a liaison and D&I initiatives began at the local level. As a result, some Chapters are hosting diversity mixers,

while others are planning panels with diverse guest speakers. Others have taken it a step further and added D&I as part of their bylaws and strategic plan.

"There's no better way of saying that 'If you build it, they will come!'" Thanks to the chapter liaisons, diversity and inclusion-focused initiatives are beginning to take form in more and more PRSA Chapters. "Now we see Chapters defining what diversity and inclusion means to them; others are adding D&I statements on their websites, or even appointing Diversity Officers or holding diversity training icebreakers during their board meetings and retreats. "Chapters are becoming our affinity groups!"

The Committee is convinced that through the Chapters' concerted efforts to make PR a diverse and inclusive profession, PRSA will see a shift toward more diversity in years to come.

According to Chitkara, "The lack of diversity can inhibit innovation when people of diverse thinking, backgrounds and skill sets are not at the table." That's why the D&I Committee is working with the Thought Leadership Committee on another initiative that will elevate PRSA's commitment to D&I in the industry in 2018.

"Our hope is to see a broad representation of practitioners at all levels of PRSA, from Chapters, to Sections, to Districts, but also, in our leadership and national committees," Toro says. "It is up to us to push the envelope and continue to ask the questions; screaming that we are here, and that we need a diverse Society that reflects the clients and markets that we all serve."

The D&I Committee is also working closely with the PRSA Foundation and the PRSA College of Fellows to implement new initiatives this year, which will benefit students and young professionals. "There is still a long way to go, but the changes are happening day after day," Toro says.

The 2017 committee leadership is comprised of Ana Toro, APR, Fellow PRSA (chair); James Shackelford (vice-chair); Cambria Jones (secretary); Y'Anad Burrell; Henry Cervera-Nique; Angela Chitkara; Tiffany Cody; Laarni Dacanay; Aerial Ellis; Cheryl Forsatz; Angela Hayes; Anthony Hicks, APR; Beth-Ellen Keyes; Ericka Lozano-Buhl; Olga Mayoral-Wilson, APR, Fellow PRSA; Johnny Smith; Jaron Terry, APR, Fellow PRSA; Stephanie Thara; Natalie Tindall, PhD, APR; Andrew Young (PRSSA); Bonnie Upright, APR (Board liaison); and Philip Bonaventura (PRSA staff liaison).

Chapters are encouraged to participate in the PRSA Chapter Diversity Awards, which will be announced during the Diversity Mixer at PRSA ICON in Boston. Additional information can be accessed [here](#).

PRSA members are welcome to join the D&I Committee during their two ICON sessions in Boston:

- Your Society at Work: Increase Your Chapter's Awareness and Commitment to Diversity & Inclusion (Sunday, Oct. 8)
- How can Brands Address Diversity? A Look at Brands That Yelled: *We All Matter!* (Tuesday, Oct. 10)