**Alignment with Strategic Plan:**

This project was developed to begin an examination of the experiences of members who identified as a person of color.

***Goal 1: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:*** NCDA seeks to represent a diverse membership who advocates for career challenges critical to marginalized groups in our society (e.g. people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA, religious minorities, women, etc.).

*Objective 1A:* Increase the visibility, participation, and leadership of diverse members.

*Objective 1B:* Increase the number of articles addressing diverse populations in our publications and social media.

*Objective 1C:* Provide support for diverse leaders to attend conferences and other important events.

**Interest in Topic:**

As a woman of color, I personally identified with this study and sought to design a survey to learn more about challenges and opportunities within the NCDA membership. My own level of participation in NCDA has fluctuated over my years as a member and while I can personally identify several barriers to participation, I hope to better understand the experiences of other members who identify as a person of color.

**Rationale and Background of Survey:**

NCDA has recently outlined an updated Strategic Plan and included a goal focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; this project examined one facet of diversity (i.e. people of color) and their attitudes and level of engagement with NCDA as a professional organization. The survey was distributed to current and previous members via SurveyMonkey; the brief survey was open for one-month and was shared once by NCDA through an email invitation. The survey itself consisted of nine questions, six of which are further explored in this summary.

**Findings:**

A total of 162 individuals responded to the survey, with 53 respondents identifying as a person of color.

After reviewing responses, several themes emerged that are worth discussing as we begin to explore how to utilize the feedback to implement and realize NCDA’s Strategic Plan.

1. **Time is a precious commodity.** The majority of respondents (64%) indicated that the lack of time they had available directly impacted their ability to participate in professional organizations. Some noted difficulty balancing other commitments, lack of support from their employers, and live events being hosted outside of their time zone.
2. **Knowledge and awareness of resources**. Most participants (74%) indicated professional development opportunities, space for networking, and publications were reasons they were attracted to NCDA but a high number (56%) also indicated they were unaware of what exactly was offered or what would be relevant to them.
3. **Current Involvement**. When asked about current involvement and beneficial resources within NCDA, respondents were almost equally split between attending the annual conference and holding/pursuing an NCDA Credential. These are both items that have both a significant cost and time commitment but provide many professional development and training opportunities within a time-sensitive environment.
4. **Narrative Responses** provided by respondents provide additional ideas for accessibility and mid-level professionals. A handful of respondents asked for a video on how to better navigate the website as they had difficulty locating past recordings and future opportunities (outside of the annual conference). Another small group of respondents suggested/requested a guide on how to determine what might be relevant to based on your setting, goals, and/or years of experience. The final grouping of narrative responses wanted more information (or a guide) on leadership for mid-level professionals.

**Limitations:**

This brief survey only touched the surface of what could be explored and understood about barriers to membership and participation. There was limited participation, 53 total participants identified as a person of color, and it would be difficult to draw definite conclusions. The survey also missed an opportunity to ask respondents about their respective constituency groups and as the survey was anonymous, it was not possible to review the member directory to cross reference and validate. However, we are grateful to have heard more than 50 voices and can certainly amplify the challenges and opportunities uncovered.

**Recommendations and Ideas for Future Exploration:**

It is clear that NCDA’s Strategic Plan is in alignment with the challenges faced by members of color, and specific plans and ways to increase awareness regarding opportunities are on-going. With high value placed on professional development, networking, and resources/publications, there is space for increased participation if time, cost, and awareness of such opportunities are considered. While time is not something that NCDA (or anyone) can produce more of, we can ensure that offerings are well advertised and not cost-prohibitive for members.

There are a myriad directions future research could take, but themes from the survey indicate a lack of awareness of relevant resources and cost to be key factors in limiting participation. How-To guides or navigation resources would be a benefit to all members and would save time when choosing from archived or upcoming opportunities. A follow-up survey of diverse members by constituency group would also provide more detail to explore beneficial or lacking resources.

With Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion a foundational goal of NCDA’s Strategic Plan, this study sought to highlight the experiences of a subset of members. We learned high value was placed on pursuing activities that weren’t cost-prohibitive or time consuming. We also learned that a lack of participation could be attributed to a lack of knowledge of what exists and what would be relevant for a particular setting, years of experience, and/or career goal. This preliminary survey reinforced the importance of listening to members’ voices and directing resources where needed. The future of the profession continues to evolve, and our members look to NCDA for upskilling, leadership opportunities, and engagement. The future is bright.

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