AED

Center for Leadership Development

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An AED Public Service Leadership Paper

"It's Not Rocket Science–It's Much Harder"

Racial & Ethnic Diversity in Public Service

Where Do We Go From Here?

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Academy for Educational Development
Connecting People > Creating Change

About the AED Center for Leadership Development (CLD)

Through exchange, training, and education opportunities, the AED Center for Leadership Development (CLD) seeks to offer present and future leaders experiences to elevate their skills, stimulate their creativity, and enhance their impact and effectiveness. CLD leadership programs encourage civic responsibility and participation, grassroots development, networking and coalition building. CLD focuses on programming in three areas:

- leadership training, drawing on the experiences of current initiatives to research, utilize, and evaluate the best theories, practices, and resources for leadership development;
- equity and ethnicity, providing a safe and stimulating space for leaders to explore the significance of race and ethnicity in human interactions and to explore mechanisms to advance equity; and
- leadership, ethics, and faith, offering technical assistance services which draw on a range of ethical and faith traditions of the global community.

This paper is based on the CLD Public Service Leadership Symposium "Creating the Environment for Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Public Service Workplace: A Challenge to Senior Leadership," funded by the Ford Foundation and held on June 3, 2003.

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INTROD

For people concerned with the future of diversity in the United States, the month of June 2003 was a momentous watershed. Nearly four decades earlier, President Lyndon B. Johnson first advocated affirmative action as a means to “seek not just freedom, but opportunity.” June 2003 also saw the 25th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling on *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, permitting race to be used as one criterion for admitting a diverse student body in higher education. It was likewise the eve of the seventh anniversary of the refusal of the Supreme Court to review the *Hopwood v. Texas* ruling by the Fifth District U.S. Court of Appeals, questioning educational diversity as a compelling state interest.

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Most urgently, the Supreme Court was preparing to issue a ruling on two University of Michigan admissions cases in *Gratz et al. v. Bollinger et al.* and *Grutter v. Bollinger et al.*, addressing whether diversity might be used as a factor for evaluating applicants. It was in this setting that over 50 executives from the public and nongovernmental sectors met on June 3, 2003, in the first Public Service Leadership Symposium organized by AED's Center for Leadership Development. The Ford Foundation-funded Symposium addressed the key issue of *Creating the Environment for Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Public Service Workplace – A Challenge to Senior Leadership.*

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The occasion also marked the publication of a timely report published by AED, *Toward Diversity in Public Service*. Also funded by the Ford Foundation, this report chronicled the impact of the Public Policy and International Affairs (PPIA) Fellowship Program, an initiative over twenty years old designed to bring diversity to public service by enabling U.S. students of color to gain experience in the public service professions and receive financial support for master's degrees in public policy and international affairs.

The Stakes

In her opening remarks to the Symposium, U.S. Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton traced two crucial developments that could have an impact on bringing a new, more diverse generation into public service in the face of a waning of interest following the 1960s. First, the events of September 11 reinforced the importance of an active and vital public service in ensuring the well-being of the nation and promoting peace in the world. Second, the anticipated retirement of one-half of the current U.S. civil service by 2007 presents challenges and opportunities for recruiting a new diverse cadre for public service. Noting, however, that GAO projections of current trends indicate that the limited racial and ethnic diversity in the Senior Executive Service will not appreciably change in the near future, Representative Norton posed the question whether the federal government would do anything to prepare the diverse population of the next generation to undertake careers in the public service.

In recounting the “extraordinary story” of PPIA, Stephen F. Moseley, President and CEO of AED, observed that PPIA had a significant impact in helping prepare a generation of students for careers in public service. Noting that PPIA had an influence on the “supply side” in the numbers of graduates who subsequently entered public service after receiving their master’s degrees, he nonetheless cautioned that it was necessary to provide comparable opportunities in the public service workplace. AED Vice President and Director of the Center for Leadership Development Yvonne L. Williams underscored the importance of the workplace, stressing that “ending the underrepresentation of people of color in public service professions requires more than enhancing recruitment and academic preparation. We believe that it is essential, also, to prepare the workplace to assure racial and ethnic diversity – particularly at the professional level.”

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Education & Achievement

Looking back at the accomplishments of PPIA, Alumna Dale Robinson Anglin observed that the AED study *Toward Diversity in Public Service* is an important step in quantifying the impact of the first two decades of its existence because it measures the success of PPIA in addressing the underrepresentation of people of color. AED principal investigator Keith MacAllum outlined several key findings from the survey of PPIA Fellows and Alumni, noting that PPIA

- Resulted in an overwhelming number of its participants making the transition to graduate school, 97 percent applying to graduate school and 99 percent of applicants enrolling;
- Instilled an abiding interest in public policy and international affairs, with 86 percent of the respondents making use of the PPIA graduate fellowship to study in those fields;
- Furthered a commitment to a professional career in public service, with 84 percent of the respondents having worked in public service at some point in their careers;
- Nonetheless did not guarantee that the Fellows would break through the "glass ceiling" into positions of greater responsibility, given that only 42 percent indicated that the program helped them in a significant way ("considerably" or "a great deal") in that regard.

Adria Gallup-Black of New York University drew from the results of a survey of the participating institutions to discuss the impact of the program on the graduate schools. She noted that PPIA:

- Served as an important recruiting tool in raising the visibility of the graduate schools in the eyes of PPIA Fellows in their search for a graduate school;
- Transformed the curriculum of the graduate schools through the leadership exercised by the Fellows.

In discussing the impact of the program from an individual Fellow's perspective, Alumna Terrelene Gene observed that PPIA was a "springboard" for interacting with her peers who were interested in public service. Alumnus Daniel Sepulveda added that PPIA created a valuable network of contacts through the program with the potential to have an impact on public policy in the future. Ms. Anglin also emphasized the potential of the PPIA network, noting that PPIA alumni could provide important mentoring support to the next generation of leaders.

In testifying to the contribution of PPIA in promoting graduate study for public service, increasing diversity in U.S. graduate education, and promoting networks of people of color dedicated to public service, each of the PPIA Alumni on the panel nonetheless stressed the work still to be done to enhance the impact of the program. In suggesting that PPIA did a good job of bringing people of color to public service, Mr. Sepulveda warned that more is needed in order for the program to achieve its objective of fostering greater diversity in such a way that it will have an impact on the public service profession. Ms. Gene agreed that more is needed to increase the numbers of people of color in public service, particularly in addressing the glass ceiling noted in the PPIA report. Ms. Anglin summed up the discussion with the question, "What do you do next; what do we need to do to move up?"

Diversity in the Workplace

In looking at "what to do next," Sanford Cloud of the National Conference for Community and Justice suggested that leaders in public service face a serious challenge in bringing diversity to the workplace. The private sector on the whole has embraced diversity as essential to reaching a diverse marketplace and has made its management accountable for results. He observed in contrast that leaders in public service – while saying "We serve all; we're open to all" – need to demonstrate a deep commitment in responding to the demographic and global realities that will transform the first half of the 21st Century. He concluded that the public service profession must respond to two needs: first, for programs such as PPIA that prepare people of color for the public service profession; second, for public service leadership that will acknowledge the need for systemic change in the workplace to overcome the legacy of prejudice.

Drawing from his research on organizational effectiveness, Taylor Cox, Jr., author of *Creating the Multicultural Organization: A Strategy for Capturing the Power of Diversity*, examined how to create the environment for inclusion in a public service organization. Dr. Cox's research on U.S. corporations found:

- Organizations with climates and cultures that embrace inclusion reach their full potential by bringing new and innovative approaches to bear on the challenges they face.
- Diversity in itself, however, can make organizational performance either better or worse, depending on the management of diversity.
- Diversity competence can ensure the positive aspects of diversity, but not through a mere checklist of skills.

The motivation to achieve diversity competence comes from an acknowledgement of how diversity and its management are relevant to the public service mission. The achievement of diversity competence, however, requires that each of us acquires and applies to our work a knowledge of how human differences affect work tasks and group processes.

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Dr. Cox suggests five components that together can foster diversity competence in an organization.

- **First**, leadership is needed to connect diversity to the organizational mission and to communicate the importance of a commitment to diversity in order to achieve that mission.
- **Second**, measurement is essential to determining success – not simply a shift in demographic results, but a sense of the working climate in the view of all the people in the organization.
- **Third**, education is necessary not only to raise awareness of cultural differences, but also to build a knowledge of diversity effects and to translate that knowledge into behaviors that are supportive of diversity.
- **Fourth**, management systems must be aligned with the goal of welcoming diversity in areas such as recruiting, information systems, performance appraisal and promotion.
- **Fifth**, follow up is needed to ensure continued improvement by establishing accountability, on-going reporting of results and creating a knowledge management process.

In a related address, Arthur F. Brimmer, President of Brimmer & Company, drew upon his experience in the corporate world to explain how these and similar techniques have taken root in the private sector as an alternative to a climate in the workplace that leads to discrimination suits and results in monetary settlements that cost far more than corrective actions to prevent them.

Executive Perspectives

In initiating an executive roundtable to examine the experience of leaders directing diversity competence initiatives in public service organizations and agencies, Stephen Moseley recalled that AED undertook a new diversity initiative as a result of two factors. First, a survey indicated that professionals of color did not always feel engaged with the organization. Second, leaders in the organization had always worked toward fulfilling the vision that all employees should feel a part of AED. As a result, AED committed itself to a program of "environmental change" in the workplace based on diversity competence. Mr. Moseley added that AED was "about halfway there," but still engaged in an active period of learning and doing.

Suzanne Kindervatter of InterAction, a coalition of over 160 U.S.-based international development and humanitarian nongovernmental organizations, explained how the organization's new Diversity Initiative is catalyzing member agencies to take effective action to:

- Increase the representation of people of color on their staffs and boards; and
- Adopt inclusive organizational policies and practices that reap the full benefits of a diverse workplace.

Using the metaphor of a tree, she indicated how a diversity initiative must include change in four areas. At the root of the process is **political will**, which is evident when leaders use their power actively to support, communicate about, and advance diversity. When political will exists, the branches of the tree can grow and bear fruit in the form of: 1) **technical capacity**, which involves not just awareness or sensitivity training, but changing how an organization actually does its work; 2) **accountability**, meaning instituting rewards and requirements for making sure that diversity policies and plans are carried out; and 3) **promoting an organizational culture** that addresses unwritten norms and codes of behavior, supporting a climate of open communication and prohibiting all forms of dominance and subordination. With these components fully activated, agencies can move beyond changing hearts and minds to achieving organizational transformation.

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In the process of changing hearts and minds, Faith Mitchell of the National Academies recounted how a mandatory workshop on diversity in her organization led to addressing issues associated with managerial skills. The individuals who began to address such issues in turn expressed an interest in meeting after the workshop, creating a "workplace community" that could respond to a range of issues raised by staff. Out of this experience, the National Academies learned that bringing everyone together to address workplace community issues and making sure that participants at all levels reflect the diversity of the organization resulted in a transition from issues involving "diversity" to issues involving good management practices.

Barry Wells, Deputy Director of the George P. Schultz National Foreign Affairs Training Center of the U.S. Department of State, addressed what was learned by the State Department in nearly twenty years of legal disputes related to diversity. He concluded that diversity:

- Has to be on the agenda of the top leadership;
- Is a process, not a single event;
- Must address issues in the early stages;
- Depends on everyone being at the table, and the table being "owned" and made available by the chief executive.

He concluded by quoting Christopher Edley, Jr. of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights who said, "it's not rocket science – it's much harder." He added that while it may not be possible to change hearts, it is possible to change behaviors through a process that is advocated from the top levels of the organization.

Barbara Murphy-Warrington of CARE USA found that CARE's institutional vision of enabling the poor to help themselves required the organization drawing more fully on its global and U.S.-based diversity. The ingredients of its diversity initiative included: 1) leadership from the board and the CEO; 2) a commitment of resources and expertise; 3) an initiative not housed in human resources, but governed by a representative board of employees; 4) a sounding of organizational attitudes through an employee survey and organizational culture audit; and 5) a series of dialogues enabling people to "open up" before a plan of action was developed. Based on this process, she concluded that to realize the full benefits of diversity, it is necessary to be in it for the long haul. The object is to achieve change in the face of resistance by constructively engaging that resistance. The key is patience and the vision of how to effectively manage the change.

The perspectives offered by these executives in turn led to a lively discussion with Symposium participants.

- In response to one question about how to incorporate international diversity competence in an organization, Ms. Murphy-Warrington replied that it is not necessary to go overseas to address this issue, but – given the number of people from other countries in the U.S. workforce – it can and should be addressed at the start with one's locally-based staff born in other countries.
- When one participant asked whether diversity can be argued from a moral perspective, Dr. Mitchell responded that the moral argument has not swayed the public debate, as seen in the history of the *Gratz* and *Grutter* cases as they made their way to the Supreme Court. The utilitarian argument is a new approach and it may well prove to be more successful. Mr. Wells added that while seeking the moral good is a good foundation, diversity must also be advocated as having a positive impact on the bottom line of organizations. Dr. Kindervatter observed that some organizations (such as the faith-based ones) may respond to the moral argument, but that others will respond more to a utilitarian perspective.
- One participant asked about how to deal with those who would "sabotage" diversity efforts. Ms. Murphy-Warrington responded that such people may not be saboteurs, but rather resistant to change due to their experiences with past, failed diversity initiatives or because of their fear of losing their job or seniority by being found lacking – a different challenge to address in implementing diversity programs.

- Another participant asked how to address diversity issues in a staff that is predominantly of color when it represents different ethnicities of people of color. Mr. Wells responded that it is necessary to exchange personal stories and endeavor to connect people. Mr. Moseley added that sharing experiences through assessment tools did not have to mean pointing fingers at one another.

> *Realizing diversity competence means effecting a significant environmental change in the workplace. It requires long-term engagement.*

- In response to a question about the role of people in mid-career in diversity initiatives, Mr. Wells responded that it is important to acknowledge the role of staff members at that level and their potential for mentoring and leadership. One approach is a new awards structure built around 360-degree evaluation and geared to measuring personal effectiveness in promoting diversity as a manager or a senior staff member.
- On the subject of advancing diversity competence in their public service organizations, Mr. Moseley concluded that CEOs need to manage a leadership process primarily through effective education and communications programs. It should stem from a plan, but a plan much different and more complex than a business plan, one that develops systems that will advance the sense of community and professional development of all employees, accounting for the fact that people learn and acquire experience differently. Realizing diversity competence in an organization means effecting a significant environmental change in the workplace. As such, it requires a long-term engagement and a long-term view.

From Research to Action

In a session entitled "Toward a Research and Action Agenda," Taylor Cox, Jr. asked Symposium participants to discuss what they had gained from the day's discussions and how those "take-aways" might suggest areas for future inquiry and research. Several of the participants offered comments that addressed one or both of these points.

- One participant, calling the Symposium "the single best training for senior managers I've received in my experience in Washington, D.C.," suggested that the group needed to apply its vision and energy to the development of a **philosophy and language to counter that of the opponents of diversity initiatives,** noting that the latter "had seized the high ground." Others concurred that such opponents have had a negative impact on the research agenda and they have continued to campaign for counter-measures through initiatives and referenda. Still others suggested that the group should **engage in media training and/or develop advocacy campaigns to disseminate ideas more effectively**, creating research such as a public service version of the 2001 Conference Board report on private sector diversity management.
- Another participant confessed that she previously had been "demoralized" with the public debate and so was heartened by what was being done by the participants and their respective organizations to enhance diversity competence. She suggested the **publication of the Symposium proceedings and the formation of an e-mail network to stay in touch**. Several Symposium participants who were in the early or middle stages of their careers noted that the experiences recounted in the sessions pointed to inspiring new directions for initiatives

to promote future diversity in the workplace and informed their personal career visions for another ten or twenty years. The **potential for mentoring** was also mentioned by a participant as a valuable resource stemming from the group.

- One participant, praising the "rich set of experiences," suggested that the group **could offer powerful testimony in briefings on Capitol Hill**. Another participant, recalling Dr. Kindervatter's diagram, noted that manifesting political will would be at the root of changing the climate at the public level. Working in partnership on these matters would be key to achieving this change in political will, added another participant. One participant cautioned that the pipeline of talented and diverse people of color "won't take care of itself," suggesting that **advocacy would be needed if programs were to continue to focus on underrepresented people**.
- In concluding the session and the Symposium, Dr. Cox noted that the group was in agreement that the sharing of practices and ideas would be worthwhile in a future follow-up gathering. Mr. Moseley agreed that the sharing of ideas at the Symposium suggested that there was an extraordinary opportunity to find common ground in future roundtable sessions.

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Diversity and the Public Interest

Within three weeks of the AED Symposium, the Supreme Court handed down its rulings on *Gratz* and *Grutter*, upholding the principle (in Grutter) that "student body diversity is a compelling state interest that can justify using race in university admissions." In her opinion on *Grutter*, Justice O'Connor (joined by Justices Stevens, Souter, Ginsburg, and Breyer) emphasized that the educational benefits of diversity "are not theoretical, but real."

Detailing the benefits of diversity, the ruling further specified that "student body diversity… better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society, and better prepares them as professionals." It added that "major American businesses have made clear that the skills needed in today's increasingly global marketplace can only be developed through exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints." It concluded that "effective participation by members of all racial and ethnic groups in the civic life of our nation is essential if the dream of one nation, indivisible, is to be realized."

The Supreme Court decisions handed down on June 23 did not mark the end of the debate on the dream of how to achieve one nation, indivisible.

The Supreme Court decisions handed down on June 23 did not mark the end of the debate on the dream of how to achieve one nation, indivisible. They instead ushered in a new phase of vigorous debate and activism on achieving diversity in the U.S. public life of the 21st Century. The participants of the June 3, 2003, AED Symposium were well aware of the advent of this new era. They had learned from the twenty-year history of the seminal PPIA Fellowship Program how graduate education in public policy and international affairs and orientation to a life of public service brought a new and diverse generation of professionals to public life, and how it resulted in mixed results in the workplace. They had gained an understanding of the importance of diversity competence for promoting private sector organizational effectiveness and for improving innovation, problem solving and creativity in an organization. They had shared experiences illustrating how public service organizations had begun committed, systemic action to ensure their diversity competence in support of the public good.

In committing to a long-term diversity vision, the senior leadership from the public and nonprofit sectors who attended the Symposium also voiced their continued commitment to sharing information and supporting diversity in public service. Given their contributions to a vigorous exchange of ideas at the Symposium, that commitment promises to be a welcome and vital voice for the current debate and will be so long into the future.

About the Academy for Educational Development (AED)

Founded in 1961, the Academy for Educational Development (www.aed.org) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to solving critical social problems and building the capacity of individuals, communities, and institutions to become more self-sufficient. AED works in all the major areas of human development, with a focus on improving education, health, and economic opportunities for the least advantaged in the United States and developing countries throughout the world.

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