



## BACKGROUND

### Ethnic and Racial Representation

- Diversity in people leads to diversity in thought, which leads to greater innovation
- The lack of ethnic and racial diversity in aquarium and zoo science leadership and management positions, conference attendance, and conference speakers is obvious and limiting industry potential
- This lack of representation can negatively influence a minority's sense of isolation, not only at their home facility, but across their field as a whole
- Demographic data in aquarium and zoo science fields is needed to understand current trends, future directions, and if or when progress is made
- Analogous data from fisheries fields show that there are 31% ethnic and racial minorities at the PhD level, however, only 8% are granted full professorship (Arismendi & Penaluna (2016) Examining diversity inequities in fisheries science: a call to action. BioScience (66):7)



Figure 1. MIAZS Member Tyler Jung working with a seal

### Barriers Contributing to Lack of Diversity

#### Financial barriers:

- 4-year degrees are often desired for aquarium or zoo science jobs
- Husbandry positions often require additional unpaid internships or volunteer work for resumes to move past the first round of reviews
- Minimal pay compared to cost-of-living expenses, compounded by increasing debt for recent college graduates
- Entry-level professionals are less likely to be funded for professional development or conference attendance
- Self-funding conference attendance is cost-prohibitive
- Barring active efforts to retain BIPOC professionals yields few opportunities for advancement leading to attrition and scant representation

#### Social barriers:

- Succeeding in aquarium and zoo science fields is greatly influenced by *who* you know versus *what* you know
- Wariness about relocating to communities or work environments where minorities feel unsafe or even threatened in order to gain experience or career advancement is real
- Lack of minority representation at conferences highlights the lack of diversity in science fields as a whole and can leave minority attendees feeling even more professionally isolated
- Creating and maintaining welcoming and supportive work, living, and learning environments in our communities – where inequities, microaggressions, and ignorance toward the challenges of BIPOC are not tolerated – is critical to retaining existing and future BIPOC professionals



Figure 2 (left). MIAZS Member Claudia Tibbs working at a waste management facility

## WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

1. **Initiate your own learning** about what allyship is and how to be an ally
2. **Strive to be an ally** at every opportunity
3. **Work to ensure a minority-friendly work culture** at your facility
4. **Engage in discussions** on minority-friendly work culture, identifying and countering/eliminating inequities, in particular unpaid pathways to career entry
5. **Elevate the visibility of BIPOC professionals** in your social media networks and beyond to normalize BIPOC working and excelling in these fields and to inspire the next generation
6. **Hiring Managers: Evaluate your own practices** in how job postings are crafted, where they're disseminated, and what criteria you are using to eliminate or advance applicants to the interview process.
7. **Advocate for appropriate compensation of BIPOC** for their expertise, insights, and extra work in correcting exclusionary institutional systems
8. **Connect all aspiring professionals with resources** and community through minority-focused organizations
9. **Get involved** in minority-focused organizations to aid their coordinated efforts



Figure 3. The first MIAZS Networking Event including professionals and aspiring professionals in aquatic and terrestrial husbandry and science education.

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- AnimalProfessional.com and TheAquariumVet.com for making their digital library, educational and conference materials accessible to MIAZS Members
- Minorities in Shark Sciences (MISS) for blazing this trail of action and being awesome, inspirational women



Figure 4 (right). MIAZS Member Amanda (Hodo) Felix hookah diving as part of her job as an aquarist

## METHODS

### Departmental Level:

- Examine job postings for limiting factors not necessarily aimed at finding the best candidates
- Ensure an inclusive culture to help retain existing and future minority staff
- Increase the visibility of BIPOC professionals in media, conferences, and professional development/leadership opportunities to increase diverse perspectives and inspire the next generation

### Organizational Level:

- Examine the demographics of staff by department and level in the organization
  - If any group skews toward all or no minorities, ask what business practices might be influencing that trend
- If unpaid work is a potential pathway to entering in-house careers, consider ways to make those learning opportunities more equitable to those with less financial means:
  - Prioritize funds to create scholarships
  - Transition to part-time/seasonal paid positions
  - Offer housing and relocation assistance
- Ensure that staff in positions of management or mentorship of any aspiring professionals are equipped with the knowledge of how to be an ally
- Increase visibility of BIPOC professionals in media (Fig. 1-5), conferences, and leadership opportunities to normalize BIPOC working at all levels of these careers and inspire the next generation

### Industry Level:

- Identify career pathways that yield top notch candidates and discuss ways those pathways could be more equitable
- Encourage professional organizations and conferences to examine their member and/or attendee demographics to understand their influence, role, and progress in professional/leadership development, networking opportunities, and the normalization of BIPOC working and excelling in aquarium and zoo science careers
  - Partner with minority-focused groups (e.g. MIAZS) to provide Conference Mentors who are designated to ensure that BIPOC attendees are invited to and welcome at social gatherings during and outside the conference agenda



Figure 5. MIAZS Member Jordan Veasley working with a clouded leopard

## CONCLUSIONS

- Greater diversity of aquarium and zoo science professionals will advance these fields by diversifying perspectives, solutions, and innovations
- Intentional actions are required to significantly shift career demographics
- Actions are needed at all levels
- Focus goals:
  1. Making career entry more equitable by countering or eliminating financial barriers through paid positions, scholarships, etc.
  2. Retaining existing BIPOC professionals by building a supportive culture and by making professional development, networking, and conference opportunities more accessible

## CONTACT US