

WORKPLACES AND  
MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

INTERSECTIONALITY:  
WHY IT MATTERS

CORPORATIONS ARE TAKING  
A STAND ON THE ISSUES

# INCLUSION

*Creating Globally  
Inclusive & Culturally  
Competent  
Workplaces*

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+ ISSUE 4

**AARP'S**

Leading the  
Charge for  
Inclusive  
Outreach

**EDNA  
KANE  
WILLIAMS**



# Edna Kane Williams

## Senior Vice President, Multicultural Markets and Engagement, AARP

**“People 50 and over today face distinct challenges and have different goals than people in their 30s and 40s.”**

**E**dna Kane Williams has more than 20 years’ experience in senior management positions within both nonprofit and for-profit organizations, with an emphasis on strategic planning, targeted marketing, community outreach, media campaigns, partnership development, and program development.

In her current position as senior vice president of multicultural markets and engagement at AARP, Kane Williams is responsible for the development and execution of strategy related to growing the association’s multicultural audiences: Hispanic/Latino, African American/black, Asian American/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and LGBT. She previously served as vice president of strategy and communications for the AARP Foundation.

Prior to joining AARP, Kane Williams was senior vice president of communications and social marketing at IQ Solutions Inc. and senior vice president at Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide.

Kane Williams graduated from Yale University with a BA and received an MA from George Washington University. She is a recipient of a Coro Foundation Fellowship and was a fellow in the Diversity Executive Leadership Program of the American Society of Association Executives.

She currently serves on the board of directors of AARP’s Legal Counsel for the Elderly and the Center for Responsible Lending.

**INCLUSION:** You lead a department called “Multicultural Leadership” at AARP. What is your department responsible for?

**Edna Kane Williams:** Multicultural Leadership really has an important dual role within the Association—as external partners to multicultural communities and as internal advocates for strategies that allow AARP to continue growing our capacity to meet the needs of these audiences—both members and non-members.

Our work focuses on Black, Hispanic, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Native American and LGBT communities. We are building capacity to ensure that AARP can provide advocacy, information and education that supports these audiences—both members and nonmembers. Our work really lends itself to how AARP is organized—working both nationally but also nationwide—meaning at the local level through our state offices and community partners. Multicultural work at its core is local, touching the individual to meet the needs and wants of these oftentimes overlooked constituents.

**INC:** What type of progress have you seen? Have you enjoyed true success?

**EKW:** The department has undergone a natural transformation over the last 8 years when it was first created. We exist to bring additional capacity to AARP in an area of need and growth. We all know and recognize the evolving demographics of our country—multicultural communities are growing at significant rates. The Association understands the importance



of these shifts and wants to ensure that internal staff across the country are prepared to support the health and financial wellbeing of these growing multicultural communities.

Certainly, our department has evolved over the years. We provide capacity and support for staff in the national office. We create, test, and pilot innovative opportunities. We try to always be on the cutting edge in our approach and understand the changing needs of our constituents. Importantly, we've seen improvements in our membership data—particularly in terms of acquisition numbers, and greater awareness and engagement. We've been successful because we aren't afraid to alter our approach as needed. Of course, there is always more work to be done. This work for us is a marathon, not a sprint.

**INC: Why is this role important?**

Having multicultural expertise interspersed throughout an organization is certainly necessary and needed. Beyond the day to day practicalities of our work, having a dedicated department shows AARP's commitment to diversity and inclusion. The fact that there is a Senior Vice President specifically for creating multicultural strategies and engaging communities of color is a great example of AARP's priorities and values. Not only do families across the country see our commitment to multicultural outreach, but other companies and organizations recognize that one of the largest non-profits in the country believes this is the best way to do work and to support our communities.

**INC: Tell us about "Disrupt Aging".**

**EKW:** Disrupt Aging really began because our CEO, JoAnn Jenkins, wanted to change the conversation about what it means to get older. People 50+ today face distinct challenges and have different goals than people in their 30s

**"I am so hopeful about our younger generations. They are alert, active, socially conscious, and focused."**

and 40s. They're at a different place in their lives and are motivated by different things. They see the world through a lens that is shaped by the ups and downs of life, experiences that have created a better understanding of who they are as individuals and what they want from life.

As we change the conversation on aging, we need to discuss how aging affects all of us so that diverse voices are included. Disrupt Aging is that place that we created to have that conversation—often funny, sometimes raw, always honest—about how we want to live and age. We want to be explicit about how we change the conversation to ensure that all voices are heard.

**INC: Is this where you thought you'd be when you imagined the lifespan of your career?**

**EKW:** I enjoy this job immensely, and feel that I'm making a real impact on how AARP shows up in communities nationwide. That's very gratifying—and exactly what I hope I'd be doing at this point in my career. Making a tangible difference in everyday lives—priceless.

**INC: What challenges do you see down the pike? How can innovation be used to address these challenges?**

**EKW:** The obvious challenge is presented by our current state—we see today is how divided our country is—whether that's politics, race, ethnicity, or gender. As leaders in our companies and organizations, we need to understand that and position ourselves to help bridge the divide. I don't see it getting better immediately—after all, change takes time. But I am hopeful that leaders in this country have been stepping up to address these challenges.

And we absolutely need to continue to be innovative in our approach. We need to know how people age, how people grow, how people live to better find solutions. It ranges from creating age friendly communities to opportunities for lifelong learning.

**INC: What's your advice for young people—and young women in particular?**

**EKW:** I am so hopeful about our younger generations. They are alert, active, socially conscience and focused. I would encourage them to continue speaking their minds and their truth. They are helping this world change and become a better place. I believe in strongly supporting them through mentorship. I would encourage young people to find a mentor. Find a sponsor. Particularly young women of color. It's incumbent on my generation to open doors, and I hope I've been doing just that. **IN**