

## **AASLH Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Framework**

### **Purpose**

This document serves as a guide for decision-making related to diversity, inclusion, equity, and accessibility at the American Association for State and Local History, or AASLH. The concepts and ideas articulated within this framework are specific to the organization's internal workings, emphasizing AASLH Council, Staff, Committees, and Affinity Groups. While this document provides overarching guidelines of our collective work, more detailed aspects are (or will be) reflected and updated in written policies and procedures.

### **Introduction**

AASLH is committed to Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI). The Association's strength lies in its diversity among a broad range of people that represent the organization. AASLH respects, values, and celebrates the individual differences and intersectionality that make everyone who they are. Examples of these differences include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, age, education, culture, gender, persons with disabilities, family status, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, political and religious beliefs.

AASLH is committed to attracting and sustaining a talented workforce that reflects its present and aspirational membership diversity. Our commitment is vital to the success of our mission. We seek to ensure that all persons can access our services, which are as diverse as our clients and communities. We also aspire for our collaborative work to equitably improve the quality of life for all.

The AASLH Council, Staff, Committees, and Affinity Groups will take stock of the efforts outlined in this framework and assess progress annually.

Lastly, AASLH adopts the following definitions from the American Alliance of Museums to cultivate a shared understanding when discussing our collective efforts to impact the wider history field.

- **Diversity** is all the ways that people are different and the same at the individual and group levels. Even when people appear the same, they are different. Organizational diversity requires examining and questioning the makeup of a group to ensure the representation of multiple perspectives.
- **Equity** is the fair and just treatment of all members of a community. Equity requires a commitment to strategic priorities, resources, respect, civility, and ongoing action and assessment of progress toward achieving specified goals.<sup>1</sup>
- **Accessibility** is giving equitable access to everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience. Accessibility encompasses the broader meanings of compliance

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://institutionaldiversityblog.com>

and refers to how organizations make space for the characteristics that each person brings.

- **Inclusion** refers to the intentional, ongoing effort to ensure that diverse individuals fully participate in all aspects of the organization's work, including decision-making processes. It also refers to the value placed on diverse participants as respected members of an organization and community.

**DEAI Strategy** (*Define DEAI purpose, vision, and values; establish governance body; identify metrics to evaluate outcomes and progress*)

The American Association for State and Local History seeks to establish greater diversity and equity across the broad historical enterprise. AASLH values diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusivity as a collective priority and anticipates our individual and institutional members share these sentiments. We know that a greater respect and acknowledgment of diversity amongst our staff, volunteers, audiences, and programs will make us a more vital and robust organization.

1. The governance of this work is a shared commitment between the AASLH Council, Staff, Committees, and Affinity Groups. Each group has a specific role and responsibility to the overall effort and will have identified roles with shared expectations.
2. Our measurement of success involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative data. Our assessment centers on the diversity of identities in the makeup of the AASLH Council, Staff, and Committees. We also assess the sense of belonging and perception of how diversity sits within the organization.

**Leadership Commitment** (*Define leadership roles and expectations for advancing DEAI; empower leaders as diversity champions and change agents; define and establish leadership accountability*)

We affirm our commitment to the Association's values of dignity and respect for all individuals. We believe that employees' and members' diverse backgrounds and personal characteristics bring varied perspectives and experiences that enrich the work of AASLH and all members. Since a diverse workplace is critical to this organization's ongoing success, we have emphasized diversity and inclusion in our strategic framework. We are committed to ensuring that it will be a part of our everyday business. At every level of our team and committee work, we will consider and prioritize in all decision making, the values of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusiveness. Also, we will strive to communicate this commitment to DEAI values to all staff, members, volunteers, committees, vendors, and organizations and agencies with whom AASLH partners.

**Council.** As the governing body of this membership association, AASLH Council sets the tone for the entire organization and leads by example. Because Council is responsible for representing the Association's entire membership, Council must include individuals

of diverse backgrounds and experiences. The Council must reflect the field that AASLH serves and help set the strategic direction for AASLH by making decisions from the broadest possible basis of understanding. It is also crucial that the Council membership reflects the diversity of American society at large.

**Staff.** AASLH staff members contribute to the organization's strategic direction, design its programs, and carry out most of its work. They are often the face of AASLH, the first or only person with whom a member or nonmember might interact. Individual staff members also serve as the point of contact for most AASLH committees and task forces. Therefore, the staff's makeup and how it reflects the membership and broader population is a concern that the CEO, staff leadership, Council, and the Diversity & Inclusion Committee will continually address. To adequately serve the membership, create valuable programs, make intelligent decisions, and establish productive new collaborative relationships locally and nationally, we will strive to cultivate a lens of diversity in everything we do.

**Committees.** AASLH committees create space for members to discern and create inclusive spaces for history practitioners. They value and respect diversity as it leads to better solutions. They actively seek to dismantle hierarchical structures that impede the inclusion of diverse perspectives at the table. Ultimately, these teams ensure the organization advocates and practices diversity and inclusion. They provide guidance and support to AASLH Council, Staff, and other Committees on issues related to diversity and inclusion. Some may also sponsor, and coordinate activities and educational programs designed to advance DEAI awareness and behaviors across the organization.

**Equitable and Inclusive Organizational Culture** *(Identify inclusive values, behaviors, and norms; foster an environment of trust and transparency; increase awareness education opportunities)*

Dr. R. Roosevelt Thomas, considered by some as one of the founders of the field that has come to be known as Diversity and Inclusion, said "if the goal is not to assimilate diversity into the dominant culture but rather to build a culture that can digest unassimilated diversity, then you had better start by figuring out what your present culture looks like."

Generally, diversity is related to the numbers and the policies and practices behind those numbers. Equity and Inclusion are more about organizational culture and the culture's impact on employee and member engagement and commitment. Therefore, AASLH strives for fairness, uniform access, and understands and leverages our culture to constantly improve.

Our organizational culture is defined by the practices and behaviors that exemplify the underlying beliefs, values and assumptions held by members of an organization.

- **Values.** We believe everyone makes history. Relevant history is inclusive history.

- **Behaviors.** Council will hold itself to adhering to AASLH's 13 inclusive behaviors. These 13 behaviors are common to high-trust leaders and people throughout the world. All 13 behaviors require both character (moral or ethical quality) and competence (having suitable or sufficient skill, knowledge, experience.) The first five flow initially from character, the second five from competence, and the last three from an almost equal mix of character and competence. Establishing ideal behaviors for Council is not a response to some past issue of concern but a preventative effort to maintain our individual and collective focus on creating a more inclusive learning AASLH. It will be each Council member's responsibility to hold each other and themselves accountable for their behavior.

AASLH staff will regularly discuss inclusion and equity issues. Each quarter, staff will meet to focus internally on DEAI issues in the workplace and operations and externally on DEAI issues within AASLH programs, reviewing and updating this action plan as necessary.

AASLH will actively seek expert guidance and professional development opportunities for staff to remain current on issues of inequity in the larger society and the field to improve our practice. Staff will participate in workshops and webinars offered by organizations like the Center for Nonprofit Management and others who provide relevant training. Leaders and staff may identify training sessions that may be useful for the collective staff. Individuals are encouraged to seek out and discuss with their supervisors' training they want to pursue individually.

Every year, AASLH will allocate fiscal resources for staff equity training. Also, staff will work with supervisors to ensure they have the flexibility and capacity to pursue such training in addition to their regular workload.

**Recruitment and Hiring of Diverse Talent** *(Identify DEAI hiring goals: adopt inclusive candidate sourcing methods; address bias and subjectivity in the sourcing and interview process)*

When new positions open or when replacing an existing position, AASLH will use that opportunity to practice inclusion and diversity.

1. We will create position descriptions and job announcements that widen the prospective applicant pool. For example,
  - a. Instead of requiring specific educational degrees, job announcements in many cases can substitute job experience.
  - b. Instead of particular disciplines or areas of professional expertise, job announcements can substitute "related skills and abilities."
  - c. We will seek advice and comment on job descriptions and announcements from the Diversity & Inclusion Committee and colleagues, locally or in other

areas from which we draw the applicant pool, representing organizations that have successfully developed inclusive policies and programming.

- d. We will circulate job announcements widely, paying particular attention to organizations, individuals, and networks to help AASLH reach targeted applicant pools.

Also, AASLH staff will establish a robust, consistent, and mutually rewarding system of internships, both onsite/in-office and digital, that prioritizes inclusion and diversity. Having multiple interns at a time and interns throughout the year will build a community for individual interns. A strong internship program can produce a bench of current and former interns who add to the diversity of the staff and to whom we can turn when filling new or existing staff positions. An internship program that prioritizes inclusion can also help connect the staff and AASLH to the local institutions (e.g., colleges, museums, community organizations) to prioritize inclusion.

### **Marketing**

AASLH promotes the relevance of history, insists on history rather than heritage, and acts to build diversity and inclusiveness. Imagery in our marketing, and the channels in which we promote our organization, should reflect the current diverse makeup of our membership and the history professional community. Since diversity is not limited to race and ethnicity, we want to provide our services in a relevant, inclusive, and accessible way for all of our current and potential members.

AASLH will search for, procure, and implement imagery that reflects the broader diversity of the field. Using the findings provided by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, our goal is to reflect the diversity of the history community. We will seek potential members from colleges, institutions, and organizations with students, staff, and members representing identities not found in AASLH membership.

To make our material accessible to our current and potential members, we will

- a. Design our environments, whether virtual (websites, webinars, and virtual meetings) or physical, with physical disabilities like loss of mobility, blindness, and deafness or learning difficulties like dyslexia in mind.
- b. Include in our digital materials detailed alt text for images on our website and social media.
- c. Add captions to our videos with the initiative to also include transcripts.
- d. Capitalize each word in every hashtag we use on social media.
- e. Select easy-to-read fonts when we can.

- f. Avoid using color as the only visual means of conveying information, indicating an action, prompting a response, or distinguishing an optical element when designing advertising.

**Community Impact** (*Establish strategic alliances and partnerships; engage diverse suppliers and vendors*)

We aspire toward inclusive excellence by leading with courage and compassion, treating everyone with dignity and respect, and enhancing the quality of life for everyone with whom we connect. Our continued work will specifically place emphasis on our strategic alliances and partnerships, and vendors/ consultants.

**Strategic Alliances and Partnerships.** AASLH will make use of our current relationships and build new relationships with the broader history community to identify areas where our collective work overlaps. We view a successful strategic alliance and partnership as encompassing five essential characteristics:

1. It is critical to the success of our core mission and overarching organizational strategic framework.
2. It is critical to the development or maintenance of a core competency or other source of competitive advantage.
3. It blocks a competitive threat.
4. It creates or maintains strategic choices for the Association.
5. It mitigates a significant risk to the business.

**Vendors and Consultants.** AASLH directly impacts Nashville, Tennessee, and various cities where Annual Meetings occur or where onsite workshops occur. By choosing to work with consultants, exhibitors, service providers, and other vendors who embody or promote DEAI practices, we can encourage DEAI values.

For work projects and services needed in the AASLH office and Annual Meetings and workshops, staff will seek bids from or work with minority or women-owned businesses. We also will encourage our primary service providers, such as hotels or decorating companies or caterers for the conference, to seek bids from or to work with businesses that are minority or women owned. These parameters will be included in our Financial Policies and Procedures Manual and Annual Meeting Host Guide.

**Inclusive Performance Management** (*Establish clear and agreed-upon performance goals; employ multiple evaluation resources to avoid bias; monitor, measure, and evaluate outcomes of the performance management system*).

AASLH's performance management approach sets the tone for what we value as an organization and consequently impacts who feels valued and respected as an individual. AASLH

will regularly review current performance management systems to ensure that our approach embraces diversity and creates an inclusive environment.

1. Set clear goals to base performance on facts, not opinion
2. Use multiple feedback sources to limit bias
3. Nudge people into using inclusive language
4. Reinforce inclusive behaviors
5. Ask employees how they feel

Beginning in 2021, AASLH will regularly assess its DEAI work with feedback from the Council, Staff, Committees, and Affinity Groups. Metrics include, but are not limited to:

1. Sense of belonging to AASLH
2. Comfort in dissenting thoughts and opinions
3. Perspectives of the importance of DEAI (personally and organizationally)
4. Demographic information (i.e race/ ethnicity, gender identity, age, etc.)

## **13 Inclusive Behaviors (adopted from the FranklinCovey 13 Inclusive Behaviors)**

1. **Talk Straight.** Communicate clearly so that you cannot be misunderstood. Preface your discussions by declaring your intent, so you leave no doubt about what you are thinking. Counterfeit behaviors include withholding information, flattery, and spin. Be honest and call things what they are. Don't manipulate people distort facts or leave false impressions.
2. **Demonstrate Respect.** This behavior is based on the principles of respect, fairness, kindness, love, and civility. The opposite is commonly experienced as showing disrespect, which is a huge issue, both at work and home. The counterfeit is to fake respect or concern, or, most insidious of all, to show respect and concern for only those who can do something for you.
3. **Create Transparency.** Be real and genuine and tell the truth in a way that people can verify. The opposite is to obscure, and the counterfeit is an illusion of pretending things are different than they are. You can establish trust quickly by being open and authentic, erring on the side of disclosure and not having hidden agendas.
4. **Right Wrongs.** Make restitution instead of just apologizing. The opposite is to deny or justify wrongs because of ego and pride, and the counterfeit is to cover up mistakes. Apologize quickly, take action to make restitution when possible, and demonstrate personal humility to achieve this behaviour.
5. **Show Loyalty.** Give credit to others and speak about people as though they are present. The opposite is to take credit or not represent people fairly. The counterfeit is to appear to share credit but then downplay others' contribution when they are away. To exhibit a trustworthy character, give credit freely, don't badmouth people behind their backs and don't disclose others' private information.
6. **Deliver Results.** This is a way to convert cynics and establish trust in a new relationship. Because it is often difficult to measure results, take time to define results upfront. By establishing a track record, making the right things happen, being on time and on budget, and not making excuses for not delivering, you quickly restore lost trust on the competence side.
7. **Get Better.** Continuously improve by learning, growing and renewing yourself. Others will develop confidence in your ability to succeed in a rapidly changing environment. The opposite is entropy and deterioration, while the counterfeit is the eternal student – always learning, but never producing. Don't be afraid to make mistakes but learn from them. Develop formal and informal feedback systems and respond to them.



8. **Confront Reality.** Take the tough issues head-on. This affects speed and cost by facilitating open interaction and fast achievement and also allowing you to engage the creativity, capability, and synergy of others in solving problems. When leaders use the opposite behaviour by ignoring problems, they pay a huge tax when people feel they are being dishonest. It is far better to address the real issues and lead courageously in discussions of uncomfortable topics.
9. **Clarify Expectations.** Create shared vision and agreement up front. The opposite is to leave undefined expectations and the counterfeit is to be vague about specifics. Consider that most circumstances encompass three variables – quality, speed, and cost – but you can only have two. Always discuss and reveal expectations, and never assume they are clear or shared. Renegotiate if necessary, but don't violate expectations once they have been validated.
10. **Practice Accountability.** Hold yourself and others accountable. Leaders who generate trust do both. The opposite is not to take responsibility, and the counterfeit is to point fingers. Other people respond to accountability – particularly performers. They want to be held accountable. Don't avoid or shirk responsibility and be clear on how you'll communicate progress.
11. **Listen First.** Genuinely understand another person's thoughts and feelings, before trying to diagnose or advise. The opposite and counterfeit are to speak first and listen last, or not at all, and to pretend to listen while waiting for your own chance to speak. Listening teaches you which behaviors create dividends. Use your eyes and your gut to listen as well as your ears, and don't presume you know what matters to others.
12. **Keep Commitments.** It is the quickest way to build trust in any relationship. The opposite is to break commitments and the counterfeit is to make vague, unreliable commitments, or never make them in the first place. Some cultures view commitments differently, and understanding the difference is key to getting dividends and avoiding trust taxes. People tend to see family commitments as more flexible than work commitments, but they are just as important. Make keeping all commitments the symbol of your honor.
13. **Extend Trust.** Shift trust from a noun to a verb. While the other behaviors help you become a more trusted person or manager, this behavior helps you become a more trusting leader. Extending trust leverages it to create reciprocity. The opposite is withholding trust. The counterfeit is extending false trust by giving people responsibility, but no authority or resources to complete a task. There is also fake trust that seems like trust until you follow-up behind people and micromanage. Based on the situation, extend conditionally to those who are earning your trust, but extend it abundantly to those who have earned it.