

The Digital Divide has Minorities searching for App of Inclusion in Jobs and Contracting

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At a recent Congressional hearing, Congressman G.K. Butterfield (NC-01) brought to light a very serious issue that the National Association of Minority Contractors has been echoing for some time now. There is a digital divide between minorities as tech consumers versus minorities as entrepreneurs or employees. These differences cannot be ignored. On one hand, the industry has done a very good job of implementing mobile applications for the minority consumer. Companies such as Intel, Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat have become an everyday part of our tech life experience. On the other hand, only one out of every 28 minority applicants receive a job in this field. Minorities also find it very difficult to find early-stage funding for startup companies at a rate of nearly one out of 1,000 minority entrepreneurs being able to obtain funding for a tech startup.

According to the Associated Press, black employees are underrepresented in high paying professional jobs when compared to their white counterparts. Whether in business, technology, science, or architecture, more than any other group, black workers are

disproportionately excluded. For this reason, many minorities are left with no choice but to seek lower-wage jobs in less prominent fields. Even though there has been a rise in the population of black students graduating from college, this does not mean that they are automatically granted



NAMC President

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When the water system at a tech center is cleaner than the drinking water in urban Flint MI. Access to tech level the playing field of diversity, jobs, contracts opportunity and quality of life.”

*Wendell Stemley, President
NAMC*

higher paying jobs or professional employment. In fact, experts believe that professional employment for many minority students still remains out of reach in the U.S. where opportunities are hampered because of the plaguing issue of exclusion based on race. The Associated Press report also shared that the ratio of white to black employees in management remains 10 to 1. Meanwhile, in the area of math and computers, the ratio is 8 to 1; in education, 7 to 1; and 12 to 1 in law.

In Silicon Valley, tech companies and startups are struggling to achieve inclusion and diversity in the technology field. Meanwhile, in Seattle, white employees

outnumber black workers at a ratio of 28 to 1 in both math and computer-related fields.

Another issue is the lack of access to supercomputers or data centers. At a cost of \$200 million

per center, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) do not receive the same level of support from federal or corporate funding sources to support investments in the computer systems for their technology programs. In contrast, is the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois, home to a petascale supercomputer called "Blue Waters;" and its \$208 million price tag was authorized by the National Science Foundation, a U.S. government agency. Large scale server farms like this one at the University of Illinois are powering your Gmail experience or streaming your Netflix programming.



A big problem for small business consultants trying to break into the technology arena is many of the jobs to in the industry are virtual and offer little or no job security. They are part-time, short-term contract jobs, with variable hours and no benefits.

Having access to opportunities in the tech industry is greatly needed in minority communities. By being part of the building process of some of these data facilities, [NAMC](#) has witnessed the impact of these \$200 million dollar fulfillment & data centers across the country on local communities through utilizing skilled workers, installing data lines, chiller systems, water infrastructure, and megawatt power distribution centers. We are missing the opportunity for technology transfer when the water system at the data center is cleaner than the drinking water in a minority community of Flint MI. We know that inclusion is the way to level the playing field of diversity, opportunity and quality of life.

As difficult as it is for Americans trying to break into the technology field, it is more challenging for minorities. Black unemployment rates remain nearly twice as high as white unemployment rates. Black households earn less income and have dramatically less wealth than white households. This is true at all levels of education and in every region. According to a report from the Asset Funders Network, the median wealth of single African-Americans is stunning at less than \$800, while \$1000 for Latinos, and \$30,000 for single white men.

It is true that there is less poverty now than there was 50 years ago. Minorities have started to close the education gap — in graduating from high school, attaining a college or advanced degree, but still need technical resources and federal partnerships to increase the opportunity for inclusion.

Companies that dominate the tech industry sectors appear to be more comfortable with what is familiar, rather than diversity; and some still maintain hiring practices that are passively discriminatory against the unfamiliarity of a black and brown graduates, consultants, and contractors. NAMC is committed to continuing to advocate for diversity and inclusion across the technology industry, not only relating to opportunities to design and build data centers and other technology infrastructure; but also in employment and other entrepreneurial opportunities.

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