ADVANCING DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IN THE FOREIGN POLICY SECTOR

A REPORT BY Vestige Strategies

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For years, the work of traditional foreign policy institutions, think tanks, foundations and civil society organizations have played leading roles in the international community by spearheading critical research to help shape timely policy positions; however, there continues to be a lack of research and intentional strategy developed to ensure that the most effective and diverse pool of experts are represented within institutions that seek to solve the world’s greatest challenges. A lack of diversity in foreign policy can inadvertently lead to disenfranchisement of minority groups not just in the field but in how institutions interact and perceive them globally.

In an open letter from experienced diplomats, former military officers and intelligence officials released in April of 2018 titled, “Fundamental Equity and Inclusion for U.S. National Security and Global Engagement”, it was noted that:

- As of 2015, people of color represented only 22 percent of the overall officer corps and 40 percent of the enlisted force in the military.

- Only 24 percent are people of color and only 11 percent lead in senior ranking positions in the intelligence community.

- Women make up only 38 percent of the Senior Executive Service and 36 percent of the Senior Foreign Service at the State Department.

Yet, a 2018 report by McKinsey & Company, highlights that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on their executive teams are 21% more likely to outperform on profitability than organizations with fewer women. The report also details that it’s not just gender, companies in the top quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity on executive teams are 33% more likely to have industry leading profitability; benchmarks that could be successfully replicated and surpassed if significant investments are made in the foreign policy sector to “expand access and inclusive professional development toward career advancement for professionals currently representing America’s interests at foreign policy and national security entities in government and partners outside of government” (Open Society Policy Center, 2018).

The need for diverse voices represented at the decision table is especially important in the world of foreign relations and as such, Vestige Strategies, LLC has conducted a survey among the leading foreign policy institutions in Washington, DC to provide insight into how we can ensure a more diverse and inclusive foreign policy community to engage with the world.

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Methodology

In May and June of 2018, Vestige Strategies, LLC – a Washington, DC based civic and community engagement consulting firm – initiated a survey of institutions within the foreign policy community to assess their awareness and involvement in diversity and inclusion efforts. The purpose of the survey was to determine various ways organizations were currently engaged in diversity initiatives and provide recommendations on how best practices from these initiatives can inform future activities.

The assessment included an online survey targeting 20 non-governmental and non-academic foreign policy organizations with a significant presence in Washington, DC. A staff member that primarily works in foreign relations within targeted organizations received emails and follow up phone calls requesting their participation in the survey. Ten (10) organizations, or 50% of those contacted, ultimately completed the 18-question survey. Participants included:

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<tr>
<th>The Atlantic Council</th>
<th>German Marshall Fund of the United States</th>
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<td>Center for International Policy</td>
<td>The Bridging the Gap Initiative at the Center for Strategic International Studies</td>
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<td>Center for Strategic International Studies</td>
<td>The Brookings Institution</td>
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<td>Global Access Pipeline</td>
<td>International Career Advancement Program Alumni Association (ICAPAA)</td>
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Defining Diversity and Inclusion

Oftentimes, diversity is viewed only through the lenses of race and gender; thus, diversity initiatives in the foreign policy sector have also narrowly addressed inclusion through these lenses. For this survey, dimensions of diversity were classified as race, culture/ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation and physical ability.
KEY FINDINGS

“From my vantage point, diversity and inclusion in foreign policy in DC is quite poor.”

- Foreign Policy Organizational Staffer

One of the primary themes echoed throughout the survey findings is that organizations are concerned about the issues of diversity and inclusion within the foreign policy sector, but they lack internal and external accountability structures and consistent financial resources to implement successful models of inclusion. Organizations have systems in place to recruit, engage and/or promote people of color and women through programming and organizational leadership, but respondents observed a lack of true inclusion for those leaders in organization agenda setting.

Gender, race, and ethnicity, are at the forefront of diversity and inclusion efforts in the foreign policy space and most organizations are striving to, at a minimum, provide accurate representation of these subgroups on their staff – but true success in this area will be reached when inclusion is present in all factions of an organizations’ work.

• A majority of organizations surveyed (90%) have a staff member responsible for leading or managing diversity and inclusion efforts; however, we’re unsure if these staff members have adequate budgets and organizational authority to hold senior leaders accountable.

• Sixty percent (60%) of the organizations had staff representation at a diversity and inclusion training, fellowship or conference over the last year.
“My organization has an informal "no manels" rule, meaning that any panels should include women and not just as the moderator but as experts.”

- Foreign Policy Organizational Staffer

- 8 out of 10 organizations surveyed incorporate diversity and inclusion in the foreign policy sector through programs and events.

- 80% of organizations had awareness of the number of women recruited to be speakers, panelists or presenters for programs and public events but there wasn’t the same awareness of racial, ethnic or LGBTQ participation in these programs and events.

- 70% of organizations have mechanisms in place to promote aspects of diversity and inclusion for the recruitment of speakers, panelists, or presenters for programs and public events, but there remains a lack of accountability internal and external within the foreign policy sector.

- 80% of organizations have policies and practices in place for the recruitment, hiring, development and promotion of diverse individuals within the organization.

- 80% of organizations surveyed utilize imagery representing diverse populations for company advertisements, collateral material and other external communications pieces.

- Every organization surveyed indicated that a member of the senior executive team completed one of the following activities:
CHALLENGES TO DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

While diversity and inclusion are often paired as connecting themes or interchangeably used, the issue of how to create an inclusive environment to best engage diverse staff and external audiences was raised as a greater challenge than recruiting or maintaining diversity itself. The primary challenges to diversity and inclusion that were revealed via the survey are listed below.

“We are currently not collecting this information systematically.”

- Foreign Policy Organizational Staffer

Narrow Scope of Diversity & Inclusion Tracking

One major challenge faced in the foreign policy sector for diversity and inclusion is that the scope of diversity is narrowly tracked. Although the majority of organizations surveyed tracked the race and gender of the speakers, panelists, or presenters that participated in their foreign policy related events and programs over the past year, many of the organizations noted having no such tracking in place for participants that identified as LGBTQ or those with a physical disability. In addition, at times gender and political representation can be more of a priority than racial and ethnic diversity.

- When asked about LGBTQ participation in programing and events, the majority of organizations were unaware of participation numbers. Only 20% of organizations could provide concrete data.

- When asked about programing and events featuring people who have identified themselves as having a physical disability, only 1 of the 10 organizations surveyed provided specific information.

“We require gender diversity in panels of three or more people; we are staunch on bipartisan representation.”

- Foreign Policy Organizational Staffer
Lack of Funding and Support for Paid Internships

Another challenge revealed was the lack of consistent and timely funding to support administering diversity and inclusion work within the foreign affairs sector; specifically, funding to implement paid internship programs that would result in a more diverse pool of talent within foreign policy organizations.

In a 2015 article published by Brookings titled, “Unpaid internships: Support beams for the glass floor”, they noted that internships were ranked as the most important factor in deciding whether to hire a recent college graduate or not, according to a 2012 survey commissioned by the Chronicles of Higher Education.3

However, they also highlight that “even for those who can survive for a while without an income, the costs of living in the intern capitals—New York, Los Angeles, DC—are beyond the reach of most low-income and even middle-income students” (Brookings, 2015).

Additional Challenges

- Only 50% of organizations surveyed could provide information about research and grant making opportunities geared toward diversity and inclusion in the foreign policy sector.

- There is a lack of diversity on the senior staff level, especially among the people who can make decisions on how/if diversity and inclusion programming is funded within the organization.

- There is unconscious bias among staff members and executive leadership and the impact it has on the success of diversity and inclusion initiatives.

- There is lack of networking opportunities for staff from diverse backgrounds.

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GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

The aforementioned challenges lead to immediate opportunities for growth to further the success of diversity and inclusion work in the foreign policy sector; therefore, Vestige Strategies proposes the following recommendations to bring the foreign policy sector one step closer to closing the diversity and inclusion gap in the field:

• Foster inclusion through the implementation of **anti-bias and unconscious bias trainings** for all staff members within an organization to facilitate diversity and inclusion activities based on best practice approaches.

• The development of a **diverse and inclusive speakers bureau for foreign policy experts** to better assist organizations in their selections of speakers and experts to feature on panels.

• A focus on **recruiting and preparing diverse senior staff** within foreign policy organizations to transition to senior leadership roles within policy think tanks. The deficit of inclusion from entry to senior-level management in the sector offers an opportunity for think tanks and leading institutions to coordinate their efforts to address challenges throughout the pipeline.

• The creation of a **tracking mechanism to monitor panelist, presenter, and awardee demographics** for the 4,000+ events held by the surveyed foreign policy organizations to hold institutions accountable to their diversity and inclusion statements.

• **Dedicated and consistent funding commitments** to bolster the diversity and inclusion staff leads’ abilities to ensure diversity and inclusion statements and policies are fully integrated into all programmatic and operational functions within foreign policy institutions.

• **Provide space and public platforms** for diverse groups to convey existing challenges in navigating the foreign policy sector and allow that feedback to guide best practices in diversity and inclusion efforts.

• **Collaboration across foreign policy institutions** to create a standard culture for diversity and inclusion within the field.

• The creation of **affinity groups** within the foreign policy sector for diverse staff to connect across organizations to cultivate a more inclusive environment and the promotion of initiatives spearheaded by the group to the public.
Provide paid internships, fellowships, or stipends to potential participants from underserved and underrepresented communities to eliminate financial barriers of access to the sector; ultimately, strengthening the pipeline for students of diverse backgrounds to enter the field and decrease the gender pay gap.

Actively recruit from and develop career tracking programs for graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), women’s colleges, tribal colleges and community colleges.

“There’s a solid group of folks who have been at this for a while. We connect with some level of frequency and it’s clear the network is still somewhat concentrated. This is helpful because we know who to turn to for ideas on speakers, topics, programs, etc., but it seems we could probably be doing more to make our work clear to others.”

- Foreign Policy Organizational Staffer

Vestige Strategies believes that if the suggested recommendations identified in this report are implemented, the foreign policy sector will be that much closer to becoming the diverse and inclusive environment it can be to provide the leadership necessary to move the world forward.

ABOUT VESTIGE STRATEGIES, LLC

Founded by Quentin James and Stefanie Brown James in 2013, Vestige Strategies, LLC is a nationally recognized community and civic engagement consulting firm based in Washington, DC. We build engagement programs for campaigns, causes, and companies to move their audiences to take action and win victories. It’s our mission to foster stronger collaboration between our clients and their targeted communities, strengthening leaders and achieving tangible results.