From Small Wins to Sweeping Change

*Working Together to
Foster Equity, Inclusion, and
Antiracism in Museums*

EDITED BY PRIYA FRANK
AND THERESA SOTTO

AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF MUSEUMS

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American Alliance of Museums

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Acknowledgments

This book is a testament to the power of collaboration and collective action. We began this project knowing of one another's work to further equity, inclusion, and antiracism; however, we had never worked with one another and neither of us had experience editing a book. Yet we knew the opportunity to collect the insights and recommendations of colleagues dedicated to fostering change in museums would cause a ripple effect across the field. It was an opportunity we couldn't pass up.

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Dear reader, we also thank you for joining us.

Preface

Priya Frank and Theresa Sotto

How does a diverse community thrive in spaces that were designed to be exclusionary? Museums, with histories tied to colonial violence and racist practices and whose survival is largely reliant on the generosity of wealthy donors, were not built to be inclusive. Yet many museums' missions and the people who bring these missions to life have egalitarian aims. There have been many moments when we, the coeditors—two women of color who are daughters of immigrants—have not felt a sense of belonging in the field to which we have devoted our careers. This tension has been simmering in museums for decades. Convenings organized by Museums as Sites of Social (MASS) Action beginning in 2016 and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) annual conference's 2017 diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) theme are just two examples in recent years that demonstrate the urgency of confronting histories of colonization and advancing equity and inclusion in museums. The Mellon Foundation's second Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey, released in 2019, confirmed that we still have a great deal of work to do to diversify staff, especially at senior leadership positions.[1] The museum remains perilously at odds with the diversity of the United States.

In 2020, after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and countless others sparked protests worldwide, and while the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequities, museums were increasingly and vociferously called on to establish antiracist practices, take action in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, and authentically engage

audiences representative of their diverse communities. Grassroots efforts to call out racist behaviors and push for more equitable practices in museums increased exponentially and have taken the form of open letters demanding change,[2] social media campaigns such as the @ChangetheMuseum Instagram account, unionization efforts,[3] and convenings with like-minded museum staff, such as "[Collective Liberation]: Disrupt, Dismantle, Manifest," which was organized in 2021 by members of Museums and Race, MASS Action, Museum Workers Speak, The Incluseum, Museums Are Not Neutral, Empathetic Museum, and Visitors of Color.

These efforts have galvanized museum professionals to examine institutional culture and to begin or augment the challenging work of looking inward to foster DEAI and antiracism within their own institutions. Museums and Race contributors Janeen Bryant, Barbara Cohen-Stratyner, Stacey Mann, and Levon Williams state in a 2021 AAM article:

> museums operate within a white supremacy culture, which informs the norms and practices of the museum field at large. This culture comes from museums' historic ties to the Atlantic slave trade and has remained embedded in institutional and individual practices. However, there are field-wide efforts to dismantle white supremacy culture, and there are ways that individuals can begin to see and disrupt this culture in their respective organizations.[4]

Indeed, in recent years museums have begun to form cross-departmental working groups and committees to critique their internal practices, review hiring processes, and ultimately foster a more inclusive environment for both visitors and staff alike. According to the Cultural Competence Learning Institute (CCLI), 30 percent of 580 museums that responded to a CCLI survey have active DEAI committees.[5] Additionally, since summer 2020, a proliferation of DEAI-related positions have emerged in the museum field. In personal communications with Andrew Plumley, Senior Director of Equity and Culture at AAM, he approximated a 300 percent increase in calls from folks with DEAI in their title looking for support.[6]

Although establishing positions focused on DEAI efforts in museums is a positive indicator of organizational change, it is critical that this work does not fall on one person but is integrated into all facets of museum operations and processes. All stakeholders have a part to play in this work, and we are more effective if we work together. But how do cross-departmental initiatives get off the ground? How do individuals build support and successfully advocate for limited resources to be allocated to new positions, programs, and cross-departmental working groups? How can colleagues work together to decolonize their museum practices and make space for institutional critique? What lessons are being learned from these internal groups, and how can they

inform practices that are sustainable and responsive to changing needs? The process of initiating and implementing DEAI initiatives can be complicated, challenging, and resource-intensive. Conversations about inequities, privilege, and power in the workplace are often tense if not fraught, and many museum professionals are seeking resources to navigate uncomfortable terrain.

In this book, we bring together a collection of tools, solutions, and models from DEAI practitioners who have actively worked toward institutional change. This is the first book to focus specifically on collaborative and inclusive practices in equity and antiracism work in different types of museums.[7] Through a range of case studies, we demonstrate the importance of relationship building, authentic connections, and developing foundations together over time, providing a much-needed resource for museum professionals at every level who are grappling with challenges that are pervasive in predominantly white institutions.

BOOK OVERVIEW: OUR JOURNEY TOGETHER

This book offers a range of learning about how different groups have approached their DEAI work in museums and how it's often the small steps that lead to significant change. Whether the work is achieved through cross-departmental teams like those at the Minneapolis Institute of Art or Hammer Museum; inclusive assessment approaches such as those at the Minnesota Historical Society and Pacific Science Center; or collaborations with volunteers at the Cincinnati Art Museum, with community advisory groups at the Burke Museum, or with the board at the Seattle Art Museum, the experiences are as diverse as the museums that they represent. We intentionally asked authors to describe the processes that led to their accomplishments to help readers enact similar initiatives at their institutions. For many museums, this work is still new and the challenges and failures are just as important as the wins—perhaps even more so. Our hope is that these learnings can spark questions, discussions, and ideas for how to implement equity and antiracism work in your own organizations, assess those practices, formulate and prepare groups to support the work internally, and authentically connect with constituencies outside of staff.

As coeditors of this book, we consider ourselves to be coconspirators, amplifiers, and collaborators in shaping material whose original form had already been produced through collective will. When we put out our initial call, we contacted groups such as MASS Action, Museum Hue, Incluseum, as well as our personal and professional networks. We received more than thirty proposals, each of which recounted stories of change made possible through

collaboration. Even the structure of this book was borne out of the wisdom of a collective. While we reviewed the proposals, five threads emerged across a range of types of and sizes of museums, which ultimately became the main sections of this book: Goals and Vision Setting; Structure, Sustainability, and Impact; Assessment and Accountability; Staff Learning and Training; and Engaging Groups beyond Staff.

After we chose the chapter authors, we held a virtual meeting for everyone to connect, introduce their chapter topic, and learn more about the vision for the book. We were overjoyed to convene many people doing incredibly powerful equity work from all over the country. Our hearts felt full knowing that this project had potential to help shift our field. For many of the practitioners, writing about their work in a chapter format was a new experience, and we wanted to make sure they felt supported and understood that this process was new for us too. We expressed that we would be embarking on this book journey together.

The book authors represent a range of institutions—art and history museums, science centers, and children's museums—and a diversity of perspectives, approaches, positions, and experiences in the field. Of the forty authors in this book, 60 percent identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). In contrast, 28 percent of staff in art museums are people of color, according to the Mellon Foundation's Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey 2018,[8] and between 0 percent and 20 percent of executive staff and senior leadership at four major museum associations (American Alliance of Museums, Association of Science and Technology Centers, Association of Children's Museums, and American Association for State and Local History) are people of color.[9] When making decisions about authors for the book, we felt it was essential to center BIPOC voices in a field that is predominantly white. Moreover, as we read proposals from across the country, we saw that in many cases, BIPOC museum professionals were the ones who were catalyzing change.

As coeditors new to the publication process, the challenges to complete this book were numerous, and we received little direction or support from the institutions that called on practitioners to share their knowledge with the wider field. We knew that coediting a book would be a heavy lift, but the weight was even greater than we anticipated. We felt enormous pressure to produce a resource that does this work justice and ensures the authors get the recognition that they deserve. This was particularly crucial because we learned after our book proposal was accepted by the American Alliance of Museums, that chapter authors are not compensated for their labor, and editors receive a small percentage of the profits on book sales. This practice is in line with academic publications that work with authors who are ostensibly compensated

by their employers to share their specialized expertise. Museum workers, however, are hamstrung by predominantly low wages, as demonstrated by The Art + Museum Salary Transparency Google spreadsheet, which includes more than twenty-five hundred salaries from museum workers at all levels. As an article in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* pointed out, this spreadsheet "shows that pay and benefits differ radically across locations with one stark exception: Low wages are the norm for most of those who don't hold top director or chief curatorial posts."[10] Every field, including publishing, has a long way to go to become more equitable and offer fair compensation, especially to BIPOC museum workers who are disproportionately impacted by salary inequities.[11]

During the process of completing this project, our motivation for helping other BIPOC writers and editors navigate these inequitable structures has grown, and we have become advocates for greater transparency in fields, like the publishing industry, whose work coincides with ours. Our expertise is shifting these fields to better serve communities in line with the changing demographics of the country, and our work should be recognized, supported, and compensated accordingly. The authors have worked incredibly hard to shape complicated initiatives into cohesive stories with little or no compensation. Some, during the writing of this book, have decided to leave the museum field or are actively planning an exit strategy. We share these details with a desire for full transparency about the inequities that are pervasive in our field and the emotional labor that results. Even practitioners who see a vision for inclusive and equitable museums and have the passion and drive to realize that vision are burning out. Being BIPOC women leading this effort, the pressure to do it "right" feels insurmountable. Moreover, while reviewing authors' stories of frustrations and struggles resulting from institutional roadblocks, we would relive traumatic moments as well. As we approached each chapter with editorial care, we needed to extend the same care to ourselves, and fortunately, while reading about small wins from colleagues across the country, these accounts rekindled moments of joy we experienced in parallel situations. Ultimately, working on this project helped energize our DEAI and antiracism efforts, and we believe that reading about advocates and accomplices all over the country will energize and galvanize you, too.

MANY PATHS FORWARD

We hope that years from now we can look at this book as a collection of collaborative actions to forge new paths in DEAI and antiracism work. We also recognize that this work is constantly shifting, so this is by no means a map

with only one path. We also hope that maps will no longer be necessary to arrive at places of inclusion and equity and that DEAI will be the foundation of every organization. This work must be considered fundamental to the excellence and success of a museum, and this includes dedicating time, people power, relationship building, and resources toward it. Our equity lenses must be affixed every day, across all departments, to be most effective.

This is a book for those who recognize that we are not going to undo structural and institutional inequities overnight, a resource for people who are willing to step out, have courage to take risks, and build pathways where there are none. This is a book for those invested in pushing for equity and inclusion long term, no matter what stage in their careers. It is for those struggling to make a difference in an institution whose white supremacist roots run deep. Of course this book is specifically about museums, but we also believe that the strategies and tools described can be applicable to a variety of industries, organizations, and communities looking to build more equitable processes and programs. This is a book for allies, for agitants/advocates (see chapter 4) as well as those who don't know where to start. This is for you, for our field, for the millions of people who visit museums online or on-site, and for those who won't visit until our spaces become more equitable and inclusive.

NOTES

1. Westermann, Schonfeld, and Sweeney, "Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey 2018."

2. See Randle, "'We Were Tired of Asking': Why Open Letters Have Become Many Activists' Tool of Choice for Exposing Racism at Museums."

3. See Greenberger and Solomon, "Guggenheim Museum Workers Push to Unionize Amid Wave of Organizing across U.S. Museums."

4. Bryant, Cohen-Stratyner, Mann, and Williams, "The White Supremacy Elephant in the Room."

5. Garibay and Olson, *CCLI National Landscape Study: DEAI Practices in the Museum Field.*

6. Andrew Plumley (personal communication, August 11, 2021) also stated that "most museums lack the ability/capacity to understand what the function of this role must be, and tend not to hire who they really need."

7. Collaborative efforts to further DEAI have been referenced in online resources and articles such as the Museums as Sites of Social (MASS) Action Toolkit or "Facing Change: Insights from the American Alliance of Museums' DEAI Working Group." There are some book publications on DEAI strategies in museums; however, those that exist focus on curatorial practices, such as *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (2012) by Amy Lonetree; center strategies for individual leaders and change agents, as in Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko

and Chris Taylor's *The Inclusive Museum Leader* (2021) and Mike Murawski's *Museums as Agents of Change* (2021); or offer foundational starting points, such as *Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion in Museums* (2019), edited by Johnnetta Betsch Cole and Laura L. Lott, and *Understanding and Implementing Inclusion in Museums* (2018), by Laura Edythe Coleman.

8. Westermann et al., "Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey 2018."

9. Garibay and Olson, *CCLI National Landscape Study*.

10. Dimento, "Crowdsourced List of Museum Salaries Goes Viral, Exposing Pay Inequities."

11. See Dafoe, "Arts Workers of Color in Los Angeles Earn 35 Percent Less in Wages than Their White Colleagues, a New Study Finds"; and Miranda, "Column: Are Art Museums Still Racist? The COVID Reset."

Part I

GOAL AND VISION SETTING

Chapter One

Carving a Path
from Diversity to Justice

Anniessa Antar and Elisabeth Callihan
with contributions by Alice Anderson,
Gretchen Halverson, Frances Lloyd-Baynes,
Thomas Lyon, Tobie Miller, Krista Pearson,
Frederica Simmons, Jamie Van Nostrand,
Keisha Williams, and Jill Ahlberg Yohe

I interrogate museums not because I abhor them or because I want to see them die; but because I want to witness and be a part of their necessary rebirth. I love museums, deeply. I just don't like where they appear to be headed.

—Dr. Porchia Moore[i]

Our journey to this current moment in 2021 has not been a straight line; there have been periods of time when it feels as if we are moving backward—perhaps an inevitability given the complex and intertwined systems of oppression that institutional change work must engage.[2] As our understanding of these complex systems has deepened, the goals for the intended outcome of our individual and collective work have transformed as well.

Throughout the institution's history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) has made various attempts to address the underrepresentation of racial and socioeconomic diversity in its audience, staff, and programming. Mia articulated an institution-wide commitment to this work in 2015, using the language of diversity and inclusion. Although the museum initially gained some small wins in this area, over time staff began to see that this approach was only making surface-level reforms to an otherwise unaffected system. A focus on equity led the next phase of our journey, as we developed an understanding that it would be necessary to examine and address the complex systems of power within which we operate. Most recently, staff engaged in this work

have begun to accept that these systemic structures are deeply resistant to change as long as they continue to operate; therefore, we must act radically—working holistically from the root of the tree to its fruit—to overcome these systems of oppression and become a space of justice and collective liberation. While transformational work is challenging, focusing on these aspirational values is a reminder that this work can be joyful; it is generational and, in many ways, will always be necessary. It is essential that we look beyond this current moment and envision a radically transformed, liberatory museum of the future to build toward it effectively and sustainably.

The phases of our work over the years can best be defined by the language we applied at the time, which has changed accordingly and necessarily, to support our long-term vision and intended impacts. The language is less important than the values the work is rooted in, but the evolution is necessary to stay in motion, one step ahead of the whitewashing that threatens to co-opt and silence these efforts, one step ahead of the magnetic pull of the status quo that threatens to pull them back to the well-worn path.

TOWARD DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

In order to create a roadmap to navigate toward where museums need to go, we must first understand their origin. As authors of the *MASS Action Toolkit* write, "Historical and social context informs the conditions under which museums [were] created and within which their roles and purposes are defined. These sites cannot separate themselves from the collective memories that link their development with white supremacy, . . . structural racism and other oppressions."[3] At Mia, we recognize that addressing our history enables us to learn about harms caused during the museum's formative years to move toward collective repair and healing. As Rose Paquet and Aletheia Wittman explain, "Legacies based on systems of power and oppression will not go away simply by ignoring them. Dealing with them allows us to get to the heart of who our museums are for . . . and, by extension, whose experiences are acknowledged by museums and whose are not."[4] It is within this contextual framework, therefore, that we share some of our institutional history here as grounding for our present work.

Through oral histories and informal sharing of narratives, we have been able to put together this account. We are not the first, or the only, to have attempted to repair historical harms. There are many stories missing from this collective sense-making, and we honor the unnamed who have been pushed out, left quietly, left loudly and are unable to share their own story today. Although we do not wish to perpetuate the worship of the written word, we do

offer this chapter as a snapshot of institutional memory for those who follow after us in this work to know that you are not alone.

BOX 1.1.   ACTIONABLE PRACTICE: INSTITUTIONAL LEGACY

We must connect our past with our present to effectively address the future.

We encourage a deep dive into the founding of your institution, which is a vital first step in transformational, generational work.*

Individually, or as a group, consider the following: Who founded your institution and why? Who or what was displaced for its creation? What else was happening in your city, region, or nationally when it was founded? Who has it traditionally served; Who has it excluded? What narrative about its creation do you tell publicly, and how does that differ from the history you just constructed via these prompts?

Creating a People's History: Who has been responsible for past inclusion and equity efforts? How are you documenting this work for future generations of staff?

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* For more information on this inquiry process and a resource for approaching this work, see Wittman, "Creating a Framework for Institutional Genealogy."

Our Founding History

Mia is located on the traditional lands of Dakota people, who were coerced[5] into ceding them to the US government in 1805 through deceitful tactics so that a military base could be built at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers, or the *bdote*, a sacred site of creation for the Dakota. Seven miles away lies the parcel of land the museum resides on, bequeathed to the city in 1872 by its third mayor with the stipulation that the site become a public park and an art museum. The museum opened its doors in 1915 with support from the Park Museum Fund[6]—a property tax to support green and cultural spaces, which continues to this day to be levied and reapportioned.

The white founding members of the Society of Fine Arts hoped the museum would elevate the perception of the Midwest in the eyes of those on the East Coast. Yet, they were also committed to making the museum an accessible place "for the people, all of them, from wherever they may come."[7] Free

admission was offered several days a week—a requirement per the museum's bylaws—and attendance the first year exceeded 148,000, nearly half of the city's entire population.

Understanding this foundational context—being shaped and guided by the wealthy elite, while receiving public funds and purportedly existing "for the people"—is informative because its legacy has continued in the intervening century and has resulted in various degrees of tension and existential questioning. Since its opening, Mia has been in an oscillating cycle between the mythical identity of a "universalist museum,"[8] an institution that purportedly serves all people, and the exclusive, "monocultural club"[9] it was formed to be. For every attempt the museum has made toward diversity or inclusion, there have been opposing efforts that reinforce a narrative centering whiteness. The work has remained on the surface without ever impacting the bedrock. Thus, we cannot make substantive change through a one-off initiative; rather, it necessitates a complete change in our culture, practices, and larger vision.

Shifting Culture

Around 2010, Mia began to experience a culture shift that would lay some foundation for our future equity-related work. Under the leadership of its then director, staff began a practice of experimentation, embracing risk and potential failure in pursuit of innovation. The addition of contemporary art to the collection created opportunities to interrupt canonical art historical approaches. Staff began to work more collaboratively across divisions and hierarchy. Efforts were made toward cocreative models that moved programs from the stage to the circle and offered space for both subject "experts" and traditional knowledge keepers. The words *relevance* and *engagement* began being embedded in our vocabulary because staff began to expand on the idea of what a museum—and who its audience—could and should be.

These efforts were supported by museum leadership to the degree that they would not require a larger systemic evaluation. However, this embrace of experimentation naturally led to an examination of our historical modus operandi, which began to surface questions about how and why we do things—and again, *for whom*. This would reach a pivotal point in 2015 as Mia, and the field more broadly, began reflecting on its responsibility as a civic institution in responding to social injustices, such as police brutality. This was spurred on by the joint statement issued by a collective of museum bloggers in December 2014, followed by the weekly #MuseumsRespondtoFerguson Twitter conversations started by Adrianne Russell and Aleia Brown, and amplified

by the #MuseumWorkersSpeak insistence that the social justice lens must be applied inward, as much as outward toward the public.[10] Mia, like many other predominantly white organizations, felt an internal tension arise around whether making a statement about human rights was aligned with our mission as a museum; and if it was, how might we even begin to do so.

Recognizing this as an opportunity to catalyze a field-wide commitment to social justice, Mia's head of multigenerational learning presented the museum's director of learning innovation with an idea for a national, collaborative initiative that would work toward developing actionable equity practices. Mia's then director and president agreed that Mia could support and host the idea. In collaboration with colleagues engaged in social justice efforts from across the field, Museum As Site for Social (MASS) Action was born.

Concurrently with this field-focused work, Mia's associate curator of Native American art began developing a large-scale exhibition of Native women artists, which would put some of these equity commitments into practice. From its inception, this exhibition broke the established curatorial paradigm, eschewing the individualist model to convene a roundtable of Native advisors, artists, and scholars to cocreate and collaboratively shape the exhibition. This process aligned more closely with Indigenous practice than the neocolonial approach art museums typically take toward Native material. Together, these initiatives, MASS Action and the exhibition that came to be called *Hearts of Our People*, provided an opportunity for a radically different approach to museum practice.

This direction was further reinforced with the creation of a new strategic plan in 2016, which prioritized engaging communities, acknowledging the importance of working collaboratively with partners outside its walls, as well as focusing internally on diversity and inclusion training for staff. Mia began its first attempts at directly addressing the topic of race, exclusion, and the pervasiveness of whiteness in museums. To support these efforts, Mia's head of multigenerational learning convened the cross-departmental resource team (later renamed equity team) with ten BIPOC and white staff representing areas of learning innovation, membership, human resources, accounting, and curatorial. This space gave staff members the chance to gather formally to discuss the challenges and inequities of the current work environment, propose solutions, and build a supportive community of allies. This early group was small, had no formal reporting structure to leadership, and no budgetary support; therefore, initial efforts had a somewhat ad hoc feel. Yet, as staff continued to gather and collectively address these issues, hope began to grow that these grassroots efforts might lead to more transformational change.

Diversity without Inclusion

While these staff-led initiatives were underway, Mia leadership was also creating some institutional goals around its newly named commitment to diversity and inclusion. These metrics were primarily focused on quantifiable diversity: How many staff are people of color; how many community partners we had; how many exhibitions representing nondominant identities, and so forth. Although the word *inclusion* was also being used, the emphasis was on "including" racial diversity in the existing system, with much less attention given to involving these perspectives in a way that would meaningfully change those systems. Predominately white institutions (PWIs) like Mia often start with the diversity approach because it allows the institution to make some visible changes to achieve tangible results and create a few easy "wins."[11] Institutions often think focusing on a statistical representation of diversity will be a stepping-stone to transformative work—or perhaps some regard diversity as the terminal goal.

The diversity fellowship model is a popular example of this tactic.[12] This model aims to redress the absence of staff of color through explicit invitations. However, without also considering the changes to the dominant culture needed to support the fellow's experience, the program risks being tokenistic at best and harmful at worst—a gesture of reform and not transformation.[13] The challenge with this kind of gesture, adding diversity to existing structures as an afterthought, is that it has the paradoxical effect of reinforcing whiteness as the norm. No transformation of the larger system is necessary if diversity is just a statistics problem that can be logistically and tactically "fixed."

This diversity ideology also allows white members of staff to construct a positive identity of themselves and the organization "as open-minded and accepting of difference . . . while maintaining the social and legal benefits of systemic whiteness."[14] It excuses white people from the conversation about their own participation and complicity in the system that invisibly benefits them and the need to change their own individual behaviors or mindset.

To counteract this, white people need to actively practice antiracism in their own lives and deepen their tolerance with discomfort. Often white individuals do not understand the relationship between institutional systemic racism and personal racism.[15] They may take offense or shut down from taking personal responsibility for unlearning white supremacy culture. Pushing through that discomfort can serve as a step toward transformation, and the willingness to adapt the conditioned responses of our bodies and minds can open the space for healing. At Mia, members of the equity team address this by creating opportunities to engage in critically self-reflexive practice,[16] examining one's individual mindset, assumptions and actions, and their impact on the organization.

White Supremacy Culture at Work

As challenging as it is to be critically reflexive at the individual level, museums—built on a foundation of white supremacy and from a history of colonization over land, people, and cultural and spiritual material—are especially ill-equipped to examine themselves. An effective tool we have used to encourage institutional-level reflection at Mia is Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun's insightful examination of the fourteen characteristics of white supremacy culture.[17] Although many employees who encounter these characteristics will find them so familiar and banal as to be harmless, Jones and Okun state this is precisely what makes them dangerous. Organizational culture is profoundly influential on our behaviors because it is ever present and, yet, invisible and unspoken. These characteristics are the norms and standards without ever having been intentionally named or chosen by the organization.

This is not without purpose. The characteristics displayed in white supremacy culture work are mutually reinforcing and keep the system operating as it always has. So, despite organizational leaders outwardly saying they are looking for multicultural diversity, they also expect—sometimes explicitly, sometimes subconsciously—that subordinated identities entering the space will assimilate to the organization's current cultural norms. For the people in the organization who have benefited from this system, there is no reason to question this way of operating. For anyone else, it creates a precarious dynamic wherein proposing a variation from the status quo might result in being labeled disgruntled, a troublemaker, or "not the right fit." Every organization has their own coded language for labeling employees who advocate for substantive transformation. At Mia, we noticed the word *rogue* was often used by management to describe any attempt to deviate from cultural norms. Whenever this word is used, it sets off alarm bells that white supremacy culture is being challenged.

White supremacy culture is damaging to everyone in a global sense, but it is materially harmful to the people of color who are brought into the space, who attempt to advocate for change and are shut down, reprimanded, or retaliated against in subtle to tangible ways. This yields a painful experience of tone-policing, gaslighting, and undermining the lived experiences of harm and trauma of BIPOC staff, forcing them to compartmentalize or sublimate their feelings. As a result of this, museums will continue to see a harmful cycle of disengagement[18] or departure of BIPOC staff as long as white supremacy characteristics go unchecked.

While the cultural change at Mia over the past decade, which moved staff from a dysconscious racism[19] to an explicit focus on "diversity and inclusion," felt like a seismic shift to some; for others, it felt insufficient to radically transform our practice. For change to happen, change must happen at

BOX 1.2.   ACTIONABLE PRACTICE: INTERSECTING CULTURES: WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE AT WORK

Consider how your organizational culture might be centering white dominant culture. At Mia, we did this by presenting one of the fourteen Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture* at each of our monthly all-staff meetings for more than a year; then we held a series of one-hour deep-dive sessions to unpack each characteristic.

As individuals or in groups reflect on the following questions:

Can you identify ways characteristics of white supremacy manifest in your work culture?
What are some antidotes and strategies you could develop to interrupt and counteract them?

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* Jones and Okun, "White Supremacy Culture."

all levels—from individual mindsets to institutional policies. This requires an examination of larger systemic issues and a commitment to learning and changing behaviors. Over time, we realized that the *product* of our labor cannot and will not change until we address our *processes* and, most importantly, the root cause of current injustices within our organization.

This realization played out saliently in the planning of a recent exhibition, where a group of community voices most impacted by the exhibition content were invited to provide input on interpretive and programmatic strategies. Members of this advisory group were identified through existing Mia partners and offered an honorarium to compensate their time and contributions. Community members shared three main concerns: the exhibition erased local Native presence; prioritized content for the museum's predominantly white audience over those whose identities were reflected within the exhibition; and highlighted artists who they felt were profiting off the pain of BIPOC subjects. Staff shared these concerns with museum leadership in several meetings and in a formal letter outlining the disconnect between the museum's purported desire to invite community voices and the refusal to hear them. The critiques from staff and community were minimized and dismissed. In perhaps the most painful instance, an interpretation panel—featuring a quote by a BIPOC community member expressing their disapproval of an artist's use of Black death spectacle[20]—was removed after the exhibition opened because it was deemed too subjective.

This experience reinforces the negative impact of the diversity ideology. As in the case with the diversity fellowship, by seeking to reform current structures just enough to allow space for diversity, the museum only succeeds in inviting people of color into the systems that were designed to exclude and oppress them.

TOWARD EQUITY

Recognizing the harm of "solving for" diversity without designing for real inclusion was the first step in the next significant shift at Mia. It helped us differentiate between reformist tendencies that maintain the status quo and deeper transformational strategies focused on equity, which will bring about new ways of operating. Mia's working definition of *equity*[21] had been a relatively passive concept rooted in the ethos of diversity until the museum hired its first manager of diversity and inclusion in 2018. This staff member led us to a more explicit definition of equity—one which necessitates a systemic power analysis, action, and accountability. Although Mia had historically avoided explicitly addressing race, this new approach would intentionally be race-specific, though not exclusive.[22] With expertise in organizational development and change management, the diversity and inclusion manager provided structure and strategies that would help staff collectivize, prioritize their efforts, and gain momentum.

To begin, we used the multicultural organizational development (MCOD)[23] framework to examine the current institutional environment. MCOD is a process of change that supports an organization moving from monocultural and exclusive to multicultural and inclusive and equitable. This became a key tool for staff to understand not only where Mia fit along the continuum but also the structural areas that needed to be addressed to effect real change. The other key element brought in to help organize our work was an annual compression planning session,[24] through which we were able to identify various pillars of organizational structure (e.g., personnel, policies and procedures, programs, and exhibitions), map out how they intersected with the MCOD chart, and prioritize the work needed to impact each area.

Applying these frameworks, staff from the larger equity team community began to organize strategically in a matrix of work groups aimed at making an impact in each of the identified pillars and the organization as a whole. Two employee resource groups would also emerge for BIPOC staff and those identifying as two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer, questioning, asexual, and intersex+ (2SLGBTQAI+) and allies. Later, a racial equity roadmap would be developed by staff, administered by an interdepartmental

BOX 1.3.   ACTIONABLE PRACTICE: EQUITY FRAMEWORKS

Group Discussion Questions:

Does your institution have an equity statement? What are some words or phrases that feel most resonant or powerful? Where is there a disconnect?

What are the actionable commitments your organization has made to equity? What accountability measures are in place to ensure the sustainability of those commitments?

Using the continuum of multicultural organization development,* break into small groups and identify where your institution falls on the chart. Compare and discuss findings with one another. Where do you align, and where do you differ? What are the areas needed to impact change?

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* Jackson, *The NTL Handbook of Organization Development and Change.*

BOX 1.4.   MIA EQUITY TEAM COMMUNITY AND WORK GROUPS

Equity Team Community

Mia's equity team "community" is a monthly meeting for equity team members, and open to all staff, to discuss broad topics that relate to equity and museums (usually kicked off by a short article, podcast, or video clip). It is also a chance to hear updates on Mia equity initiatives, share upcoming opportunities, or calls for support.

The following work groups were designed to support movement along the MCOD, as well as the frameworks of change mapped out by Mia's inaugural diversity and inclusion manager. Groups are listed in order of workflow process.

Equity Strategic Work Group

This team connects other work groups to the broader equity strategic vision, prioritizes workflow, and provides mechanisms for ongoing assessment.

Cultural Fluency
Cultural fluency is the ongoing journey of learning the language of equity and embedding it into our critical consciousness. This work group supports staff learning by organizing cultural fluency "sparks"—workshops or talks led by guest speakers that address the internal transformations needed to create a more equitable workplace and world.

Unpacking Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture
These monthly staff-hosted sessions explore one of the fourteen characteristics of white supremacy culture, examining how they may appear in our daily work. Understanding how each of the characteristics operate is the first antidote in dismantling them.

Mia Mindset
This group focuses on shifting from theory to praxis, by developing tools for implementing what staff are learning from cultural fluency sparks, ensuring that the staff's job activities, as well as the institution's policies, procedures, and external messaging are aligned and integrated with an equity lens.

Racial Equity Roadmap Task Force
This task force was formed by Mia's current director to address the racial equity roadmap created by staff.

Ad Hoc Groups
Shorter-term task-oriented committees regularly emerge. For example, a group rewrote Mia's performance evaluation to include DEAI commitment; another group was created to help support Human Resources to develop actionable strategies to hire and keep employees of color.

Employee Resource Groups
Two-Spirit LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC groups were created to provide safer spaces to build solidarity and respite for impacted staff.

Accessibility Team
This cross-functional team works to support staff learning, research effective practices, advocate for improved accessible design throughout our building, and support accessibility in public programs and digital tools.

Artist Identity Group
Mia's Artist Identity project works to match our collection documenta-
tion standards to our DEAI efforts by examining the artists—named,
unnamed, living, dead—represented at Mia and considering how their
unique identities impact their art. How we document and share that
information with our audience relies on: self-identification; avoiding
"othering"; and acknowledging that this work should remain as fluid as
identity and language itself.

task force. Other independent groups, including an accessibility team and the
artist identity group, also created intersections with the equity team.

Participation in equity-related initiatives grew tenfold, and at one point,
members represented almost half of Mia's entire staff. However, just as it
seemed that equity was becoming a standard consideration, we began to
feel the beginnings of some resistance emerging. In 2020, we experienced a
deep disruption: Mia's manager of diversity and inclusion resigned, followed
shortly after by the diversity and inclusion coordinator, after assessing resis-
tance from leadership to applying the mindset and strategy of equity through
organizational development.

Although the decentralized power structure they established before their
departure could support the continuation of this work for a period of time fol-
lowing their absence, it is not indefinitely sustainable. Further, despite strong
efforts to build shared understanding and commitment around equity broadly
across staff, it has yet to be embedded as a central tenet of the museum. While
equity team and its subgroups have organized—frequent learning opportuni-
ties, frameworks, and audits for structural analysis, recommendations on how
to move forward with these values in mind—they have not "trickled up" to
the structural leadership level. Primarily, the work is "allowed" to happen
insofar as it does not fundamentally challenge the status quo or the existing
power dynamics.[25]

To counteract these moments of institutional inertia, we continue to adapt
and develop resilient structures to help with the consequent burnout, includ-
ing decentralizing leadership of initiatives to allow staff to step in/out and
organizing to offer paid time for BIPOC staff mental health check-ins. We are
better at naming our realities in our staff conversations on white supremacy
culture characteristics, and we intentionally carve out meeting time to address
topics of discomfort or disagreement head-on, in community with one an-
other. We understand that generative conflict is necessary to interrupt cycles

of white supremacy. There is a push and pull to this work, always, and it is this kinetic friction that propels us ahead.

The Death of DEAI

The work that equity-engaged staff has supported has set up new paths toward a values-based museum practice of the future. But broader institutional transformation will require uprooting norms around power, authority, and decision-making. Although we initially decided to shift the language describing our efforts from *diversity* to *equity* to address power and disrupt the harmful cycle of white supremacy, we are now seeing that white supremacy culture is even co-opting *equity* as a means of self-preservation.

As witnessed in June 2020 in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, an unprecedented number of museums issued statements on social media.[26] The challenge is, as evidenced from the noncommittal, "bothsidesism" language, it wasn't entirely clear what the statements were meant to convey. These largely empty posts (some of them, quite literally, empty black boxes) were devoid of accountability, lacking acknowledgment of harm caused by complicity in white supremacy, and commitment to do something about it.[27] As Angelique Power explains, these performative equity statements—words without actions—actually harm the broader movement: "Equity as a statement, an accessory, rather than a word that actually should create fear, [is] being used right now as a badge. And that is the death of the term 'equity.'"[28]

For staff engaged in this work at Mia, the moment felt like a passage for us as well. The museum's diversity and inclusion department no longer existed, and the equity team was becoming something more than a work group. We realized that the language of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) was not the end goal; it could only ever be a starting point. We not only needed new language but, also, an aspirational vision to set our sights generationally into the future. Not "fixing" or reforming oppressive systems to be slightly less oppressive, but building a new world of radical hope and possibility. The death of DEAI at Mia was the birth of our vision for justice and collective liberation.

TOWARD JUSTICE AND COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

In response to the June 2020 statements, museum workers across the country began sharing personal accounts of racism in their institutions, detailing how these externally facing messages did not match their internal experiences.[29] At Mia, staff from the museum's BIPOC group and allies from the equity

team expressed their own concerns and experiences to members of senior leadership. These were met with responses ranging from a sympathetic but beleaguered, "I know, but what can we do?" to denial. Feeling a growing sense of frustration from the avoidance and inertia, a group of staff intervened and took direct action. The result was the racial equity roadmap, a strategic plan for moving the dial toward racial equity within all aspects of the museum's practice, shared with Mia's staff, leadership, and board of trustees for consideration.

The racial equity roadmap envisioned a reparative workplace culture that would move beyond the performative toward substantive transformation through a series of short- to long-term recommendations. In the immediate, the document suggested the creation of a respite policy to support the physical and emotional well-being of BIPOC staff; a community review board to create transparency and accountability around museum budget, accessions, exhibitions, and programs; and a more democratic exhibit planning process to involve stakeholders most impacted by the content.

In response, Mia's director formed a cross-hierarchical task force to review the recommendations. This group was subsequently put on hiatus to create a labor management committee to address some of the roadmap's issues related to human resources. Although there are legal parameters and liability issues that leadership has to consider, this "step back" approach, pausing one committee to form another, is a time-honored resistance strategy to slow work down[30] and, in this case, to prevent staff from challenging white supremacy culture. It also signals that leadership either misunderstands or is intentionally preventing the radicality required to create meaningful change. Those in structural power are likely not even conscious of their motives. The white person's default reaction to protect its dominant culture is deeply ingrained in our patterned behaviors. Therefore, just as we need language to describe the change movement we are trying to shape, we also need language to identify emerging strategies of change resistance—and to recognize when we ourselves are perpetuating them.

The Ongoing Path

The need to cultivate a culture of imagination, emergent practice, and radical hope for what is possible are central components to change. *We cannot create what we cannot imagine.* We also cannot build anew without tearing down what no longer serves us. If we are to make real commitments to justice, there must be acceptance that we cannot continue to attempt reform. Accountability must be part of any work moving toward justice and is necessary for our path to collective liberation.

BOX 1.5.   ACTIONABLE PRACTICE: RECOGNIZING THE 3 *R*'S

When this work stalls, it's helpful to recognize and understand the 3 *R*'s of resistance, repressive tolerance, and retrenchment, to work collaboratively to address them.

For Reading and Group Discussion (see Bibliography):

- Resistance: Active & Passive
  Resource: "Managing Resistance to Change" by Ken Hultman
- Repressive Tolerance
  Resource: "Repressive Tolerance and the 'Management' of Diversity" by Stephen Brookfield
- Retrenchment
  Resource: "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law" by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw

This journey is difficult, and it is unresolved. Staff engaged in this work will feel tired, exasperated, and devalued because that's what white supremacy normalizes, and it can feel Sisyphean, witnessing a wave of retrenchment following a progressive measure. We have reached a turning point because the terminology of equity has been co-opted by the dominating culture as a tactic of repressive tolerance to paradoxically preserve its dominance. In response, we need to move ahead, not only to new language but also toward the ethics of care, transformation, truth and reconciliation, justice, and reparations. We encourage you to look at DEAI, not as an end goal but as a starting point. Create actionable and accountable commitments in your internal and external work. Recognize the forms and patterns of resistance. Activate and release your imagination for a radically hopeful vision of what is possible. Envision a fully transformed antiracist institution working toward our shared liberation. *What does it look like? What did you do to help create it?*

Working collectively, museums can become that which we imagine and need them to be—centers of creativity, reciprocal relationship, mutual aid, organizing, solidarity, and collective liberation. Until objects and the institution itself are no longer prioritized over the well-being of humans, we will remain in a crumbling foundation rooted in colonial extraction. The path that

lies ahead is clear. As we move forward, we carry the narratives of those who came before, those who fought for the future that expands endlessly into the horizon ahead. We honor their sacrifices and deliver justice through our pursuit of a world reconstructed. Stepping forward from the shadows of oppression that extend centuries wide, we move forward into a space previously only held for dreams, now made reality, constructed without compromise.

We insist on a future that is:

Indigenized
Queer
Anti-capitalist
Decentralized
Collective
Cooperative
Trauma-informed
Practicing consent
Relational
Interconnected
Our tenacity is a testament to the viability of such a future.

It is ours to shape and to claim.

NOTES

1. Moore, "Reflexive Cartography: Or, a Ritual for the Dying Museum Landscape—the Socio-political Impact of Change in Museums."

2. As this work is complex, it is vital that staff from across the museum be part of the conversation so that a wide array of perspectives and job functions are represented. Therefore, the contributors to this chapter (Alice Anderson, Gretchen Halverson, Frances Lloyd-Barnes, Thomas Lyon, Tobie Miller, Krista Pearson, Frederica Simmons, Jamie Van Nostrand, Keisha Williams, and Jill Ahlberg Yohe) are all current and former Mia staff and members of the equity community who represent each of Mia's divisions: advancement, audience (formerly audience engagement and learning innovation), curatorial, finance, and operations.

3. Patterson, Wittman, Phillips, Guillotte, Quinn, and Russell, "Getting Started: What We Need to Change and Why," in *MASS Action Toolkit.*

4. Paquet and Wittman, "Bringing Self-Examination to the Center of Social Justice Work in Museums," 41.

5. Generally, the America Indian leaders who signed treaties did not read English, relying on interpreters paid by the US government. It is uncertain whether they were aware of the exact terms of the treaties they signed. Of the seven Dakota leaders present at 1805 negotiations, only two signed. Although their land was valued at

$200,000, when the US Senate later approved the treaty, they only allocated $2,000. See Minnesota Historical Society, "Minnesota Treaties."

6. In 2021, Mia received $15 million from Hennepin County property taxes, meaning about 40 percent of Mia's total operating budget comes from public dollars. Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. "Resolution 2020-350."

7. Although democratic words in theory, in practice Wallace Nye—the city's mayor at the time who spoke—would most likely have been thinking specifically of *white* people. Although the state had technically been desegregated since 1885 with the passage of the Equal Accommodations Act, racial discrimination was still rampant and, at times, violent. See Burnside, "African Americans in Minnesota."

8. Raicovich, *Culture Strike: Art and Museums in an Age of Protest*, 24.

9. "The Club" is the second stage on the *Continuum of Multicultural Organization Development*, wherein an organization seeks: "to maintain privileges for those who have traditionally held social power," allowing entry to a limited number from other social identity groups if they have the "right" perspective and credentials. "The club . . . engages with social justice issues only when they can be approached with comfort and on club members' terms." See Jackson, "Theory and Practice of Multicultural Organization Development," 181, https://naaee.org/sites/default/files/mcodmodel.pdf.

10. Antar, Callihan, and Russell, "A Watershed Moment: Lessons from #Museums RespondtoFerguson and MASS Action."

11. Brownlee, "The Dangers of Mistaking Diversity for Inclusion in the Workplace."

12. A quick Google search of this topic will yield 173 million results (when accessed on May 12, 2021).

13. For a critical theoretical framework for thinking about the dynamics of these initiatives, see James, "White Like Me: The Negative Impact of the Diversity Rationale on White Identity Formation."

14. Mayorga-Gallo, "The White-Centering Logic of Diversity Ideology."

15. Van Der Valk and Malley, "What's My Complicity? Talking White Fragility with Robin DiAngelo."

16. Greenberg, Antar, and Callihan, "Change-Making through Pedagogy," in *MASS Action Toolkit*, 156–59.

17. Jones and Okun, "White Supremacy Culture."

18. Page, "The 'Problem' Woman of Colour in the Workplace."

19. Anderson, Narum, and Wolf, "Expanding the Understanding of the Categories of Dysconscious Racism."

20. Greenberger, "'The Painting Must Go': Hannah Black Pens Open Letter to the Whitney about Controversial Biennial Work."

21. With phrases like "seek to understand" and "strive to overcome," Mia's initial definition of equity relied on conservative, noncommittal wording that did not explicitly name how it would be adopted or implemented by the museum. See Minneapolis Institute of Art, "Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility policy."

22. Race Forward, "Principles For Racially Equitable Policy Platforms."

23. Jackson, "Theory and Practice of Multicultural Organization Development."

24. McNellis, *The Compression Planning Advantage: A Blueprint for Resolving Complex Issues*.

25. Brookfield, "Repressive Tolerance and the 'Management' of Diversity."

26. Greenberger and Solomon. "Read Statements from Major U.S. Museums about the George Floyd Protests."

27. Callihan, "From Statements of Solidarity to Transformative Action and Accountability."

28. Power, "On the Death of Equity."

29. Durón and Greenberger, "In Open Letters, Art Workers Demand that Institutions Do More to Fight Racism."

30. Glaveski, "Stop Sabotaging Your Workforce."