

DEAI Priorities

September 2020

This document is intended to support the VSA Board in prioritizing next steps for its DEAI initiatives by outlining the initial thinking of the DEAI Task Force. This draft is based on numerous information gathering efforts, including informational interviews with field experts, two 2-hour Board conversations, and two 1-hour webchats through the DEAI quarterly webchat series (April and July 2020). This document is organized in two parts: 1) Overview; 2) Vision for VSA's role in relation to DEAI; and 3) Priorities / Action Steps.

1. Overview

VSA established a DEAI Task Force in July 2019 to address the growing need for professional development and membership support around diversity, equity, access, and inclusion¹ – both within visitor studies and evaluation practice and as a tool for supporting the DEAI initiatives across the institutions in which we work. This work has focused on understanding how VSA could most effectively support DEAI, identifying the needs and interests of VSA members, and defining priorities and concrete action steps to move these efforts forward. In 2020, a renewed sense of urgency around addressing systemic racism, both in the museum field and society more broadly, has influenced our conversations (both within the board and with members and other professionals in the informal learning fields) to include discussions of racial and social justice, and the role of visitor studies in this important work.

2. Vision for VSA's Role in DEAI

As part of developing a DEAI action plan, the VSA board engaged in a 2-hour conversation (July 15, 2020) focused on how the Board envisioned the long-term role of VSA in relation to DEAI work. A question around the role of VSA in the conversations on anti-racism and DEAI was also raised at the July 29 webchat, "Reflections on AAM's Panel, 'Racism, Unrest, and the Role of Museums' for Visitor Studies." Based on these conversations, the following areas are envisioned for the long-term role of VSA in this work:

- **Center DEAI throughout the organization**, including policies, procedures, practices, board composition, membership, scholarship (*Visitor Studies* journal), and professional development offerings. This includes operationalizing VSA's values and what is put into statements (e.g., diversity statement, BLM statement, vision and mission)
- **Increase diversity of the VSA board and membership** to better reflect the communities in which we live, and the communities that informal learning institutions aim to serve. This includes diversity around race/ethnicity, gender identity, age, ability,

¹ We use the AAM definitions for diversity, equity, access, and inclusion (*Facing Change: Insights from the American Alliance of Museum's Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion Working Group*, p. 8); <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/diversity-equity-accessibility-and-inclusion/facing-change/>

geographic location, type of institution, professional skills, academic background, and length of time in the field. Specific metrics and strategies would need to be developed for diversifying both the board and membership.

- **Be an active and engaged leader around DEAI in evaluation and informal learning settings**, being agents of change and using its power as a professional association to influence the field, set standards, and shape conversations around anti-racism and DEAI efforts in visitor studies and evaluation, as well as the informal learning field more broadly. This includes setting standards and expectations of professionalism in visitor studies that centers DEAI, such as hiring practices and equitable salary ranges; and weaving DEAI into the fabric of what it means to be doing visitor studies.
- **Actively work to create career pathways**, particularly for BIPOC individuals, into visitor studies and informal learning environments via communications, membership recruitment, relationships with other associations/partners, and recruiting from fields with a broader representation of BIPOC individuals.
- **Serve as an intentional, visible platform and network for disseminating strategies** for DEAI implementation and accountability (i.e., when folks think about where to present their DEAI work in evaluation, or where to seek resources around DEAI and visitor studies, they will think of VSA).
- **Be responsive to the changing needs of the VSA membership and visitor studies field** more broadly around DEAI; engaging with membership around DEAI efforts in order to meet emerging needs.

3. DEAI Priorities

The priorities listed below have emerged through the information gathering phases of the DEAI task force (expert interviews, board conversations, document analysis, and webchat discussions). They are currently in no particular order, as we are in the process of prioritizing through Board discussions and the Town Hall (October 14, 2020 at 4pm ET). As broader context to these priorities, it is important to consider the state of the visitor studies and informal learning institutions around COVID-19, and the resulting financial crises, furloughs and layoffs, as well as the shifting roles of evaluators, temporary and/or permanent elimination of evaluation or visitor studies positions, and staff taking on evaluation / visitor studies roles who previously have not served in that capacity.

1. **Internal board anti-racism work and professional development around anti-racism and DEAI** – This would entail a facilitated process to ensure that VSA is doing the internal work necessary to build and sustain an equitable organization, including the investigation of best practices around Board evolution related to DEAI, as well as ongoing dialogue and internal work to increase capacity and awareness across the Board around DEAI and anti-racism work.
2. **Revise our current diversity statement** - assess the diversity statement (which was written in 2015) from current perspectives, including components that identify how the statement will be operationalized (metrics).
3. **Review all policies, bylaws, etc. with a DEAI, anti-racism lens** – this would be a thorough analysis of key documents that guide the organization (policies, procedures,

bylaws, etc.) from a DEAI lens. This could include an advisory board of members with diverse perspectives and backgrounds to support this process.

4. **Invite BIPOC VSA members to join the Board and/or committees or working groups** - use a DEAI lens to build a strong, diverse board slate for 2021-2023, representing diverse backgrounds, perspectives, experiences, fields, and institutions. We would need to gather baseline data on our current board and set goals for our board makeup.
5. **Create BIPOC advisory group or conduct needs assessment focus groups with BIPOC members** – VSA would need to be clear about articulating the goals of this process so it does not reinforce burdening BIPOC members with answering how VSA should better serve them; would need to include compensation (monetary or otherwise) to support the value of these contributions.
6. **Revise Evaluation Competencies** that set the standard for DEAI being central to Evaluation / Visitor studies practices, an essential part of what it means to do visitor studies.
7. **Offer ongoing, accessible professional development opportunities around DEAI** – continue the quarterly DEAI webchats at no cost (with suggested donation), gather input from members and webchat attendees around future topics.
8. **Understand evolving membership needs around DEAI work** – while part of this was accomplished through the recent survey, continue to gauge how VSA can best support member (and non-member professionals) in doing DEAI work in their own institutions.
9. **Develop a theory of change for VSA in its DEAI work** – this would include defining our locus of control, what we can realistically change or influence and what we can't, and what the change is that we commit to; this process would include defining measures of success, indicators, and a process for accountability.
10. Make the process for submitting **conference sessions and Visitor Studies journal publications more transparent and accessible**; include DEAI lens as part of the conference session and journal article review process in order to broaden access, participation, and the dissemination of knowledge and scholarship in the field.
11. **Provide a list of DEAI evaluation resources**, including articles, toolkits, publications, and funders that support DEAI work, etc. Many have been shared and collected from webchats.