



ASLA Diversity SuperSummit 2017 Report

ASLA Center for Landscape Architecture, Washington, D.C.

June 9-11, 2017



Diversity SuperSummit Participants / EPNAC.com

Introduction

Population growth of people of color in the United States has outpaced that of white Americans for the past two decades, and by 2043 the U.S. Census Bureau projects the nation to become a [majority-minority nation](#). The shifting demographics of our nation are not reflected in the field of landscape architecture. Under-representation of people of color in firms and among students of landscape architecture means we are failing to capture the potential of the future of our profession. New perspective is needed to ensure that landscape architecture reflects the communities it serves.

In 2013, ASLA convened its first Diversity Summit with the goal of developing a deeper understanding of why landscape architecture is failing to attract a more diverse profile. Each summit has brought together a group of emerging landscape architects who identify as African American or Latinx to develop strategies that address diversity issues in the field.

The 2017 Diversity SuperSummit convened the largest group of attendees to date, with 23 returning and six new participants, at the ASLA Center for Landscape Architecture in Washington D.C. Participants evaluated goals from previous summits, developed focus areas for four key diversity initiatives to guide ASLA's work plan in the coming year, and discussed the future of the Diversity Summit.

The SuperSummit gave ASLA and past participants an opportunity to reflect on efforts to date and progress needed to achieve greater diversity in the profession. The takeaways in the following report will serve as accountability for ASLA



and as an actionable guide for the newly created Career Discovery and Diversity position for the upcoming year. It can also serve as a guide for other organizations pursuing the same goal.

Returning participants:

Aaron Ruffin, ASLA
Ailyn Mendoza, ASLA
Angelica Rockquemore, Associate ASLA
Bianca Paz, Associate ASLA
Carolina Carvajal, ASLA
Chris Sanders, ASLA
Courtney Hinson Cason, ASLA
Diana Fernandez, ASLA
Domini Cunningham, ASLA
Janelle Johnson, ASLA
Jose Alvarez, Associate ASLA
Kelly Fleming, ASLA
Kene Okigbo, Associate ASLA
Lindsey D. Smith, ASLA
Luis Gonzalez, ASLA
Luis Hidalgo, ASLA
Melissa Henao-Robledo, ASLA
Mercedes Ward, ASLA
Monique Bassey, Associate ASLA
Paul McGehee, Associate ASLA
Paula Barreto, Associate ASLA
Roberto Rovira, ASLA
Wesley Brown, ASLA

New participants:

Camille Applewhite, Associate ASLA
Darneka Waters, Associate ASLA
Erica Mackenzie, ASLA
Maggie Aravena, Associate ASLA
Meredith Leigh, Associate ASLA
Ujijji Davis, Associate ASLA

Observers:

Kona Gray, ASLA, EDSA, Inc., LAF Immediate Past President
Richard Alomar, ASLA, Rutgers University
David Cutter, ASLA, Cornell University

Facilitator:

Juanita Shearer-Swink, FASLA, GoTriangle

ASLA support staff:

Susan Apollonio, Education Programs Director
Shawn Balon, ASLA, Career Discovery & Diversity Manager
Terry Poltrack, Director of Public Relations and Communications
Kristopher Pritchard, Accreditation & Education Programs Manager
Carolyn Mitchell, Honors & Awards Specialist
Kelli Bland, Meetings & Special Programs Manager
Curt Millay, ASLA, Corporate Secretary
Dana Davidsen, Student ASLA, PR & Communications Intern
Nathania Martinez, Student ASLA, LAAB intern



Summary of Proceedings

Day One - Friday, June 9, 2017

Susan Apollonio, Education Programs director, kicked off the weekend by welcoming the attendees, new and old, to ASLA’s first Diversity SuperSummit. She introduced ASLA staff and volunteers supporting the summit and diversity efforts, including facilitator Juanita Shearer-Swink, FASLA, and observers Kona Gray, ASLA; Richard Alomar, ASLA; and ASLA Vice President of Education David Cutter, ASLA.

This is the first Diversity Summit to be held in the newly renovated Center for Landscape Architecture in Washington D.C. ASLA Corporate Secretary Curt Millay, ASLA, gave a presentation about the updated design and how it contributes to ASLA’s commitment to green design and construction and the “[Well Building Standards](#).”

Who’s Who Exercise

As an introductory exercise, participants took part in a “who’s who” group charrette, creating sketches and diagrams to share their paths into landscape architecture. For new participants, it was an opportunity to introduce themselves while returning participants were able to give updates on their career paths.



Who's Who Exercise / EPNAC.com

Groups translated their career paths onto canvases through a variety of drawings, including “transit-map” diagrams, vignette sketches, and collage. This creative exercise revealed unique stories from participants’ backgrounds as well as common themes in how they arrived to the profession.



Many participants entered the field through architecture before switching to landscape architecture as a student or later in their careers. Some participants began their interest in the field as early as high school while some reflected on early childhood memories as the beginning of their passion for design. Other participants arrived to the profession after pursuing careers not directly related to the field but that ultimately brought them into landscape architecture.

Day Two – Saturday, June 10, 2017



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Review of Decisions and Steps to Date

Day two kicked off with a look back at progress to date. Terry Poltrack, director of Public Relations and Communications, gave an overview of the changing demographics of the United States and the field of landscape architecture, the topics focused on during past summits, and ASLA's subsequent responses to the strategies and recommendations that emerged from previous years.

Overarching themes from past summits include experience-based analysis and commonality in paths into the field, as well as obstacles, guiding priorities, and opportunities in the profession. General public awareness and understanding of landscape architecture, particularly with parents, was also a recurrent topic addressed in past summits, as was early exposure in the profession and importance of mentorship throughout education and career.

Each year, beginning with the first summit in 2013, ASLA has developed a summary report of findings and action items from the discussions. Recommendations from these reports were shared broadly with:

- ASLA Trustees
- Chapter Presidents and President-Elects
- Landscape Architecture Program Chairs
- Committee on Education



- Allied organizations

And regular briefings to the following groups:

- Presidents' Council
- COE
- ASLA Executive Committee
- Council of Fellows

In 2015, the Presidents' Council, comprised of allied landscape architecture organizations, drafted and signed a [joint commitment to diversity](#) and has stepped up efforts on several fronts. Diversity was incorporated as a priority into all 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 president-elect platforms.

Multimedia Outreach

In addition to the annual report, ASLA has documented the Diversity Summits online and for digital distribution. Marking the first Diversity Summit in 2013, ASLA filmed and edited videos of the original participants in two films titled, "[Why Become a Landscape Architect](#)" and "[Personal Paths](#)". Links of these videos were shared with all Landscape Architecture program chairs and ASLA Chapter leadership to adopt for their own use, and posted to the [ASLA career discovery webpage](#). To date, they have received several thousand views.

When it was announced in 2014, the [Career Discovery website press release](#) was translated into Spanish and grabbed substantial media attention. It was picked up by over 150 Spanish-language sites and sent to African-American media outlets and picked up by *Black Enterprise*, among other media organizations. Ongoing promotion of key issues presented on the site focuses on the need to expose the profession to diverse audiences. In line with that commitment, a brochure was created in 2013 to introduce the profession to junior high and high school guidance counselors, with an ask that ASLA members personally deliver them to under-represented schools. Since then, ASLA has received some 250 commitments from chapters, members, and students to do so, and we still are distributing it.

In recognition of African-American History Month, "listicle" media advisories were distributed in February 2014 featuring Perry Howard, FASLA; Stephen Carter, FASLA; and David Williston.

Similar releases were issued in 2015, 2016, and 2017, including a release focused on Summit attendees. Releases are also sent out recognizing National Hispanic Heritage Month each year.

K-12 Engagement

Responding to outcomes from past summits, ASLA hosted a tour in August 2015 of its Green Roof and introduced our new Green Street demonstration project for the National Building Museum's Teen Council, primarily made up of junior high and high school students of color. This was followed by a charrette to help the students design their own green street. Such hands-on outreach has continued with school group tours of the green roof. Since the opening of the ASLA Center for Landscape Architecture in January 2017, ASLA has hosted diverse students from Johnson Middle School and college students from a historical black college, Morgan State.

As a test based on 2015 summit outcomes, ASLA formally adopted a school in Washington, D.C.'s under-represented Southeast. With the local Potomac ASLA Chapter, staff conducted three activities with the students, including a field trip to sites designed by landscape architects. ASLA re-upped the Adopt-a-



School effort with a new school but still found difficulty in getting school's full commitment despite the fact that it is a formal D.C. program.

Highlighting Diversity at the Annual Meeting

As the recommendation of 2014 summit attendees, a continuing education session for the 2015 Annual Meeting and EXPO in Chicago was submitted and accepted. The topic was a cross-generational conversation about diversity, with an emphasis on helping attendees recruit and retain minority talent. Two past Summit attendees, Janelle Johnson, ASLA, and Luis Gonzalez, ASLA, shared the stage with Stephen Carter, FASLA, and Sandy Gonzalez, FASLA, facilitated by summit facilitator Juanita Shearer-Swink, FASLA.

Diversity was the topic of one of two General Sessions at the 2016 Annual Meeting and EXPO in New Orleans, reaching thousands of attendees. The conversation continued on the EXPO floor with both panelists and attendees. Stories of panelists' experiences were edited to share on social media, and the [General Session recording](#) remains available on ASLA.org.

Since the first summit, ASLA has increased its commitment and awareness to opportunities for all ASLA members (with a strong focus on African-American and Latinx professionals), to volunteer for visible roles of authority.

- Several Diversity Summit veterans now serve on ASLA committees and in chapter leadership
- Summit attendees have been named to prestigious ASLA awards juries
- ASLA has increased resources directed to this initiative and named Shawn Balon, ASLA, as Career Discovery & Diversity manager to turn efforts from this summit into an actionable work plan

ASLA's Current Action Items & Work Plan

The 2017 SuperSummit marks the first year of ASLA's dedicated Career Discovery & Diversity role. Shawn Balon, ASLA, was appointed to the position in early 2017. ASLA established this position within the education department based on feedback of the organization's strategic priorities from members and staff on the importance of growing and adding more diversity to the profession.

Career Discovery & Diversity efforts focus on initiatives and projects under three key entities: ASLA National, local ASLA Chapters, and at universities and schools. In addition to convening the annual diversity summit, ASLA continues to research and evaluate existing career discovery and diversity initiatives, programs, and outreach, and look into other allied organizations and programs around the nation that have built successful programs. The evaluation of other websites and interactive applications is also underway for future improvements on asla.org.

Additional items in ASLA's research include resources for website design, videos, etc.; local ASLA chapter initiatives; list of existing design summer programs and workshops; summer programs for collaboration; and grants and scholarships. Further collaboration with ASLA chapters and universities and schools is planned as the work plan is finalized

A closer look at resources currently available on ASLA's career discovery webpage was discussed. At the SuperSummit, new resources were proposed by attendees in the morning breakout sessions. The



proposals included a revised career discovery webpage that simplifies ASLA’s resources into links directed at kids, teens and undergrads, parents, teachers and schools, and professionals. The resources listed under each category would fit within the individual’s skills and abilities.

Big picture group discussion

Participants broke into working groups for an initial brainstorming discussion on topics that would inform ASLA’s action items moving forward. Participants reviewed a list of goals and initiatives that ASLA plans to focus on in the next year, paying particular attention to what was missing, which items need additional focus, and future goals. Groups presented takeaways from their discussions in presentations to the larger group. These report-outs and subsequent feedback spurred a number of organic conversations that addressed the specific initiatives but also touched on a variety of topics related to diversity. Overarching themes, issues, and proposed solutions included the following:

- A clear return on investment is missing. Why become a landscape architect? Rethink how to market the profession.
- There is a lack of diversity in professional and academic leadership.
- A more sensitive, proactive approach is necessary in the language regarding diversity initiatives.
- Publications, website, etc. should show diversity in context, not just as an isolated issue.
- Increase accountability through data collection on diversity initiatives.
- There is a need for an immediate, readily available set of resources from ASLA on diversity.

Focusing on ASLA Initiatives, Identifying Consensus, & Creating a Vision

In the initiative-specific discussions, participants worked to identify areas of consensus in an effort to streamline action items for ASLA to include in the work plan. The groups presented their prioritized items and took comments from the larger group. Then the groups picked their top priority to create a vision and process for implementation.



Small group discussions / EPNAC.com



Group 1 - K-12 Chapter Presentations and Toolkits: This group highlighted a critical need for ASLA to occupy digital space by identifying platforms and digital ecosystems that are already being used by kids. The group then suggested leveraging that content to reach a broader audience. A digital K-12 toolkit should be easy to disseminate and implement as a roadmap for continued engagement. Content for chapter presentations and toolkits should seek to inform students about landscape architecture; connect the profession to real world examples with a diverse group of people; be fun and engaging to make kids excited about the future; and finally, actionable by encouraging participation through summer programs and activities, like visiting a list of top local parks, or using popular social media apps like collecting snapchat filters.

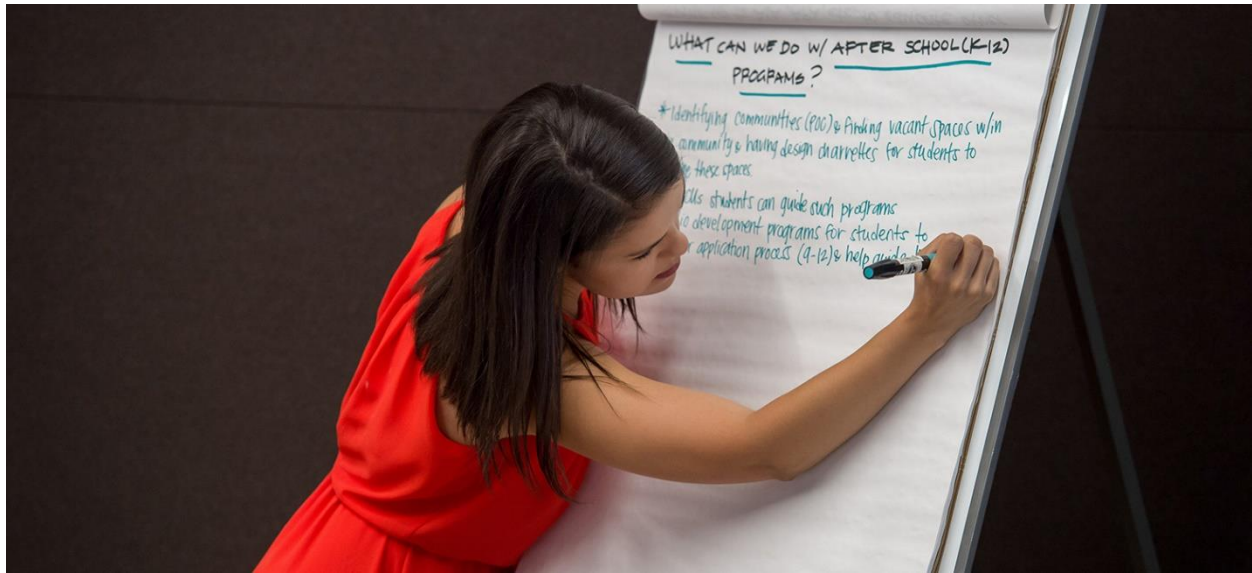
Identifying Consensus:

- Piggyback onto existing digital platforms
 - Invest in platforms that already have momentum, like games and social media.
 - Remain adaptable to new and emerging information platforms by keeping pace with current trends.
- Content should be digital, shareable, and easy to disseminate and implement as a roadmap for continued engagement.
- Content should be fun and engaging, and exist on digital platforms so learning can extend beyond the classroom.
 - Use hands-on tools for exploration; show don't tell.
 - Tie to social, environmental issues.

Vision and Program:

GOAL: Speak their language – kids speak in social media, YouTube channels, Instagram, snapchat, etc. This group's vision and program takes forward the concept of piggybacking onto existing platforms to appeal to target K-12 audience. To do this, ASLA needs to identify who can reach them and who are the influencers.

- K-5 grades - target parents
 - Piggyback on existing content, like homeschooling materials, science channels, podcasts sponsored by ASLA, and collaborate with zoos or national parks, etc.
- 6-12 grades - target kids
 - Identify organizations who have similar values to ASLA.
 - Capitalize on popular social media, video games, famous social media figures.
 - Tie social media and outreach to national campaigns.
- Invite participation and interaction with landscape architects.
- Measuring effectiveness/touch points
 - Web analytics to track online engagement
 - Google form to track participation events, practitioner outreach
 - Streamline web content for consistency between national ASLA social networks, chapters' social network.



Small group discussions / EPNAC.com

Group 2 - After school Alliance and Summer-camp Curriculum: To reach a diverse student group, ASLA should work with organizations, like Boys and Girls Clubs, that have established after school programs to expand how they operate and bring more design activities to their program. ASLA can also create incentives for engagement in the field by increasing entrepreneurial opportunities for teenagers, such as selling vegetables from a community garden or connecting teens with firms that can sponsor them for the summer. The following items were agreed upon as initiative priorities and a vision and program was proposed:

Identifying Consensus:

- Create opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship through design.
- Introduce design process and thinking at after-school programs while integrating students for guidance.
- Chapter/national/firms can partner and sponsor Boys and Girls Clubs or individual students as a source of support and inspiration.

Vision and Program:

GOAL: Introduce landscape architecture to under-represented schools through youth employment and entrepreneurship as an economically viable career path. This initiative would take on a City Year-type model -- nationally structured but chapter specific, including local firms and allied organizations.

- Grades 9-12
 - Sponsor students for after-school or summer program. This would be targeted toward students but also aim to reach untapped communities.
 - Offer opportunities to shadow firm leaders.
 - Host design competition to help with higher education costs.



- Explore volunteer opportunities for school credit.
- Grades K-8
 - Design exercises through events like PARK(ing) Day.
- Measuring effectiveness/touch points
 - Success measured by how many chapters, firms, organizations buy into this and how many students go on to pursue a degree or career in landscape architecture.



Small group discussions / EPNAC.com

Group 3 - ASLA Diversity Webpage: The group focused on diversity on ASLA.org, including what should be included, how it is represented, and whether it should have a separate webpage within the ASLA site. It was universally agreed that diversity should be better integrated into ASLA.org. A separate diversity webpage or tab within the site should not be created, but rather ensure that all content on ASLA.org reflects a diverse representation of the society. Diversity should be included in mission statement and the statement should be in an easily-accessible location on the website.

Identifying Consensus:

- Diversity should be integrated into web page and all publications.
- PPN – mentorship network opportunity
 - Voluntary practitioner profile tags, headshots
- Web content.

Vision + Program:

GOAL: This group focused specifically on the content, organization, and integration of diversity on ASLA.org. Their concept was that the website should be looked at as a reference and explanation of what landscape architects do in general (“Architects design the buildings,



landscape architects design the rest of the world”), not only specifically related to diversity, but rather with diversity engrained within the content.

- Diversity integrated throughout website
 - Diversity statement under the “About” tab
 - Include more visuals, including infographics, and images.
 - Include resources for firms, chapters, and individuals to address diversity issues and inform the public and professionals.
- Measuring effectiveness/touch points
 - Develop a plan to measure effectiveness of integration of items.



Small group discussions / EPNAC.com

Group 4 - University Recruitment and Curriculum Development: The group focused on how landscape architecture curricula can attract diverse student groups. They agreed that there should be increased recruitment of professors, guest speakers, and lecturers who are people of color. Additional proposals were to educate prospective and existing students on the diversity of the profession and importance of community engagement.

Identifying Consensus:

- Testimonials so current students and potential students can relate to a career trajectory
- Highlight varied academic paths to becoming a landscape architect (for example, a 4-5 year program versus community college).
- Incorporate more diversity into design projects to underscore the importance of culture and place.



Vision + Program:

GOAL: To inspire through showcasing diverse paths to success in landscape architecture and broaden the definition of design excellence.

- Testimonials
 - Video content of personal stories at the annual meeting and featured at events throughout the year.
- Diversify design aesthetics
 - Identify academic avenues.
 - Model after LAF case studies series – success of spaces, how different cultures are experiencing spaces.
- Measuring effectiveness/touch points
 - Metrics measured by consistent, curated social media outreach.

Day Three – Sunday, June 11, 2017



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Building the Foundation from the Center for Diversity and the Environment

Balon presented on a recent equity, diversity, and inclusion workshop he participated in at the [Center for Diversity and the Environment \(CDE\)](#) in Portland, Oregon. Balon reviewed the workshop agenda including items focused on building the common language, understanding self-awareness, vulnerability, empathy, privilege, and micro-aggressions, and creating a personal action plan.



A detailed look at CDE's "Theory of Change" included a discussion on melding the person/individual with the interpersonal and organizational makeup of that individual and the organization. All elements of the CDE workshop lead to a final exercise of action planning where workshop attendees were asked to describe their current reality and project their future reality with "check-ins" or "touchstones." With a focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion, Balon encouraged participants to seek local schools and organizations that provide workshops or short courses on these issues. He also encouraged participants to think about these concepts when discussing the future of the Diversity Summit.

What's the Future of ASLA's Diversity Summit?

Summit participants broke into working groups to evaluate the past four years of summit experience and propose new ideas. Participants were asked to address the following:

- What is the current reality of the Diversity Summit?
- How do you see the Diversity Summit in a year from now?
- What are the six, nine, and 12-month benchmarks for diversity initiatives and planning for the Diversity Summit?
- What are the overarching goals for the future (five- year plan)?

The groups came back together and answered the above questions. Shearer-Swink facilitated a final discussion to create a consensus to inform ASLA's career discovery and diversity work plan. Participants created action items including specific benchmarks for the next six, nine, and 12 months including a five-year outlook. After the summit, participants were surveyed to prioritize consensus items to give ASLA direction on which items will be developed and considered over the next 12 months, including the development and planning of next year's Diversity Summit. Below are the results of action items and initiatives for ASLA to consider in the proposed work plan.

2017-2018 Action Items

Six-month benchmark:

- Review, assess, and implement diverse content on ASLA.org (ongoing).
 - Highlight the Diversity Summit (and other ASLA summits) on ASLA.org and create an online form for future participants to apply.
- Create a short report/infographic summarizing the last five years of Diversity Summits.
- ASLA staff give an update on what has been accomplished thus far and what assistance is needed from summit attendees
- Define a common language for ASLA (inclusion, engagement, minority, etc.).

Nine-month benchmark:

- Review, assess, and implement diverse content on ASLA.org (ongoing).
- Review Presidents' Council Commitment to Diversity with all organizations and discuss revisions if necessary.
- ASLA staff give an update on what has been accomplished thus far and what assistance is needed from summit attendees.
- Critical self-assessment and execution of best practices at ASLA (ongoing).



12-month benchmark:

- Review, assess, and implement diverse content on ASLA.org (ongoing).
- Review Presidents' Council Commitment to Diversity with all organizations and discuss revisions if necessary.
- ASLA staff give an update on what has been accomplished thus far and what assistance is needed from summit attendees.
- Critical self-assessment and execution of best practices at ASLA (ongoing).

Additional Survey Results:

As part of the future of the Diversity Summit, participants were asked to rate agenda items for future summits. *The following items were ranked by summit participants from highest importance (1) to lowest importance (6):*

1. Clarifying the mission and message of the Diversity Summit and diversity initiatives at ASLA.
2. Identify opportunities to research and workshop for all attendees (action oriented).
3. Review 2017-2018 benchmarks prioritized by 2013-2016 Diversity Summit participants.
4. Present case studies and tasks/projects that each attendee undertook in the year prior.
5. Introduction of one to two new groups to join the African-American and Latinx participants.
6. Engage with local community to take part in workshops.

In creating a five-year plan, participants were asked to rate action items that are most important for ASLA to accomplish in five years. *The following items were ranked by summit participants from highest importance (1) to lowest importance (8):*

1. Diverse imagery and resources integrated into entire ASLA.org website.
2. All ASLA materials made in digital format and easily accessible to everyone.
3. ASLA becomes leader and best practice model for other professional organizations.
4. The Diversity Summit and diversity efforts are aligned with the Presidents' Council Organizations (ASLA, CSLA, LAF, CELA, LAAB, and CLARB).
5. STEM/STEAM is built into the pipeline as an integral part of landscape architecture.
6. A process and program is in place for ASLA National and past summit attendees to assist local chapters to empower their communities.
7. A Senior Advisory Network and process is in place (made up of all past summit attendees).
8. Various sessions and/or forums are in place at the ASLA annual meeting.

As one of the top rated benchmark action items, ASLA asked participants to rate the most appropriate common language to use when discussing race and ethnicity. *The following terms were ranked from most appropriate (1) to least appropriate (5):*

1. Person/people of color
2. Referred by ethnicity (African American, Latinx, etc.)
3. Professionals of color
4. Diverse
5. Minority.



Closing Remarks

Shearer-Swink closed out the weekend by thanking summit attendees and ASLA staff for their participation. She has been the facilitator since the summit began in 2013. The 2017 SuperSummit marked her last year in this role. She will be passing the torch to Richard Alomar, ASLA, who will facilitate the 2018 Diversity Summit.

Mentorship Commitment

To wrap up the summit, participants wrote down ways they could commit to becoming a mentor or activist in their communities, and ways ASLA can support their efforts. ASLA will be following up with participants to report back and will be creating a platform where attendees can discuss their actions and initiatives.