**AIGA** Chicago

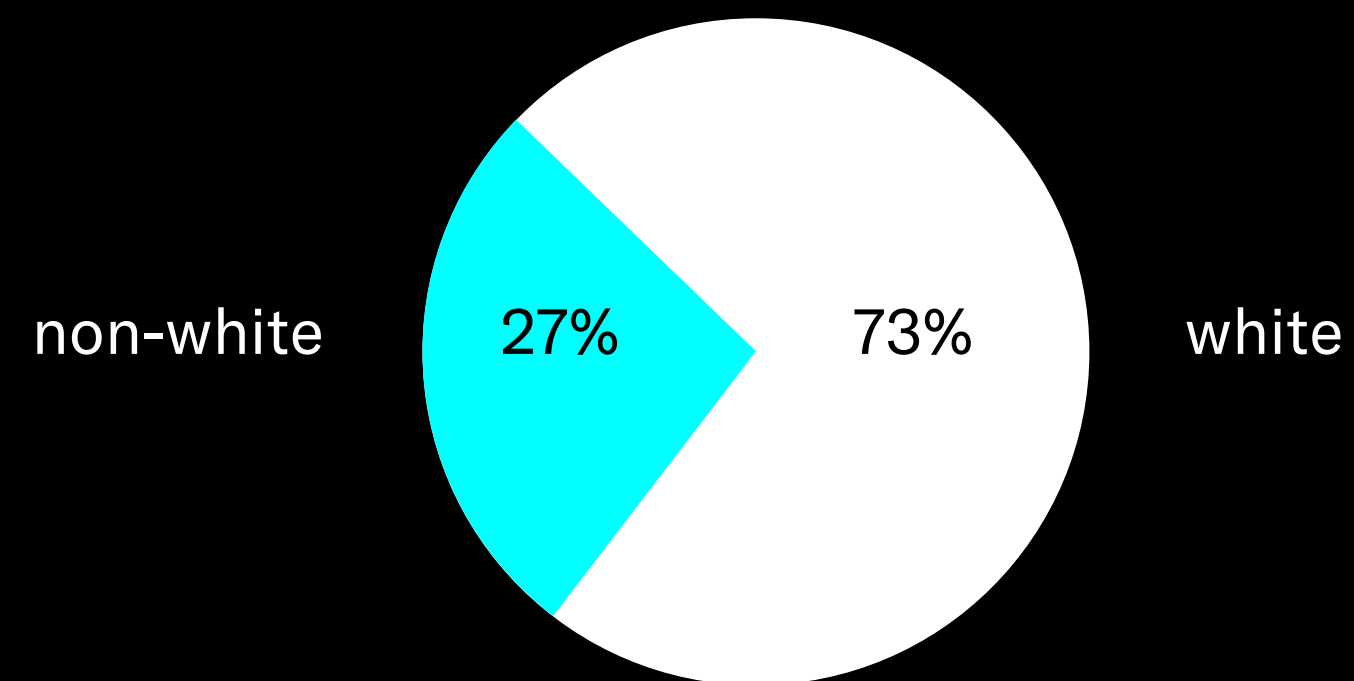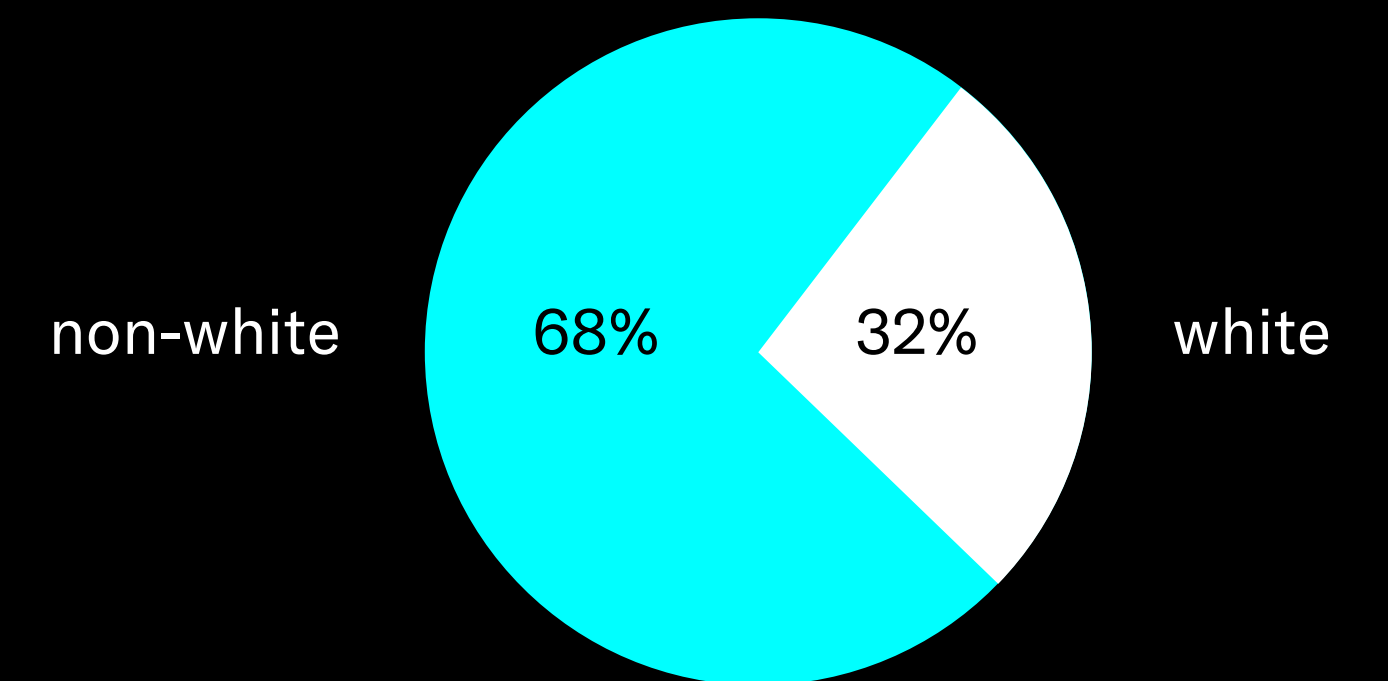# Diversity & Inclusion Hiring Survey Results

The results for the 2016 Design Census revealed that a total of 293 designers participated in Chicago. Of those, 215 were white.

**Why was participation for designers of color so low in a city as diverse as Chicago?**

2016 AIGA DESIGN CENSUS

CHICAGO POPULATION

non-white 27% 73% white

non-white 68% 32% white

Additionally, we learned that small studios were facing challenges when attempting to hire more designers of color to their teams.

To learn more, we sent a survey to 17 small, privately-owned design studios. This document reveals the results and the insights derived from the survey.

**We have kept participants anonymous to protect their privacy. Here are some details about the participants:**

- **15 designers in charge of hiring**
- **9 men, 5 women**
- **Ranging from ages 25 to 60+**
- **Based in Chicago**

How many
designers
are currently
employed
at your
company?

2

4  4  4  4  4

5

6

7

8

10

12

15

1

When hiring designers, where do you post the position?

**Facebook 7**

**AIGA Design Jobs 6**

**Company website 6**

**Word of mouth 4**

**Instagram 3**

**LinkedIn 1**

**Dribbble 1**

**Indeed 0**

2

Which of these have yielded the most amount of hires?

Word of mouth **7**

AIGA Design Jobs **3**

Instagram **2**

LinkedIn **1**

Dribble **1**

Indeed **1**

Company website **0**

Facebook **0**

3

If word of mouth is the most common way designers are being hired, companies need to expand their networks to include more people of color.

What are the top priorities when hiring designers for your team?

Talent **6**

Cultural fit **4**

Work experience **1**

Work ethic **0**

Diverse cultural background **0**

Education **0**

Other **0**

4

A designer from a diverse cultural backgroud may not seem like a cultural fit initially.

Thats the point.

Increasing diversity means bringing in different points of view.

Do designers with
diverse cultural
backgrounds apply
to your job
postings?

**Everyone said yes. Answers fit into 3 categories:**

**A.** I don't know.

**B.** We serve diverse clients.

**C.** We have made this a priority.

5

Why do you
think you
have had
success with
attracting
diverse
applicants?

- **It isn't a goal**—just happens.

- **I don't know**... but they come because the studio is defined by our version of design excellence.

- **I'm not really sure** to be honest. We should spend some time discussing this question internally!

- We are an entirely open, no bullshit team of amazing talented people. **We recognize talent—not color, race, sex, etc.**

5A

Why do you
think you
have had
success with
attracting
diverse
applicants?

• Because we work for **diverse clients**.

• We focus on working with clients and organizations that value a diverse group of creative individuals who will be working on their project. **If they believe the team understands and experiences their values, they will trust us.**

5B

Why do you
think you
have had
success with
attracting
diverse
applicants?

- **We encourage applicants from underrepresented groups to apply and post our jobs in accessible venues.** We also check that the language we use is not coded or off-putting to groups of people.

- Our social mission, our currently somewhat-diverse team, maybe **our "equal opportunity" language.**

- **We have made diversity and inclusion a priority**, not just with hiring, but overall. Our small team of designers is also well connected within the Chicago design community and understands that our group becomes better the more diverse we are.

- We work directly with schools and make sure to include in our postings we're looking for diverse hires. **It also helps that our design team isn't all white men.**

5C

A strong portfolio and reputation will attract designers to apply to job postings. However, inclusive language and a diverse team will make designers from different backgrounds feel less intimidated about applying.

Have you hired
designers with
diverse cultural
backgrounds?

**Everyone said yes! Again!**

**A. We only hire the best talent.**

**B. We have a welcoming environment.**

**C. We make diversity a priority.**

6

Have you hired
designers with
diverse cultural
backgrounds?

- We do good work—**diversity is not an issue.**

- We all understand and **resonate with design excellence on a global level**.

- We try to **hire the best talent.** That's it.

- At the end of the day, while diversification is important, **talent is really the trigger for a hire.** And we have to look at the pool of applicants that either apply, or work to get on our radar within the design community.

6A

Have you hired
designers with
diverse cultural
backgrounds?

- We've also **created an environment that is welcoming to anyone that walks in the door.** People sense that when they visit the studio and meet the team. So that combination of doing great work and being respected and appreciated for your contribution to the team checks a lot of boxes for job seekers.

- Our space is welcoming to anyone, we make it clear that **differences and diversity make the studio stronger/richer.**

- Because **they feel like they fit in here** and they like the type of clients we work with.

- We strive to maintain **a workplace environment that is flexible, open and supportive of all staff while presenting opportunities to grow a career** within the agency. We pay well and offer a generous benefit package. I think most importantly we work on interesting projects and strive for excellence.

6B

Have you hired designers with diverse cultural backgrounds?

- Because **we put in the work to do it.** We know it is important so we just commit to doing it.

- **We aim to follow the 50/50 initiative.** I believe that a team of the same age, color and background do not yield enough unique perspectives. I like to change that up.

- **We value diverse perspectives and actively seek to build a team that's reflective of the world at large.** We are aware of subconscious biases and actively work to fight against them. We also use our own measuring stick, free from the imperialist view of "good design." Our design team is led by young women, which has allowed us to take a strong stance as leaders in the tech scene in Chicago.

6C

Studios have different ideas on the importance of diversity. For some, it is a priority based on the types of clients they serve. Others are aware of subconscious biases and have established policies to ensure fair hiring.

How might we communicate the importance of diversity to all studios?

What are some
of the challenges
with hiring
diverse
applicants?

**A.** **We don't have any.**

**B.** **Not enough apply.**

**C.** **Our networks are not diverse.**

**D.** **The work is not well received.**

**E.** **Hiring anyone is challenging.**

7

What are some
of the challenges
with hiring
diverse
applicants?

- **None.**

- **Never had any.**

- None. They are people same as everyone else. Anyone who thinks there are challenges with hiring diverse applicants works in a toxic environment.

7A

What are some
of the challenges
with hiring
diverse
applicants?

- **Not enough apply.**

- Not as many in the talent pool.

- **Getting the word out** to them and /or finding them in the first place.

- Specifically in design, **the number of diverse applicants is a small percentage** of the total applicants. (Sometimes it approaches zero.)

7B

**What are some of the challenges with hiring diverse applicants?**

7C

- It's always a challenge to attract a wider pool of candidates. **It's hard to break out of our existing circles and reach people we don't know.** I feel like our existing venues and job boards are okay, but not great at this.

- As mentioned above, **most of our hires tend to come from our local network or a referral by current staff.** We are always looking to expand the reach of that network and avoid potential insularity.

- The diversity within the design community. For everywhere we post positions, **it still comes down to recommendations and referrals 90% of the time.** We don't have a dedicated HR team to handle screenings and proactive scouting, so we look for guaranteed opportunities where the leads are strong and backed by relationships.

What are some
of the challenges
with hiring
diverse
applicants?

- We've also had challenges with diverse applicants' **portfolios not being as well-received by our design team.**

- Fielding the applications and **making the case to hire them if their education pedigree isn't as impressive.**

7D

**What are some of the challenges with hiring diverse applicants?**

7E

· Again, our applicants will only be as diverse as the talent pool available. There's not really a challenge specific to hiring diversity. **Finding great talent is tough period.** It takes time, effort and diligence to connect with potential candidates and take them through the hiring process which is on top of everyone's project responsibilities.

· We don't have a dedicated HR team to handle screenings and proactive scouting, so we look for guaranteed opportunities where the leads are strong and backed by relationships. This means we get caught up in a cycle where we look to the design and development communities in Chicago for talent— which is heavily defined by white men. **This lack of diversity in and of itself may be a turnoff for a more diverse crowd, which keeps the community in it's current state of homogeneity.**

Hiring is challenging, and more so for small studios with limited resources. The majority rely on recommendations from trusted networks to make it easier and reduce risk.

Increasing the diversity of Chicago design studios begins with growing our networks beyond who we already know.

...and taking a chance on people who many not fit the mold.

How can AIGA
support your
company to
increase
its cultural
diversity?

**A.** More events focused on diversity.

**B.** Raising awareness.

**C.** Help to improve hiring practices.

**D.** Grow the talent pool.

8

How can AIGA support your company to increase its cultural diversity?

- I think you are doing it, but **more diverse programming will yield more diverse attendance,** which in turn will create a more diverse community... which ultimately will help all of us be more diverse studios.

- Community conversations. More diverse crowds at events. **More programming dedicated to discussing this paradox in an open and safe setting.** Guidelines regarding industry best practices.

- Host **more events focused on diversity;** educate more young designers of color; educate employers **about how to build more inclusive cultures.**

- AIGA can continue to **feature (at events, conferences and in positions of leadership) diverse designers.**

8A

How can AIGA
support your
company to
increase
its cultural
diversity?

8B

- It can continue to work on **awareness and accessibility to diverse cultures.**

- Keep doing what you're doing! Reaching out to company's with surveys like this is great. Furthering outreach in the design community helps raise awareness. **Highlighting designers with diverse cultural backgrounds is a great way to showcase potential talent, too.**

- I think it's important for folks to know that smaller studios are **seeking designers and design thinkers with different backgrounds** to make projects/work more important and powerful for the community.

- Give tips and tricks to finding more diverse hires and how to make the case. **Give us better ways to expand our circles.**

How can AIGA support your company to increase its cultural diversity?

- **Language we can borrow or shape for job postings.**

- **Ways to address underlying issues at companies** that deter people from underrepresented groups from applying.

- Ways to **drive a broader range of candidates to the AIGA job board.**

- I would suggest there is a way to **pre-vet all great candidates regardless of cultural backgrounds worthy of consideration.**

- **Send us some top talent.** We're hiring!

8C

How can AIGA
support your
company to
increase
its cultural
diversity?

- It starts with **helping to create a more diverse talent pool,** getting students of all cultures aware and excited about design. Maybe there are "design-deserts" out there were kids aren't getting exposed to design as a possible career path and AIGA could help identify those design-deserts and create opportunities for those kids to get exposed to design.

- Work to get **more diversity into design schools.**

8D

**AIGA Chicago has a huge role to play in remedying this issue. Companies are craving more tools to make hiring easier, and more opportunities to grow their networks.**

Would you be interested in continuing this conversation with peers in the community?

**A.** No time/not my place.

**B.** Maybe, but I need more clarity.

**C.** Absolutely.

**D.** Less talking, more doing.

9

Would you be interested in continuing this conversation with peers in the community?

- **Not really** as time is a premium for me as I have so little extra time.

- **Not really.** Honestly, this isn't my favorite topic to discuss when it comes to talking about design. I think there are other factors that contribute to this issue, in context of hiring, like design education (and it's issues), access to resources, design awareness, community building and the understanding of how design adds value to business, that are more interesting to me. **I think to engage others around this topic you need to show the value and benefits of having a more diverse team.** And, potentially, showcasing design groups that you feel are a model of diversity, so as to give an example of an achievable goal for others.

9A

Would you be
interested in
continuing this
conversation with
peers in the
community?

- **As a white, male I would not be the best person to talk about diversity with the design community.** I respect it greatly and believe it's extremely important but there are others at our studio who would be much better suited to have this conversation.

- Sure. That said, I am a white male. **Perspectives on this should be limited, or balanced away from white males.**

- Sure. First, **I'd be interested in learning more about AIGA's goals and initiatives around diversity.**

9A

Would you be
interested in
continuing this
conversation with
peers in the
community?

9B

- Sure, I think having **a focus group** around it could be nice.

- Maybe. **I wish the design community was a better reflection of the community we design for.**

- Possibly, would **depend on timing /expectations.**

- For sure. This can be a sensitive topic so I like the idea of the anonymized survey. Then perhaps getting together to discuss the compiled results in an open forum. **As an aside, it wasn't clear to me what exactly AIGA meant by "cultural diversity" so it may help to define that term.**

- I would love a **round table with other managers** around best practices.

Would you be interested in continuing this conversation with peers in the community?

- **Happy to continue the conversation.** Continue or rekindle partnerships with Chicago Public Schools, job shadowing, career day type-stuff. Could sponsor students to attend Cusp Conference, or offer live-stream to schools throughout the city. Expose more people to our industry.

- Absolutely. **Let's learn from what the big guns are doing: how does Leo Burnett — or any other large agency with an HR team—handle diversification?** Can we have a talk where lots of players with experience tackling different sides of the problem share their experiences and solutions?

- **Yes! How to attract and retain people of color in your design firm.** Would be amazing to bring in national experts to speak about this topic— they don't have to be related to design.

9C

Would you be interested in continuing this conversation with peers in the community?

Don't just talk about inclusion, do something bold and follow through. For example, could the entire board be made up of underrepresented individuals for the next 5 or 10 years?

9D

**The value of diversity needs to be communicated clearly to the design community and everyone needs to be included in the conversation. This is not about designers of color not being able to find work, it is about the relevance and future of the design industry.**

For more information, comments, and questions,
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