KEYNOTE ADDRESS

# Getting Our House in Order: Moving from Diversity to Inclusion

Chris Taylor

**ABSTRACT**

For several decades, museums and other cultural organizations have aspired to be more inclusive. Often, this has been through community engagement or outreach efforts. This article argues that inclusion is primarily an internal effort, focused on creating an inclusive work environment and inclusive work practices. Using systems theory, the Minnesota Historical Society is applying new approaches to inclusion to create an organization that embraces diversity and embeds inclusion into everyday work practices.



**KEY WORDS**

Diversity, Inclusion, Community engagement, Organization development, Open systems, Organizational culture, Work practices, Staff diversity, Moral imperative, Business case, Intercultural competence, Systems theory

Editor's Note: Chris Taylor's keynote address at the 2016 Joint Annual Meeting of the Council of State Archivists and the Society of American Archivists complemented Dennis Meissner's presidential address. Therefore, I have decided to include the keynote address in this issue as well.

Good morning. Thank you for having me be a part of your conference. My background is in museums. I will apologize now. I tend to default to museum speak, but my thoughts are relevant to the broader heritage field as a whole. For a long time, I considered myself a museum professional, but at some point in the last four years, I have evolved into a diversity and inclusion practitioner who happens to work for a historical society. I am always excited to share my thoughts about inclusion within cultural heritage work. I believe our organizations have an *incredible* role to play within society, but it is incumbent upon us to continue to evolve to be relevant to our ever-changing constituencies.

Diversity. Such a charged word in our society. My guess is that many of your thoughts, whether conscious or unconscious, went directly to race when I mentioned the word "diversity." Others of you may have thought about LGBTQ or gender identity; still others may have thought about different levels of physical and mental abilities. Regardless of which dimension of difference your mind automatically defaulted to, my guess is that very few, in fact maybe none of you thought about strategies to leverage that difference within your daily work or within your organization. Let's be clear when we talk about diversity. The website for the American Library Association provides five different suggested definitions for "diversity."

The Society of American Archivists understands "diversity" to encompass

- **Sociocultural factors.** These factors relate to individual and community identity, and include the attributes mentioned in SAA's Equal Opportunity/Nondiscrimination Policy.
- **Professional and geographic factors.** Concern about these factors reflects the Society's desire for broad participation from archivists working in various locations, repository types and sizes, and professional specializations.[1]

The American Alliance of Museums defines diversity this way:

> The quality of being different or unique at the individual or group level. This includes age; ethnicity; gender; gender identity; language differences; nationality; parental status; physical, mental and developmental abilities; race; religion; sexual orientation; skin color; socio-economic status; education; work and behavioral styles; the perspectives of each individual shaped by their nation, experiences and culture—and more.[2]

Even when people appear the same on the outside, they are different.

As you can see, there are *numerous* definitions that identify a wide range of diversity. When we think about diversity as difference, there are so many ways we can define the term that we often become overwhelmed with where to start. So we start where we always do, externally. We want to diversify our archives. We want to diversify our programming. Essentially, we want to diversify our products, our stuff.

To do that, we target certain groups. Let's have a program for the LGBTQ audience. Let's collect from the African American community. Let's do outreach to millennials.

While we *do* need to identify communities of interest, what I have been pushing my organization to understand is that the common denominator in all of our functions and activities that emphasize various communities is *us*. Our mindset, our experiences, our backgrounds, our training, which is often rooted in the dominant culture, within organizations that tend to be very homogenous. Regardless of what community or dimension of difference we emphasize, the staff, the leadership, and the culture of our organizations all shape how we do our external work. When our worldviews have been formed within the dominant culture, the dominant culture is what we tend to project through our work. We need to focus on inclusion to be successful with long-term, sustainable engagement with communities that we have not served well, if at all, in the past. More specifically, we need to focus on workplace inclusion. In a book called *Diversity at Work: The Practice of Inclusion*, which I highly recommend, Mary-Frances Winters made several distinctions between diversity and inclusion. She says diversity is *not* about counting heads, it is about making heads count. Or, another way to describe the difference between diversity and inclusion is to define diversity as a noun describing a state and inclusion as a verb, in that to include requires action.[3] This shifts how we have traditionally thought about diversity and inclusion from external work to internal work.

I want to take a little bit of a left turn to tell you a story as an analogy for my philosophy of inclusion. In the summer of 2015, my family celebrated a major milestone for my oldest son, Quincy. He graduated from high school. While graduation parties are not the custom for everyone, we did organize a party for him. To make this happen, we needed to do a great deal of work to get our house in order.

My wife and I knew for four years that our son would graduate from high school. As he entered his senior year, we began to think about the realities involved with his graduation. We began to think about how we would celebrate his accomplishment and decided on a graduation party. Once the decision was made to have the party, we began to think about the timetable necessary to prepare for the celebration. We could now become intentional about our actions. We could develop a strategy to make sure we were prepared and able to welcome friends and family to celebrate with our son. We looked at the calendar for the upcoming year. We knew June would be the month we wanted to have the party. Once we had a date selected, we had an end point from which we could begin to work backward. The next step was trying to figure out how much time we needed to prepare for the party.

Planning was the roadmap to success for the event. We had some *key* questions that we needed to ask ourselves. What was the intended result of the party? What were the steps in the process to prepare? When did they need to be

accomplished? This provided an order of operations for us to make sure that we had a process and a timeline to be successful.

We also needed to take stock of our resources. While this included our financial resources, it also meant we needed to think about time, access to information, and our relationships. We did not want to overpromise what we could deliver, either to our son or to our guests. How would we allocate our existing resources? That question caused us to prioritize our ideas. We had a million ideas, but finite resources. How would we best put those resources to use to make the party a success? Understanding what resources we already had helped us to identify gaps that we needed to fill.

One resource available to us was friends who were willing to help. They understood how important this event was and wanted it to be successful just as much as we did. Not only did our friends roll up their sleeves and provide extra pairs of hands during the preparation for the party, they also helped us to think through from a different perspective some of the decisions we were making. They brought a fresh set of eyes to what we were doing, which helped my wife and me think outside of our experiences.

Choosing the guest list was another step in the process. Family was the easy part. We had relationships with family and we were comfortable with them. Many of our family had been over to our house before. We had contact information and we regularly communicated with these individuals. It became more difficult with inviting our son's friends. My wife and I knew some of Quincy's friends, but many we had never met before. Also, we found out that it is customary for parents of these friends to be invited to the party as well. We had to take stock of our social network. Who did we know and what connections did we already have? What connections do the people that we know have? In addition, what other resources do we have at our disposal to find contact information for people we wanted to reach out and connect with? Could we use the school directory? Were there social media tools or other ways to get the message out? We had to find answers.

Hosting this event at our home also required preparation. We wanted to create a space where family and friends felt welcome and comfortable. This caused us to think from the perspectives of our guests. What would be good for them? We were inviting people to our house that we did not know. We wanted to make a good impression. We wanted them to feel welcome and comfortable. There also was a little bit of apprehension. What will people think of our home? Will we provide an environment where they feel welcomed? These questions required my wife and me to think past the normal way we entertain when our guests are people we are comfortable with, like friends and family. We were trying to anticipate the needs of people we did not know. In the end, we reached out to some of the other families organizing graduation parties for their sons or daughters to

compare ideas. We also had the ability to attend several graduation parties prior to Quincy's. We could experience these events as participants and learners. What we saw expanded our horizons beyond our experience and pushed our thinking in terms of what we should provide for guests at our son's party.

Physical comfort was important. We knew we needed chairs and a tent. Physical comfort was fairly intuitive. What we had not thought much about was our system or process to make people psychologically comfortable. How would we create an intuitive experience so that our guests did not have to ask us what to do when they arrived? Placing the food in a separate tent and laying out the taco bar in a reasonable order was a place to start. Keeping the beverages near the food tent also made sense. Having the seating arranged to encourage people to talk with each other, rather than sitting separately in smaller groups also helped. Some of these techniques we thought of ourselves, others we learned from the graduation parties we attended.

Thank you all for indulging me the time to speak to you about my son's graduation party, but there is a point to what I am saying. Actually, several points. The fact that my wife and I knew graduation was coming is not much different than we, as heritage professionals, knowing that our audience is shifting. In every corner of the country, our society is becoming more and more diverse. We have seen for the first time a generation born that is over 50 percent nonwhite.[4] Recently, we have seen the political power of the LGBTQ community.[5] We understand that the dominant culture, the audience we have primarily served for as long as our organizations have existed, will soon be the minority. Yet we continue to conduct our work in the same manner. We prioritize the same cultural norms and narratives that we always have. This does not seem to bode well for the relevance of our organizations. Much as we came to a point where we needed to be intentional about our son's graduation party, we need to be intentional about inclusion now. We need to have a plan, but plans alone are not enough. We need to ask ourselves, what does success look like? What steps do we, as organizations, need to take to truly become inclusive? Once we can identify those steps, only then we can begin to create an effective plan.

For the graduation party to be a success, we needed to take stock of our resources. As organizations, we must do that as well. We cannot oversell our ability to become inclusive, but we cannot continue to allocate minimal resources, in terms of money and time, and really believe that we can be different organizations. While I think we collectively understand the moral imperative for inclusion, the moral imperative has not been enough to shift the way we practice our craft. We also have to begin recognizing inclusion as a business imperative, as this is the language that leaders in our organizations understand. It must be treated as a strategy that will continue to keep our organizations relevant ten,

fifteen, twenty years from now. But if we do not start now, we will continue to fall farther and farther behind.

For the graduation party, we realized that we had a resource in friends who wanted to help us, not only plan the party, but dig in on the day of and help us pull it off. Where are our friends in the communities that we are struggling to serve? What relationships do we have that we can activate to help us learn to be more inclusive? We can't wait until we have made our plans. We must bring those partners in at the beginning of the process. More often than not, they want us to be successful as much as we do when it comes to inclusion. As privileged organizations, we often have on blinders. We work by the golden rule, "Treat others as you would like to be treated." The golden rule is no longer good enough. We need to start to live by the platinum rule, "Treat others as *they* would like to be treated."[6] We cannot know how members of underengaged communities want to be treated until we ask them. We develop relationships and we work in partnership: true partnerships, not paternalistic or transactional partnerships, but authentic transformational partnerships. And we will find that more often than not, the transformation in that partnership happens for us more so than for our partners.

This requires us to understand who we are inviting to the table. Much as we needed to make a guest list, cultural organizations need to understand who they are trying to serve. There will be groups that we are more comfortable with, but this is not about us. We did not know the extent of our son's network, nor how to get in contact with them, but it would not be fair to our son for my wife and me to only invite people we knew. We needed to figure out ways to get the message out, to reach out and invite people to come to the party. As socially conscious organizations, we need to reach out and invite diverse communities to engage with us. We need to be open to engage on terms that are comfortable for community members, but may not be comfortable for us. It is not fair to broader sectors of society that we only engage with communities that we are comfortable with. It is our responsibility to correct that.

How are we creating spaces that are welcoming and user friendly? For the party, this required some thought and input from others. Our horizons were limited to our experiences. We needed to have collective wisdom to create a space that people could walk into and not need an orientation. They could walk in and feel comfortable participating right away. What organizational barriers keep new audiences from feeling comfortable? Do we even see them as barriers? What we intuitively know as insiders in the business can be very opaque for people who do not engage with organizations like ours on a regular basis. No one enjoys feeling like they do not know what to do. How do we work with community partners to see our spaces differently to create an environment where everyone feels like they belong?

While I realize that this analogy is comparing apples to oranges in many respects, what I am trying to get across is that inclusion does not happen by accident. Groups that have had their cultures marginalized since the inception of this country will not all of a sudden decide to patronize our organizations. It is up to us to create spaces that have value for members of these communities. We need to make sure they see themselves represented in our archives, collections, and programs. They must feel like we value their cultures as much as any other culture. But most of all, they must feel like they can truly be stakeholders and have a say in what we do.

In a post called "The Danger of the D Word," my colleague and friend, Porchia Moore, who often writes blog posts for *The Incluseum*, urged cultural organizations to move away from the term "diversity." To summarize a section of the post, "We must be cautious to not send the message that [marginalized] visitors are merely niche or annual visitors. Instead, what can we do to ensure that visitors [from nondominant culture groups] are long-term invested stakeholders with a unique set of values whose narratives are celebrated as equally as important and complimentary to the system of values which permeate the traditional white mainstream organization."[7] How do we do this? Certainly not through merely running programs or adding diversity to our archives and collections. That is an example of a diversity program. The through line in all of the diversity programming that we do is us, individually, as organizations, and as communities of practice. We cannot remain the same organizations, with the same homogenous staff demographics, continuing to hold the same mindsets we have always held and expect that because we may offer a different subject matter, miraculously, groups that have not perceived value in what we do will all of a sudden value that work in a different way. That is just not going to happen.

To become more inclusive of groups that have been traditionally marginalized by cultural organizations, we need to get our own houses in order, meaning that the focus of our work in terms of diversity and inclusion must begin as internal to affect the work that is external. The strategy is "focus on process to impact product."

We must move our mindsets from diversity, where we single out "othered" groups, to inclusion, where we understand that the immediate work is with us and within our profession. This means a couple of things. First, we have to stop being one-trick organizations. We can no longer rely only on outreach programs to be inclusive. Reaching audiences that have been traditionally underengaged by our organizations will not be successful or sustainable through outreach alone. We must begin to fully embrace inclusion within our organizations, within our fields.

This leads to the second point. We must turn the lens inward and begin to focus on inclusion as a strategy to be more successful. Oftentimes, we run a program or event or reach out to collect artifacts or archival materials and when

that meets resistance, we say, "Well we tried." *They* do not want to work with us. But we do not take the opportunity to ask the question of why there is resistance to working with us. As a museum person, I will speak for my field (but I suspect it is the same across most heritage fields): we need to get over ourselves. We have practices and ways of thinking that do not fit our rapidly changing external environments. We often try to hang on to our ways of working, even when they do not seem to fit the needs of our audiences. We say, "Well we have done things that way for twenty years," or "that's what museums do." Nothing gets my hackles up more within my organization than when I hear that said by my colleagues. What is interesting is that scholarship over the last forty years clearly articulates a need for cultural organizations to change, but we continue to keep our same traditional ways of working. We talk about best practices. Best practices, in terms of diversity and inclusion, are how we have become privileged institutions that exclude nondominant culture communities. We need to be thinking about next practices, evolving the way we work to fit the needs of the communities that we have not been serving. The foundation of cultural organizations is rooted in elitism. We are the cultural gatekeepers that, simply by what we deem important, create standards and norms for what is, or is not, culture.

I have talked in generalities about what we should be doing. At the risk of talking about my work or my organization, I do want to give some concrete examples of ideas to address what I have been ranting about. I want to talk a little bit about where I am pushing my organization. I say this with the caveat that, while I feel like we are trying something different, there are no guarantees that it is going to work. What I can say is that our strategy is based on incredible data that we have collected over the last two years about the levels of inclusion in our organizational culture, the intercultural competency of staff, and general attitudes about what the results of a successful inclusion initiative might look like in an organization. Our strategy is also rooted in organization development theory, looking at organizations as open systems in which the various parts are all interrelated and affect each other.

My team and I focus on two areas. The first is creating an inclusive organizational culture that embraces diversity within the organization. The second is developing inclusive work practices through increasing intercultural competency of staff.

Creating an inclusive organizational culture stems from a desire to increase staff diversity in my organization. I agree fully that we need more diversity on staff and indeed within our various professions under the heritage umbrella. In my mind, though, this is putting the cart before the horse. Increasing staff diversity does nothing for the organization if that organization is not able to retain diverse staff or to create a space where diverse perspectives and experiences are embraced. More often than not, diverse staff are brought into an organization

and expected to assimilate into what is typically a work culture based on the norms of dominant society. So the diverse staff member has a choice to make. Either assimilate, meaning that that person needs to be someone other than who he or she really is at work, or leave the organization. That is not a fair choice.

This is a classic case of the moral imperative and the business imperative. While the moral case should be enough reason to be inclusive, often it is the business case that gets listened to by leadership. Morally, putting that staff person into the dilemma to hide parts of his or her identity or leave the organization is wrong. That should be reason enough to create inclusive work cultures. If that is not enough of a motivator, a strong business case can be made for creating an inclusive environment. First, the cost associated with replacing employees can be in the thousands of dollars per employee replaced. Second, research shows that a more diverse staff drives creativity and innovation within an organization. In addition, an inclusive work environment increases employee engagement, which increases productivity. So, by creating an inclusive work culture, we can increase diversity within our organizations, feel good about it because it is the right thing to do, and see an impact on the bottom line because we are highly productive, creative, and innovative organizations. Where is the loss in that?

The other area of focus for us at the Minnesota Historical Society is inclusive work practices. This is about embedding inclusion into everything we do, every function of the organization. A couple of things have to happen for this to work. Staff need to feel comfortable working with different cultures and people who identify as diverse in various ways. Staff also need to understand the opportunities they have to be inclusive within their work. Again, this comes with intentionality. Helping staff feel comfortable working across difference is about increasing intercultural competence. We are pushing the intentional development of opportunities for staff to learn or refine skills that increase intercultural competence. We are in the process of developing learning opportunities that will focus in three areas: intellectual knowledge, affective or emotional development, and skill development. This is the head, heart, and hand approach.[8] Targeting all three areas to increase intercultural competence will remove barriers for staff who want to engage with inclusion work, but have not always felt comfortable. Self-awareness, cross-cultural communication, and conflict management are just a few examples of the type of opportunities we are hoping to develop.

So how do we pull this off? I mentioned systems theory before. I want to briefly explain it to you, without getting too technical. Essentially, a system has multiple levels: individual, team/group, organization, and marketplace.[9] Sustainable change happens within organizations when change happens at each level. By targeting what we call interventions at each level, we hope to begin to shift the culture of the organization and our work practices to be more

inclusive. At the individual and team/group level, we focus on intercultural competency learning and embedding inclusion into work plans. At the organizational level, we audit policies and procedures for barriers to inclusion, particularly in our hiring practices and our reward systems, such as performance management, and revise those policies and procedures to promote inclusion. As behaviors are learned at the individual and team/group level, they are reinforced by the policies and procedures at the organizational level. The impact at the marketplace level can be increased brand awareness; increased diversity in audience, memberships and donors; and increased partnerships with organizations rooted in target communities.

But all of this starts with the internal work. I hope this example has helped you to understand the "focus on process to impact product" argument that I mentioned earlier. When we target certain communities and do outreach or run a program, we are engaging a new audience. But what is the experience they are having? Do we still come off as paternalistic? Does our privilege show? We need to have more staff diversity within our fields (and just a side note, we may have more than we think but the culture of our organizations makes people assimilate rather than show up with their whole selves), and we need to have sustained engagement with communities that we have not previously engaged on a regular basis. But what is different now? If we do not change, we will continue to have the same revolving door of staff and the same underengagement of communities that we currently experience. We will write about how we need to be more inclusive, and we will have conversations and panels, and keynotes at conferences, but what do we do when we go back to the daily grind? Do we make change?

And one last word of advice to the leaders. You have the power to make this happen. The best thing that you can do as a leader is understand that you might be in a situation where you "don't know what you don't know." It is often hard for leaders to be vulnerable and say, "I just don't know how to do this," or "someone else may be better at doing this than I am." That might just be what it takes to create real change in our organizations. I am sorry if I am painting all leaders with a broad brush; that is not my intent. My experience is that most change agents tend to be people who are not in leadership positions in their organizations. I have an incredible network of colleagues across the country working to create change, but very few hold leadership positions.

What we are facing is a new skill set that needs to be developed. The lag time in our professional training programs to catch on to this fact means that people who have been in the profession for a long time, who are leaders, need to develop a new skill set related to creating inclusive institutions. When you have been recognized as an expert, as someone who is capable of running the

show, that realization that you need new skills might be a hard pill to swallow. This requires that you do your own work; that you are on your own journey.

My guess is that most of you have someone in your organizations who is ready to be a change agent for inclusion. Those people do not tend to be at the leadership level—yet. Find out who the people are in your organization who are passionate about this work, and support them. Create the space for them to begin the process of transforming your organization to one that creates value for all people and is relevant into the future.

## Notes

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Chris Taylor** blends a passion for history and diversity and inclusion work in his job as the chief inclusion officer at the Minnesota Historical Society. As part of the executive leadership team, he is responsible for creating and implementing a strategic vision for inclusion. To support this work, he created the Department of Inclusion and Community Engagement (DICE) in 2014. DICE develops internal and external strategies for diversity and inclusion throughout the museums and historic sites operated by the Minnesota Historical Society. Taylor holds an undergraduate degree in social studies and secondary education from the University of St. Thomas, and earned a master of arts degree from the Cooperstown Graduate Program for Museum Studies with an emphasis on museum education. He is currently working on a doctorate of education in organization development at the University of St. Thomas.