



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Working Group Working Group Report Summary

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Advancing and sustaining diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) within cultural heritage preservation and its engagement with stakeholders will affect every other pillar of the Held in Trust (HIT) initiative, from climate crisis to communication, education, and digital research and practice. It demands our urgent and sustained action and offers some of the greatest rewards.

Our vast cultural treasures—tangible and intangible—can help foster a society where humanity is valued and thrives. To increase and prioritize DEIA within cultural heritage preservation, the field must ensure equity and justice for those who are doing the work, in the kind of work that is being done, and for the intended beneficiaries of the work.

Outlined below are the areas of key consideration the Held in Trust (HIT) Working Group on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility identified for this pillar of cultural heritage preservation work.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Conservation stewardship in collaboration with creator communities

Conservators working with Indigenous and contemporary art in the 1980s began advocating for ways to involve diverse voices and local communities in the care and interpretation of collections. Following months of protests around racial inequity and social injustice sparked by the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, more cultural heritage institutions and individuals began to re-examine their relationship with the communities they serve and how they interpret, care for, and share the stories of objects within their collections. Among other opportunities to further greater collaboration with creator communities, the Working Group urges a revised [American Institute for Conservation's \(AIC\) Code of Ethics](#) that more explicitly reflects a profession that centers people, not things.

Inclusive engagement with diverse communities

In addition to ensuring the voices of creator communities are prominent in cultural heritage preservation work, preservation professionals and organizations need to ensure they are engaging the diverse communities around them with the cultural heritage displayed and preserved. Working across institutional silos and collaboratively with other cultural heritage professionals, organizations, and allied fields, there is significant opportunity to increase engagement with diverse local and stakeholder communities.

Recruitment and retention within the cultural heritage preservation field

The cultural heritage preservation field is currently predominantly white, female, and upper-middle-class, with entry into the field largely influenced by one's networks (<https://mellon.org/programs/arts-and-culture/art-museum-staff-demographic-survey/>). There is a general lack of understanding or consideration of an individual's intersectionality, a factor that impacts significantly how one enters and experiences the field. The cultural heritage preservation field needs to look closely at its pathways to entry, as well as assess whether it is accessible, welcoming, and empowering to people from a wide variety of backgrounds and circumstances

interested in pursuing and advancing a career in the field. In doing so, it can address recruitment and retention barriers and systemic racism within collecting institutions.

STRATEGIC GOALS

The HIT Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Working Group has identified the following three strategic goals to guide the field's advancement of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility today and into the future. Additionally, the field would benefit from an in-depth root cause analysis that identifies all the contributing factors to the inequities outlined in this and other HIT reports. Outlined below are three specific goals for the field to pursue that align with the above primary focus areas. Further detail on these goals and an outline of benchmarks over the short, medium, and long term can be found in the Working Group's [full report](#).

GOAL #1: Reconnect communities with their objects and incorporate community-based knowledge.

Many institutions and individual practitioners in the field are making a concerted effort at prioritizing inclusivity and modifying their practices; however, the work is often done in isolation as opposed to endemic to the field. To achieve this goal, the field needs to invest in training and resources to support and require poly-vocal practices in conservation.

GOAL #2: Engage local and stakeholder communities with cultural heritage and preservation in inclusive ways.

Historically, the preservation or conservation of cultural heritage was not something expressly highlighted for visitors. The field has recognized the limitations of this approach and has engaged various strategies to help raise awareness of the critical importance of its work. However, these efforts, to date, have often been exclusionary and sporadic. By engaging more diverse communities with cultural heritage preservation work, the field encourages a deeper connection to our cultural heritage, gains a more nuanced understanding of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and encourages communities' participation in its preservation.

GOAL #3: Cultivate more equitable, diverse, and inclusive recruitment, advancement, and work environments.

Before new strategies in recruitment and retainment can be implemented, the field needs to gain a data-based, nuanced understanding of current strategies, successes, and obstacles. As part of recruitment and retention, the field needs to focus on how to prioritize cultivating healthy work environments with equitable pay and professional development opportunities. By gathering data in a systematic way, the field will have the analytical intelligence needed to design effective practices and to advocate with funders and partners for resources and change.

IN SUMMARY

Committing to the goals and outcomes outlined above is imperative to preserving and sharing the remarkable diversity of human cultural achievement. It extends across and connects the communities, collections, professionals, and institutions engaged in and impacted by this work. The field has excellent examples on which to build, but will require leadership, training, and resources to truly enact change and foster deep connections with our local and global cultural heritage.

To learn further details around the findings and recommendations of the HIT Working Group on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility, please access their [full report](#).

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