

INCLUSION DIVERSITY EQUITY ACCOUNTABILITY UPDATE

In early June, the Citizens Foundation began an internal discussion about how we could ensure that our organization and our community be more inclusive, diverse, accessible, and equitable to represent all people that live in our county and region.

We began with a statement, which we shared with the public in early June and reiterate here:

At the Orange County Citizens Foundation, we live by the motto: "Learn More. Do More. Live Better." These tenets have no greater meaning than in times like these. We strive to create welcoming places for ALL. We invite ALL people to come to our table, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, and background. We reject racism and discrimination of any kind. We implore our neighbors to learn from this, as we are learning, and to do more to ensure inclusion and equality in all aspects of our communities, so that ALL of us may live better.

Over the past six months, we've taken several steps:

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- We established an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Taskforce comprised of Board Members and local volunteers to conduct an assessment of our existing Bylaws and internal policies, Board composition, Committee composition, existing initiatives and community relations, evaluate where we are progressing in IDEA efforts, and where we need improvement. We used comprehensive guidance and tools from non-profit associations and other external organizations to limit our own bias when conducting our self-evaluations, and have been in discussions with other non-profits to share ideas and tools as we continue to progress.
- We held a meeting with our Board of Trustees dedicated to learning about IDEA and discussing the ways in which we, as an organization, can improve our efforts. We now dedicate a portion of each and every Board of Trustees meeting to discuss our ongoing IDEA efforts. We are grateful to Anthony Davidowitz, Deputy Director of Operations, Administration, and Legal Affairs at Storm King Art Center, for facilitating a discussion at that first meeting. Anthony's work and Storm King Art Center's own efforts in this area are strong models for others to explore.
- We have incorporated the following questions into our standard rubric, used to evaluate every initiative which we undertake: "Will there be an opportunity to include diverse viewpoints in this project?" and "Will this project be equally accessible to all members of our community?" Our goal is to continually ask ourselves whether we are serving ALL members of our community and to keep an expansive view of how we can include more people and more viewpoints in fulfilling our mission.
- We have established lines of communication with local groups dedicated to amplifying diverse voices in our community, including NAACP Newburgh/Highland Falls Branch, Jewish Federation of Greater Orange County, NY, Independent Living, and the Women's Bar Association of Orange and Sullivan Counties. We are strengthening our relationships with these groups, and others, by inviting them to participate in our events and collaborate in reaching our shared goals. For example, we hold non-partisan debates for local candidates each year. This year, we included more diverse viewpoints than ever before by inviting those organizations to participate. They posed questions relevant to their interests to all candidates in our local Senate races, sparking greater discussion on topics of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility.
- Our Placemaking Committee hosts an annual Placemaking Conference. This year, in light of COVID-19, our format has switched to individual webinars on a host of different topics. The first of these topics will be dedicated to achieving greater diversity and inclusion in placemaking.
- We are continually seeking new members and volunteers to help fulfill our mission. Now, we have included as part of our outreach, a dedicated effort to connect with residents and active members of the region's diverse communities to join us in our projects, work with us in our committees, and serve on our Board.
- As part of our Almost Daily Update emails, we've pledged to share thoughtful and noteworthy articles, information, and commentary touching on IDEA topics.

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We will continue our efforts to incorporate inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility in everything we do.

Recognizing that this will be an ongoing process, our Board of Trustees, at its December meeting, developed a permanent place for the IDEA Taskforce in our corporate structure by including it in a newly developed Governance Committee.

We have set several goals for ourselves over the coming months including:

- Updating our Nominating Committee policies and procedures to include diversity of race, gender, ability, sexual orientation,
- Holding a meeting with all of our Committee Chairs to discuss and incorporate IDEA principles into committee work,
- Establishing an anonymous feedback system to measure the effectiveness of inclusive policies and programs, including a written policy to effectively address input from the public about our IDEA efforts,
- Updating our website to make it accessible for Spanish-speakers and adding subtitles to all of our videos.

We expect that, as with almost everything the Citizens Foundation takes on, this initiative will grow and evolve as our work continues. New goals and action steps will surely follow. We will continue to provide updates on our progress as it occurs. Please reach out to us if you have ideas, comments or recommendations as we move forward.