

# SSAC/SÉAC Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Sustainability Recommendations

SSAC/SÉAC Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Sustainability Committee

For the SSAC/SÉAC Annual General Meeting

November 21, 2020

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# Introduction

The Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Sustainability (DEIS) Committee was formed in the wake of last summer's protests by Black communities and supporters against historical and ongoing racial injustice (we have recently added the fourth pillar of Sustainability). On June 22, 2020, the Officers of the SSAC/SÉAC published a Statement on Racial Justice as well as a call for SSAC members to form a committee that would examine issues of diversity, equity and inclusion

(<https://canada-architecture.org/statement-on-racial-justice-and-new-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-committee/>). The committee currently comprises seven members who expressed interest in joining the committee in response to this statement.

The initial mandate of the committee, as laid out in the statement, was to “examine both how the Society can become more inclusive of the voices of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) and what we can do to promote the study of Black architectures, Indigenous architectures, and the architectures of people of colour in Canada.” While these remain core aims of the committee, based on feedback we have received along the way, we have broadened our outlook to wider issues of equity.

Since August, the committee has met virtually six times on an accelerated schedule to enable substantial conversations to take place ahead of the Society's virtual Annual General Meeting on November 21, 2020. During this time, we have received feedback from several current and former SSAC/SÉAC members. We continue to welcome comments from the membership and, as outlined below, will aim to offer opportunities for members to consult on specific initiatives. Following the AGM, we will continue to meet periodically to further this work. The information and recommendations contained in this report represent the committee's work in progress, on which we hope to gather feedback and for which we hope to gain support from the membership of the SSAC/SÉAC.

## Contact Information

Questions or comments can be directed to the DEIS Committee by email at [ssac.seac.dei@gmail.com](mailto:ssac.seac.dei@gmail.com). Information on the committee will soon appear on the SSAC/SÉAC's website.

## Committee Membership

Rebecca Lemire, committee member (SSAC Secretary)

Stephanie Mah, committee member (ACO liaison, VP of ACO Toronto)

Ipek Mehmetoglu, committee member  
Magdalena Miłosz, committee chair (SSAC Communications Officer)  
Jenni Pace, committee member (SAH liaison, BC Rep to SAH-Pacific Northwest Chapter)  
Cédric St-Amour, committee secretary  
Julia Tischer, committee member

## Equity Statement, Code of Conduct, and Internal Complaints Procedure

### Equity Statement and Code of Conduct

The DEIS Committee believes that an Equity Statement (ES) is important as it can shape a safe and inclusive environment within the Society by outlining expectations and commitments from each member and the Society as a whole, by making explicit the foundational concepts and how they connect to our values and actions.

It gives members a shared vocabulary to discuss equity, instigating conversations about equity, and serves as an accountability mechanism by acknowledging our responsibility and naming our commitment to embedding equity into our Society at every level.

We recommend that the following content be included in an ES:

1. Acknowledgement of systemic injustice built into our society and acknowledge our responsibility to critically examine enduring discriminatory practices.
2. Definition of the core values that provide the foundation for a diverse, equitable, inclusive and sustainable environment within our Society.
3. Explicit commitment on the ways we can contribute towards the fight to reduce current conditions of inequity in a collective purpose.
4. Specify expected behaviour of our members and point to discriminatory behaviour.
5. Make a commitment to challenge canonical narratives and expand our discussion to diverse subjects of study and methods that place value on land, neighbourhoods and buildings acknowledging the merit of larger social and political realities, identities, and peoples.
6. Call all members to challenge and rectify discrimination (by speaking up).
7. Familiarize members with the Equity Policy and Complaints Procedure to eliminate discriminatory behaviours and practices within the Society.

\* The ES should be read both in English and in French prior to any SSAC/SÉAC sponsored events.

## Mission Statement

The Mission Statement (MS) explains the need for a DEIS Committee, articulates its mandate, and outlines the ways in which the committee serves its members and how it can be reached.

Familiarizing members with the overall goals and actions that the committee is trying to accomplish, and defining the roles of the committee aims to both protect committee members from liabilities that fall outside of the mandate and help build a culture of accountability within the Society under continuous improvement that includes the needs and wishes of its members.

We recommend that the following content be included in our MS:

1. Rationale of the DEIS Committee.
2. Outline of the roles and responsibilities of the DEIS Committee such as:
  - Understand diverse perspectives of members around DEIS and identify any form of systemic discrimination in our Society.
  - Create policies that challenge disparate power relations and remedy the negative impacts that they cause.
  - Serve as an advisory body to build and maintain a culture of DEIS in all activities of the Society, including membership, programs, publications, funding, awards, opportunities, outreach, annual conferences and administration.
  - Draft a list of action items that advocate for justice and inclusiveness through recognition, respect, representation, accountability and responsibility.
  - Represent SSAC/SÉAC members in issues regarding DEIS within the Society, which includes receiving and processing internal complaints according to the proposed Internal Complaints Procedure.
  - Address any form of systemic discrimination in our Society by reminding and keeping members and existing committees accountable for the Society's ES/Code of Conduct as well as encouraging the active participation of its membership in building a culture of DEIS.
  - Collaborate with affiliate groups and organizations within the field committed to promoting DEIS.
  - Draft a position statement regarding developing a meaningful relationship with Indigenous peoples.
  - Draft a position statement regarding Anti-Black racism.
3. The MS also indicates in which ways the DEIS Committee serves its members such as:

- Responding to questions about what SSAC/SÉAC is doing in terms of promoting DEIS.
- Receive suggestions for ways that SSAC/SÉAC could better address DEIS concerns.
- Concerns relating to DEIS that members would like SSAC/SÉAC to address.
- Receive feedback on an event, initiative or action that promotes a culture of DEIS.
- Receive complaints about not being listened to on issues of DEIS within the Society.
- Welcome members to get involved in DEIS issues within the Society.

\* The Mission Statement should be made accessible to all members to consult in English and in French.

## Internal Complaints Procedure

The SSAC/SÉAC should be committed to creating a safe space for all of its members, staff, and conference/event participants. Inappropriate behaviour, discrimination or harassment of any form should be subject to a complaints policy in accordance with the equity and mission statements. The following policy outline has been created upon research of the frameworks of similar organizations to ours.

We recommend that the following content be included in the Complaints Procedure:

1. Outline of the SSAC/SÉAC's commitment to provide a welcoming and safe environment and expectation for all members, event organizers, attendees, volunteers and guests to behave in a professional manner.
2. Definition of forms of unacceptable behaviour (discrimination and harassment, verbal or physical abuse or disruption of SSAC/SÉAC sponsored events).
3. Draft of the procedures for filing and processing internal complaints. Outline of the descriptions of complainant, respondent and advisor, as well as a procedure for addressing potential conflicts of interest. For conferences, a list of contact information of staff, organizers or directors.
4. Identification of the best way to address complaints: Possibilities include equity training of (a) member/s of the committee, inclusion of a third-party investigator or an ombudsman. Descriptions of informal resolution and formal resolution or investigation.
5. Identification of time limit for internal complaints (examples vary from six months to one year).

In consultation with the Board of Directors and the membership, the SSAC/SÉAC DEIS Committee recommends developing an internal complaints procedure related to member conduct at SSAC/SÉAC-sponsored events in line with the above points.

## Engagement with BIPOC Architectures

A significant aspect of the DEIS Committee's initial mandate was to engage in discussions about what the SSAC/SÉAC can do to promote the study of Black architectures, Indigenous architectures, and the architectures of people of colour in Canada. These are long-term conversations that relate to broader issues of representation in architecture, architectural history, and related disciplines. At the same time, these issues relate to diversity and inclusion within the Society itself.

This is an area that the Committee will continue to investigate in consultation with the membership (e.g. through a survey, as outlined below). Some preliminary ideas include:

- Inviting BIPOC lecturers to conferences and creating a speaker fund;
- soliciting conference sessions and presentations on these topics;
- special issues of the *JSSAC*;
- compiling bibliographies on diverse architectures;
- reaching out to and learning from other organizations.

The Committee would like to acknowledge the work of Daniel Millette in regularly chairing panels on the topic of Indigenous architecture at the SSAC's annual conferences.

## Relationships with Indigenous Peoples

### Truth & Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's "Calls to Action" focus on redressing the harms resulting from the Indian residential schools (IRS) and creating better relations between the federal and provincial governments of Canada and Indigenous nations, with an emphasis on creating a reconciled relationship.

The SSAC/SÉAC has the unique privilege and position to consider how architecture in Canada has participated in the colonial project of forced territorial occupation and how it can make amends and foster better relationships with the Indigenous peoples of these lands.

In order to create reconciled relationships with Indigenous peoples, the TRC calls us to:

- Acknowledge Indigenous dispossession and structural racism;
- consider architecture's responsibility as a profession, as a subject of historical study, and as a part of western academia;
- make ourselves accountable to our relationships with Indigenous peoples, present, past, and future;
- build real, authentic relationships with Indigenous peoples and their nations;
- adopt the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- highlight Indigenous people who currently work in the field.

## Land Acknowledgments Policy

Land acknowledgement is a popular and accessible first step in the direction outlined by the TRC. It is a statement of one's personal relationship with, and responsibilities towards the land and its Indigenous peoples. In this way it serves to acknowledge ethical and political accountability towards Indigenous peoples.

Given that members of the SSAC/SÉAC are situated within diverse geographic locations, the Society bears responsibility on both local/regional and national scales.

To this end, the Society and its subsidiary groups should seek to:

- Encourage self-reflection within the membership;
- facilitate members' processes by providing supporting frameworks and resources;
- learn about the Indigenous peoples to whom the land belongs, the history of the land, and any related treaties;
- understand displacement and how it may impact land acknowledgment;
- develop a land acknowledgement policy in consultation with Indigenous stakeholders.

As it pertains to the Society's activities (eg. conferences, events) we extend an invitation to the responsible committees to develop a partnership and identify, together, functional frameworks to further the reconciliation process.

At once, land acknowledgment alone is not enough; it is merely a starting point. We need to ask ourselves more deeply how we can plan to take ongoing actions to support Indigenous sovereignty.



# Accessibility

The committee believes that to foster an inclusive environment, it is critical that all members of the Society are given the opportunity to participate. We recommend that all conferences and meetings sponsored by the SSAC/SÉAC, as well as the Society's website, are accessible.

The committee recommends drafting a guideline addressing not only the physical barriers but also “invisible” barriers such as attitudinal barriers (discrimination against people living with disabilities), communication barriers (eg. small print or excessive jargon), technology barriers (eg. no access to stable connection or lack of computer skills), systemic barriers (eg. lengthy sessions, not enough time between breaks for a person with disabilities to move from one session to another).

## Conferences and Meetings

The committee recommends drafting a guideline to planning and conducting accessible events. Venues should enable both the physical access to a meeting space as well as access to its contents and proceedings.

Contents may include recommendations on:

- Selecting a venue (barrier-free, not a negative connotation for members, accessible accommodations, clear signage)
- Making presentations accessible (clear presentation format, use of microphone, access to sign language or subtitles)
- Training staff and volunteers
- Identifying people with disabilities when chairing an event
- Respectful and effective communication
- Inviting participant feedback for the planning of future meetings

## Website & Social Media

The SSAC/SÉAC should strive to make its website as accessible as possible. Although the Society is not obligated under Ontario provincial law to comply with web accessibility requirements, we believe that improving accessibility on this front is important to foster inclusion among current members as well as those interested in joining the society. The Committee recommends performing an audit of the Society's current website to determine areas for improvement in design.

Best practices in terms of accessibility should also be researched and applied to the social media channels through which the SSAC/SÉAC communicates (e.g. providing alt text for image content).

## Membership Survey & Consultations

### Membership Survey

In consultation with the SSAC's VP Membership, the Committee recommends developing a membership survey through which we can better understand the Society's demographics as well as the experiences of members and former members with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The survey should also provide a space for members to make suggestions about initiatives related to the mandate of the Committee.

### Consultations

The Committee would like to proceed in a spirit of consultation with both the Board and the broader membership. We will endeavour to collaborate with individual board members in specific areas of concern, as well as provide opportunities for members to provide feedback on any initiatives of concern to the Society more broadly.

### Sustainability

The Committee has recently added the fourth pillar of sustainability, given this area's relationship to diversity, equity, and inclusion, for example in relationships with Indigenous peoples and environmental racism. We also propose to investigate areas of concern related to the Society's operations and event planning in terms of sustainability.