

Advancing Women in the Geospatial Professions

By Susan Marlow

As the world continues to grapple with long-standing issues around gender equity in the workplace, there is an opportunity for the geospatial community to face these challenges and support lasting change.

While the geospatial professions have come a long way in fostering opportunities for a more diverse range of professionals, the COVID-19 pandemic has sparked a renewed level of urgency to establish workplace practices that generate opportunities for all, especially as workplace trends arising from this pandemic have the potential to create lasting impacts on diversity both in our profession and beyond.

According to a recent study from McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting firm, one in four women are considering downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce completely due to the added pressures of juggling home and work life as a result of the pandemic.

This trend is not only concerning in the near term, but also looking to the future when one considers the impact such a pause could have on strides made for women in current leadership positions, or those on track to take on such roles in the future. As a past president of MAPPS, I am personally committed to advancing women in this field and am pleased to see my profes-



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sional peers maintaining a focus on advancing gender diversity.

Many MAPPS members have diversity and inclusion policies, but today's pandemic shines a new urgency on ensuring that these words leap from the page of the employee handbook into practice. "Diversity became a focus of MAPPS about three years ago. During the pandemic, many MAPPS member firms have continued to bring ideas and support to our efforts towards equity within the geospatial profession," stated MAPPS President Mark Brooks.

Strides made by MAPPS member firms provide inspiration on ways we as a profession can continue to foster an environment that supports professionals from all types of backgrounds.

For example, MAPPS has partnered with the National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC) to create the GeoWomen group, and women geospatial professionals are participating in various events provided by both organizations. In response to the challenges brought on by the pandemic,

GeoWomen recently hosted a virtual roundtable with speaker Tonya Kahui, GIS programs manager for the Port of Tacoma, who spoke about maintaining connections in changing times. There was so much positive feedback from participants that we plan to offer additional events in the future.

Further examples include diversity and inclusion initiatives at Stantec, which was recently named to the Forbes list of America's Best Employers for Women. While Stantec is making notable strides in advancing women in leadership, we are focused on continually building a culture of inclusion, including building capacity for inclusive leadership and promoting equity of underrepresented groups.

Stantec believes that everyone deserves the freedom to bring their whole selves to work without fear of judgement or discrimination, and that by doing so, we will attract and invite the full spectrum of talent into our organization.

Our Women@Stantec employee resource group helps female employees build networks, expand their sphere of influence, and remove obstacles and biases. Education is a critical component of this group's success, with more than 40 Women@Stantec chapters globally that hold regular events.

Stantec is also piloting a Career Empowerment Program for Women that is designed to provide small-group career development training and coaching. Program content is participant-directed based on individual goals, but some outcomes include improved professional profiles, client and project management, and technical expertise.

Women in all professions face many diversity and equity challenges, but at the end of the day, they adapt and just "figure it out"—whether it be juggling family and business or virtual teaching at home. I am confident that the future will be bright. ■

