

Black History Month Feature

Amplifying Black Leaders in Finance

STRUCTURED
FINANCE
ASSOCIATION



ASHLEA BONDS

Marketing

Andrew Davidson & Co., Inc.

Ashlea Bonds has been spearheading Andrew Davidson & Co., Inc.'s event marketing efforts since 2011 and has recently contributed to establishing AD&Co's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. She also serves on Structured Finance Association's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Steering Committee. Ashlea's responsibilities include producing client-facing events from start to finish and seeking, strategizing, and executing exposure opportunities. She began her career at AD&Co in 2010 with the Administrative group, supporting clients and employees. Ashlea's professional career ranges from producing high-end live events to production work in advertising, television, and film with such firms as MTV Networks and Miramax.

Ashlea graduated from the University of New Haven with a BS in Communication and received All-American Honorable Mention recognition for her collegiate women's volleyball career.

Ashlea is a mother and trained fitness professional. She is dedicated to guiding individuals to achieve their fitness aspirations.

Can you tell us a bit about your firm's DEI initiatives?

In late 2019, a group of Andrew Davison & Co., Inc. employees saw an opportunity to make substantial strides in diversity, equity, and inclusion not only within our own organization, but also within the structured finance industry as a whole. At our annual company meeting in January 2020, we created four pillars on DEI at AD&Co, and utilized these as the foundation to expand our efforts further:

- Andrew Davidson & Co., Inc. is dedicated to fostering and celebrating diversity and inclusion, with the goal of equity for every individual.
- We recognize and incorporate voices from a broad range of demographics, experiences, and perspectives into our everyday business and community involvement.
- We strive for inclusion by listening and learning from each other and considering diverse viewpoints when making decisions.
- We aim to play a proactive role in advocating for diversity and inclusion, and to expand opportunities in our industry.

In the following months, more than 30 employees volunteered to join AD&Co's efforts to foster a more DEI centric industry work place. AD&Co's DEI effort is split into 4 main functions: Policies, Hiring & Equity, Internal Outreach, and External Outreach. Each group created a charter with their DEI goals for 2020 and beyond.

Although the global pandemic may have minimized some opportunities in 2020, our successful launch of the DEI Program at AD&Co cannot be overlooked. We were able to make massive strides in the right direction, with even more ambitious ideas for 2021. Some of our 2020 accomplishments include:

- Quarterly DEI Educational Series (Black History Month, Women's Suffrage Movement, LGBTQ+ History, Subtleness in the Workplace, etc.)
- One-on-one lunches: an opportunity for employees to learn about each other's experiences with social and racial inequalities
- Virtual tutoring program serving underrepresented students
- Weekly employee engagement sessions (Virtual Happy Hours, Game Nights, Social Justice Discussions, etc.)
- DEI Book Club (primarily books focusing on social and economic injustice)

FUN FACT: I learned about Andrew Davidson & Co., Inc. through ballroom dancing.

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Can you tell us a bit about your firm's DEI initiatives? (continued)

- Partnered with securitization industry leader SFA with an AD&Co employee (Ashlea Bonds) serving on their DEI Steering Committee
- Partnered with trade association National Association of Minority Mortgage Bankers of America (NAMMBA) to promote DEI best practices
- Developed a formal DEI recruiting process
- Published DEI initiative on the homepage of our Website
- Affordable housing advocacy
- Raised \$18,000 for local food banks

In addition to the activities listed above, AD&Co expanded our initiative in 2021 with the following activities:

- Formalized an internship program with Fannie Mae Future Housing Leaders
- Developed DEI career development tools
- Established DEI recruiting opportunities
- Community service

Our CEO Andy Davidson has said, *"Treating every employee, client, partner and supplier with respect, regardless of title or role, is the core of our corporate principles. Still we strive to make diversity, equity, and inclusion a part of every action, recognizing that the job is never done."* We recognize that the job is never done, but we at AD&Co will continue to strive to make our firm, as well as our industry, a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive place.

How do you help support DEI initiatives at your organization?

As one of the founders of my firm's DEI committee, I initiate our DEI internal and external programming by fostering the goal of weaving DEI throughout the firm. I work closely with teams and individuals to help guide our DEI journey.

What does Black History Month mean to you?

Black History Month is a time for everyone to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions the Black community has made to society as a whole and offer opportunities to help with the continued inequities faced by the Black community.

What can industry leaders do to increase diversity in finance?

Stand up against racism and inequities within the industry. Initiate programs to foster diverse perspectives amongst your organization and the industry. Advocate for affordable housing and fair lending initiatives. Continue to provide awareness and support to foster DEI efforts.

This year's theme for Black History Month is Black Health and Wellness. How can we better prioritize Black Health and Wellness in the finance industry?

Create spaces for Black industry professionals to share their insights on health and wellness. In my opinion, the finance industry doesn't prioritize health and wellness, but some employers are changing their policies due to the pandemic. Maybe more industry employers should influence others to provide better work/life balance initiatives and those initiatives can offer focused efforts geared towards Black professionals.