

Building more inclusive organizations

An interview with **Raquel Saraswati**, AFSC's senior director of diversity, equity, and inclusion

Q: Why is AFSC working to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)?

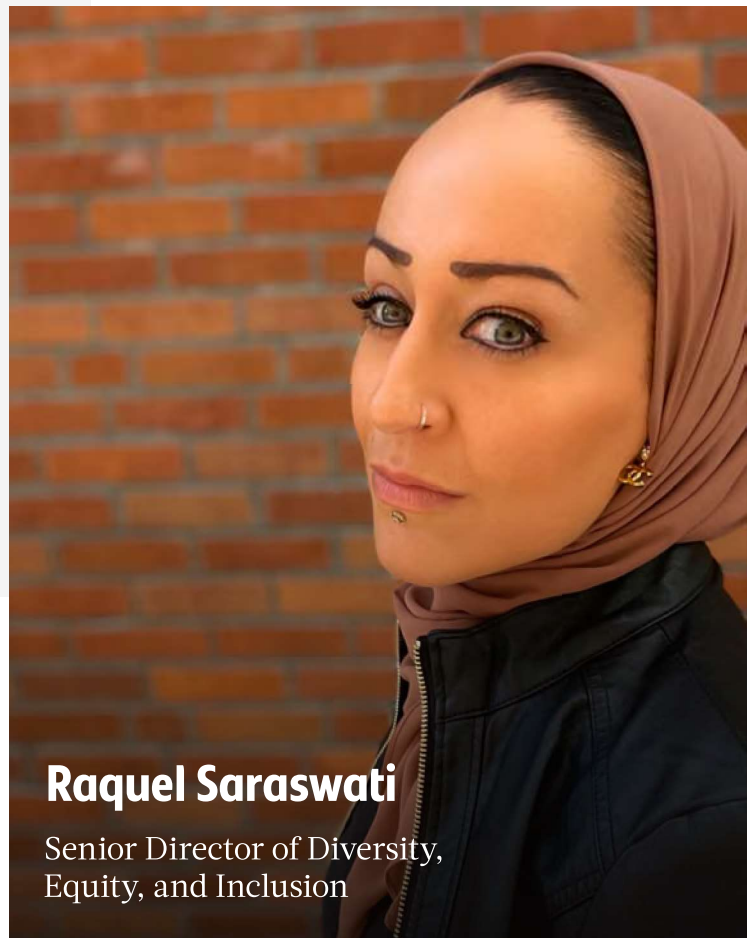
A: At AFSC, this work is an essential part of carrying out our mission with integrity and in keeping with our values. Racism, white supremacy, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, anti-Muslim hate, antisemitism, and other forms of hatred and oppression are violent and lead to violence. We cannot really meet the needs of our communities without fostering meaningful inclusivity and challenging the root causes of oppression that lead to suffering.

Q: What does it take to create more inclusive, accountable, and just policies and practices?

A: Transformative DEI work is about relationships. It's about the real, difficult, and sometimes emotional work of not just seeing the divine complexity in others, but also seeing it in ourselves. Before diversity trainings and guides, it's important to explore the intersectional attributes, beliefs, and behaviors we bring to the workplace and our communities. That helps establish deeper bonds, ease conflicts where they exist, and create deeper opportunities for engagement.

Q: What are the challenges you face in your role?

A: The challenges we face in this work also happen to be our greatest strengths. AFSC operates in over a dozen countries and across the United States. We are also an "organization of organizers," with the most brilliant, dedicated, and deeply thoughtful staff, volunteers, and partners. Balancing many priorities and needs across so many contexts is a challenge I could not be more blessed to assume. I am proud and excited to say that my office is doing this work from a truly global perspective, and does not hesitate to stand, always, with the most marginalized among us.



Raquel Saraswati

Senior Director of Diversity,
Equity, and Inclusion

“Transformative DEI work is about relationships. It’s about the real, difficult, and sometimes emotional work of not just seeing the divine complexity in others, but also seeing it in ourselves.”

Q: What guidance would you offer groups working on DEI?

A: As Dr. Muna Abdi says, “it’s not inclusion if you invite people into a space you are unwilling to change.” Be honest and transparent about your commitment to DEI, and about where you are in your process. If you are sincere about creating a healthier workplace and an organization that engages its communities with true consideration and care, you must resource the work. You must also be committed to listening to the expert you’ve hired to lead you in this work—especially when it is challenging or uncomfortable to do so. •