

Diversity Distinction in PR Awards 2011

This year marks the debut of the Diversity Distinction in PR Awards, supported by the Council of PR Firms in association with *PRWeek*. These awards aim to address the problem of attaining a more ethnically diverse workforce at all levels.

In conceiving of such a program, we hoped to raise the issue's visibility; to strengthen diversity inclusion practices across PR; and that this year's honorees would set an example for those running PR agencies.

Submissions were accepted from mid-August until mid-October from US-based PR firms of all sizes. Winners in three categories – **Best PR Firm Diversity Initiative**, **Best PR Firm Community Initiative**, and **Diversity Champion** – were selected by an experienced judging panel that included Richard Jones, SVP and CCO, The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America; corporate comms consultant Jaya Bohlmann; David Albritton, VP and CCO, ITT Exelis; Carol Evans, president of Working Mother Media and CEO of Diversity Best Practices; Lagrant Communications CEO and Lagrant Foundation chairman Kim Hunter; Katie McBride, executive director of GM Community Connections; and Shannelle Armstrong, PR director at Sears Holdings.

The judging panel included (clockwise from top left): Richard Jones; Jaya Bohlmann; David Albritton; Carol Evans; Kim Hunter; Katie McBride; and (not pictured) Shannelle Armstrong



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Commended: Porter Novelli and Mitchell Communications Group also garnered praise. One judge lauded Porter's "innovative array of programs," driven by its National Diversity Council formed in 2009. Mitchell's effort to increase its pool of diverse job applicants by partnering with top universities to offer mini-internships "creates great learning opportunities for students and delivers bottom-line results," said a judge.

APCO Worldwide won the **Best PR Firm Diversity Initiative** by impressing the judges with a holistic, multifaceted dedication to instilling a culture of diversity and acceptance throughout the global firm. This category recognizes an agency's commitment to a diverse and equitable workplace, developed through training and advancement opportunities.

The firm initiated a diversity and inclusion program two years ago. It believed it could be "the best place for diverse talent to work in the communications industry," which would also provide it a competitive advantage.

APCO sought to create a program that would resonate with the whole firm, not just diverse employees. It instituted many initiatives to create companywide buy-in, including a lunch-and-learn series on the power of diversity and inclusion; mandated training for new staff and senior managers; and small touches such as an explanatory email of the history of a holiday anytime an APCO office closed in observance. One judge praised its "innovative" approach, which led to a "cultural shift" toward diversity and inclusion.

The firm also established external partners in its diversity and inclusion program, including CEO Margery Kraus' alma mater American University in Washington, DC, where APCO has its headquarters; 826, a nonprofit dedicated to improving urban youth's reading and writing skills; and the National Press Club's Beat the Deadline 5K: A Race for Diversity in Journalism.

APCO says the program has led to a "greater appreciation about cultural differences" at the firm, as well as an increase in overall diversity, including a 19% boost in the number of minorities in client-facing roles. Among those hired between March 2010 and March 2011, 21.5% were minorities. Additionally, 51 employees are participating in its mentoring programs this year.

"Leadership clearly gets it," said another judge.

Porter Novelli's collaboration with TORCH, a communications and arts career exposure program for underserved New York City public high school students, earned a near perfect score. The **Best PR Firm Community Initiative** award recognizes an agency project to promote careers in PR, encourage diversity, fight discrimination, or work toward the empowerment of a local community.

Together Our Resources Can Help (TORCH) has existed for nearly 10 years without any PR curriculum, though it has numerous relationships in the ad industry. Porter partnered with the nonprofit to develop its first PR program beginning last year. It also aided fundraising efforts through logistical, PR, and sponsorship support, employed TORCH students as interns, and established other mentoring relationships between the agency's staff and the high school students. It aimed to expose these kids to the industry as "an exciting and viable career option."

"The initiative was groundbreaking," said one judge. "The holistic approach, combining training, internships, and PR support with strong participation from the Porter Novelli team is a winning formula."

In addition to educating 40-plus students about the industry through the eight-week PR101 course, Porter has already hired a full-time staffer from the TORCH program. It also raised more than \$100,000 in donations for TORCH. "Clearly one of the best 'feeder' programs I have ever seen in the industry," noted one judge.

The partnership with TORCH reflects Porter's dedication to the development of a diverse industry.

The **Diversity Champion** award honors an exceptional PR pro who is a role model and champion of diversity through action. **Kim Hunter** personifies this description exceptionally, the judges agreed.

Hunter founded Lagrant Communications in 1990. It has become a multimillion-dollar integrated firm specializing in Hispanic- and African-American consumer markets. Later, he founded The Lagrant Foundation to provide scholarships, internships, and other career development programs to minority students. It has awarded about \$1 million in scholarships to 150-plus ethnic minority students and facilitated more than 200 internships, firmly establishing its authority on the issue. More recently, Hunter founded KLH & Associates, an executive search firm focused on senior-level ethnic minorities in the PR field.

"Kim continues to expand his role as a pioneer," said a judge. Moreover, he is known for sharing his infectious, unrelenting passion for establishing a more diverse workforce at all levels across the marketing industry. That passion was on exhibit in the overwhelming number of nominations for Hunter that flowed in from agency CEOs to staff to students. [Ed. note: Hunter left the room to recuse himself from judging this category.]

"Kim is not only passionate about diversity," added another judge. "He has worked tirelessly to advance recognition of diversity and inclusion within the PR field."

Hunter frequently writes on the topic of diversity for industry trade titles. He also taught a course on diversity and media for three years at California State University, Northridge at the School of Journalism. His lead-by-example style impressed judges and colleagues alike.

"He is investing in our future as an industry," wrote one nominator. "Unequivocally, Kim has been totally devoted to the issue of diversity," surmised a judge.

Commended: Judges also praised GolinHarris and Edelman for community initiative efforts. Golin worked to promote the Live Out Loud Homecoming Project, which encourages positive role models for LGBT youth. Its effort demonstrated "clearly identified measurable objectives and tangible results," said one judge. Edelman's partnership with the Junior Achievement of New York also drew admiration for achieving measurable results and its commitment to the program. One judge highlighted Edelman's "multi-season, multi-year approach, and range of opportunities for staffing."

APCO Worldwide Best PR Firm Diversity Initiative



APCO's program has led to a 19% rise in the number of minorities in client-facing roles, while 21.5% of its hires from March 2010 to March 2011 were minorities

Porter Novelli Best PR Firm Community Initiative



Porter Novelli's partnership with TORCH has not only educated 40-plus students about the industry through its PR101 course, but also created an opportunity for future growth

Kim Hunter Diversity Champion



From the firm he founded 21 years ago to his foundation, which provides scholarships and mentoring, Hunter continues to be a pioneer on bringing diversity to the PR industry

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