Beyond Talk: Moving Dialogues on Diversity to Action

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Dreams come to everyone
Imagination comes to those who wake up
Success comes to those who get up
What are your goals?
What do you imagine?
What do you wish to accomplish?
Facing Change

Insights from the American Alliance of Museums’ Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Working Group
James Baldwin, writer and social critic:

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”
What are YOUR needs?

- Diversity
- Equity
- Accessibility
- Inclusion
Begin where you are

- Too homogenous
- No first voices
- We allow our biases to create and define our culture
- We don’t know how to address our LGBTQIA staff or how to use more inclusive language
- We know there are potential employees of color, but it’s easier and more cost-effective to continue what we’ve always done
- We know we need to be ADA-compliant and more accessible in general, but it’s so overwhelming
Iterative, imaginative, responsive work

“Museums, as a sector, share a culture of perfection that places large bets on getting a product—whether an exhibit, program, or building—right the first time. This culture is often rooted in traditional, hierarchical management structures...that valued authority and control over collaboration and creativity.”

Falling Toward Success: the ascendance of agile design
April/May MUSEUM magazine
Personal Work in Public Spaces

- Examine biases
- Acknowledge difficulty
- Be vulnerable
- Prepare for advocacy
Learn and Connect

- Case study from Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh

4 Museums. 1 Great Gift.
Begin from within: Talking amongst ourselves

How nearly 1,200 staff members were empowered to talk about race
Sparking discussions

Catalyze
Spontaneously discuss
Legitimize
Allow
Why talk about race at the museum?

- TMI?
- Political?
- Too polarizing
- Negative
- Hot-button
- Impolite
- Divisive
- Uncomfortable
The Work of Social Justice

- Lack of diversity in museum field

- Being inclusive of difference (welcoming, using inclusive language, acknowledging new and developing understandings of the exclusion of marginalized people, including communities of color, LGBTQ communities, people from various socioeconomic backgrounds, people with disabilities, etc.)
What happens when there’s no diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion?
“We are for difference; for respecting difference, for allowing difference, for encouraging difference, until difference no longer makes a difference.”
Why is this important?

- I know this already!
- I practice this is my life, my community, my place of worship...
- Why do I have to think about this in my museum?
The Implicit Association Test (IAT) measures attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report. The IAT may be especially interesting if it shows that you have an implicit attitude that you did not know about. For example, you may believe that women and men should be equally associated with science, but your automatic associations could show that you (like many others) associate men with science more than you associate women with science.
Museums are human-centered spaces
School integration enriched my white life.
Personal Work

▶ Examine biases
▶ Acknowledge difficulty
▶ Be vulnerable
▶ Prepare for advocacy
“Lady, I don’t want your purse.”

- Security/custodial staff
- Vulnerable minority
- Representation matters
- Profound observation succinctly stated
- Stereotypes made real
Make a day of it!

- Investment signifies commitment
- Make it one or many days of professional development
- Signify that “it’s okay” to talk about race
- Provide and suggest reading material, films, research topics, and lectures
Photos from our experience:
Kamran sharing his experiences
Valuable objects, valuable people
Step 1: Begin the dialogue

- Find out from those around you (your staff and visitors) what diversity and inclusion means to them
- Practice talking about and appreciating diversity
- Treat everyone with dignity and respect, AND
- Communicate that there are parameters and limits (e.g. hate speech, oppression)
- Create multiple opportunities for training around cultural competence
Step 2: Find out what’s already being done

- Meet one-on-one with key staff
- Document efforts, review past efforts through an inclusion lens
- Get feedback from staff at each job level and in every department
- Find out what the community and museum audience believe about your authenticity and efforts
- Collect feedback
- Don’t just pat ourselves on the back; confront difficult issues and commit to doing better
Step 3: Learn how you can do more, and how you can meet or exceed expectations

Continued dialogue

Research:
- Requirements for EEO (minorities, women, veterans, disabled staff)
- Best practice in inclusive hiring practices, including blind hiring
- Critical Race Theory
- Inclusive practices for LGBTQ staff and audiences
- US Department of Justice
Step 4: Communicate the expectations

Communication

Frequent workshops and space to collaborate
- Regular staff meetings
- Special professional development sessions
- Use technology!
- Get help from experts as needed
Step 5: Implement and codify

- Follow through on expectations
- Test and verify
- Create policy to ensure longevity and communicate importance
- Communicate new practices, along with underlying principles
The Tightrope Walker
George Segal (American, 1924-2000)
An invitation to commit

Planning for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility is not light work. It requires stamina, skill, humor, patience, and flexibility.

Your first step in this journey is acknowledging that a heavy commitment is being made the moment you start addressing diversity and inclusion.

You will need allies who support you as an individual, your team, and the initiative itself.