

# How to Advance Diversity and Inclusion in a Social Distancing World

BY ZENELL BROWN

When COVID-19 struck within months after the Detroit Bar created its Diversity and Inclusion Committee, the pandemic consumed all of our focus and attention. For a moment, like graduating seniors waking up to the announcement that their prom and graduation ceremony had been canceled, we were disoriented and lost. The annual “Celebrating Our Diverse Bar” event was postponed to a date to be determined and the State Bar’s Annual Diversity Brunch was cancelled. Even the 59th Annual Barristers’ Spring Bash was rescheduled.

Up until now, diversity and inclusion programs focused on in-person gatherings where lawyers came together to celebrate diversity or strategize on how to promote full and equal participation in the legal professions, bar associations, and law schools. COVID-19 has challenged this approach. Not only do we have to figure out how to advance diversity and inclusion, we now have to figure out how to advance diversity and inclusion in a social distancing world.

Just as the 2020 high school seniors have invented graduation parades and drive-by graduation ceremonies replete with stages and pomp and circumstance, the lawyers who care about diversity and inclusion can ensure that these efforts continue to move forward during the current COVID-19 crisis. Here are a few ideas to help advance diversity and inclusion in a social distancing world:

1. **Be inclusive in the virtual meetings.** Just as we make sure that different perspectives are heard inside our meeting rooms, we must ensure that we hear from all of those

people in the Zoom squares on our computer screen adopting diversity and inclusion etiquette in virtual environments. If there is team work, ask a different team member to give the latest update or report.

2. **Host book and movie discussions.** There are many books such as “Let the Future Begin” by our own Dennis Archer and author Elizabeth A. Atkins that can ignite deep conversations on diversity and inclusion
3. **Use social media platforms.** Educate and engage your LinkedIn connections or your Facebook friends and Twitter followers with relevant diversity and inclusion information.
4. **Publish an article.** Let your voice be heard. How about implicit bias, intersectionality, employee resource groups, race relations? There is history and ideas to share.
5. **Mentor or Sponsor.** We can reach out to mentor or sponsor someone who has a different cultural or social identity than our own. We can assume these roles with a simple email or phone call and let someone know that we see their potential and want to help open doors of opportunities.
6. **Take the implicit-association test (IAT).** By taking the IAT, we are contributing to the research on implicit bias. Harvard needs us! <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

It is uncertain when we will have an opportunity to get together in-person, but there is still work we can do until that time arrives. We can even, in a social distancing world, move diversity forward.

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