

## Working for you: Belonging, Opportunity and Access Committee

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After three years of serving the membership, starting in 2026, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee has been renamed the Belonging, Opportunity and Access (BOA) Committee. The name change was originally proposed in order to better encompass the goals and future direction of the committee.

Diversity within the group of 15 committee members comes from our backgrounds, practice types, experiences and insights. These characteristics help the BOA Committee provide engaging and diverse speakers, ensure a safe and inclusive organization, and help community members engage with the field of equine practice.

One of the committee's goals is to provide educational opportunities to the AAEP membership. In conjunction with the 2025 Convention keynote speaker, Dr. Temple Grandin, the BOA Committee presented a provoking and engaging session on neurodivergence in practice.

Dr. Naomi Nishi, associate dean for culture, community and accessible care at Colorado State University, led a welcoming discussion about the challenges and opportunities facing those in equine practice with neurodivergent diagnoses such as ADHD, dyslexia and autism. Afterward, Dr. Nishi and others continued the discussion during a lively happy hour. More than 30 people attended both the session and happy hour, making for thoughtful conversation and providing an opportunity for members to connect.

In 2024, the BOA Committee started a new initiative called "Horse Vet for a Day." The inaugural program occurred at a local therapeutic riding center during the AAEP Convention in Orlando. Led by Dr. Rachel Cezar-Martinez, the committee provided 30 local middle and high school students with the opportunity to explore a day in the life of an equine practitioner. The students learned about the safe handling of horses, physical examination, bandaging techniques, dentistry and radiology in a hands-on, engaging manner. Approximately 12 AAEP-member volunteers and staff worked the event, with many others helping behind the scenes.

Piggybacking off the success of the first event, Dr. Sara Verghis led the committee to repeat the event during the 2025 Convention utilizing the CSU Spur Center to provide a similar experience to 40 middle and high school-aged students from the Denver area. In addition to the previous stations, the Spur Center offered a virtual reality anatomy room where the students visualized equine anatomy in 3D. Once again, an incredible group of volunteers from the AAEP membership allowed the program to be a huge success.



*Forty Denver-area students got a taste of equine practice at Horse Vet for a Day during the 2025 AAEP Convention.*

The goal of the Horse Vet for a Day program is to introduce the amazing world of equine practice to young students who may have never had the opportunity to be around horses. We hope to create a pipeline of students from all backgrounds to equine practice.

Our goal is to continue the Horse Vet for a Day event at every convention but also create a tool kit for any practitioner who wants to recreate a similar event in their local geographic region. This program and the subsequent spin-offs will, hopefully, help create a diverse and organic pipeline of future equine practitioners.

In 2026, the BOA Committee obtained funding to create a leadership and belonging scholarship aimed at an equine-focused veterinary student. The scholarship will pay for the student to attend the Veterinary Leadership Experience, which is an immersive, multi-day conference geared toward veterinary students from every institution.

The BOA Committee looks forward to continuing to bring a diverse and inclusive perspective to the AAEP.

*Dr. Browne is chair of the AAEP's Belonging, Opportunity and Access Committee.*