IMLA

Municipal Lawyer

THE JOURNAL OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT LAW

MAR APR 2021
VOL.62
NO.02



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DIVERSITY

BY: DEANNA SHAHNAMI,
IMLA Associate Council

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Oh Yes!

When you begin your portfolio of investments, the number one rule is: Do not put all your eggs in one basket. In other words, you must diversify your investments in order to reduce the risk of losing all your money in one product, company, project, and so on. Imagine yourself being just as enthusiastic about diversifying your work environments as you are about diversifying your portfolio. It begins with recognizing that employees are investments.

Lawyers from different races, ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic backgrounds, cultures, and regions provide different perspectives, expertise, and knowledge. Inclusion turns diversity—what can be seen—into what can be felt. Inclusion is creating an environment to allow all employees to be heard and acknowledged. Equity is seeing that even though there is equal opportunity, it does not mean people historically marginalized are given equal knowledge of that opportunity, equal consideration of that opportunity, or equal access to that opportunity. Equity is the necessary action to invest and prioritize historically marginalized groups. Diversity, equity, and inclusion increase employee engagement and productivity. Who can resist that kind of profit?

IMLA's Diversity and Inclusion Working Group was recently formed to serve IMLA members with a particular interest in or responsibility for advocating for diversity and inclusion in legal education and legal employment. The Group focuses on developing ways to provide more inclusive services to underrepresented and underserved members of the community and find ways to expand an understanding of the unique perspective of these constituencies. The Group focuses on areas that include, but are not limited to, issues related to hiring/retention, diversity-related CLE programming, municipal programs related to diversity and inclusion (implicit bias training, racial and gender equity initiatives, disparity studies, selection criteria for bids and RFPs, etc.), and strategic planning.

Co-chaired by Baltimore's Chief Equity Officer Dana Moore and IMLA Associate Counsel Deanna Shahnami, the Group's mission is to provide valuable resources for IMLA members on matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion ("DEI"). The Group has re-introduced its listserv to IMLA members interested in conducting an open dialogue about what municipalities need to instill greater DEI qualities and in sharing their resources (e.g., sample ordinances and outreach programs) that promote DEI. The Group also advocates for members to submit articles on DEI matters to IMLA's blog and *Municipal Lawyer.*

IMLA is scheduling is scheduling more diversity-related webinars in our regular webinar schedule. In January, IMLA hosted a webinar on "Elimination of Bias and Implicit Bias for Government Lawyers," presented by Tara Kelly, Associate City Attorney, Kansas City, Missouri. And in honor of Women's History Month, on March 31st IMLA will host a webinar on "Women in Law" featuring IMLA award-winning local government attorneys discussing how the law, office practices, and local policies treated women in the past and how things have--and have not-- changed for women on a structural, policy, and individual level. This presentation will address diversity, equity, and inclusion. The presenters are Deanne Durfee, Director for the Municipal Operations Section in the Denver City Attorney's Office; Patricia Miller, Chief of the Special Federal Litigation Division of the New York City Law Department; Josette Flores, Senior Assistant City Attorney, City of El Paso; and Deanna Shahnami. Information on the webinar can be found on IMLA's website under "webinar schedule."

Change starts from where you work (office or home). In February, the co-chairs introduced an initiative to create a toolkit for our members to serve as a guide on DEI for yourself and your office on hiring practices, policies, the contracting process, provisional language, and outreach resources and methods. Local government is the closest the law gets to the community, so this toolkit will benefit small and large municipalities on how to develop DEI-friendly policies and practices as they affect attorneys and the municipalities they work for. The toolkit is expected to be available to IMLA members this Fall.

The Group and Listserv's mission mission is to provide resources and tools to aid members' use and understanding of the value that diversity, equity, and inclusion provide. The first step toward that goal is to look at your portfolio and start diversifying.

If you would like to be added to the IMLA Diversity and Inclusion Listserv, please e-mail IMLA Marketing and Administration Coordinator Caroline Storer at cstorer@imla.org. ML