



RHODE ISLAND HUMANITIES

*Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and
Accessibility (DEIA) Action Plan*

September 2023

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Acknowledgements

RI Humanities DEIA Action Plan was developed through a multi-year process in collaboration with ISO Arts Consulting with support from an Anti-Racism Training Grant from the Rhode Island Foundation. It was developed by staff and board members with input from compensated stakeholders. The Action Plan was adopted by the Board of Directors in September 2023.

Rhode Island Humanities
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Action Plan
Approved by the Board of Directors September 11, 2023

Overview

The 2023-2026 Rhode Island Humanities Strategic Plan “By and For All Rhode Islanders” places diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) at the center of our development as an organization and the impact we seek to have in the world. The result of a multi-year process, this DEIA Action Plan accompanies our Strategic Plan to provide a comprehensive process for taking specific steps toward achieving these priorities.

We are committed to the DEIA goals in this Action Plan because they are necessary steps to how Rhode Island Humanities advances as an organization. DEIA considerations are already fundamental components of our Mission, Vision, and Values:

- To fulfill our **mission** to seed, support, and strengthen humanities by and for all Rhode Islanders, Rhode Island Humanities will support activities that enable diverse audiences and communities to engage with the humanities, while working to address internal and external inequities.
- Our long-term **vision** for Rhode Island Humanities and for Rhode Island includes a commitment to drawing in and amplifying many voices to investigate historical and contemporary issues while celebrating multifaceted perspectives and approaches.
- To live up to our **values** of *relevance*, *collaboration*, and *community*, Rhode Island Humanities is committed to continually learning and implementing anti-racist and anti-oppressive changes to our organizational and operational practices; and actively addressing inequities, including those connected to race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Rhode Island Humanities will inspire collaboration through building trust with and expanding access to our resources for Rhode Island’s cultural community, while listening to and being driven by community needs.

By prioritizing our DEIA efforts, we aim to create an organizational culture that is welcoming, supportive, and inclusive, and to build stronger, more equitable relationships with partners and communities across the state.

The Action Plan identifies specific steps toward:

- **Inclusive and responsible operations and organizational culture**
- **A diverse and supported board and staff**
- **Grantmaking and initiatives that center equity and access**
- **Community-centric fundraising, resource development, and public engagement.**

DEIA Action Plan Development Process

Through our previous strategic plan, “Catalyzing the Humanities in Rhode Island, 2014-2019,” Rhode Island Humanities built an organizational foundation of grantmaking, partnerships, and initiatives that empowered us to innovate, increase our impact, and expand our network. As we began developing a new strategic plan, the staff and board prioritized a commitment to cultural equity. In 2020, with the uncertainty wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic and a societal sense of renewed urgency for the racial justice movement, we established an interim strategic plan to look deeply at our organizational culture,

practices, and structure. The interim strategic plan included a primary focus area on advancing our DEIA efforts.

Supported by an Anti-Racism Training Grant from the Rhode Island Foundation, Rhode Island Humanities began working with ISO Arts Consulting in 2021 to create and sustain diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible environments for our staff, board, and constituents. After an initial staff and board workshop, ISO Arts Consulting completed an organizational equity audit in early 2022 that included recommendations and resources. ISO Arts Consulting then facilitated multiple sessions for staff and the Executive Committee of the board to increase skills and knowledge in DEIA work. Staff worked with ISO Arts Consulting to develop and finalize the our DEIA Action Plan.

In 2023, Rhode Island Humanities held sessions with compensated external stakeholders facilitated by ISO Arts Consulting for feedback on a draft of this Plan, and how we can better weave DEIA considerations into our practices, values, and strategic planning. We will continue to communicate progress and provide feedback opportunities for the broader cultural sector as we enact this Action Plan.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Definitions

Our definitions of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility provide a shared understanding of our DEIA goals and guide how we pursues specific outcomes. These definitions extend to our internal organizational goals as well as external programmatic goals.

Diversity: Ensuring the representation of a broad range of individuals, experiences, and perspectives, including, but not limited to, age, national origin, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, gender, disability, cultural background, and socioeconomic class.

Equity: Ensuring that all people have opportunities to thrive by removing existing barriers to rights, benefits, and opportunities, while also acknowledging and adjusting for historic biases, imbalances, and injustices.

Inclusion: Ensuring that all people feel valued, accepted, and supported across race, identity, and background.

Accessibility: Ensuring opportunities for all people to participate and contribute, taking into account different physical and cognitive abilities, languages, and degrees of digital access.

Through incorporating all of the above DEIA considerations, we will seek to address the impacts of privilege, oppression, and discrimination for different individuals and groups.

Through incorporating these considerations, we will, as our vision states, “contribute to the development of an inclusive **culture of belonging** for all people in Rhode Island, while actively encouraging Rhode Islanders to engage with the complexity of the state’s history, current challenges, and future possibilities.”

DEIA Action Plan Goals

The following sections specify steps related to the Strategic Plan’s broad goals, organized by the main areas of our work. Each section includes known challenges, past successes and ongoing work, specific goals with timelines for enactment, and methods for how progress will be communicated.

Board and Leadership

Challenges: The Equity Audit conducted in early 2022 found a significant difference in awareness, engagement, and demonstrated commitment to equity work between the staff and the board, where staff demonstrated greater awareness and engagement. While some board members were aware of and willing to engage in the difficult aspects of equity work, the majority of the board did not participate in the Equity Audit despite invitations. Greater knowledge of and commitment to our DEIA efforts from the board will be essential for informed decisions about recruitment, retention, and board practices.

The Equity Audit also recommended that the relationship between board members and staff be reviewed. Staff often reach out multiple times to board members to provide information, schedule meetings, and to discuss philanthropy, which has the effect of staff working more than necessary and not feeling valued. Staff preparations for board meetings support board leadership, but are not regularly acknowledged.

Regarding the composition of the board, board members bring diverse experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives. The majority of the board has historically been white. The call for nominations for new board members includes many indicators of diversity represented by board candidates. However, the call for nominations does not articulate priorities or specific goals for the board's composition, nor does the board have guidelines to represent its composition. Many board members have pointed out that the selection process of the Lifetime Achievement Award, a board-designated responsibility, has lacked clear guidelines. Additionally, we need more clarity about the board's role in organizing gatherings that are engaging, inclusive, and accessible.

Progress and ongoing work: Board policies and organization are well-documented. There is an established process for onboarding new members as well as for surveying board members about their knowledge, perspective, and experience over the course of their three year terms, renewable for an additional three years. Board members seek to contribute their expertise as well as gain new experience, and they actively serve on committees. Board leadership has had an informal practice of checking in with board members about their experience and for their input. Board members express appreciation for diversity of backgrounds on the board. During the review of our interim strategic plan in 2020, board members recommended that the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access goal be the top priority. Many board members affirmed our statements of commitment to racial justice during the Black Lives Matter protests of police violence.

Goal #1: Expand board diversity.

- Incorporate DEIA mission into Governance Committee charge, schedule, and agendas. (1 year)
- Make specific goals for board composition across different metrics of representation. (1 year)
- Implement board composition goals to guide recruitment efforts. (1-2 years)

Leads: Executive Director, Board Chair, Governance Committee Chair

Resources: Board volunteer time and staff capacity for check ins.

Contributors: Board members, Governance Committee, prospective board members

Goal #2: Nourish board - staff relations.

- Establish responsiveness and follow-through as essential responsibilities of board membership. (6 months)
- Assess how board members work with staff to advance our mission and goals. (6 months).

- Assess board meeting practices to highlight the contributions and responsibilities of staff. (6 months)
- Based on the assessment, adjust board meeting practices and the responsibilities of staff where necessary. (1 year)

Leads: Executive Director, Board Chair

Resources: Board volunteer time and staff capacity for board responsibilities and meeting preparations.

Contributors: Board members, Committee chairs, Rhode Island Humanities staff

Goal #3: Clarify board-centered responsibilities.

- Incorporate DEIA values into the board handbook and specifically review these with new and returning board members. Include assessment of understanding of and commitment to values in the annual board survey. (1 year)
- Assess if and how awards made to external parties by Rhode Island Humanities can advance DEIA values and goals, including the Lifetime Achievement Award. (1 year)
- Based on assessment, update our award processes. (1-2 years)
- Communicate board committee responsibilities and fundraising expectations beyond the Board Handbook and orientation. (1-2 years)
- Incorporate process for evaluation of Executive Director in the Executive Committee calendar, with specific components reflecting on their efforts to advance DEIA goals. (1-2 years)

Leads: Executive Director, Board Chair

Resources: Board volunteer time and staff capacity for assessing awards, onboarding meetings, and updating Board Handbook.

Contributors: Board members, Committee chairs, Rhode Island Humanities staff

Goal #4: Retain, include, and engage board members.

- Establish formal methods of checking in with board members for perspective and experience of board activities. (1 year)
- Establish a practice of pairing new board members with active board members for ongoing orientation and support. (1 year)
- Include DEIA values and goals in the design and intention of board gatherings. (1 year)

Leads: Executive Director, Board Chair

Resources: Board volunteer time and staff capacity for check ins.

Contributors: Board members, Committee chairs

What does success look like?

- The membership of the board grows more diverse and as a result, the board culture becomes more inclusive and responsive to the perspectives and needs of its different members and communities.

- Staff and board communicate more effectively and efficiently, with the board responsive to outreach by staff.
- Board materials attribute individual board and staff contributions.
- Board members express that they understand and are committed to our values, which is reflected in practice.
- Board members of all backgrounds feel supported and valued in their contributions.
- Our award processes and outcomes, or alternatives, are equitable, inclusive, and values-driven.
- Board members report that they have had opportunities for input and feel included in board activities, and that overall engagement with Rhode Island Humanities is meaningful and accessible.

How will progress be communicated?

- Rhode Island Humanities will distribute a public annual call for board nominations that includes specific board composition goals for diversity, with additional outreach and recruitment focusing on the board composition goals.
- Provide public progress updates on our board composition efforts and established goals.
- New vision for and implementation of public awards or alternatives will be widely disseminated through e-news and social media.
- Minutes of and reports at board meetings will include recognition and contributions of staff.

Organizational Culture and Operations

Challenges: Over the last three years, our staff size has nearly doubled, as has the need for supporting ongoing remote and safe in-person work. While new staff were successfully onboarded remotely, the rapid growth in staff size has led to a lack of uniform understanding of policies and procedures, and some previous policies may impede the way staff now work. The switch to hybrid work has highlighted the need for stronger coordination, communication, and workflows tailored to different working styles that prioritize staff health and retention. ISO Arts Consulting’s 2022 Equity Audit identified a high achieving organizational culture with ambitions that can result in staff negotiating heavy workloads and competing priorities. The Equity Audit recommended more focused project workflows and timeline development, as well as clearer policies and practices to support a more inclusive and equitable organizational culture.

The lack of racial diversity in senior staff positions remains a challenge as well. The Equity Audit specifically recommended expanded recruitment efforts to extend beyond pre-existing networks. Updated job postings seem to have led to a more racially diverse representative candidate pool for recent internships, fellowships, and consultant roles. These recent successes highlight the opportunity and need for specific recruitment and development efforts for leadership roles.

Progress and ongoing work: Rhode Island Humanities has recently updated our holiday schedules as well as safety guidelines during the pandemic through deliberate processes that incorporated feedback from all employees. Operations staff has successfully implemented digital tools and platforms to support remote work and researched methods that prioritize staff wellness and flexibility. The Operations Team has advanced the development of the DEIA Action Plan. The 2022 Equity Audit found the staff had a strong awareness of where their organization is strong and ready to engage in this work and where there are areas for growth, as well as a demonstrated interest and willingness to continue to identify and implement necessary change. The Equity Audit also noted staff members are committed to our mission and impact, and don’t hesitate to support each other’s work.

Goal #1: Review and revise Employee Handbook, procedures, and practices to ensure they are inclusive, equitable, and accessible, prioritizing staff retention.

- Operations staff will assess the current Employee Handbook policies and benefits through the lenses of inclusivity, equity, and accessibility, documenting the conclusions of the assessment and decisions related to any proposed updates. (6 months)
- Operations staff will update the Employee Handbook, and reinforce changes through ongoing reminders and future onboarding material. (1 year)
- In addition to policies and benefits in our Employee Handbook, Operations staff will create an organizational handbook with specifics on different procedures, protocols, and guidelines. This will help communicate procedures and expectations for the way we work. Using our COVID-19 protocol guidelines as a model, Operations staff will center accessibility and staff wellness in ongoing adjustments to office and remote work for staff and visitors. (1 year)

Lead: Associate Director of Operations

Resources: Staff time and capacity for assessment and updates, updated handbook material, relevant memberships and software subscriptions to support our processes.

Contributors: Rhode Island Humanities staff

Goal #2: Assess and update staff evaluation and goal-setting processes. Include advancing DEIA efforts as a measurement of staff goals within evaluation and goal-setting processes.

- In 2023, the Associate Director of Operations will simplify the existing staff evaluation and goals-setting processes centering professional development and commitment to our values. (1 year)
- Staff evaluation and goal-setting methods, including those of the Executive Director, will specifically incorporate ways to identify and support staff efforts in advancing DEIA goals. (1 year)
- Incorporate expectations for advancing and incorporating DEIA goals into existing job descriptions and future job postings. (1-2 years)

Lead: Associate Director of Operations

Resources: Staff time and capacity, expenses for relevant memberships

Contributors: Rhode Island Humanities staff

Goal #3: Assess staff recruitment policies and practices.

- Assess current practices to reduce unconscious bias in the hiring process and attract a more diverse range of candidates across race, gender, and class, while ensuring that we are making inclusive and equitable hiring decisions. (1-2 years)
- Associate Director of Operations will develop and implement a recruitment and selection strategy which will include the use of diversity-focused job boards, recruitment channels, and strategies. (1-2 years)
- Review job postings, including their language, with a focus on inclusion and access. Establish best practices and templates for future postings that emphasize DEIA considerations. (1-2 years)
- Incorporate additional recruitment efforts for BIPOC staffing, specifically for leadership positions, as well as articulate professional development opportunities to support internal promotions to expand access to leadership roles. (1-2 years)

- Extend the recruitment and selection strategy to prioritizing vendors from historically underrepresented communities. (2 years)

Lead: Associate Director of Operations

Resources: Staff time and capacity, expenses for relevant memberships and recruitment tools

Contributors: Rhode Island Humanities staff, prospective staff, vendors, partners

Goal #4: Continue to provide resources to support staff DEIA efforts.

- Compile, organize, and catalog DEIA resources for staff use to bolster equity goals across departments. (6 months)
- Expand opportunities and budget for continued DEIA staff training. (1-2 years)

Lead: Associate Director of Operations

Resources: Staff time and capacity for compiling, updated compilation of relevant material, relevant professional development opportunities

Contributors: Rhode Island Humanities staff

What does success look like?

- A diverse and inclusive staff that represents a range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.
- The department will have successfully implemented initiatives to attract and retain a diverse workforce.
- A supportive and welcoming workplace culture with the resources and understanding that allows staff to excel.
- Processes, policies, and benefits that are anti-racist, equitable, inclusive, and accessible for all staff. This includes fair compensation, support for caregivers and parents, and ongoing career development opportunities.

How will progress be communicated?

- Updated public job postings with a commitment to inclusion and diversity.
- Staff will receive internal progress updates and feedback check-ins on a quarterly basis at staff sessions regarding the assessment of the employee handbook, policies, and procedures.
- An updated employee handbook, with a corresponding documentation of changes made and “How we work” manual.
- Transparent information about our internal equity visioning. Components of the “How we work” user manual and documented changes that relate to values, along with explanations for why we are implementing specific changes, will be made public on our website.

Grantmaking

Challenges: Fifteen years ago, Rhode Island Humanities updated the overall concept and structure of our standard federal grantmaking program, which draws upon federal monies to make project grants to individuals and organizations, with a number of diversity and inclusion considerations in mind. At that time, priorities included bolstering diverse geographic representation across the state, and broadening

definitions of humanities scholars to recognize expertise outside of academia. Five years ago, Rhode Island Humanities staff implemented an evaluation-focused framework into the application process, meant to encourage the use of contemporary best practices in project design and offer resources to applicants.

In addition to positive feedback on the existing program, Rhode Island Humanities staff have consistently received feedback from applicants on various DEIA concerns, including the length and complexity of our applications, particularly compared to the relatively small amount of money offered; applicant difficulty in understanding framework-specific and legalistic terms used in applications, award paperwork, and reports; the cost-share requirement for organizational applicants; the lack of regular general operating support funding and caps on certain line item types; burdensome reporting requirements; a lack of transparency around application evaluation criteria; and the fact that applications are only available online and in English. Rhode Island Humanities staff have also observed that, even if the Rhode Island Humanities manages to connect with potential new applicants, they may be dissuaded from applying for funding by these perceived barriers, while returning applicants can navigate these systems with greater ease. This contributes to the dominance of specific organizations in our year-over-year funding cycles, connections which can be then deepened by invitation-only opportunities from Rhode Island Humanities and the selection of grantees for awards at our annual Celebration. Rhode Island Humanities also lacks the data infrastructure to effectively assess the diversity of applicants and grantees across a number of key metrics.

Progress and ongoing work: In response, and also in keeping with movements in contemporary philanthropy, grantmaking staff and the Grants Policy Committee have been experimenting with different equity-based practices and structures for the past three years in the context of both our existing standard grantmaking program and our ad hoc pandemic emergency relief programs. Rhode Island Humanities staff have been incrementally implementing changes within the existing standard program to provide greater clarity, accessibility, and support to applicants and grantees. Our RI Culture, Humanities, and Arts Relief Grants (RI CHARG) emergency relief funding program explicitly prioritized small-and-midsize organizations and BIPOC-centered organizations, and successfully distributed over half a million dollars to the targeted grantee pool (many of whom were first-time grantees to Rhode Island Humanities). These experiences have demonstrated the demand for this kind of equity-based grantmaking in the Rhode Island humanities sector, as well as the efficacy of specific strategies and practices to realize more equitable grantmaking. At this time, it would benefit both us and the community we serve to fully incorporate these priorities and practices into our standard federal grantmaking program.

This past June, the RI state legislature included, for the first time, a line item in the state budget dedicated to grantmaking by the Rhode Island Humanities. We sought this allocation for the purpose of creating a regular general operating support program for humanities organizations, which is not allowable with federal monies. This initial inclusion is an enormous step towards offering flexible, consistent funding to the cultural sector in accordance with best practices in equitable grantmaking.

Goal #1: Articulate equity-centered values, principles, and priorities for grantmaking program.

- Associate Director and Coordinator work with the Grants Policy Committee to:
 - Define the kind of relationships we want to cultivate with our communities (6 months)
 - Develop a vision statement for the program: why we think the humanities are important and how they can be more expansive, whom we're here to serve, and how (1 year)
 - Explore how we can best serve all Rhode Islanders with our programs within the parameters of our funding sources (1 year)
 - Articulate a public-facing definition/scope of the humanities (1 year)

Lead: Associate Director of Grants and Humanities Initiatives

Resources: Committee time and staff capacity for articulating program values, updated material

Contributors: Grantmaking staff, Grants Policy Committee, applicants, grantees

Goal #2: Research, develop, and implement an equitable grantmaking program in compliance with federal parameters and informed by our values, principles, priorities.

- Associate Director and Coordinator perform extensive research into current best practices in equitable grantmaking, including practices developed by our fellow Humanities Councils and existing feedback from RI nonprofits and past grantees. (Ongoing)
- Associate Director and Coordinator review equity-focused learnings from the last 5 years in our grantmaking—what has been working? What hasn't been? (0-2 years)
- With the Grants Policy Committee, Associate Director and Coordinator develop and implement updates to current federal grantmaking program to increase clarity, transparency, navigability, and accessibility. (0-6 months)
- With the Grants Policy Committee, Associate Director and Coordinator develop and implement state-funded general operating support program in accordance with best practices in equitable grantmaking. (0-6 months)
- With the Grants Policy Committee, Associate Director and Coordinator develop a proposal for our federal grantmaking program that deploys these best practices and complies with federal guidelines. (1-2 years)
- Associate Director and Coordinator convene a group of external contributors to present the programs, receive feedback, and incorporate feedback. (1-2 years)
- Associate Director and Coordinator implement the new federal grantmaking program. (2 years)

Lead: Associate Director of Grants and Humanities Initiatives

Resources: Committee time and staff capacity for research and implementation, related professional development expenses, updated material

Contributors: Grantmaking staff, Grants Policy Committee, feedback group contributors

Goal #3: Research, develop, and implement grantee-facing application and reporting infrastructure that is as accessible and equitable as possible.

- Associate Director and Coordinator research best practices in equitable and accessible grantmaking infrastructures:
 - Means of submitting applications and reports outside of an online portal (Ongoing)
 - Applications and reporting available in languages that are not English (Ongoing)
 - Support for applicants/grantees that are hard of seeing/hearing (Ongoing)
 - Increased accessibility for people with neurodivergence and people with disabilities (Ongoing)
- Associate Director and Coordinator work to implement these systems and with Associate Director of Engagement to help devise the messaging and user interface. (0-2 years)

Lead: Associate Director of Grants and Humanities Initiatives

Resources: Committee time and staff capacity for research and implementation, related professional development expenses, updated material

Contributors: Grantmaking staff, Grants Policy Committee, applicants and grantees

What does success look like?

- Grantmaking programs that diverse public humanities practitioners and organizations around Rhode Island will be excited to participate in, and that diverse applicants and grantees find easy, quick, straightforward, and intuitive to navigate.
- Grantmaking programs that support diverse humanities organizations and public humanities projects all over Rhode Island, including first-time applicants and historically and currently underserved communities.
- A greater applicant and grantee understanding of what the public humanities are, and a greater applicant and grantee understanding of how their applications are evaluated and grantmaking decisions are made.
- The streamlining of processes and infrastructure for staff, and the development of policies and procedures that support and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

How will progress be communicated?

- We will update grantees and community members of equity-focused updates to our current federal grantmaking program in Fall 2023.
- We will announce the implementation of a new state-funded program in early Winter 2023.
- We will update grantees and community members of our proposed process for a new federal grantmaking program in Fall 2024, and set up a process to collaborate with compensated community members on the program's development.
- We will announce the implementation of a new federal program in Fall 2024, and announce particulars in Spring 2025.
- We will implement the new federal program for FY26.

Humanities Initiatives

Challenges, progress, and ongoing work: Designed to expand the impact of the grantmaking program, individual initiatives of Rhode Island Humanities have often sought to promote diversity and equity, and specific initiatives have incorporated equity and accessibility-focused practices, often to meaningful effect. However, the program as a whole has been opportunity-driven and has not had a specific definition, focus, and set of best practices, meaning that this focus has depended on staff awareness, capacity, and resources. The development of infrastructure will make our initiatives much more effective in promoting equity and diversity, and therefore will improve the quality and relevance of these initiatives. It will also aid staff with decision-making processes around current and future initiatives, and ensure that equity and accessibility considerations are incorporated as an integral dimension of the strategic initiative program.

Goal #1: Develop a vision statement for humanities initiatives that centers equity, as well as a rubric for current and potential humanities initiatives that allows us to assess them through the lens of equity.

- Associate Director works with Executive Director and Grants Policy Committee to clearly define humanities initiatives. (1 year)

- Associate Director works with Executive Director and Grants Policy Committee to establish core values and priorities for the humanities initiatives program. (1 year)
- Associate Director and Executive Director work with Grants Policy Committee to develop an equity-centered vision statement for humanities initiatives. (12-18 months)
- Associate Director draws on these values, priorities, and a vision statement to create a rubric through which we can develop future humanities initiatives, and assess those that currently exist. (12-18 months)

Lead: Associate Director of Grantmaking and Humanities Initiatives

Resources: Staff time and capacity for meeting and convening, updated initiative material

Contributors: Executive Director, Grants Policy Committee, Rhode Island Humanities staff, initiative partners

Goal #2: Develop a standard set of equity- and accessibility-based practices that we will use in all humanities initiatives, regardless of their specific content.

- Associate Director works with Associate Director of Engagement to assemble resources and best practices around equity and accessibility for public programs, community-based research projects, and other typical project formats for humanities initiatives. (1 year)
- Associate Director works with Associate Director of Engagement and Executive Director to establish guidelines to ensure/promote equity and accessibility in our projects. (12-18 months)

Lead: Associate Director of Grants and Humanities Initiatives, Associate Director of Engagement

Resources: Staff time and capacity to develop best practices, updated initiative materials.

Contributors: Rhode Island Humanities staff, initiative partners

What does success look like?

- All humanities initiatives will have equity and accessibility considerations and provisions embedded in their project design.
- All humanities initiatives will adhere to the established best practices, ensuring that equity and accessibility are promoted throughout the project.
- Our humanities initiatives become more robust, representative of Rhode Islanders, and relevant to the communities they serve.

How will progress be communicated?

- We will provide the definition, vision statement, and core values and priorities on the website by mid-2024.
- We will share the rubric and best practices on the website by the end of 2024.

Engagement

Challenges, progress, and ongoing work: In order to have communications material that is more inclusive and accessible, our engagement equity goals must focus on addressing challenges in allocating resources for

design, web, and materials work, while building capacity to focus on this work without pausing essential Rhode Island Humanities communications. One success in this area was the development of a strong, connected logo and core design elements for the 50th anniversary. We are also working to improve diversity and inclusion in event preparation committees and event attendance, recognizing that this requires effort and clear goals for our events from the outset.

Goal #1: Goal #1: Use our 50th anniversary year (2023) as a catalyst to acknowledge the change we've seen and the change we want to see.

- Incorporate DEIA considerations into the goals, branding, and communication plan for the 50th anniversary. (6 months)
- Apply a DEIA strategy to the 50th anniversary's event planning, budgeting, and vendor partnerships. (6 months)
- Design a community-centered 50th event that establishes a new model of gathering to celebrate the humanities. (6 months)
- Assess the role of fundraising for the community event and consider a broader sponsorship approach. (6 months)
- Work with board and leadership to evaluate awards program, including purpose, nomination and selection process with a focus on DEIA. (1 year)

Leads: Associate Director of Engagement and Associate Director of Development

Resources: Hire Events & Communications Specialist (March - Oct 2023), committed volunteers for related events, funding flexibility to prioritize working with designers when needed and to support contracting with new vendors with whom we may not have established relationships.

Contributors: Events and Communications Specialist, 50th Event Committee, Executive Committee, board, broader Rhode Island Humanities community

Goal #2: Research & implement DEIA-related best practices for materials, design, and engagement.

- With staff, board members, and community members, develop a land acknowledgement. (6 months-1 year)
- Incorporate land acknowledgement in all relevant communications, events, and documents. (1 year)
- Complete an accessibility audit of our website and materials. (1 year)
- Based on accessibility audit, implement necessary changes to website and materials. (2-3 years)
- Initiate and expand bilingual/multilingual; hard-of-hearing; sight impaired options for communications, programs and initiatives, and events. (3 years)

Lead: Associate Director of Engagement

Resources: Staff training, consultants for audits, translation services, and to work with designers on updates, strong relationships with volunteers and partners willing to provide honest feedback regarding land acknowledgement and bi/multilingual efforts.

Contributors: Board, staff, consultants, compensated community members, institutional partners

What does success look like?

- An organization that has outward facing communications (web, social, print, other media) that clearly and concisely conveys impact, invites specific forms of engagement, and aligns with best practices in DEIA-driven communications approaches.
- A 50th Anniversary year where activities are aligned with our existing portfolio, where the design is driven by our legacy and strengths as well as audience reflections, and where the event is a community-centered, welcoming, humanities-oriented gathering.
- Increased engagement with Rhode Island Humanities materials across a diverse representation of Rhode Island communities, measured through online engagement (social media, eNews subscriptions and donor roll metrics) as well as personal engagement (event attendance, participation with initiatives, volunteers and/or board membership).
- A strong model for fundraising through sponsorships that support our mission.

How will progress be communicated?

- In Fall 2023, when we have a 50th event that is welcoming and community-centered.
- Through updated communication material and social media campaigns, as well as our newsletter.
- Through information related to event attendance, locations, and evaluations included in our communication material, such as our Annual Report.
- In Fall 2024, when Rhode Island Humanities hosts the National Humanities Conference and is able to showcase leadership in DEIA-driven communications & engagement practices.

Development

Challenges: In order to integrate the development program with our mission, vision, and values, fundraising efforts must communicate with and engage a more diverse donor base. All external and donor-specific communications should be accessible, inclusive, relevant, and make donors feel like they belong to and are welcomed by the Rhode Island Humanities community. Current fund development practices are impacted by a lack of racial, socio-economic, gender, and age diversity on our Development Committee and among staff leadership. A number of other areas for improvement exist, with each area impacting the accessibility and inclusiveness of our giving program in a variety of ways, including: falling short of 100% board participation in giving, a largely white and highly educated donor base, fundraising communications geared toward college-level readers, and challenges meeting annual fund goals.

Progress and ongoing work: Recent fundraising successes include building meaningful relationships with existing donors through individual outreach and conversations, as well as increasing and maintaining a high renewal rate for major giving. Staff research into *community-centric fundraising* methods—an approach that emphasizes building trusting relationships across communities based on equity, inclusion, and mutual respect—is a promising step towards aligning our fundraising efforts with its equity goals. This approach will allow Rhode Island Humanities to be more transparent, accountable, and collaborative, and, we hope, will instill confidence in our fundraising efforts with a broader donor base.

Goal #1: Conduct a Development program-specific assessment using the Community-Centric Fundraising (CCF) template to audit our fundraising practices and implement necessary changes.

- Obtain staff, board, and development committee buy-in to ensure commitment and participation in the CCF assessment process. (3-6 months)

- Development committee and development/engagement staff undergo the CCF assessment process, including determining what we mean by broadening the donor base and broadening our engagement. Creating explicit definitions will focus our work and provide a roadmap for our efforts. (6 months)
- Implement changes that have already been identified, such as removing educational barriers to our development-related job opportunities and adjusting donor acknowledgements in print publications to have them less segmented by giving levels. (6 months)
- Establish a schedule and timeline for the CCF assessment process over 6 months, with an additional 1- 3 years for the implementation of changes, as well as an evaluation rubric for determining success. (1-3 years)
- Develop a long-term plan for ongoing assessment and improvement of the Development program. (1 year)

Lead: Associate Director of Development

Resources: Staff and board time and capacity for conducting the assessment, including resources for data collection and analysis, stakeholder consultation and dialogue, and report writing; allocation of additional time and capacity for implementing changes based on the assessment findings, including staff training, process improvements, and investments in necessary materials or subscriptions.

Contributors: Development Committee, Engagement Working Group, Associate Director of Engagement, Executive Director, board members, and other Rhode Island Humanities staff as needed.

Goal #2: Create a more diverse Development Committee to better represent the Rhode Island community.

- Combine the Development Committee with the Engagement Committee to create a more holistic approach to engaging with donors and community members. (3-6 months)
- Using the diversity definitions determined by Rhode Island Humanities and as part of the CCF assessment, cultivate racially, socio-economically, gender and sexuality, and age-diverse prospects for Development Committee service in 2024. (1 year)
- Onboard new members to the Development Committee in 2024. (1 year)
- Develop volunteer and non-monetary ways for community members and donors to engage with Rhode Island Humanities activities that encourage the sharing of time, treasure, and talent. (2 years)

Leads: Associate Director of Development, Associate Director of Engagement, Development Committee Chair, Executive Director, Development Committee

Resources: Capacity for board outreach, time committed from Committee members, meetings supplies and engagement material.

Contributors: Current Development Committee, current board members, prospective Rhode Island Humanities board members

Goal #3: Develop equity-focused fundraising communications.

- Based on the department audit, devise strategy to garner community feedback on fundraising methods and strategies. (1 year)
- Collect input and incorporate changes to future campaigns and fundraising appeals. (1-2 years)
- Implement updated campaigns and appeals. (2 years)

- Emphasize opportunities to support Rhode Island Humanities that also advance DEIA goals. (2 years)
- Support Engagement Goal #2 to research & implement DEIA-related best practices for materials, design, and engagement across external platforms. (1-2 years)

Leads: Associate Director of Fundraising, Associate Director of Engagement

Resources: Staff and board time and resources for community feedback sessions, updated fundraising materials and corresponding donor records.

Contributors: Development and Engagement committee members, compensated community members for feedback and brainstorming sessions.

What does success look like?

- A Development Committee, board, and staff that better represents the communities we serve.
- A more inclusive and diverse donor base that feels they are represented by the Development Committee, board of directors, and staff.
- Development program decision-making that reflects our increased awareness of inclusive and accessible communications, engagement, and fundraising.
- Donor engagement strategies and fundraising campaigns that prioritize community experience and feedback, as well as transparency and accountability in fundraising activities.
- A positive and trusting relationship with our donor base.
- Communities across Rhode Island see themselves in our fundraising communication; communities feel like they belong in our broader fundraising strategies and campaigns.

How will progress be communicated?

- A public update on our CCF assessment findings will be completed at the end of the department-specific assessment.
- Publicly available demographic information for the board and Development Committee.
- Communication and donor outreach emphasize belonging and diverse representation.

Action Plan Evaluation and Accountability

The success of our DEIA action plan depends on the regular evaluation of progress toward our goals, being honest and realistic about timelines and outcomes, and providing public transparency through accessible progress updates. Annual updates in different formats will communicate progress on the plan’s goals, clarifying what we have done, what the next steps will be, and when we will provide additional updates. Rhode Island Humanities staff and board will measure progress toward completing the actions identified in the plan using the communication methods provided for each goal. The staff and board will also frequently assess and adjust DEIA plans and practices. The Board Chair and Executive Committee will review the DEIA Action Plan and report to the full board quarterly.

Rhode Island Humanities acknowledges that this work is ongoing and intensive, and will require flexibility as schedules and priorities adjust due to changing circumstances. Checking in with staff and sustaining capacity will be necessary for the plan’s success. However, our commitment to becoming a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible organization, as well the intrinsic connection between these efforts and our mission, vision, and values, will be ever-present.



RHODE ISLAND HUMANITIES

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