



HARRY RANSOM  
CENTER

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

# **Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan**

**November 24, 2020**

## Ransom Center Diversity & Inclusion Plan

As a humanities research library and museum, the Harry Ransom Center affirms the fundamental dignity and worth of human life and works to preserve and share the creative record of human achievement in diverse and varied forms. The goals and priorities expressed in this Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan are rooted in that mission and in those values and include a commitment to the diversity of individuals and ideas in all facets of the Center's work.

This action plan is the result of months of discussion, self-examination, and reflection, and it aims to translate the Ransom Center's values into promises. The plan is a living blueprint to guide us in our work and a tool for measuring our future growth. Because the Ransom Center's story is an ongoing one, this plan will continue to evolve to reflect new understandings of our responsibilities to the past, to one another, and to those who will follow. Ultimately, the success of this plan will be reflected in the kind of community the Ransom Center becomes.

### People

#### **Action 1: Complete a diversity and inclusion climate survey and share findings with all staff.**

- a. How: Work with an external consultant to administer a baseline diversity and inclusion climate survey, analyze the results, and review and discuss recommendations for advancing the Ransom Center's diversity goals. Repeat the process on a regular periodic basis.

#### **Action 2: Revise recruitment and job search processes and goals to ensure an increasingly diverse workforce.**

- a. How: Commit to the identification of diverse applicant pools by conducting open searches for all new Ransom Center job openings.
- b. How: Commit to hiring candidates from underrepresented communities and/or those who, by their records, can demonstrate a commitment to a diverse and inclusive working and learning environment through their experience, teaching, research, and/or service.
- c. How: Commit to the identification of diverse applicant pools for all student employment positions.
- d. How: Explore avenues for job postings and advertisements that will better lead to a diverse applicant pool.
- e. How: Require training in inclusive search and recruitment best practices and implicit bias for all those engaged in hiring.
- f. How: Include diverse membership on hiring committees where possible.

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### **Action 3: Broaden the communities from which the Center recruits docents and other volunteers.**

- a. How: Compile baseline demographic data regarding active volunteers. Build relationships with relevant University Resource Groups and academic programs and advertise volunteer opportunities through their communication channels. Identify and recruit through Austin-area venues that serve diverse members of the community.

### **Action 4: Continue and expand opportunities for internships, student employment, and post-graduate residencies that promote cultural heritage-related career paths for members of underrepresented groups.**

- a. How: Build and strengthen partnerships with departments and programs at the university to develop mentored apprenticeships and progressive leadership opportunities for a diverse community of undergraduate and graduate students.

### **Action 5: Develop culturally sensitive staff.**

- a. How: Invest in required training and professional development opportunities related to diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.
- b. How: Train docents and volunteers on diversity and inclusivity initiatives, on understanding the perspectives marginalized groups bring into the Center, and on how to discuss collection materials made by diverse creators with all groups who may come to visit.

### **Action 6: Include diversity and inclusion practice and training expectations in annual goal setting and performance reviews.**

- a. How: Supervisors regularly engage with staff about internal and external diversity and inclusion training opportunities, build expectations for diversity and inclusion training into annual performance evaluations for staff, and establish meetings throughout the year to ensure goals are being met or determine if employees need support in achieving the goals.

### **Action 7: Recruit and sustain a more inclusive and culturally diverse membership in the Advisory Council.**

- a. How: Work with the Advisory Council's Nominating Committee and the full Council to identify and prioritize the recruitment of diverse Council members.

**Action 8: Collaborate on research and interpretive projects, symposia, and programs with colleagues across campus and other subject-area experts outside the Ransom Center to share a more inclusive and diverse representation of perspectives and experiences.**

- a. How: Build and strengthen partnerships with interdisciplinary faculty, students, and external researchers through a University of Texas at Austin Fellows program, affiliated researchers, works-in-progress series, and other collaborative programs and initiatives to invite and share diverse research perspectives and interpretations of our collections.
- b. How: Ensure that all future symposia, seminars, and programs feature a diverse and inclusive representation of speakers, participants, and ideas.

**Action 9: Establish diversity and inclusion goals for the fellowship program to broaden the diversity of both the Center's community of researchers and the range of projects they explore in the collections.**

- a. How: Build, strengthen, and integrate opportunities for more diverse researchers both externally and internally at the University of Texas to participate in fellowships and research programs, improving access to underutilized collections related to underrepresented groups. Target outreach to HBCUs, Hispanic-serving institutions, Native and Indigenous consortiums, and other underrepresented groups, both nationally and internationally in the Global South.

**Action 10: Increase transparency about the fellowship application process.**

- a. How: With fellowship instructions, include sample applications demonstrating diverse approaches and highlighting underutilized collections related to underrepresented groups. Build research consultation into the application process for added reference support. Increase diversity in the fellowship application review committee, and ensure that the review process engages goals for diversity and inclusion.

**Action 11: Increase outreach to underrepresented communities across all audience types.**

- a. How: Activate a strategic social media and publishing plan to develop and share content related to underrepresented creators and communities on a regular basis through the Center's social media channels and the *Ransom Center Magazine* (print and online).
- b. How: Establish priorities, best practices, and workflows to publish multilingual content on the Center's website and in exhibitions and printed materials. Designate

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funding for content translation for the website and exhibitions based on a priority plan.

- c. How: Target The University of Texas and City of Austin demographics as a first phase goal for baseline diversity representation within the Center's audience, and then work to expand that goal.

### **Action 12: Commit to using Historically Underutilized Businesses (HUB) vendors for goods and services when possible.**

- a. How: Commit to making a good-faith effort to identify minority-owned or woman-owned businesses even for purchases falling below the threshold amount for University-mandated HUB quotes.

## **Services**

### **Action 1: Review web and public-facing content to improve accessibility, to increase availability of content in non-English languages, and to better share our institutional commitment to diversity and inclusivity.**

- a. How: Conduct an annual audit to ensure the Center's website continues to comply with The University of Texas at Austin's Web Accessibility Policy.
- b. How: Review website content and public-facing materials and messages for inclusive language and revise as necessary to reflect diversity related to collections and creators.
- c. How: Establish priorities, best practices, and work flows to publish multilingual content on the Ransom Center website.

### **Action 2: Review and consider revising access policies to reduce barriers for access to the collections.**

- a. How: Continue to review existing guidelines to ensure both a secure and welcoming reading room environment for all visitors.

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**Action 3: Assess and enhance the accessibility, functionality, and appeal of the technological platforms providing access to collection materials. Explore ways that technology can improve accessibility and inclusivity for staff, for onsite visitors and researchers, and for remote users of our content.**

- a. How: As part of a general accessibility audit, review and implement within exhibitions, as appropriate, best practices set out in *Inclusive Digital Interactives: Best Practices + Research*, a collaboration of Access Smithsonian, Institute for Human Centered Design, and MuseWeb.

**Action 4: Review existing and create new educational resources for collections related to underrepresented groups and individuals, and increase participation in Open Access and Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives.**

- a. How: Continue to propose the creation of educational resources related to underrepresented groups and individuals in future grant proposals. Invite the creation of such educational resources by subject experts within and outside the Center.

**Action 5: Continue targeted campus outreach to departments and instructors with a focus on classes engaging with materials related to underrepresented communities and individuals.**

- a. How: Continue to recruit first-time classes visiting or making use of the Center's collections in instruction and class assignments.

**Action 6: Assess the diversity of class visits over the past five years and establish benchmarks to increase diversity of content covered, departments represented, collection materials taught, and pedagogical approaches employed in future instructional activities.**

- a. How: Perform a statistical analysis of past class topics, departments, collection materials, and pedagogical techniques. On the basis of the results, aim to improve the diversity in each of these areas.

**Action 7: Continue and expand offerings of onsite and online programs that share an inclusive and diverse representation of perspectives, voices, and experiences.**

- a. How: Include representatives from diverse communities at the earliest stages of program planning. Research resources and costs associated with providing such services as American Sign Language translation for in-person and virtual program offerings.

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- b. How: Schedule programs so that they don't fall on major religious or other special holidays that might limit fullest participation.
- c. How: Develop purposeful, mission-driven programming for national observance days and commemorative months honoring underrepresented communities, including but not limited to Black History Month, Women's History Month, LGBT History Month, National Hispanic Heritage Month, and Native American Indian/Alaskan Native Heritage Month.

### **Action 8: Revise the exhibition idea and proposal forms and revisit the review and approval process to better encourage the development of exhibitions that represent diverse perspectives and cultures.**

- a. How: Craft questions that prompt prospective exhibition organizers to address issues of diversity and inclusion at the outset of exhibition planning and to include elements in exhibitions that will encourage reflective engagement by visitors to the exhibitions.
- b. How: Solicit exhibition ideas that amplify different types of diversity represented in the collections. Invite faculty and staff from other divisions as guest exhibition curators and/or as collaborators with staff curators.

### **Action 9: Support the Center's diversity and inclusion goals through strategic fundraising.**

- a. How: Identify diversity and inclusion initiatives that lend themselves to external funding through the university's What Starts Here Campaign.
- b. How: Prioritize grant applications that align with the Center's diversity and inclusion goals and consider incorporating actions to advance diversity and inclusion goals in all grant applications.
- c. How: Secure funding for postdoctoral fellowships for recent PhDs from underrepresented communities who are interested in pursuing career paths in libraries, museums, and cultural heritage institutions.

## Collections

### **Action 1: Revise the Collection Development Policy to emphasize the Center's commitment to building collections that represent diverse perspectives and cultures.**

- a. How: Integrate language that supports the Center's diversity goals into the purpose, collecting rationale, and collecting priorities sections of the Collection Development Policy. Review the policy annually and update it as needed to ensure that increasing diversity in the Center's collections is a key principle in collection development.

### **Action 2: Assess the diversity of recent acquisitions and establish benchmarks to increase the representation of diverse perspectives and cultures in future collection development activities.**

- a. How: Research possible assessment models and develop a plan to assess the Center's acquisitions over the past three to five years to identify what percentages of acquisitions enhance different types of diversity in the collections. Analyze the results and establish goals to increase the diversity of acquisitions.

### **Action 3: Increase transparency about the collection development process to promote better understanding for our staff and audiences.**

- a. How: Share information with staff on the staff portal and through information sessions. Make the updated Collection Development Policy available on the Center's website and share information with the public through online *Ransom Center Magazine* articles and other outlets.

### **Action 4: Research and document the Ransom Center's institutional and collecting history as it relates to diversity and inclusion.**

- a. How: Analyze the University Library's history of special collections development, with particular focus on the Ransom Center's evolution, across three pivotal collecting time frames: 1883–1957, 1957–1978, and 1978–present.

### **Action 5: Prioritize cataloging, recataloging, and provision of onsite access to increase accessibility of collections related to underrepresented communities and individuals.**

- a. How: When setting goals for cataloging and recataloging, work to ensure that such collections are included as priorities. Adopt and post a "Statement on Description in Past Cataloging Practices."

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### **Action 6: Review existing research guides and create new ones for collections related to underrepresented groups and individuals.**

- a. How: Curatorial and library staff will continue to update and develop new research guides. Invite creation of guides by subject specialists within and outside of the Center.

### **Action 7: Prioritize the preservation and digitization of collection materials related to underrepresented communities and individuals.**

- a. How: Prioritize collection materials related to underrepresented communities in preservation housing and conservation treatment workflows.
- b. How: Establish annual target quantities for digitization projects that advance the Center's diversity and inclusion goals.

## **Spaces**

### **Action 1: Conduct an accessibility audit of all Ransom Center spaces.**

- a. How: Work with the university's Division of Diversity and Community Engagement to ensure that the Center is meeting federal, state, and university accessibility standards and best practices. Identify and implement, when feasible, more comprehensive accessibility standards identified by library, archival, and museum professional organizations and practitioners.
- b. How: Assess the Center's exhibition and program offerings against the Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design and the related *Inclusive Digital Interactives: Best Practices + Research* document and make recommendations for modifications. Research best accommodation practices for those with needs that may not be addressed in the aforementioned documents.