



Q&A

Checking In With the DEI Council

May 2022

Alyssa Gittleman, a member of the Conning Holdings Limited (Conning) Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Council, recently spoke about diversity initiatives with the co-chairs of the DEI Council, Sandra Yim and Marcus McGregor.

1. **Alyssa: What does DEI mean to you and why were you interested in joining the DEI council?**

Sandra: My passion roots from my personal story which has made me want to help make the world a better place, especially for future generations. The experience I had when growing up has given me the impetus to contribute to promoting diversity, equity and inclusion.

Before I joined the financial industry, I helped local non-profit LGBTQ+ groups with qualitative research to share their stories about “coming out” and to voice the pressures they have faced in a Chinese society about being themselves. These were important topics when I was teaching Gender Studies and Intercultural Communication students in higher education.

I believe there’s a gap we can fill in the financial industry to help people be more aware of their unconscious bias toward underrepresented and marginalized groups, and to eliminate microaggressions so we can build a more diverse and inclusive environment. I really hope my efforts can help move the needle.

Marcus: I am very blessed to have been born and raised in an extremely loving, warm, hardworking, and disciplined West Indian household. Being fair skinned and multiracial living in the U.S., this strong family foundation gave me the necessary tools to navigate instances of racism, microaggressions, and general bias occurring since I was a child from all types of folks. Learning to navigate these headwinds makes ALL concepts around diversity, equity and inclusion very important to me.

I was anxious to volunteer as the next DEI Council Co-Chair given my 18+ years at Conning coupled with my unique and diverse background, which I think give me a great perspective on CHL’s current culture and business growth over the years, and how DEI can positively influence both. Additionally, having been a member of various affinity groups such as fraternal orders, charitable organizations, and mentor and community outreach programs over the course of a number of years, I am hoping to leverage these alliances globally to move CHL’s DEI strategic plan and objectives forward. Lastly and importantly, I firmly believe that a strong sense

Month of Understanding

As part of our pledge to CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion™, we take part in this month-long series of activities created to explore our similarities and differences and have an open dialogue as we strive to play a meaningful role in this important societal issue. The goals of the Month of Understanding are:

- » To explore our individual and collective roles in fostering a culture of inclusion at Conning
- » To continue to make our workplace a trusting place to have complex, and sometimes difficult, conversations about diversity and inclusion
- » To bring our commitment to CEO Action to life while building trust with one another, learning from different perspectives and becoming champions of change at Conning and in society.

of patience and purpose is needed related to moving our firm's DEI initiatives forward just given we are still in the beginning stages, which are also familiar concepts to me given my background.

2. **Alyssa: What would you consider the DEI Council's biggest achievement in 2021?**

Sandra: It's encouraging to see us taking initial steps in various DEI initiatives. But for me, the standout achievement is the launch of mandatory inclusivity training for all staff. Not only does this enhance the DEI proficiency within the firm, it also demonstrates management's commitment to providing the right resources, which is encouraging. In fact, studies by various established institutions show that education and training can make more of an impact on cultural change than simply increasing diversity or numbers of staff from underrepresented groups.

3. **Alyssa: What has been the biggest lesson you have learned since the council was formed?**

Sandra: My biggest lesson so far has been to be humble. Only when this happens can we actively listen to different voices with the required respect. An article in the *Harvard Business Review* called "The Key to Inclusive Leadership" says it all: With quantitative support, the combination of both empathy and humility helps one become more inclusive and will enhance the performance of the teams – which ultimately benefits our clients.

Marcus: I have become more aware of the many voices across our organization and the challenges we face in the area of DEI, which tends to vary across regions. For example, our colleagues in Hong Kong continue to see a conflict with China based on cultural and economic differences and navigating this can be stressful for them. There are also several employees that are being directly impacted by the war in Ukraine, and others that have come to the aid of Ukrainian refugees by bringing them directly into their homes, which to me is the epitome of the compassion and mindset needed to further our DEI efforts globally.

"This year, I hope that our firm's DEI initiative will continue to bring more awareness around the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion."

- Marcus McGregor

4. **Alyssa: What roadblocks did you encounter in promoting DEI within the firm?**

Sandra: It would be tough to promote DEI if people believe they already know enough about the topic. We also have to be cognizant that everyone may be at a different starting point on this DEI journey, so we should stay open-minded to trying different routes to achieve progress. It is also important to be aware that with DEI, one size certainly doesn't fit all. This is especially true for a global firm like ours, with people of many different backgrounds and value systems working together.

5. **Alyssa: Have your views of DEI changed since the start of this initiative?**

Marcus: Yes. After listening to council members both past and present, I have come to realize that issues around DEI (e.g. microaggressions, bias, etc.) have taken an emotional toll on them in the workplace, and in some cases over the course of many years. It is also well known that stressful work conditions impact performance, so it is in the best interest of our firm to implement its DEI strategic plan with complete involvement across all business units. I have come to feel that as an organization we are obligated, through our DEI initiatives, to create a more inclusive work environment for all employees because studies have shown that a more inclusive workplace tends to have a positive impact on customer service and investment performance over time.

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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Conning

Conning is dedicated to creating a workplace where diverse voices are valued. We believe our diverse perspectives and experiences enable us to best serve our clients. We strive to fulfill our mission by creating a work environment that allows all employees to attain their full potential personally and professionally.

Click [here](#) to learn more about Conning's ongoing DEI efforts or visit www.conning.com/about-us/dei.

Interviewer:



Alyssa Gittleman is a Director at Conning where she leads marketing and new business development in Conning's insurance industry research and consulting business. In her earlier roles at Conning, Alyssa covered several P&C sector lines of business and was responsible for providing strategic analysis and producing reports related to the property/casualty insurance industry. Prior to joining in 2016, Ms. Gittleman was an account manager with Horizon Marketing Group. She earned a BA in liberal studies with concentrations in marketing and psychology and a minor in communications from Western New England University and an MBA with concentrations in finance and marketing from the University of Connecticut.

Panel:



Marcus McGregor is a Director at Conning and Head of the Commodities Research team in the Investment Research and Trading Group. He is also a member of the team managing the firm's dividend equity strategy and has prior experience as an equity market strategist with a focus on the energy and commodities sectors. Prior to joining Conning in 2003, he held analyst roles with Banknorth Connecticut, BankBoston and also with the Bank of New York Oil & Gas division. Mr. McGregor earned a degree in sociology from Boston College, a certificate of transitional economies from Helsinki University of Technology, and an MBA from Northeastern University.



Sandra Yim is Head of Marketing and Communications for Conning Asia Pacific, responsible for devising, managing and executing the company's marketing, branding and communications strategy in the region. Previously she was with Allianz Global Investors/RCM in Asia Pacific on both institutional and retail marketing. Sandra holds dual master's degrees in cultural studies and international and public affairs from the University of Birmingham, UK and Hong Kong University, respectively.

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