

AAPILC Leaders in Corporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (AAPILC)

Session Description: As California and America become more diverse, corporate diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives are facing greater public scrutiny. DEI efforts are increasing in importance for recruiting and retaining employees and improving the bottom line. However, AAPILCs are often not prioritized or even included in DEI efforts. Research by Bain & Company on belonging and inclusion found that Asians felt the least included of anyone, even though AAPILCs were more represented than other groups in many environments. Two-thirds of Asians feel businesses have ignored racism against their community and over half say racism has damaged their relationship with their employer and say little has been practically done to address systemic racism. Due to workforce representation, Asian women are often excluded from DEI initiatives, but a Center for Work life Law report on women of color in tech found that the experiences of Asian women in tech more closely parallel other underrepresented women of color. In medicine, when DEI committees are formed, AAPILC have been made to feel that their need for DEI is unsubstantiated, citing “over-representation” among physicians. In this session we welcome AAPILC leaders who serve in corporate DEI roles to share their experiences and ideas on the inclusion of AAPILC in DEI initiatives. How did they achieve their DEI leadership roles in their organization and what barriers did they face? And as DEI leads, what are the barriers to inclusion and prioritization of AAPILC issues in corporate DEI initiatives? And what should AAPILC do collectively to increase inclusion and advancement of AAPILCs in the workplace.

Moderator: Dr. Richard Pan

Former Senator and Chair of the Asian American Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus

Researcher: John Iino

Chief Diversity Officer of Reed Smith

Researcher: Grace Moss

Vice President of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at Warner Brothers Discovery

Researcher: Jennifer “Jae” Pi’ilani Requiroy

Vice President of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at AEG Worldwide

Please visit <https://www.aasc.ucla.edu/aapipolicy/default.aspx> to view the researchers’ policy briefs.

Panel will explore the role of the AAPILC community in DEI

Background: Dr. Pan cited data that helped illustrate the nature of the problem. For example, Bain did a study that looked at DEI and AAPILC and noted that half of Asian Americans felt racism in the workplace and two-third of Asian Americans felt racism toward Asian Americans was ignored and that little was done to address these concerns. Another cited example included a study done by the Center for Workforce Law that found that Asian American women in tech were often excluded from DEI conversations either though Asian American women also feel the same exclusion in the workplace as other women of color. Some feel discouraged from inclusion in DEI inclusions because Asian Americans are well represented in the medical field.

So, where does our community fit in DEI initiatives?

[Dr. Pan then introduces the three DEI leaders in the corporate space and asked each to tell their story of how they got to where they are]

[Grace Moss]

Was an Asian American Studies department alumni of UCLA. SoCal Native and grew up in an Asian American community in Diamond Bar where she never questioned her race. This community allowed her to feel she could be whoever she wanted - like the head cheerleader. When Grace graduated, she knew she wanted to work in media. She started in reality production and launched a career in television. She worked at MTV and VH1 and became a creative producer and director. She wanted to switch lanes and become a network executive. So she moved to Style (a network) and learned about the other side of media.

There, she started to reflect on the audience a bit more - through AAPI or diversity talking heads and showrunners. An opportunity opened up at NBC to work in DEI. She had become more active in BRG, ERG and these, together with the opportunity, was a trigger a switch to DEI career.

She does a lot at APA events - like lunch and learns. And is currently heavily involved in the pipeline programs. Currently launching pipeline programs globally to expand the pool of talent.

[John Iino]

Worked on the Asian Pacific alumni board for USC. Then was the President of the Board of Trustees.

He was a lawyer for 32 years at big firms, like Reed Smith. Got into management 20 years ago. Became part of the senior management team and became a managing partner of the LA office. But wanted to more. . The head of DEI at the time approached him and said he was leaving.

For the role of the Chief Diversity Officer they wanted someone that senior - that understood the promotions process, compensations, business, really understood what it would take to make a difference. He decided to take the job. For the first three years he tried to balance heading that and being a lawyer. But that proved to be too much and now he doesn't practice law anymore. Originally, the DEI team started with 2 people. Now they have 11 people in the DEI program.

At first, he felt the imposter syndrome. Was asking himself, am I right for this role? The Chief Diversity Officer before was black. So in his first public speech he acknowledged race - that he was not black but has experienced racism. Represents ideas of support vs understanding someone else's experience. He knows that when he first came on, some of his colleagues were a little skeptical. But he walked the walk and was validated by other colleagues later on. There is a challenge for AAPI DEI leaders. He wanted to make sure that I was supportive of everyone. At the beginning he felt like he had to prove himself to his Black and Latinx employees and, in doing so, may have ignored AAPI employees.

[Jae]

UCLA grad in sociology. Daughter of Filipino immigrants. She wanted to get into television production and ended up working as an NBC page right out of school. She worked in production and was always the only Asian in the room.

She thought about how to build bridges to other people so she could get my voice heard. Wanted to move into film production and got selected for a dream job in London when she got a call and the producer who said, I'm sorry I have to give your job to someone's nephew. So she moved to advertising at Toyota Motor Sales where she worked for many years. When they first started the DEI department she moved over to DEI and started doing communications there. Her work was really about trying to create a sense of community for employees, customers, and fans. She learned about organizational development. And she realized she could be the bridge between execs from Japan and white men in the US. She was perceived as "safe".

[Dr. Pan]

Oftentimes AAPI are not included in DEI because they seem to be well represented. Even for the subgroups - like medicine, law, tech - that representation thins out really quick in upper management. Can you speak to what you see as the challenges and barriers or opportunities to make sure AAPI are included in DEI opportunities?

[John]

He has a background in corporate roles and has been a part of Ascend, a group for pan-Asian leaders. Ascend produced a report with KMPG and found that AAPI make up 13% of the US workforce and yet only 4% of corporate boards have Asian representation. Why are AAPI not at the highest levels?

Similarly, Asian Americans are well represented in major law firms, but they have the highest attrition rates and smallest conversion to partner. Again, why?

One, AAPIs are viewed as a monolith. There are 19 different sectors of Asians within the US. There is East Asian vs West Asian. *We need to disaggregate data.* And there needs to be more focus on the subgroups. When looking at the

data, think about these sub groups – there are X number of Indian Americans in these roles - but what about the Cambodians?

[Grace]

Gave a +1 on the monolith idea. She added that there is also an issue of perception at play. She has experienced this in her career on two fronts as an Asian American woman. She was prevented from going to set as a PA because they wanted the men to do that. The perception was that this young woman can't do that. As far as being Asian American - she is perceived as being passive, weak, or not authoritative. She's had two bosses - both white women - who told her "you need to be more authoritative" and "you're too quiet". Even though she was doing a really great job, she was held back by this perception. But working in DEI, we all see the value in what we're bringing to the table. That's why she thinks working in media is so great because she gets to shape how new narratives are formed.

[John]

Reiterates the importance of the media. Who is famous? How many judges, lawyers, CEOs have you seen that are AAPI in TV shows? Why is that? We don't see those people on TV as kids.

[Jae]

Yes, representation matters. On an individual basis - peers saw her as a leader. But her boss didn't see her as such because of that cultural thing that we have where we don't look people in the eye and we don't speak directly to authority. So she started doing that in every meeting. Now she's at AEG - who produces Coachella and festivals where they can feature artists or highlight athletes. There is an exposure to what's happening outside – and – in her role – she can help bridge the people inside the corporation and outside the corporation. For example, AEG worked on the 88 Rising Festival [which is about amplifying Asian talent and culture]. In her corporate role she makes the argument that this is how to help the business make money – that's how they are going to hear her.

[Dr. Pan]

AAPIs are not moving up into the leadership of corporate America? As DEI leaders you are close to the leadership you report to. Do they recognize this as an issue? Are they interested in investing in programs that will help AAPIs move up into positions of power?

[Jae]

She was hired in 2019. During that time, she thought, we need to stop and think about our people and employees right now – in terms of safety and what it means for the API community. [AEG] had never made public statements on cultural issues. They were targeting African American employees after George Floyd. Realized that they don't have enough diversity and professional development. So they built a talent acquisition that has a diversity and development strategy. Collective voice that is about all of us. Because she's there she's not letting the API community get left out those conversations (for example, the Kings had Stop AAPI Hate on their website).

[Grace]

During the stop Asian hate movement, the workforce team created listening sessions. Less for strategy but more for people to gather, listen, hear. She saw breakout rooms with non-Asians who were there in support. Having the freedom to facilitate those conversations is really powerful. At WBD there is a robust team in the DEI division and that is one thing that speaks to the support they are getting from the higher ups. More broadly, there is/was a mass search for DEI executives - to lead the charge and change the landscape. But it's not sufficient to hire one brown person to change things at a company. That is not enough. Regardless of the community, they are being inclusive of all communities - racial, disability, trans community - but also native - they get left out too.

[John]

Reiterates the need for an increased focus on data in DEI. What are the populations, attrition rates, promotion rates? Once you start looking at data – and it's not 'people of color generally' – the data lets you see what is actually happening in smaller minority groups. Support ERGs, which are doing a lot of great work around a sense of belonging, but you also need those ERGs to work together. Big criticism is of the type of thinking that goes – okay if we need to bring in Black and Latinx employees then we shouldn't put an Asian in that position. That ends up

creating a scarcity issue. But we really need to work together. We don't view it as the suffering Olympics - or that there is zero sum game.

[Jae]

And it's not just about representation but also about the culture. So first you have workplace culture - what type of education, etc. Second, representation is another piece. And third, community work - where are we doing biz, are we helping nonprofits, where is our company getting visibility within the community. It's about holistic system change, not just about representation. Affirmative action did not prove to be successful. If it was just about representation, then we would have solved the issue then.

[Dr. Pan]

Asian American include so many groups: south Asian, Pacific Islanders. Can you speak to the challenges - or opportunities - of DEI efforts that are inclusive of the diversity of our OWN community?

[Grace]

She thinks about the Asian American community in media and television. When they have an Asian panel she is always curious to see how representative they are. When people say Asian they often mean East Asian. Especially when Indian and Filipinos are often left out of the API narrative. She is seeing some improvements - folks are trying to be more inclusive. Sunrise Collective and Black House - had the first Fill-Am panel. I think folks need to call it out when they see it. Many of us plan events, and when speaking in panels we should make sure that we are representative.

[John]

At the Ascend national conference, he spoke on a panel on inter-Asian ally ships. Why don't you see as much ally ship in support of other Asians? You hear black colleagues say, when I retire, I will bring in another black person. Why don't Asians do that? Maybe it's because we come from different countries and there is lots of diversity there. Wars have happened between those countries. There is also this whole concept of working hard to assimilate. Or, do I really want to suggest that THIS person should be the next person? Again, that suggests a zero sum game - which John doesn't feel like it is! We should support diversity. The other reason people maybe don't is because you hold Asians to higher standards? What does it mean to be an ally - a sponsor, a confidant, a mentor? It's important to learn about the other API cultures. The more you learn about their challenges, the unique aspect of what makes them great.

[Jae]

She is going to be more vulnerable. Her thinking has been clouded by white supremacy. There is an idea that Asians becoming closer to white means we are safer. AAPINH. That is the collective - she's educating herself on the different countries and communities under that umbrella. Do I happen to know other Asians for these roles?

The younger generation is not going to stand for us to not think about intersectionality. If our organizations use 1990s type of thinking, no one will listen to us. We need to listen to folks who are going to games, spending money at festivals - that's how we will support our business. That's how we grow and learn.

Audience Question: How do we as community advocates help the DEI issue when we know it's also about the bottom line?

[Jae]

Connect with ERGs at corporate organizations. And they can help build the bridge to nonprofits. Business want to build connections to communities where they are doing business.

[John]

Those are consumers, voters, people who are important to business. One half of global spend will be by Asians. Where do you want to be as a business? Supporting diversity is good for business.

[Grace]

Lean into using your voice. Anecdotal story: there was a project in development about Filipinos. A mail order brides' comedy. And she was contacted by an Asian American media newspaper for a reaction. She didn't know

about the show and she was mortified. But by the end of the week there were so many AAPI groups organizing a strike, and she was like YES! Using the power of community activists and using your voice is key. Because as someone on the inside, she can hear your voices on the outside and use them to advocate for change.

Also, we are wanting to partner on how we can utilize community networks to bring in talent for the pipeline programs. That can be a healthy relationship.

Audience Question: Re: representation of Asians in media– where do you see representation in the future?

[Grace]

We want to tell those non-stereotypical stories. Like *Never Have I Ever* or *Hawkeye*. The role of the WBD pipeline programs and her job is to find those untapped storytellers and make sure they have access to WBD. Her job is to make sure these writers are fully prepared to write a script and survive and navigate the challenging world of the TV landscape. This means equipping writers with training, managing micro-aggressions in the work place. Even for our showrunners. We are actively trying to tell different stories. We want to find the next generation of showrunners.

[John]

Just a plug - there is an AAPI film festival at USC tomorrow.

[Jae]

Part of what our roles are is to provide access. So how do people even get into the industry? There has been an explosion of nonprofits trying. For example, Goldhouse is a non-profit doing a ton across entertainment. AEG has a big sponsorship with them. Creating ACCESS. Introducing people to their jobs. There are so many jobs out there - in sports and music that are not just athletes and musicians. We need accountants and other roles within those companies. We need to amplify these opportunities.

Audience Question: Referenced experience of not feeling like the cool POC or pitching to white execs without wanting to alienate people. How do we navigate that?

[John]

There is a lot of power in being vulnerable. We have a lot in common and we should find areas of common struggle. Common bonds. Experiences you had in high school. Help navigate those challenges. It just takes time. Couldn't force it. Stick to a sense of purpose. Over time people see that - it was genuine. Comes down to the WHY.

[Grace]

Re: pitching to white corporate America: let them feel uncomfortable - you don't have to have to make yourself feel small because the white folks in the room. This is your story. As an executive they shouldn't feel bad about hearing another person's story. That is their problem. If it's feeling too particular, find common humanity. I want my kids to feel like they have white people swagger where they can walk in a room with confidence and tell their story. Don't feel like you have to minimize your story.

[Jae]

Also, understand that you're being different is actually bringing value. Your diversity is actually adding value. They need you.

Question: You don't see enough AAPI representation in the c-suite in corporate. What can we do as a group to make that shift happen?

[John]

What can we do ourselves? Collective intentionality is one answer. Look to places like Ascend which supports folks in their journey. Ascend sets goals about how much representation they want to see. So set goals. We want to see more – and here is our goal. Intentionally talking about goals collectively and share those goals with the C-suite folks who have the ability to make changes. And more training - how do we get people to become leaders - lift up younger folks and train them.

[Jae]

This is a tough nut to crack with unconscious bias of white supremacy - but you should encourage people to go for jobs. Literally use your voice. Refer people into roles. Collectively - ally ship is very important.

[Grace]

Echoes Jae. And add that you should know your value. Oftentimes you will have to leave the company and then come back. She was at a previous company where she was the head of department and doing to the job of SVP. She was very vocal that she deserved a promotion. But she was passed over. In a month or two she left the company and landed a VP role.

They say that Asian Americans or BIPOCs are the most over developed and least promoted. Break out of the perception that putting your head down and being diligent workers. That's when change will happen. Re.

[Dr. Pan]

Ascend presented data that while certain Asian groups are represented in tech, actual Asian American women have the lowest rate of promotion in tech. Followed by Asian men in tech.

Quick story - they did a research study on awards and research and, in academia or medicine, when you publish a paper the metric of how successful the paper is usually based on how many people cite your paper. The study found that while AAPI authors get cited often, they do not get awards.

Need to recognize that the playing field is not level for us. Still have things to overcome. It is so important that our community supports each other. Where are Asian donors?

When Dr. Pan was running for office, people said, "you can't win in the district because an Asian American can't win". John Chung convinced democrats.

Why Asian Americans don't reach the top of the corporate ladder - the playbook that your parents taught you doesn't work in corporate culture.

Audience Question: The dos and don'ts /recommendations to get agencies to address AAPI issue?

[Jae]

Communication. How are you creating visibility to your constituents? Use of different languages? What communities can you help advocate for or champion?

Then there is the performative question - many orgs and companies have DEI - but if people also need to have resources necessary to make those changes actually happen. And outside of resources, what DEI leader really needs is a team behind the DEI person and influence with c suite.

[Grace]

Let's make these into job conversations: how do they stay within the WBD ecosystem?

[John]

Echo points on performative aspect- important to have the data and accountability to leadership. And to set goals.

[Audience Question]: Do your companies have internship programs for AAPI students?

[Grace]

No, not specific AAPI internships. But referenced a professional development program at Stanford, looking to HBCUs

[Jae]

Also no. But there is an internship program at AEG and at least 60% of the final applications are diverse. They have targeted programs with HCBIs and HBUs. And try to find nonprofits that are doing work in diverse and educated folks on how to get them connected to employees that look them.

[John]

Mostly AAPI bar associations, but at intern level - not specifically AAPI.

[Audience Question] Have there been times where there were lost opportunities tied to this discomfort (of pitching to white audience) and what are the ways we can tell our stories?

[Jae]

It's so important to build relationship and trust. All her peers at the very top are white. Her job is to make them feel comfortable with feeling uncomfortable. They have to be open to the fact that they don't know everything. How do you build that trust with someone? There is great power in storytelling.

[John]

Saw a leader of another law firm who was Korean American. And she just got up and talked about her experience. Sharing personal stories helps people see the challenges that we face.

[Grace]

Referenced a leadership development course by Dr. Frey at HBS. She stressed having three prong approach 1) effective leadership and communication, 2) building trust through communication and 3) having a rigorous and tactical plan.

[Dr. Pan]

There was a bill that said we should have at least black and latinx representation on boards of directors but we got AAPI added to that before it got out. Requires that boards have women as well. Legislative efforts to increase diversity but it's also incumbent on all of us to figure out what we can do to lift each other up.

Policies can help facilitate that, API leg caucus is interested in these policies, but we need to be sure that our communities are inclusive in the DEI space.

It's important that we make the other people uncomfortable- were not there yet so we should make them uncomfortable.

Thanks to panel and audience.