



**AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION**
SERVICES, INC.

February 10, 2022

Marie A. Bernard, MD
Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity
Office of the Director
31 Center Drive
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892

(Electronically submitted via COSWDStrategicPlan@nih.gov)

Dear Dr. Bernard:

The American Psychological Association (APA) is pleased to provide comments on the Draft National Institutes of Health (NIH) Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity (COSWD) Strategic Plan for fiscal years (FY) 2022 – 2026.

APA is the leading scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States, comprised of more than 133,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students. Its mission is to promote the advancement, communication, and application of psychological science and knowledge to benefit society and improve lives. In addition, APA works to increase scientific understanding of how psychology pertains to race, ethnicity, and culture and enhance the delivery of culturally and linguistically appropriate psychological services to racial and ethnic minority communities.

As an association with a longstanding history of devoting attention to and advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) related issues, APA strongly believes these factors are critical to advancing biomedical, behavioral, and psychological research supported by the NIH.¹ APA applauds COSWD's comprehensive and thoughtfully drafted strategic plan to allow the nation to benefit from all its talent when it comes to federally supported research. The plan recognizes the value of a diverse workforce, viewpoints, and experience. It also acknowledges that the importance of diversity in all forms is required to advance NIH's mission "*to seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability.*"

Implement Organizational Practices to Center and Prioritize DEIA in the Workforce – APA commends the COSWD's strategic plan for its aim to rely on the evidence to inform its implementation while recognizing the accompanying challenge of identifying and supporting necessary research to fill any knowledge gaps. COSWD's plan recognizes the importance of a leadership structure for DEIA and an organizational infrastructure that supports the work to achieve the plan's goals and objectives. COSWD's focus on the value of diversity, NIH

¹ American Psychological Association Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Framework <https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/framework.pdf>



**AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION**
SERVICES, INC.

settings, and effective programs is commended along with its recognition of the need to reevaluate the priorities in these areas over time.

To further enhance inclusivity, APA encourages COSWD to consider individuals with mental health lived experiences. However, due to discrimination, lack of understanding and accommodation, and the impact on professional opportunities and growth, many professionals will not discuss disability due to serious mental illness that can be detrimental to health and well-being.

Structural and Cultural Change – Similarly, APA appreciates that the plan seeks to shape and influence the NIH workforce culture by bringing uniformity to NIH's research portfolio related to the diversity of its scientific workforce. We agree that the COSWD's strategic plan should center the values, beliefs, and attitudes of those in the scientific workforce whose contributions have been less valued or who have been underrepresented in the past.

APA agrees with the plan's acknowledgment of the need to widely disseminate scientific evidence related to increasing workforce diversity in research institutions supported by NIH. APA also commends the plan's attention to the need for multifaceted approaches to effect change at a meaningful scale and its plan to address a range of talent life cycle stages, including focusing on various career stages. At the same time, APA urges COSWD to personalize outreach to marginalized stakeholder groups to ensure that outreach effectively reaches the associated populations. Unfortunately, history has shown that generic outreach is not always effective, although well-intended.

Research – APA unequivocally agrees increased diversity "broadens the scope of scientific inquiry." We believe that a diverse scientific workforce is an essential foundation for ensuring that investigators with the most creative minds and varied perspectives lead and contribute their expertise to solve complex problems in population health. Furthermore, a substantial body of research has demonstrated that socially diverse groups are more innovative and effective at determining solutions to complex problems.

The association also appreciates COSWD's recognition that many areas will require additional research and evaluation to determine the effectiveness of programs. APA supports the plan's strategies to incorporate newly acquired evidence-based approaches to catalyze cultures of inclusive excellence. The association also concurs with COSWD's approach to champion DEIA throughout the NIH-supported research enterprise to ensure the agency's commitment to DEIA is grounded in effective research. Accordingly, APA applauds COSWD's focus on a range of research examining the effects and value of DEIA. Likewise, APA supports the Office's focus on unintended consequences that can impact the effectiveness of implemented programs.

Work-life balance – APA is specifically encouraged that the plan's third goal is to "act on the evidence," including setting comprehensive targets. Recently, inequities in scholarly productivity have been highlighted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for women, women of color, many of whom are also caregivers. A perennial concern, work-life balance is crucial for addressing equity in science. Increasing the number of women



**AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION**
SERVICES, INC.

engaged in NIH-supported research will require continued and increased efforts to address this disparity in NIH funding.²³⁴⁵⁶

In conclusion, APA applauds COSWD for its thoughtful plan. The association is committed to engaging in a collaborative process with the NIH to advance diversity and science and is ready to assist COSWD in achieving the plan's goals and objectives.

Thank you for the opportunity for APA to provide input on an issue of great importance to the association. Do not hesitate to get in touch with Angela Sharpe (asharpe@apa.org) if APA can partner more closely or assist in any way.

With all best wishes,

Mitch Prinstein, PhD, ABPP
Chief Science Officer

² King, M. M., & Frederickson, M. E. (2021). The Pandemic Penalty: The Gendered Effects of COVID-19 on Scientific Productivity. *Socius*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/237802312111006977>

³ Staniscuaski, F., Kmetzsch, L., Soletti, R. C., Reichert, F., Zandonà, E., Ludwig, Z. M. C., Lima, E. F., Neumann, A., Schwartz, I. V. D., Mello-Carpes, P. B., Tamajusuku, A. S. K., Werneck, F. P., Ricachenevsky, F. K., Infanger, C., Seixas, A., Staats, C. C., & de Oliveira, L. (2021). Gender, Race and Parenthood Impact Academic Productivity During the COVID-19 Pandemic: From Survey to Action [Original Research]. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.663252>

⁴ Cardel, M. I., Dean, N., & Montoya-Williams, D. (2020). Preventing a Secondary Epidemic of Lost Early Career Scientists. Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Women with Children. *Annals of the American Thoracic Society*, 17(11), 1366–1370. <https://doi.org/10.1513/AnnalsATS.202006-589IP>

⁵ Krukowski, R. A., Jagsi, R., & Cardel, M. I. (2021). Academic Productivity Differences by Gender and Child Age in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine Faculty During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Women's Health*, 30(3), 341-347. <https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2020.8710>

⁶ Docka-Filipek, D., & Stone, L. B. (2021). Twice a “housewife”: On academic precarity, “hysterical” women, faculty mental health, and service as gendered care work for the “university family” in pandemic times. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28(6), 2158-2179. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12723>