



# VIANCCA WILLIAMS

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Beta Theta Pi

*Candidate, AFA Board of Directors*

**The fraternity and sorority profession (and higher education in general) is a complex, interdisciplinary space with many key stakeholders. What do you see as the greatest opportunities to build stakeholder alignment and consensus over the next five years? How would you effectively lead the association through this exercise in alignment?**

Stakeholder alignment focuses on creating consensus among different stakeholders to set a clear direction for the organization. Stakeholders' interests, goals, and expectations need to be aligned with the strategic direction of the organization. To build this alignment, diverse perspectives among the membership must be heard and that feedback should be aligned with the organization's goals. I believe I could effectively lead AFA through this as someone who can relate to members across the organization, identify effective areas of agreement, and create a plan for effective alignment with the strategic plan. I would report on key indicators and develop processes to demonstrate continuous improvement. In reviewing AFA's strategic plan, we have an opportunity over the next five years to strengthen the use of technology to make professional development more accessible and affordable. I also believe we need to use technology to connect people and create community based on functions, regions, institution type, membership size, and salient identities. With a growing number of individuals getting doctoral degrees, we need to capitalize on the research being done to advance the profession. Last, we need to continue to build data infrastructures (and use research) to advocate for fraternity/sorority advisors and increase retention in the profession.

**Describe your understanding of the role of the board of directors (BOD). What strengths or characteristics do you possess that would make you an effective BOD member? How, specifically, have you demonstrated this?**

A board of directors must clearly delineate, articulate, and guide the association's mission and vision; they should understand how to create and carry out a strategic plan and hold staff accountable for aligning the organization's operations to that plan. The board should understand how to properly oversee the organization's finances, allocate funds, and oversee investments. The Board should also understand how to select and supervise the Executive Director, the climate of higher education and the fraternity/sorority industry, and should have a vested interest in the fraternity/sorority profession. I am a strategic thinker who understands alignment between an organization and its strategic priorities; I know how strategic plans work and feel comfortable in spaces that allow me to collaborate with others to set this direction. I have a rich history working with boards and non-profit organizations professionally and as a volunteer. Professionally, I have worked with limited resources and budgets and know how to work with and supervise staff in a board governance model. Work in a corporate setting and higher education has allowed me to understand how businesses run, the importance of timeliness in innovation, and how to forecast to stay relevant. I understand how to use data, theory, and my network to inform and create purposeful direction. I have intimate knowledge of the association's operations and the dynamics it faces which help in guidance and decision making.

**Describe any salient identities you hold, both professionally and personally, and how they may frame your perspective as a member of the board of directors.**

Personally, my salient identities include being a Latina of Puerto Rican descent (born and partly raised in the island), a woman, a first-generation college student and sorority member, and a parent. How these identities will frame my perspective as a member of the board is how they frame my everyday life; I use experiences throughout my lifetime in observations and decisions I am making, in how I listen to people's perspectives, in how I help others, and in how I advocate for and stand up for others. I am attuned to individuals who experience marginalization and underrepresentation and I try to find a way to amplify their voices. I'm also not afraid to ask questions about or challenge situations that are not inclusive in a way that doesn't make others feel threatened. Last, these identities help me consider how to create situations that are accessible to different identities. Professionally, I served as a campus-based professional for 16 years and currently serve as a headquarters professional; this allows me to understand the professional development needs and experiences of most of AFA's members and provides me an opportunity to represent different perspectives and advocate for their needs. Additionally, as an engaged member of the association and volunteer, I have an inside perspective into the experience of general members, have created connections with members representing a wide range of communities, and can be a representative voice for the membership.

**AFA at its core is a professional development association, and has continued to invest in and enhance our professional core competencies. How can AFA best facilitate the development of necessary knowledge and skills for those doing the work of the fraternity/sorority profession, and how do you see that work needing to evolve?**

To facilitate the development of necessary knowledge and skills to do the work of the profession, AFA needs to understand the gaps found in the profession, what employers expect of professionals, and what is happening on campuses that affects the work of professionals. Using this information, AFA should design interventions that are affordable and accessible to professionals and provide professionals with the how for accomplishing their work instead of focusing on the what. Additionally, AFA should facilitate knowledge sharing across the membership through technology (ex. online forums, live discussions, and development of written or video resources). AFA should also consider micro-learning opportunities to meet busy professionals where they are. For in-person experiences, AFA should develop specialized bootcamps and/or in-depth learning experiences that focus on emerging topics and tangible skill-building beyond the current outlined core competencies. Last, consider non-traditional ways of learning; many individuals learn from observation and being provided with feedback - is there an opportunity to create a shadowing program beyond graduate assistantships for professionals to learn from one another or are there observation checklists that supervisors could use to provide professionals with feedback? Could we consider doing simulations during in-person events that help professionals practice skills? What gamification techniques could AFA use to enable professionals to learn?

**One of the main responsibilities of board members is to maintain financial accountability of the organization. Board members act as trustees of the organization's assets and must exercise due diligence to oversee that the organization is well-managed and that its financial situation remains sound. Please describe a time when you have had to make difficult financial and/or resource allocation decisions and how would you use that experience as you serve on the board.**

As a department director at the height of the pandemic, I made difficult financial and resource allocation decisions (the institution faced budget cuts due to lower enrollment and a decrease in members diminished fees collected for programming and department initiatives). My duty was to ensure quality education and services were being provided to the fraternity/sorority community while advancing the mission of the institution and the department. I had to assess the greatest needs and explore the expectations the institution had of the community and department. A strategic plan was created which aligned these expectations and needs. I then created a budget that advanced the greatest needs identified in the plan and had to make difficult decisions about what we were not going to do that year or what we needed to do creatively (without financial and/or human resources); this required me to think innovatively. This experience translates well to a board role as they examine situations holistically to determine what resources are and are not available. They identify the needs of the constituents involved and how those align with the purpose of the organization. When the needs and purpose align, that is a signal for what a priority should be - the board is tasked with identifying this opportunity. Boards provide guidance on what to execute (with or without resources) and what to put on pause until resources are found, requiring out-of-the box thinking.

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**AFA's strategic plan, 'Forward to 50', will be the 'north star' for the Association's efforts over the 2025 and 2026 years. Discuss how you typically approach prioritization and allocation of strategic planning efforts, and what you see as the Board of Directors' role in strategic plan execution.**

My approach is multifaceted. I familiarize myself with mission and vision of the organization and its identified goals. I gather information about what has been advanced, how resources were allocated, and the needs of the organization's constituents. I seek to understand what resources (financial, human, and property) are available to advance the plan. This context helps me align the purpose and direction of the organization with the activity that has transpired with the strategic plan, and assists me in understanding what needs to be prioritized. When prioritizing, I consider the value the organization's constituents place on the goals and objectives and the return of investment (short and long-term) on the decisions made; if the value and return of investment match, that becomes a priority for resource allocation. When they don't match, I have conversations with trusted advisors/colleagues to determine whether there's perspectives I am not seeing; for this role, those people would be fellow AFA board members. I believe the role of the board is to identify priorities, determine which goals and objectives the organization (through the staff and volunteers) should complete, allocate funds to accomplish the goals and objectives identified, and monitor execution of the strategic plan. If the strategic plan is not being executed effectively, the board has a responsibility to hold the operational leader of the organization (ie. the Executive Director) accountable.