



Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) Framework

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Introduction

Throughout forty years of growth and change, Discovery Museum has held true to its conviction that all children, irrespective of their developing identities, learn by exploring their world through play. Because of the fundamental importance of play for learning, we have worked for many years to remove physical, developmental, and financial barriers to Museum access. The events of the recent period have raised further our awareness of the depth and breadth of inequality in our world—we are compelled to build upon our long-held values and formalize strategies for affecting a more just society. What follows is a framework for action and a system of accountability, drafted over the span of a year with input from staff in all departments and guidance from our external advisors. These action steps address all aspects of our internal operations, including hiring practices, marketing, governance, and audience engagement. While our intent was to be comprehensive, we recognize that this framework represents the next, but by no means final, phase in our evolution. As we move forward, we commit to changing course when needed as we gather insight from our community and learn from our experiences. We take this work seriously and we strongly believe that there is joy to be found in celebrating the unique lived experiences of the children and families we serve. Such joy can give rise to hope, which in turn can inspire action.

History of DEAI at Discovery Museum

Discovery Museum has long worked to remove barriers to access, create a sense of belonging for our visitors, and build an audience that better reflects the diversity of our region. The Museum first formally articulated its commitment to diversity in 2007 with a vision statement expressing respect for “differences of abilities, perspectives, background, and opinion.” In 2010, the Museum reaffirmed this vision and set a strategic goal of “appealing to a larger and more diverse audience that reflects the communities we serve.” That same year, the Museum established Open Door Connections (ODC), a series of programs aimed at eliminating financial and physical barriers to access through free or low-cost services to under-resourced families and children with developmental or physical disabilities. The Museum also adopted the following Statement of Inclusion and Accessibility in 2015 and has regularly reaffirmed it thereafter:

The Discovery Museum is committed to welcoming children and the adults in their lives. We seek out, welcome, and embrace learners of all ages, abilities, economic, and cultural circumstances. As an organization, we strive to broadly reflect the communities we serve, both in visitors to our campus and our own staff/volunteers/board members. Through community partnerships and targeted initiatives, we work to increase access for individuals, families, and communities facing barriers to visitation. We seek to keep programs, exhibits, and our campus accessible, appropriate, and welcoming to all and actively encourage and consider feedback with respect to potential improvements, modifications, and adaptations.

After having taken incremental steps over the years to improve access, it ultimately became clear that our aging facilities were preventing us from advancing our goals and for accommodating a growing audience. This led us in 2013 to initiate a 5-year \$8.4 million capital campaign to fund a complete renovation and expansion of the larger of the two Discovery Museum buildings and our outdoor areas. We concluded the first phase of this project in 2016 with the opening of Discovery Woods, a playscape anchored by a classroom-sized, wheelchair-accessible treehouse. The expanded Museum building,

renovated in accordance with the Principles of Universal Design, opened in March 2018. This brought all public areas of the 4.5-acre campus, indoors and out, up to full ADA compliance to be used and enjoyed by all. Following an audit of our renovated campus, a nationally known accessibility expert remarked that the Museum provided “a model for others to follow” and called the Museum a “thought leader” in the field. We were also honored to receive state and national awards in 2017 and 2019, respectively, recognizing our work to promote inclusion for people with disabilities.

Present Focus

With decades of facilities issues resolved, we were able to shift our priorities to enhancing the quality of the Discovery Museum experience. In 2019, we established “Belonging” as a key pillar in our Strategic Plan to ensure everyone in our community feels that they are a valued part of the Discovery Museum. This goal, as well as the additional pillars of “People” (emphasizing professional development, equitable pay, and improved recruitment practices) and “Advocacy” (determining when and how the organization might take a public stance on issues that impact children and their families), helped lay out a 5-year framework for our continued work to improve our DEAI practices. Meanwhile, participation in our ODC access programs continued to increase year over year. Just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were reaching 50,000 people annually—a quarter of our audience—through these initiatives and had set a 5-year goal to increase the number of people we reach through ODC by 50%.

Despite the Museum’s successful track record with accessibility and inclusion initiatives, we had not until this point thought holistically about DEAI. As is the case for many museums, this organizational change approach to DEAI is relatively new for us.¹ In developing this framework, we challenged ourselves to take a deep look inward to better understand and recognize the unintentional ways we perpetuate inequity within our society. As a launching point, the Museum’s senior management team held a series of discussions in September and October 2020 centered on Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum’s book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race*. The book underscored how being passive is tantamount to supporting inequality. Senior leaders recognized that to change an inequitable system, our organization needed to be more overt and intentional in countering it. Our group became energized about brainstorming ways to further a culture of inclusion, encourage critical thinking beyond science principles, and help children better understand stereotypes and inequities.

The ideas raised through our group’s conversations suggested a different approach to the way we had been successfully operating for decades. Discovery Museum has always maintained a solid focus on playful learning for children, knowing that curiosity is a path to continued exploration. However, we had perhaps not fully recognized the importance of providing opportunities for children to notice and appreciate differences in developing their own sense of self. While exciting, the prospect of change also caused trepidation—about making mistakes, inadvertently tokenizing individuals, or not doing enough. In her book, Dr. Tatum encourages readers to take purposeful action despite fear of failure. Her words “...a sincere, if imperfect, attempt to interrupt the oppression of others is usually better than no attempt at all”—were reassuring and motivating.

Over the course of the next year, as work on this framework progressed, staff members continued to pursue additional opportunities to deepen their understanding of how imbalances of power have given rise to our inequitable society. More than 60 staff members participated in a four-part Diversity, Equity,

¹ The CCLI National Landscape Study: The State of DEAI Practices in Museums (2020) reported on the results of a survey of nearly 600 museums nationwide. DEAI was a stated priority for 90% of respondents, but only a third had formal DEAI action plans. In implementing this framework, we hope to offer leadership in the field, to share both our successes and failures, and to likewise learn from the experiences of other museums.

and Inclusion workshop facilitated by Wayside Equity Training Center in late 2021 and early 2022. These sessions addressed such topics as privilege, implicit bias, intersectionality, and white fragility, and offered strategies for engaging children and families in discussions about difference. In addition to these training sessions, staff also participated in a two-part workshop in January and February 2022 led by Dr. Atyia Martin, CEO and founder of All Aces, Inc., on confronting racism and advancing racial equity and social justice. The ongoing Discovery Museum Speaker Series, now in its 10th year, has also provided opportunities for both staff and the public to consider different perspectives on diversity and inclusion. Recent program topics have centered on talking to children about race; addressing bias in children’s literature; and empowerment of individuals with disabilities.

Additionally, Discovery Museum contributed a chapter in 2021 to the forthcoming book *From Small Wins to Sweeping Change: Internal Initiatives to Foster Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism in Museums*, edited by Teresa Sotto and Priya Frank. Drafting this text provided further opportunity for staff to reflect on the Museum’s history and develop goals for action. All of this has helped us to more fully understand that efforts to advance diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion should not take place independently of one another. Rather, it’s only by fully integrating our DEAI values that we will create the sense of belonging for our audience that we seek to achieve. While continuing to build upon our existing initiatives, our work on this framework has prompted us to consider how we operate at the institutional level with respect to such operational practices as hiring and compensation, governance, communication, and audience engagement. The remainder of this document outlines our process for developing goals and our approach for holding ourselves accountable.

Definitions

For the purposes of this document, we define key terms as follows:

Diversity is the presence of difference within a given setting. In this case the Museum and offsite programs are the settings and the differences typically refer to identities like race, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality of origin, economic status, and sexual orientation. A person isn’t diverse. They’re unique, but they can bring diversity of experience and thought to a group. Diversity describes the nature of a collective or a group.

Equity is an approach that ensures everyone has access to the same opportunities. Equity recognizes that we don’t all start from the same place because advantages and barriers exist. It’s a process that acknowledges uneven starting places and seeks to correct the imbalance. Diversity and inclusion are both outcomes. Equity is not. It refers to the process an organization engages in to ensure that people with historically marginalized identities can grow, contribute, and develop.

Accessibility is giving equitable access to everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience. Accessibility encompasses the broader theme of compliance and refers to the ways organizations make space for the characteristics that each person brings.

Inclusion has to do with people with different identities or abilities feeling and/or being valued, leveraged, and welcomed within a given setting (whether that’s a team, workplace, or industry). Longtime Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion educator, Verna Myers, said: “Diversity is being asked to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.” Inclusion isn’t a natural consequence of diversity. You can have a diverse team of talent, but that doesn’t mean all feel welcomed or valued or are given opportunities to grow.

Process

Building on ideas generated during the early book discussions and subsequent conversations about DEAI at the Museum, senior managers agreed the next step would be to involve additional staff members in creating a DEAI statement for the Discovery Museum and a formal DEAI action framework. We thus formed four working groups aligned with the Museum’s core areas of operation and charged each with developing a goal statement and strategies with respect to the following:

- Governance: Board of Directors
- Institution: Administrative, purchasing, hiring, and compensation procedures
- Audience Engagement: Programs, exhibits, outreach endeavors, and visitor welcoming efforts
- Communications: Content and methods of communicating internally and externally

The groups, comprised of 16 staff members in total from all departments, met monthly for a period of six months in 2021, with regular joint meetings held to assess progress. The process relied on the belief that effective solutions can emerge from focused conversations among dedicated teams of staff. In our experience, solutions can be implemented most effectively when the staff who develop the plans are also responsible for execution of the solutions. Once the working groups had completed their tasks, the results were synthesized into a unified organizational DEAI statement and strategy for addressing DEAI inequities throughout the organization.

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Discussions within and between each of the four DEAI working groups reinforced the idea that our aspirations will require a shift in our long-held practice of not calling out or highlighting any specific visitor identity, an approach that perhaps led us unconsciously to invalidate some visitors’ lived experiences and propagate dominant viewpoints. We recognize that we must be explicit about providing visible opportunities for children and their families to see themselves reflected when they visit the Discovery Museum, participate in outreach programs or online events, and see or hear from us in publicity materials. The goal statements and actions steps drafted by each group lay out our strategy for proactively creating a culture of inclusion and encouraging critical thinking about racial-ethnic-cultural identity. We know we can do much more to support children and their families and will require ongoing DEAI self-education and feedback, which will lead our strategies to evolve over time. We also understand that advancing our goals will likely require the support of professionals outside our organization, guidance from our wider community, and new sources of funding. Despite this reality, we know that working toward a more equitable society can’t wait until we have extra time or extra money. Rather, this work will be integrated immediately into everything we do across the entire organization.

Organizational DEAI Goal statement

Discovery Museum believes that the best strategies and decisions—and the strongest institutions—are informed by an array of perspectives. Our work with children and families must be and will be rooted in respect for the breadth of cultures and lived experiences in our community. Discovery Museum commits to inviting, welcoming, listening to, learning from, creating with, and supporting an audience, Board of Directors, and staff that is diverse in race, national or ethnic origin, ability, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, family status, veteran status, perspective, economic circumstance, and other characteristics.

For Discovery Museum, “Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion” means reflecting and including our communities in all that we do; designing and co-creating educational

experiences that celebrate individual and collective contributions; continuing to break down barriers to access; committing to the solicitation of feedback and a spirit of self-improvement; and advocating for principles that promote a more equitable society. For this organization, “DEAI” is a priority that nourishes our goal of achieving a greater sense of belonging across our community.

Governance

Goal

A board with diverse perspectives is critically important to the health and sustainability of the Museum. Each person brings their own personal and professional contacts and life experiences to the board. With a diversity of experience, expertise, and perspectives, we will be in a stronger position to plan for the future, manage risk, make prudent decisions, be in touch with community needs, and take full advantage of opportunities. Discovery Museum will strive to achieve a Board that represents and gives voice to the diversity of the communities served by the Discovery Museum.

Action Steps

1. Institute a process for board members and other committee members and advisors to self-identify their personal characteristics and skills to ensure the spectrum of diversity we seek to achieve; actively make use of those skills to support the mission of the Museum.
2. Regularly conduct a self-assessment of our Board to evaluate our progress on achieving diversity of experience, inclusiveness of approach, ensuring that varying opinions and ideas are expressed, and assuring equity.
3. Report back to the Board the results of its self-assessment regarding the Board’s current “culture.” (Is it welcoming? Do members feel comfortable and become engaged with the mission, their role, and their colleagues on the Board?) Commit to continuous improvement.
4. Empower the Board Nominating Committee to constantly consider where the organization is going and what skills, experiences, contacts, and professional/personal backgrounds will be most helpful to the organization and that can lead to increased diversity on the Board.
5. Cultivate new Board members, committee members, and advisors who can expand our collective cultural and community awareness; actively and with a sense of urgency seek out candidates with a variety of professional expertise, cultural backgrounds, spectrum of life experiences, and geographic reach, who can help us respond to future needs.
6. Regularly exchange information with Museum staff engaged with community partnership efforts to identify potential candidates for Board and advisory roles; expand relationships beyond staff relationships to engage the Board with our community partners and similarly leverage the connections of other Museum advisors and volunteers.
7. An important measure of success is to have a Board composition that reflects the communities the Museum serves. Measuring and judging the degree to which this objective has been achieved will consider perspectives, lived experiences, demographics, and other factors that best advance the Board’s effectiveness. At each annual review of progress, the Nominating Committee will evaluate the degree to which this objective is being met and consider why or why not so as to inform future practices.
8. Onboarding new members with a thoughtful orientation can help manage expectations and presents an opportunity to introduce veteran Board members to the newcomers, as well as establish mentoring relationships that can help knit together a diverse group.

9. Regularly plan candid conversations about diversity, and other important issues for the Board to wrestle with; create a plan to ensure this is a regular part of Board discussion.
10. Make it a standing agenda item at every Nominating Committee meeting to review action items and status.
11. Make it a standing agenda item at Board meetings to report out on this topic.

Institution

Goal

Lead efforts to measure the diversity of staff and vendors of the Discovery Museum and provide framework for short-term and long-term enhancements on diversity, equity, access, and inclusion amongst the staff and vendors.

Action Steps

1. Survey staff and vendors to understand current diversity of population; measurement and reporting on these statistics annually.
2. Review current hiring practices and identify new initiatives to attract a more diverse candidate base.
3. Develop a framework for identifying bias in employee, volunteer, and vendor relations and seek ways to improve and remove any bias practices.
4. Develop education and training on DEAI for the Museum staff.
5. Develop programs that promote understanding and inclusion amongst the staff.
6. Seek external partnerships that will support DEAI initiatives.

Audience Engagement

Goal

Commit to working with our community to actively create a culture of inclusion that honors diversity and empowers children and adults in their lives to value the unique qualities within themselves and others.

Action Steps

1. Prioritize efforts to remove barriers to STEAM access and learning.
 - Through Museum-wide conversations, create a rubric, including defined language, for how to identify barriers and measure success with reducing barriers.
 - Coordinate with Communications and the other DEAI teams to understand what barriers exist.
2. Create diverse environments and experiences that foster cooperative play, inquiry, and self-discovery.
 - Regularly conduct DEAI assessments of current environments and experiences with a wide audience, including parents, teachers, partners, camps, and afterschool programs; seek external consultation for initial evaluation.
 - Build cultural representation throughout the Museum. This could include making connections between cultures and STEAM discoveries from individuals or groups from these cultures in our programs, images, or on the floor; bring in real-world examples of STEAM to the Museum through a cultural lens.
3. Build trust through everyday interactions, intentional practices, and a dedication to nurturing sustainable relationships.
 - Model inclusion, co-creation, and empowerment of others in interactions with visitors, Museum partners, and within our own Museum staff interactions.

- Invite conversation and collaboration to understand and respond to community needs, with external consultation as needed.
- 4. Create a culture of continuous learning about DEAI issues that impact our community.
 - Ensure staff and volunteers have cultural competency training or skills needed to be successful in modeling DEAI; seek external consultation and additional funding as needed.
 - Support opportunities for staff and volunteers to express/share their community representation.
- 5. Implement a system for collecting audience demographic data and regularly compare it to regional demographics.

Communications

Goal

Actively work to advance DEAI initiatives in Discovery Museum marketing and communications to both attract and engage audiences and build a more inclusive community. To implement this goal we need to build trust with underrepresented audiences, deepen partnerships and establish new partnerships with local/regional/national organizations that can help us reach and engage diverse communities, and broaden the Museum's reach and impact.

Action Steps

1. Identify who we are reaching now and research new markets/targets/approaches for under-reached communities
 - Inventory media list and research additional media outlets; add new media outlets to media distribution list; place targeted communications, targeted ads; increase ad budget as necessary.
 - Inventory current outreach programs to understand who we are reaching and how and who are we not reaching; consider Community Kit, school programs, and corporate events.
 - Analyze visitor zip code data to identify communities that are visiting and communities that are not.
 - Inventory existing feedback mechanisms and evaluate how to gather input and feedback from a more diverse audience (e.g., surveys, comment boxes, social media, on-site staff; voicemail) and look specifically at affinity groups.
2. Evaluate and implement appropriate and effective ways to communicate with both new and existing communities
 - Research/receive training on language to use in communications that effectively reflect our DEAI goals and initiatives.
 - Evaluate external communications for reflection of DEAI values; ensure use of broad and inclusive language in job postings and other external outreach; infuse more diverse voices into our marketing pieces, funding proposals, testimonials; develop/find a tool or rubric with professional external support.
 - Evaluate internal communications to ensure DEAI values are reflected among staff, volunteers, advocates, partners; develop/find a tool or rubric with professional external support.
 - Research and identify key languages that our broader community would benefit from; incorporate Google Translate into website; offer translations of key printed materials, and post online

- Evaluate and implement an approach to communicating Open Door Connections objectives and results through the website and elsewhere.
 - In partnership with the Development Committee of the Board, discuss and consider the ways in which the Museum’s fundraising program can be made more equitable and inclusive; commit to learning from peers in the industry, contributing to advancement of the industry, taking regular action within the Museum’s program, and demonstrating clear improvement over time.
3. Identify and build partnerships to inform and support this work.
- Build on the community partner inventory to identify current relationships and areas of opportunity.
 - Consider diversity criteria when seeking new community and corporate partnerships (e.g., women-owned business, Black-owned businesses).
 - Engage other museums and professional associations, such as the Association of Children’s Museums, to inform relationship-building strategies and apply best practices.

Implementation

This framework creates action steps that cut across all areas of Museum operations. The responsibility for taking these actions will be both narrow and broad across departments of the Museum. Generally, however, most actions will require cooperative efforts across units of authority. To facilitate implementation, three key aspects of structure will be used:

1. Work plan development: The Museum undertakes the development of annual operating budgets, a process that begins with the development of annual objectives and key workload considerations. Future budget cycles will explicitly require the incorporation of the DEAI action framework in creating annual plans. Those plans are incorporated at the Operations (senior) Team level, and by the CEO and Board of Directors.
2. Resource allocation: Similarly, the annual budget process will consider the funds necessary for any of the proposed DEAI framework actions. Many of the actions should not require much in the way of funding beyond staff time. Some items may be opportunities for specific fundraising and will be slated for those efforts.
3. Decision making and barrier removal: Most of the actions will be the responsibility of the Museum managers who meet with the CEO at bi-weekly Management Team meetings. A portion of each of these meetings will be devoted to items of implementation needing a decision, or for which a roadblock has emerged requiring steps to resume progress. This regular forum will allow the process to progress. If this strategy does not yield effective results, the Museum may create a DEAI Working Team, a format that the museum has used to address other important initiatives.

Accountability

The success of this framework will depend on continued commitment and perseverance in implementation. To best ensure this effort, a key aspect of this framework is to be publicly accountable. The CEO, working with the Operations Team, will prepare an annual review of progress on the framework for Board review, and make a public report of progress, and adjust goals and actions in response to results and opportunities. Reporting on progress will remain challenging until more specific measures of success are developed. The Operations Team will prioritize determining and adopting effective measurement tools. The Museum has begun to try out measurement based on the concept of “net promotor scores” as a means to measure satisfaction with its DEAI “atmosphere” across visitors, staff, teachers, and board. In the CCLI study of museums referenced on page 1, the lack of clear measures and the challenges of identifying measures were identified as leading barriers to

implementation. As such, the Museum is not alone in knowing that even as we report on progress we will be simultaneously defining the benchmarks against which we will report. Clearly, that is not ideal, but alternatively we would have to wait until better measures are in place to move forward and be transparent in our reporting.

The key elements of our accountability plan are:

1. Create a DEAI Framework Review Committee consisting of members internal and external to the organization and engage them on an ongoing basis.
2. Create an annual DEAI report including data on audience, staff, board, member, and volunteer diversity.
3. Publish the DEAI framework and an annual report on the Discovery Museum website.