

"Change Never Starts in the Center. It Starts at the Edges and Moves Its Way In."

By Terrie Furukawa, PhD

I frenetically scribbled down these words late one evening in my hotel room while watching a PBS special on Mark Twain, a master storyteller and keen observer of life. Change after all is at the heart of our work as psychologists. Because change begins on the edges, it is not always easy to clearly see its early beginnings.

I was in Washington DC attending the March APA State Leadership Conference (SLC) in my capacity as the newly appointed CPA Diversity Task Force Chair, and had the opportunity to see some *early threads of convergence*. These observations were further reinforced again in April, when I attended the APA Practice Directorate's Committee for the Advancement of Professional Practice (CAPP) meeting. There, as an observer for California, I got another glimpse of a fuzzy, but emerging picture.

Diversity Initiative - A Shift in Strategic Focus

Despite 20 years of focusing on diversity at a national level, ethnic minorities represent only 5% of the APA membership. State and provincial associations similarly have struggled to build a diverse membership with limited success. The recruitment, retention, and training of ethnic minority psychologists has long been recognized as a necessary and desired goal to meet the projected changing national and state demographics.

The APA Office of Ethnic Minority Affairs (OEMA), seems to have brought slow "change along the edges" into focus through the assistance and support of work by State and Provincial Psychological Associations (SPPA). The 1998 SLC was the spawning ground of the Diversity Initiative, and where the Diversity Task Force Chair position had its origins. Representatives from Committee of State Leaders (CSL) and the APA Commission on Ethnic Minority Recruitment, Retention and Training in Psychology (CEMRRAT) initiated discussions on how the SPPA might increase the ethnic diversity of APA and state association memberships through **development of ethnic diversity within leadership not just in membership**. This represented a significant change in strategic focus by building diversity at all levels of the organization. The emphasis upon ethnic leadership development within state association boards recognizes that for any significant organizational change to occur, both top down and bottom up implementation is essential.

OEMA and CAPP allocated funds (CEMRRAT Implementation Grant Fund) starting in 2000 to support diversity delegates, utilizing the SLC as the venue for development of the Diversity Initiative. The mechanisms to diversify membership have been left up to the states in an independent "*fits and starts*" sort of implementation. The necessity of developing a 5-year national plan to move state association efforts along in order to actualize its goals for diversity was recognized by the 2002 SLC diversity delegation.

CEMRRAT Implementation Grant Funds

The Council of Representatives (C/R), the highest governing group of APA, authorized allocation of \$100,000 per year to fund a 5-year plan for ethnic minority recruitment, retention and training in psychology. Grants by CEMRRAT to seed diversity implementation projects have been available for the last 3 years to state associations, APA Divisions, APA boards and committees, departments and schools of psychology. Awards totaling \$163,000 have funded 46 of the 70 grant proposals received. Funds will continue for another two years.

APA Council of Representatives Action

Critical mass continues to build on another front. At the August 2001 meeting, the Council of Representatives passed a motion "**that APA will fund any Division, State or Provincial Association for the expenses incurred by representatives to C/R who are ethnic minorities and who are elected during the years 2002-2004 to attend C/R bi-annual meeting.**" This action represents a significant

effort by APA to increase ethnic minority participation in APA governance, and is to be reviewed in August 2004 to determine its effectiveness and whether funding will be continued.

CPA Has an Opportunity to Truly Diversify Its Membership and Leadership

After intensive work in January 2001, representatives from the CPA Board forged a shared vision for CPA, "to be so influential, knowledgeable, relevant and responsive that membership in the California Psychological Association is essential." We were then confronted with the task of asking ourselves, "How will we know when we've gotten there? What will we actually look like as an organization when we have achieved our vision?" The vivid description included "**CPA membership and leadership is diverse**" as a marker of our success at achieving our goals. These ideas, then, have been both independently and simultaneously emerging along the "edges" within our own organization, moving us towards a larger convergence. On an parallel track three years ago, CSPA Foundation's FOLD program (Foundation Outreach Leadership Development) also recognized the need to build developmental leadership opportunities to diversify the organization.

Diversity makes us a stronger organization at all levels. We unwittingly tend to duplicate sameness. It's often easier, but runs the risk of duplicating our weaknesses. Surrounding ourselves with like perspectives limits the way we perceive problems, gather information and generate solutions. Different information gets filtered down when diverse interests, values, and perspectives are represented in association governance, on boards and in committees. An organization is made stronger by the diversity we use to identify and define problems, and by the diversity we use to gather information and grapple with solutions from these different perspectives.

Over the next several months I will be asking Chapter Presidents to help me identify a Diversity Task Force Chairperson at the local level to assist me with diversity efforts in California. CPAGS Chair Rebecca Murray has already identified three graduate students who quickly stepped forward. Please contact me if you are interested in joining us.

Changing up front is necessary and important. However, change is generally occurring along the edges simultaneously. At first glance it is not always easy to see change while in the midst of changing. It's happening!

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