



## Diversity In ASHRAE (DIA)

Going way back, ASHRAE has always had a discrimination and harassment policy that strictly prohibits discrimination against staff, members, or applicants for membership because of race, color, religion, age, sex, national origin, physical or mental disability, pregnancy or any other category protected under law. Also included in that policy is a strict prohibition against sexual harassment. But around the 2017 to 2018 timeframe, they began developing a written “Diversity and Inclusion” policy. This effort led to an evolution of committee name changes in hopes of creating a broadening of emphasis and improved focus in this area. From a historical perspective (not a political one), I have tried to do some research on exactly when certain name changes occurred and why, and it has been a little difficult to pin it all down, but here it goes:

In Society year 2019-20, the longstanding Women in ASHRAE (WIA) committee (which worked to encourage females to choose our industry as their career) was rebranded Diversity In ASHRAE (DIA) with a newly broadened focus going beyond just gender by encouraging industry participation from all aspects of mankind. For examples, see the list above that starts with “race, color, religion,” etc. Whereas the older discrimination and harassment policy’s focus was to prevent the suppression of participation from anyone based on any of those descriptors, the DIA focus was on encouraging the participation from individuals outside of the traditional majority. The intent would appear the same, however the emphasis was turned from a negative to a positive. Instead of just saying “Don’t discriminate!”, Society is instead saying “Encourage diversity”.

During the 2019-2020 timeframe when this refocusing was getting hashed out and better defined, at the 2020 Winter Meeting, Society formally approved a “Diversity Commitment” statement which starts off: “Our culture is one of inclusiveness, acknowledging the inherent value and dignity of everyone.” At some point a couple of years later, however, the Diversity in ASHRAE committee became the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee. If you go to the Society webpage that lists all current standing committees (<https://www.ashrae.org/communities/committees/standing-committees>) the DEI committee is listed, but DIA and WIA are not. This expanded name seeks to better define the mission by using three descriptors in the title, “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion”, rather than just the one: “Diversity.” The DEI phrase has become well known in common society (small “s”) and ASHRAE Society (big “S”) has followed suit using the more current vernacular.

As this change in emphasis worked its way down to the chapter committee level, there was some pushback. I distinctly remember a heated discussion in a CRC business meeting where some female members expressed concern that changing the name from “Women in ASHRAE” to “Diversity in ASHRAE” could actually hinder efforts to bring females into our industry. Advertising a “Women in ASHRAE” event makes it clear in the title alone what the purpose of the event is (encourage women to come to have fun at the event and, perhaps, join ASHRAE). This is important when people might spend only a few seconds reading the ad and considering whether to go or not. Advertising the same event as a “Diversity in ASHRAE” event might not be as effective in getting females to attend, if that was your goal. The response from Society to this concern was that they are in no way saying chapters can’t have WIA events or WIA subcommittees. If you want to have a WIA event, you can! They are actually still having WIA events at the Society level. Likewise, if you want to have DIA events that seek to attract minorities and others, you can! They are, however, encouraging every chapter to have a formal DEI committee to work toward fulfilling the mission of DEI.

Central OK had our first DIA committee in 2019-20 with Aruna as the Chair and Madison Schultz as Chapter President. Madison then served in 2020-21 and 2021-22 as the DIA committee Chair. Lauren



Moriarty was the DIA Chair in 2022-23, and Jessica Fitzpatrick was the chair in 2023-24. This year, 2024-25, the committee was renamed DEI and Jamie Whittington is Chair.

Dusty Stoabs, PE  
*ASHRAE Central Oklahoma Chapter Historian*



[www.ashraecok.org](http://www.ashraecok.org)