A Case Study in Firm Evolution

Caroline Braga
SASAKI
Course Description

Incorporating an equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging lens into how we plan and deliver programs and support our members and firms helps us remain relevant, meaningful, and effective. It also ensures we're thoughtfully engaging and including individuals and communities. How is your component or firm building the collective voice, leadership, and capacity to enrich the lives of the communities they serve? How are you addressing inequities and creating innovative solutions? The panelists will discuss positive steps to remove systemic barriers and promote inclusion.
Learning Objectives

- Identify steps to create greater equity within your programs and practices.
- Recognize leadership behaviors that exhibit equity, diversity, and inclusion practices.
- Examine and adopt practices that promote equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging.
- Gain a greater understanding of the importance of individual and community involvement.
Caroline Braga, ASLA, PLA

landscape architect & chair, employee engagement | principal,

A born city-dweller, Caroline is passionate about bringing people closer to the natural world through design. Her design practice focuses on both campus and commercial settings, from master planning to built landscapes. She works closely with clients, architects, engineers, and ecologists in pursuit of well-crafted places.

In addition to her work as a landscape architect, Caroline serves on Sasaki's Board of Directors as Chair of Employee Engagement, working closely with firm operational and practice leaders, and the Sasaki community, to make Sasaki a rewarding place to work. Her areas of accountability include professional development, strategic staffing, and equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Caroline holds a master of landscape architecture from the University of Pennsylvania and a bachelor of arts from Georgetown University.
Contribution is the only value, for it brings the advantage of giving more than one person’s slant to a problem, and shows how differences may be harmonized by active discussion.

HIDEO SASAKI, 1957
Who are we?
300 employees
39 countries represented
32 languages spoken
51% women
Average employee age: 32

APA National Planning Firm Award
ASLA Firm of the Year (2x)
AIA Firm of the Year Finalist
800+ design awards (and counting!)
Phase 1

Start to talk about diversity
Understand who and where you are as a community
Three phases of practice at Sasaki

1 - The entrepreneurs (1953 - 1983)
2 - A *business-focused* practice (1984 - 2013)  
3 - A *practice-focused* business (2014 - present)

Focus on EDI begins
What Can Firms Do? (from AIA Online Guides for Equitable Practice)

Talk about your firm’s values: How do they shape your work and your culture?
Firm self-assessments: How do you compare to the survey?
Walk the talk: Firm leaders that adopt equitable practices
Increase access to firm leaders as mentors
Go beyond annual reviews and provide ongoing feedback
Implicit bias training: Identify and mitigate biased practices
Conduct a firm-wide pay audit
Develop clear and transparent promotion criteria and policies
Create a culture that is equitable, empathetic, and adaptable
Invest in opportunities for staff to build relationships
Develop leadership opportunities at all levels
2012  1\textsuperscript{st} Sasaki Diversity Committee Formed
2013  1\textsuperscript{st} Diversity Consultant Engaged
2014  First Diversity Survey Administered
2015  Focus Groups and Recommendations
      Diversity Timeline and Initiatives Formalized
2016  2\textsuperscript{nd} Diversity Survey
      Hired Director of Talent and Organizational Development
In 2015, we start to talk about the relationship of diversity to what we do beyond disciplinary diversity.

Sasaki is a culturally diverse design firm that powers its mission in the world through the collective work of our employees. We offer opportunity and reward achievement regardless of an individual’s gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, religion, country of origin, social class, or disability. We give people with different backgrounds, skills, and perspectives a voice at the table to enable design outcomes that best address the complex needs of the clients and communities we serve.

We believe that diversity is essential to design.
Understanding our cultural identities

Cultural Identity*

Sasakians hail from 39 countries and speak 32 languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages we speak*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENGLISH (291 SPEAKERS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANDARIN CHINESE (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPANISH (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HINDI (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANTONESE (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRENCH (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERMAN (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITALIAN (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOREAN (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEBREW (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAPANESE (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUSSIAN (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALBANIAN (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BENGALI (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CROATIAN (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GUJARATI (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data from HR internal reporting
Tracking advancement by race/ethnicity

**Ethnicity at Sasaki***

- **60%** White
- **29%** Asian
- **2%** Black or African American
- **9%** Hispanic or Latino
- **<1%** American Indian or Alaska Native
- **<1%** Two or more races

*Categories reflect those used in the U.S. Census as dictated by the Office of Management and Budget

**Ethnicity by Position***

- **18 point increase** from 2014 of % non-white ethnicities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino</th>
<th>Black or African American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sr. Associate</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Staff</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data from HR internal reporting
Tracking advancement by gender identity

Gender*
- 51% Female
- 48% Male
- 1% non-binary

Gender by Position*
- Principal & Associate Principal: 32% Female, 68% Male
  - 15 point increase from 2014 of % Principals & APs who are women
- Sr. Associate: 45% Female, 55% Male
  - 8 point increase from 2014 of % Sr. Associates who are women
- Associate: 58% Female, 42% Male
  - 19 point increase from 2014 of % Associates who are women
- Professional: 56% Female, 44% Male

*Data from HR internal reporting
Phase 2

Expand internal culture to be more inclusive
Focus on firm policies
Thanksgiving Potluck
Children’s Holiday Party
Added Staff-Driven Cultural High Holiday Celebrations

Moon Festival

MLK Day
HONORING THE LEGACY OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
01.21.19 - 01.25.19

Passover
A SASAKI CULTURAL HIGH HOLIDAY EVENT
JOIN US FOR A PASSOVER MEAL CELEBRATING THE JEWISH STORY OF EXODUS AND SALVATION
APRIL 24TH NOON LOWER MILL CREEK
2017 Reshape Diversity + Inclusion Committee to be principal-led

**Culture + Employee Engagement**
- Caroline Braga
- Ming-Jen Hsueh
- Debbie Wallis

**Market Position**
- Bill Massey
- Sarah Viafora
- Luke Mich

**Content and Thought Leadership**
- Michael Grove
- Diana Fernandez
- Joanna Chow
- Emma Flowers

**Partnerships and Outreach**
- Mary Anne Ocampo
- Chanwoo Kim
- Ivelisse Otero
- Meredith McCarthy
2017 Volunteer Time Off (VTO) Policy Established

**PAID TIME OFF TO VOLUNTEER**
In 2017, we introduced a Volunteer Time Off policy, which allows each employee 8 hours/year.

[link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f1ciM0_PPTOQjbB9RtMr7HdlAjnRHiui/view)

**MAKING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES ACCESSIBLE**
In 2018, we launched a web page where employees can find opportunities to volunteer, and where we can share our personal stories.

[link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1geN0_M9YGpSjkxeTkEj3-euSODfiQ80-/view)

**ORGANIZATIONS WE VOLUNTEERED WITH IN 2019**
- Arlington Food Pantry
- Big Brother Big Sister of Boston
- Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Association
- Christmas in the City
- Charles River Watershed Association
- Greater Boston Food Bank
- Museum of Fine Arts
- Plummer Youth Promise
- Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy
- Scholar Athletes
- Spark Boston Council
- Urban Science Academy
- Operation: American Soldier
2019 JUST CERTIFICATION
Policies Revised and New Policies Added

Diversity & Inclusion
Ethnic Diversity
Gender Diversity
Inclusion
Employee Engagement

Equity
Full-time Employment
Pay-Scale Equity
Freedom of Association
Living Wage
Gender Pay Equity

Employee Health
Physical Health
Well-Being

Employee Benefits
Employee Health
Retirement Provision
Family/Medical Leave
Training and Education

Stewardship
Local Communities
Community Volunteering
Animal Welfare
Charitable Giving
Positive Products and Services

Purchasing & Supply Chain
Equitable Purchasing
Subcontractors

*green text = new policy
*white text = updates made to policy
Phase 3

Greater representation in firm leadership
Focus on equitable paths to success
Align practice direction with values
New governance model with built-in turnover every 2 years allows for increasingly more representative Board.

3 women and 1 Chinese man included in the 2020 Board of Directors, making it more reflective of our firm demographics than the previous leadership model— but still not reflective of the racial/ethnic diversity of our broader society and the communities we serve.
2018 Chair of Firm Culture Role Created
2020 Role shift to Chair of Employee Engagement

WORK WITH OTHERS TO BUILD AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE
  • Centralize and share information
  • Act as a resource for questions about “how we do things”
  • Lead change around how we do things

CHAIR OF DIVERSITY + INCLUSION COMMITTEE

BRING EDI LENS TO BOARD DISCUSSIONS AND INITIATIVES

SET STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR HR STRATEGY AROUND RECRUITING, HIRING, ONBOARDING, STAFFING, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
2019 ESTABLISH ASPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP GOALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>ETHNIC MINORITIES IN LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>16% principals</td>
<td>32% principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(+10 percentage points since 2014)</td>
<td>(+15 percentage points since 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>25% principals</td>
<td>40% principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2028</td>
<td>33% principals</td>
<td>50% principals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recruitment Refresh

Ongoing effort to increase under-represented populations within the firm.

Expanded target list of schools.

Develop new and/or enhanced relationships with institutions, via teaching, lecturing, reviewing, offering internships, etc

Personal notes to department heads asking for student recommendations.

Internal production of new internship video to showcase the Sasaki experience to attract a diverse group of applicants.

Hiring committees come together across disciplines to review overall mix of intern candidates.
2019 Illuminate paths to professional success. Describe the skills and behaviors that the firm values. Invest in training, mentorship and sponsorship.

R+P is Sasaki’s formal professional development process that helps employees grow and thrive. R+P includes strategic goal-setting related to roles and responsibilities, conversations with your advocate about how to reach your goals, and the communication of constructive feedback. New HRIS system brings greater tracking and accountability.
2018-2019 New Trainings & Initiatives

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TRAINING

PROJECT MANAGEMENT TRAINING

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

PRINCIPAL SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

PAY EQUITY ANALYSIS BY GENDER

GENDER EQUITY PLAN WITH CONSULTANT
Internal events and all-firm emailers communicate values internally

- **MLK 2019**
  - Boston-area speakers to leading us in discussions around politics, public space, representation

- **Black History Month**
  - Under-Celebrated Designer Profiles to shed light on Black design figures and their impact on the industry

- **PRIDE**
  - Topical Deep-Dives into discussions of gender, drag, ally-ship
Website highlights how the pursuit of equity informs our work

New Memorial Shines Light on Marginalized Histories

From left to right: Diana Fernandez, Frederick Doucet, chairperson Actia Robinson Goodnight, project co-cider, and Breece Oulitau.

Boston is known for its history—but whose story lined with plaques, its sidewalks embedded with the most noteworthy landmarks of America’s. It commemorates a side of history that is distinctly colored, with histories just as rich and significant. It itself the built environment and feel as past, present, and future.

Inclusive Design is Human Design

Too often in the design world the term “inclusive design” is an epithet for meeting the minimum requirements put forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). What’s more, many designers approach ADA regulations as a hassle and constraint rather than an opportunity to create engaging, inclusive spaces. Successful design projects are able to overcome these unfortunate pitfalls by creating inclusive best practices that aim to create spaces suited for all users.

Accessibility, Better Infrastructure and a ‘Destination Playscape’ Slated for Boston’s City Hall

SANDRA LARSON OCTOBER 24, 2019

(Brandon by Sasaki)

Boston City Hall Plaza, divided for decades as sprawling, barren, shadeless and singularly terrible and bleak, is at
Externalizing our perspectives and our culture reinforces Sasaki as an attractive design practice and employer to potential talent.

Facebook Our story is all about diversity as our biggest strength

Instagram followers see how we work
2019 Sasaki Research Grants
Internal research grant projects invest in employee’s examining a range of issues related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; this research can be folded back into the practice.

Townology
How can we develop a more nuanced understanding of small town America?

A Voice at the Table
What role do affirmative spaces play in promoting community building, empowerment, and resilience for Black women in Roxbury, Massachusetts?

Parks Equity
Across Urbanized Areas In Our Country, Who Are The Communities Being Served By Parks And Who Is Left Out?

Above: Townology just went live! Check it out at http://townology.sasaki.com
In 2000, The Hideo Sasaki Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, was established with a bequest from Hideo Sasaki’s family and friends to continue his legacy of advancing rigorous and challenging research in design.

In 2018, the Foundation created a new vision that focuses on actionable design research for the Greater Boston community.
Mission Statement

The Sasaki Foundation fosters equity and inclusivity by engaging diverse groups and individuals in the design of the built environment. We sponsor research and programs that empower communities and strengthen education in design.

Better design, together.
Hello new cohort 2019!

Sasaki Foundation Design Grants

ANNOUNCING THE 2019 DESIGN GRANTS WINNERS

The Sasaki Foundation Design Grants are an annual competition to showcase projects that support and drive interdisciplinary innovation and empower our local communities. The Sasaki Foundation also selected two additional finalists to receive Community Grants, to participate alongside the research cohort in the incubator at Sasaki with a shared goal of creating change through the power of design.

Each year, the Sasaki Foundation announces research topics that address current trends and innovations in design. In 2019, the Foundation focused on proactive approaches to climate adaptation, new models for housing, innovation in transit and access to mobility choices, and creative community building.

The 2019 Design Grants winners are:

DESIGNING SHELTERS FOR DIGNITY

Designing Shelters for Dignity will create a redesigned model for homeless shelters, from a bleak, overencouraged space, to one that offers privacy, allows people to maintain dignity, and can feel like a home, even if temporarily. Participation and engagement of shelter residents is integral.

Focus area: new models for housing

FROM ENERGY SECURITY TO ENERGY SHIFT, IN BOSTON AND BEYOND

Learning from the Merrimack Valley Gas Disaster, From Energy Security to Energy Shift in Boston and Beyond will pilot methods to inventory household electric capacity across diverse communities that improve disaster response in the event of gas outages, and lay a foundation for a permanent household electrification for climate change.

Focus area: proactive approaches to climate adaptation, creative community building

RENTIFY CHINATOWN

Rentify Chinatown documents community narratives and generates data visualizations around gentrification in Boston Chinatown due to short-term rentals. Deliverables—including documentation, an online data platform, and pop-up exhibitions—provide portals to engage communities and expose the issue to a wider audience.

Focus area: creative community building
SEED:
Summer Exploratory Experience in Design

American Student Assistance®
Phase 2020

Pause, Listen, Reflect
Get Professional Help
Keep Learning and Working
Initial Response

CONDUCT STAFF LISTENING SESSIONS AND EXPLICITLY TALK ABOUT RACISM AND WHAT SASKAI CAN AND SHOULD DO TO ADVANCE RACIAL EQUITY

HEAR FROM BLACK EMPLOYEES THAT SASKAI’S CULTURE IS WHITE-CENTRIC

FIRM LEADERS ACKNOWLEDGE TO STAFF THAT WE UNDERSTAND THAT DESIGN HAS NEGATIVELY IMPACTED COMMUNITIES OF COLOR AND COMMIT TO ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY THROUGH OUR WORK
Initiatives

2020 REVISE HOW WE TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY
Elevate pov of BIPOC staff without appropriating their work or asking them to be diversity experts

2020 PAY EQUITY ANALYSIS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

2020-2021 RACIAL EQUITY PLAN WITH CONSULTANT
EDI consultant performing internal racial equity assessment and facilitating a 6 month process (survey, focus groups, report, workshops, and coaching)

2020 ELECTION DAY POLICY
Grants paid time off to vote for those who need it

2021 MLK DAY MADE OFFICIAL FIRM HOLIDAY
2020 - 2021 Evolving approach to EDI

FIRM LEADERS TO RECEIVE TRAINING TO DEVELOP GREATER CULTURAL COMPETENCY SO THEY CAN LEAD THE WORK

BOARD DEVELOPING GUIDELINES TO PROMOTE PROJECT AND CLIENT SELECTION ALIGNED WITH FIRM VALUES

PRACTITIONERS CHARGED WITH MORE EXPLICITLY ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS IN PROJECT WORK TO ADVANCE RACIAL EQUITY

EXPAND HR TEAM TO IMPLEMENT AND RUN INITIATIVES