

2018 TAM Conference – Roundtables: Diversity and Inclusion

1. Directors and Administrators Roundtable

As the directors, administrators, and leaders of our institutions, we need to model diversity and inclusion to our staff.

What is the definition of diversity and inclusion? What are you talking about and looking at? There are many groups and areas that need to be looked at, sometimes separately. Diversity and inclusion doesn't just mean looking at your audience, it also means looking at:

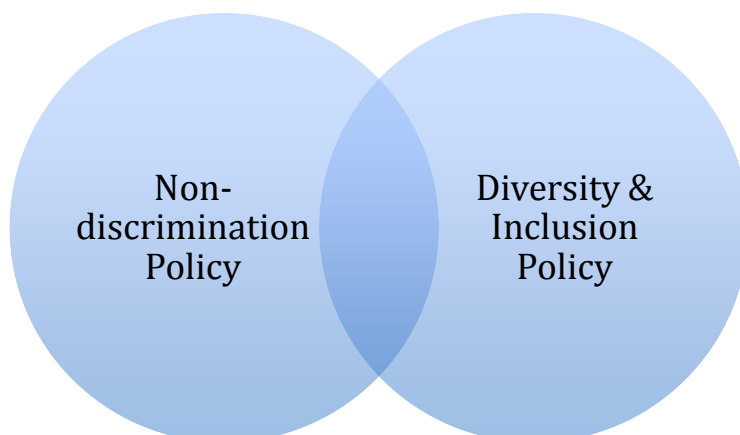
- Employees
- Mission statement
- Programming and exhibits
- Collections

There are many factors/demographics to think about when you consider diversity and inclusion:

- Age
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Socioeconomic
- Accessibility (mobility, vision, hearing, etc.)
- Learning/Developmental (autism, etc.)

Does your institution have a Diversity/Inclusion/Non-Discrimination Policy?

- There is a difference between a Non-Discrimination Policy and a Diversity and Inclusion Policy
 - A non-discrimination policy can be considered an internal policy and offers a “we will not exclude these people” policy.
 - A Diversity and Inclusion Policy is more outward facing and external; it is an active policy on who and how “we will include these people.”
- A Diversity and Inclusion Policy is an active policy that should make employees think “how do we (the institution) become more inclusive?”



There needs to be a cultural change within institutions for truly effective diversity and inclusion. There could be a policy, but no one may follow it if there is not institutional buy-in and support.

- To start this process, an institution must commit and decide to be intentional. They can create a policy that must be enforced, and over time it will become part of the culture and everyday operations.

Participant examples:

- Exhibit planning – When planning their exhibition calendar, one museum has a planning meeting where they review their upcoming exhibits to make sure there aren't any gaps in audiences and demographics. They intentionally look at the calendar for missing groups and if there is one, they will create an exhibit to fill that gap. If needed, the museum will put together a community committee to help develop that exhibit.
- Program development – There is a need to include the audience you are trying to serve in the development of the program. Co-creation is a very useful tool to make sure your diversity and inclusion is authentic.
- How do you ensure your policy and programs really meet the needs of the demographic? Institutions should reach out to the community and get their input and feedback. Ask them what they need, don't assume that the museum automatically understands the needs of the group. Have them come in and use the facility or program and get their feedback and suggestions.
 - One museum from the audience worked with a blind group to get ideas about what they could be doing better. The group was able to show the museum what it was really like to be blind or sight-impaired and visit a museum.
 - Have sign language interpreters at events and put in your marketing material that an interpreter will be present.
 - Have interpretive material or videos of your second floor available on the first floor, if you have a historic house without an elevator.
 - Make sure your website is ADA compliant. Do an audit of your website and make sure the translator is correct and all your images have appropriate descriptions.

2. Educators and School Programs Roundtable

The museum world is doing a better job in embracing diversity and inclusion but there are still challenges and issues that need to be dealt with in cultural institutions. For example:

- The challenges of not being in a diverse area – how do you embrace diversity when there is limited diversity within your community?
- Lack of diversity within organizations – how to address this issue?
- Are our mission and programming inclusive? Need to think about interpretation from mission statement on down and take a hard look at what info and programs are put out there and how we can bring more diversity and inclusion into this.

Museum education is the most trusted form of education so we have a responsibility to model language and behavior, and to be true within our representation.

- Can't sugarcoat hard facts – like slavery – need to face the truth of it and push through the awkwardness of this to have a good conversation with your tour group and visitors.
- Can't shy away from the ugly parts of history. Can use wider history as context to your site's history, or the history represented in your museum.
- Dealing with difficult history – In TN a lot of our identity is drawn from the past, so you should be drawing it from the truth of that past.

As you work with your tour groups or with your education visitors, remember that there is a difference between being assertive with that history and being aggressive – if people feel attacked, they will shut down, get defensive, and not hear what you are saying. Therefore, you need to look at how you approach these topics so they will be heard.

- Challenging the narrative we have about ourselves and our community can plant positive seeds!

We tend to make our historical figures a deity or a demon – we don't always incorporate the humanity and the history that made that person who they are.

- Simple narratives are comforting – e.g. Andrew Jackson, the people's president – but not reflective of the full reality.
- Need to examine those full histories. Including ALL of the histories of the American people is important.

Push back may happen but it's still important to share and acknowledge those hard histories – it can be uncomfortable for people to deal with, but can open up conversations about the context of terminology, why it isn't OK now, etc.

- Helps to get people to think critically by addressing different issues and questions: e.g. this is how it was, not how it is today, how does this come together in how we look at things and history?

One way to engage groups with these histories is to choose a specific artifact (or image) that can help tell the important story – a personal connection to people's experience or interest helps them to understand difficult topics so look at ways to tie in your content with the story you want to tell.

Need to think about the concepts you are addressing and how they are going to be viewed differently by different groups.

- For instance, a program focused on character in an underserved community – e.g. take a knee movement vs. today’s idea of patriotism in an African American community; citizenship in a Latino community – citizenship isn’t just about a piece of paper, it’s about people’s engagement with their community and society for example.
- It’s important to think about the audience and how your portrayal of things will impact them; will they see themselves in what you are talking about? Or will they feel excluded by how you address a topic?

Remember the question of inclusivity includes people with different abilities too – accessibility is an issue that needs to be thought about so that those visitors feel welcome and that they can have a positive experience in your institution. .

- Sometimes there are challenges to accessibility at your site or museum that you can’t change, but you can think of ways to provide these visitors with an equally positive experience through other delivery methods – videos, hands-on experiences, etc.
- Autism/ADHD, etc. – Looking for ways to engage them within their way of being because they too are interested and ready to learn.
- Tend to overlook some people physically when interacting with a group – make assumptions about who can interact with us and who can’t, but need to try to engage them.
- Free or low-cost tours to group homes are another option.
- Also when asked why you don’t have something or why some issue isn’t addressed within your facility – be it info on a group, accessibility aids, etc. – be honest about why the situation is as it is, acknowledge that it is a problem, and address how you are going to approach the issue.

Finally, staff and board diversity plays a role in our understanding of different audiences and leads to more inclusivity. A diverse staff and board means you have real insight into different ways of approaching your material, helps combat assumptions and narrow perspectives, and gives you a different eye when looking at your programs and exhibits.

Participant examples:

East TN Historical Society – training volunteer educators to use more inclusive language – most volunteer educators there are older and mostly white – some embrace it, some look at it as PC: Indian vs. Native American, slave vs. enslaved

- Our ancestors – when said by a white volunteer educator this is exclusive; “my ancestors” is personal, “our ancestors” is exclusive
- We want everyone to enjoy the museum so need to work on language so that they do feel part of it.
- Good to model behavior and language to the visitors that is inclusive and that acknowledges diversity

Doak House, slave holding family until 1839 when emancipated their slaves – not a regular part of the tour script in the past; now part of that script as part of the family’s story and

there is an effort to address how we reconcile that difficult fact within the other things we know about the family.

Several participants noted that bringing in advocacy groups can be helpful. They can help you to see your shortcomings on the diversity and inclusivity front and give you ideas on how to address them.

- Programming that addresses people with different needs.
- Kit at front desk to help different needs – guided touch tour (gloves), etc. 3-d printed artifacts.
- Training docents in leading tours for visually impaired or blind visitors.
- TN School for the Blind will translate things into braille for you so that you can have it at the front desk.

3. Docents and Tour Guides Roundtable

Definitions

Diversity: Fairness and protection to all regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, or orientation

Inclusion: Creating positive work atmosphere

You want to appeal to diverse audiences and also aim to show diversity in your docents and guides, for instance:

- Race
- Gender
- Age
- Individuals with different abilities, such as those with physical differences or mental / psychological differences (e.g. autism, PTSD, learning disabilities). It is important to ensure your organization is familiar with ADA and person-first language.

Inclusive messaging – Training tour guides on policies of institution as well as job descriptions and orientation training sessions can help clarify questions or uncertainties.

Recognition – How welcoming and appreciative / inclusive is your organization?
Engagement with the community to thank as well as recruit representative guides/docents is important. Events and recognition such as appreciation dinners, picnics, gift shop discounts, thank you cards, free parking, etc. all foster a stronger teamwork dynamic.

Interpretation and your organization

- Slavery, Jim Crow, Civil Rights, Civil War, Confederate flags / monuments, etc
 - Organizational policies on “hot button” topics are key and consistent narratives from tour guides and docents are also necessary to prevent the spread of incorrect information or negative PR considerations.
 - Previous negative connotations with a site or subject can still be addressed and used as teachable moments, providing a fresh forward-thinking message for your organization.
- Preconceived notions – Finding out how your organization is perceived in the community for its subject matter and if needed, rebrand/refocus to attract a wider audience.
- Visitors with disabilities – It is important to provide an appropriate experience for varying groups and have awareness/compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Tailoring the tours to the interests and needs of groups can enhance the experience for the organization and the customer. Organizations should include ADA statements in volunteer information and organizational policies and incorporate it into training sessions.

- Training / volunteer manual / recruitment – Volunteers are unpaid for their time. Understanding their relationship with paid staff and finding additional avenues for recruitment of them can increase community ownership of your organization.

Summary

Diversity and Inclusion among tour guides and docents is two-pronged. In order for an organization to attract a diverse group of guides, it must ensure that its messaging and interpretation are accommodating and welcoming to a cross section of the community. Likewise, guides must also be trained by the organization to understand the different types of diversity, including current laws regarding ADA, person-first language, official organizational policy regarding diversity, etc. Finally, the organization itself must work to promote diversity in recruitment on all levels including board members, staff, etc.

4. Collections and Curators Roundtable

Developing inclusivity and diversity in collections practices

- Utilizing social media to interact and collect stories.
- Identifying groups not represented in the collection and using crowdsourcing as a tool for collecting material culture or research that may help further develop the collection.
- Ask members of the community what they want to see and going in to the target communities to collect their stories. Listen.
- Create specific projects that highlight and reflect populations not currently represented and encourage sharing material culture.
- Be advocates for the communities we serve.

Developing inclusivity and diversity in curatorial practices

- Identify stories that resonate with visitors. Implement visitor evaluation tools that let the visitor show you what resonates with them or what they feel is missing from the story.
- Incorporating curatorial practices like a diagram that analyzes how we as curators or exhibit developers talk about subjects – Who is included and making sure the story is balanced. Chick History has a good example.
- Consulting with the community to work towards eliminating biases.
- Use consistent language and terminology.
- Recognize possible accessibility needs for visitors and staff in design.
- Work to understand the voice of the people we are representing and working to include.
- Understand the differences of different people. Recognize that there are certain things the group of origin needs to say, that the experts shouldn't say. Experts aren't always the expert.
- Tackle projects/research from inside the community.
- Students can be way to collect information while still building trust.

Developing inclusivity and diversity in staff

- Hiring people who have an objective point of view can have benefits. A new hire that is not a local can bring a new perspective.
- Evaluate service animals in Collections. The subject takes educating staff and volunteers about the proper way to discuss the service needs of colleagues who have physical needs.
- Accessibility of facility – How accessible are collections or work spaces for staff who have mobility or other limitations and how does this impact hiring.
- How do we expand the number of museum professionals who are people of color?

- Paid Internships. Suggested to have the internship funded through a private donation.
- Review hiring practice: Broader searches and less internal hiring.
- Diversity at all levels: Boards, Commissions, hiring practices, etc.
- Adding diversity in to the hiring rubric.

Summary

Always work to get feedback from the people who are impacted by the accessibility or content being developed. The source will provide valuable insight.