

# Promoting a More Diverse AAPA: Business Rationale for Diversity as a Strategic Management Imperative and Associated Leadership Criteria

## PART I: RATIONALE

At AAPA, we seek to provide a supportive and inclusive environment where all PAs and PA students can maximize their full potential, regardless of any personal classifications such as age, (dis)ability, gender identity and expression, national origin, race, religious affiliation, sex, or sexual orientation.

### **Reasons for Leveraging Diversity in Leadership**

- Diverse perspectives create innovative solutions.
- Having diverse teams helps avoid pitfalls of like-mindedness and following the same routine.
- When we pull from the broadest, most diverse pool, we get the best people on our team.
- By reflecting the diversity of our constituents, we better understand their needs, allowing us to provide the best solutions.
- Tapping the insights, talents, and judgments of a diverse pool is vital to being competitive.
- In a competitive market, diversity is essential and the AAPA should be at the forefront.

### **Leadership that Reflects Our Diversity**

We have yet to find limits to the responsibility our best people are able to assume. To be successful, it is essential that our leaders reflect the diversity of the communities and cultures in which we operate. This requires us to attract, retain, and motivate people from many backgrounds and perspectives. Being diverse is not optional; it is what we need to be.

An inclusive leadership environment can play an important role in supporting many of the AAPA's strategic principles. Here's how:

- Place Constituents' Interests First.** Diversity enables us to best serve our constituents by tapping the insights and talents of a diverse leadership pool. To serve our constituents effectively, we must be fully capable of engaging different cultures in an informed and nuanced manner.
- Recruit and Retain Talent.** When we build a reputation for valuing differences, we are better able to attract and keep talented leaders.
- Yield Superior Returns.** When our leaders feel comfortable enough to offer their ideas and respected enough to disagree, we operate on all cylinders. We achieve full return on investment (ROI) by maximizing the value of every leader in the association, regardless of ethnic, gender, or sexual orientation identity; religious affiliations; social classes; geographic regions; (dis)ability or any other characteristics.

- ❑ **Achieve Excellence.** If we are not diverse, we cannot excel. If we don't do a good job in terms of diversity right now, our competitiveness will deteriorate over time.
- ❑ **Identify Innovative Solutions.** The diversity of our leadership is not just an enhancement of our problem-solving capacity, our creativity, or our ability to get on with our constituents. It is a source of opportunity. Having a diverse group of people think about any given subject will elicit more innovative ideas than a homogeneous group of people considering the same problem. Diversity is critical for us to excel.
- ❑ **Select The Best People.** Preparing for our future means engaging people who reflect a broader range of diversity. Considering that the PA profession is one of the most diverse in the health care industry, we are well on our way. Our diversity efforts help us to attract, retain, and motivate the best people drawn from the broadest pool of applicants.
- ❑ **Commitment to Diversity.** In the process of identifying people to fill key or important roles, we will benefit from considering a broad spectrum of people, and considering diverse candidates for those types of breakout opportunities.
- ❑ **Teamwork.** A culture built on teamwork affords opportunities for everyone, irrespective of differences, to have an important impact on the building of our profession and our professional association. An environment where the richness of our lives and experiences is welcomed and valued, by our team and by our association, is critical to achieving our full potential.
- ❑ **Intense Effort.** Through persistent and conscious efforts, diversity will become second nature to our core competencies and integrated into the fabric of our culture. For diversity to be successful within the association and to create an environment that's conducive to it, the concept of accountability is an important one. Everyone should feel like an owner to this issue and be accountable to make it work.
- ❑ **Anticipating Change.** Our profession is so complex, so diverse, and growing so quickly that our leaders often have to find new and different ways to execute our goals. Our profession is on a trajectory of ever-increasing diversification.
- ❑ **Integrity.** Diversity is the right thing to do from a cultural point of view and from an ethical point of view.

**PART II:**  
**ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**  
**FOR AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT**

**Inclusion – What It Looks Like**

The Committee on Diversity has identified several ways we can achieve a more inclusive leadership environment. Below are two tools for possible use in recruiting and developing diverse leaders as well as enriching current leadership.

The first chart describes inclusion criteria. By integrating these eight criteria into our self-assessments, and considering these criteria during leadership appointments and nominations, we serve to benefit our profession, our constituents, and our patients. Additional details on each of the criteria can be found in the Follow-Up section below, or through the Committee on Diversity.

<b>1</b>	<b>Bring diverse perspectives to the mix</b>	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
<b>2</b>	<b>Invite people who are different from me to all events</b>	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
<b>3</b>	<b>Expand my comfort zone</b>	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
<b>4</b>	<b>Recognize and adapt to different communication styles</b>	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
<b>5</b>	<b>Respect individual differences</b>	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
<b>6</b>	<b>Develop empathy by striving to understand unfamiliar experiences</b>	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
<b>7</b>	<b>Provide feedback to people who are different than me</b>	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
<b>8</b>	<b>Engage in constructive dialogue</b>	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely

**Follow-up**

**1. Bring diverse perspectives to the mix**

It's harder to be innovative when surrounded by people with similar perspectives and life experiences. Whether recruiting for a leadership position or staffing a team, we can bring together a group of people who have different backgrounds and varying perspectives. Specific considerations we might take include:

- Evaluate the composition of leadership teams and consider people with different backgrounds to participate.
- Seek diverse opinions when making an important decision.
- Ensure a diverse pool of qualified applicants when calling for leadership candidates.
- Develop a pool of qualified, diverse, candidates for leadership opportunities.

## **2. Invite people who are different from me to events**

People gravitate toward people who are like them. It requires discipline to ensure that we avoid excluding people, both within leadership and in leadership-related social functions.

- Examine who we socialize with; do we tend to associate with the same people? How can we modify this process to include others not in our immediate social circle?
- Set up lunch, coffee, or a phone call with someone who may be different.
- Do not confine ourselves to the commonly discussed categories. Instead, actively look for people with different mindsets, worldviews and operational perspectives.

## **3. Expand my comfort zone**

When teams are diverse, there can be uncomfortable moments. We may not always understand a different way of doing things, or may worry about saying the wrong thing. We benefit by taking responsibility for how we feel and interact – and this requires a willingness to accept a little bit of discomfort. Here are a few ways we can work on expanding our comfort zone:

- Learn more about an unfamiliar culture.
- Ask questions to understand a differing perspective.
- Attend a diversity-oriented lecture at the annual conference to learn more about unfamiliar cultures.

## **4. Recognize and adapt to different communication styles**

Good communication is vital to getting work done. But it can be a source of friction if people have significantly different styles. Instead of questioning another's communication style, we may want to try analyzing how it's different and adapt our own style in order to be more effective with that person. We can:

- Suspend judgment of communication that may not seem natural. If we take the time to ensure understanding, the relationship will profit.
- Ask others about their communication preferences. This can be as simple as asking a colleague if there are ways to improve our communication with them.
- Respect cultural differences about behaviors like eye contact and personal space. If we don't know what is expected, ask.

## **5. Respect individual differences**

We bring everything we are to our relationships. In order to feel comfortable and be productive, it's important to know that our colleagues can respect who we are. We can:

- Speak respectfully to others and avoid jokes and put-downs about particular characteristics or stereotypes.
- Give people the benefit of the doubt rather than jumping to conclusions. Assume excellence and good intentions. If something comes out differently than expected, try to understand the other person's intent.

## 6. Develop empathy by striving to understand different experiences

It's common for people to make incorrect judgments about attitudes or actions of people who are different. These judgments can often be counterproductive. When we find ourselves judging another person's attitude or behavior, it's helpful to try to understand their point of view.

- Ask about the other person's experience. What have they seen or heard or done that affect their current thinking or actions?
- 'Try on' another person's perspective by assuming their conclusions are correct. Can we learn anything from this new point of view?
- Share our own experiences and ask the other person for their thoughts. Identify any bias or gap in our experience that might be limiting.

## 7. Provide feedback to people who are different than me

Sometimes difference makes people cautious, but honest feedback is a critical component of good teamwork. When we deprive someone of constructive feedback, an opportunity to improve effectiveness is lost.

- Take every opportunity to provide positive feedback. This is a good practice in general and also makes it easier to provide constructive feedback when necessary.
- Question ourselves when we hesitate to provide constructive feedback. Might we be missing an opportunity to help the team or individual be more effective?
- When giving feedback, identify specific actions the person took and the result of those actions.

## 8. Engage in constructive dialogues

Difference in ideas is an important benefit of a diverse team. But when conflicts arise, it's all too easy to blame any friction on that difference. Keep an open mind and allow for disagreements.

- Seek to understand other people's perspectives first (before articulating our opinions).
- Explain our own thinking and how we reached our conclusion.
- Accept questions and challenges as a vital part of the process rather than as an offense.

## Assessing Commitment to Diversity and Health Disparities

This second tool is offered to promote inclusion of diversity and health disparity issues into leadership practice. Assessment and discussion about interest in diversity issues can be helpful and integrated into interaction with leadership candidates. Using the following questions may prompt positive and valuable discussion about both individual and organizational work:

1	<b>Has experience working in diverse settings</b>	Extensive	Some	None
2	<b>Demonstrates commitment to addressing diversity and health disparity issues</b>	Extensive	Some	None
3	<b>Expresses interest and willingness to integrate diversity principles into organizational work</b>	Yes	Maybe	No

**PART III:**  
**ACCOUNTABILITY**

**Measuring Diversity Return on Investment (DROI):**  
**Both Possible and Necessary**

Increasing diversity impacts organizational members and employees, leadership groups and staff teams, relationships with other medical organizations, customers, and patients. Tools currently exist to measure impact. Implementing these metrics will provide objective evidence of the status of diversity within the AAPA.

**PART IV:**  
**CONCLUSION**

**Impact on Internal and External Affairs as well as Patient-Centered Care**

Previous work for the AAPA by diversity consultant Patricia Digh focused on the business enhancement we gain by shifting our organizational values. As she noted:

*"Exclusive organizations have become inclusive. We don't ask people to assimilate; we value their diversity."*

This shift moves from hierarchy to community building; from exclusion to inclusion; from assimilation to value differences; from giving and taking orders to building consensus; from maintaining control to sharing power team building; and from competing to collaborating.

By integrating these criteria into our self-assessments, and by utilizing these criteria as we consider leadership appointments and nominations, we serve to benefit our profession, our constituents, and our patients.