

RISD Museum Anti-Racist Work

[The RISD Museum stands with the Black Lives Matter movement.](#)

The RISD Museum commits to work deliberately, consistently, and compassionately to confront racism and injustice in its many forms. Written by RISD Museum staff and supported by the museum's Board of Governors, this document outlines some of the ways we will bring anti-racist practice to our internal and external work. We expect to be challenged and changed by where this collective and responsive work will take us.

The task is to commit to practices of knowing and care that critically interrogate the fraught history of museums and their contemporary form, uprooting weak foundations and rebuilding upon new, healthy ones.

Let us know and care for the other, ourselves, and society at large in equal measure, without prejudice.

Yesomi Umolu, [On the Limits of Care and Knowledge: 15 Points Museums Must Understand to Dismantle Structural Injustice](#)

On the limits of language: while the term underrepresented is imperfect, we use it in this document to refer to people who are historically and presently excluded from museums, including but not limited to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), [LGBTQIA2S+](#) people, people with disabilities, and women. We bring a lens of intersectionality to our anti-racist work.

Confronting Ourselves Together:

We, the RISD Museum staff, will:

Openly acknowledge the museum's Eurocentricity and complicity in white supremacy culture; actively work to redress its colonial foundations through re-installation and reinterpretation of the collection in our galleries, programs, publications, website, and other platforms.

1. Actively share an evolving land acknowledgement by the end of 2020.
2. Reinstall the modern and contemporary collection alongside BIPOC partners by winter/spring 2021-2.
3. Working in collaboration with BIPOC partners, identify opportunities to share more inclusive narratives through all platforms, prioritizing 5th floor galleries and Pendleton House.
4. Conduct an initial audit and improve systems to track the identities of makers for works exhibited, cared for, and taught from. Use these baselines to set future goals.

5. Ensure programs and events track and strongly prioritize sharing content by underrepresented makers and guest collaborators. Fairly compensate invited guests' labor.

Transparently work toward deaccessioning, repatriating, and making restitution for collection objects with problematic histories of ownership.

1. Deaccession the Head of an Oba by the end of 2020. Continue work on its repatriation and restitution in collaboration with its community of origin.
2. Continue Americas Research Initiative group work to research and repatriate Native American funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony following NAGPRA laws.

Prioritize ethical acquisitions, programs, and exhibitions that center underrepresented makers and their work. Collaboratively engage students in these decisions. Use funds from future deaccessioning to acquire and care for works by BIPOC makers.

1. Assess current collection for representation of makers and works.
2. Commit 75% of the acquisition budget to underrepresented makers.
3. Build relationships with galleries/dealers owned by BIPOC.
4. Deaccession with a clear, anti-racist strategy. Use funds from future deaccessioning to ethically acquire and care for works by BIPOC makers.

Examine existing community relationships for equity. Strengthen and expand relationships that align with anti-racist work.

1. Establish a cross-departmental working group by September 2020 to address the following:
 - a. Identify where we need and want to build relationships (with local communities and those that have a relationship to objects in our collection). Establish new relationships in areas that haven't had opportunities for external partnerships in the past. Sustain and nourish [existing partnerships](#) that align with anti-racism.

Seek and be responsive to feedback from advisory groups and audiences.

1. Review roles, compensation, BIPOC inclusion, and equity of already established stakeholder groups including RAC, Museum Guild, Artists Fellows, or other partners.
2. Create clear protocols for invitations and inquiries to join community and artist advisory councils and compensate them for their time and expertise.
3. Create opportunities for voluntary audience input and discussion (like Community Exhibition Previews) and create ways for audiences to initiate these conversations.

Review all existing vendors and contractors and prioritize working with BIPOC-owned and operated businesses.

1. Identify who we are doing business with. Identify opportunities for review of vendors for all areas of purchasing.
2. Define and create a policy around ethical, economic, anti-racist, and environmental/sustainability considerations for business partnerships.

Identify and develop systemic changes that invite and make more people feel welcome coming to or engaging with the museum. Prioritize visitor and user experience throughout the museum's physical and virtual spaces.

1. All-Staff Dialogue accessibility group
 - a. Hold All-Staff Dialogue around the topic of accessibility by 2021.
2. Accessibility and Visitor Experience working groups
 - a. Create a website accessibility plan with time-based action items.
 - i. Define timeline for adding image descriptors to the museum website.
 - b. Share internally about current in-progress physical accessibility improvements.
3. Create response process for visitor experience
 - a. Marketing and Visitor Services departments to finalize survey implementation plan for visitor experience by 2021.
 - b. Use survey results to establish a baseline and set future goals.

From the inside out:

We, the RISD Museum staff, will:

Require ongoing anti-racist development for every museum staff member, volunteer, intern, and fellow.

1. Make attendance of at least one All-Staff Dialogue mandatory per year for all staff (paid for all non-exempt staff). Staff will include anti-racist development in their annual performance review goal-setting and ongoing conversations with managers.
2. Share this anti-racist work document and relevant expectations with potential new hires during the interview process.
3. Create an anti-racist resources handbook to be shared when onboarding new hires. Hiring supervisors will build follow-up conversations on anti-racism into the staff evaluation process. Supervisors will also ensure handbook access and follow-up conversations for current staff.
4. Continue to hold at least 3 All-Staff Dialogues per year, led by rotating teams of staff facilitators.

5. Continue providing regular internal and external SEI training and education for staff, docents, on-call educators, and interns.

Use every available opportunity to hire, support, and retain museum staff with a diverse range of identities and backgrounds, particularly for leadership and decision-making roles. (While RISD's current hiring freeze and circumstances of global pandemic might delay active hiring, open positions as of 7/13/20 include Assistant Director for Finance, Assistant Curator for PDP, Luce Fellowship, Membership Manager, and Nancy Prophet Fellowship.)

1. Intentionally cultivate candidates toward a more diverse staff by working with HR to expand where and how positions are posted and publicized.
2. Write job descriptions to more effectively attract candidates that embrace anti-racist practices.
3. Explore and implement creative ways to train potential candidates into positions.
4. Provide ongoing support and mentorship of new hires to ensure their success and retention.
5. Work with HR to revise screening processes for museum jobs.
6. Provide access to ongoing staff professional development opportunities to support a thriving multi-cultural work space (ex. language classes or sessions on cultural competency skills such as understanding generational differences, conflict resolution strategies, etc.)

Develop more equitable processes for transparent communication and exchange of knowledge and experience across the museum.

Staff

1. Gather data from all departments and staff to determine areas for growth in internal transparency and communications between areas and roles.
2. Create a "Policies and Key Information" folder in the shared drive to aggregate and make information more accessible for staff from across departments.
3. Hold a 3 minute update from all departments & cross-departmental working groups in each All-Staff Meeting. Post notes summarizing All-Staff Meetings in the lunch lounge and via email after meetings to include those who can't attend.
4. Share regular object rotation switch-out documents with all staff via email and in the lunch lounge.
5. Ensure senior staff and managers are reporting information out to teams they supervise.

Board

1. Review Board and FAC roles & responsibilities in All-Staff Meeting.
2. Invite Board Member(s) to All-Staff Meeting(s).

At the top:

We, the RISD Museum staff and board, will:

Establish and implement a plan to develop the RISD Museum's Board of Governors (BoG) and Fine Arts Committee (FAC) to equitably and inclusively reflect our communities.

1. Share the mission, expectations, and philanthropic roles of BoG and FAC on risdmuseum.org.
2. Create a report of current representation on BoG and FAC (local, regional, national; gender; race/ethnicity; ability).
3. Recommend number of potential BoG members and FAC members to be identified and cultivated by the nominating committee by January 30, 2021.
4. Recommend a number of individuals to add to the board to increase its diversity by June 30, 2021.
5. Encourage staff to recommend (email to Tricia, cc John & Ameer) individuals for consideration for BoG and FAC.

Support ongoing anti-racist development for BoG and FAC.

1. Integrate anti-racist resources and regular discussions around anti-racist work using existing documents.
2. Create a standing BoG meeting agenda item to ensure accountability around anti-racist work.