Audiences and Inclusion:

A Primer for Cultivating More Inclusive Attitudes Among the Public

American Alliance of Museums

WilkeningConsulting
audience research | knowledge curation

THE UNITED STATES IS OFTEN CELEBRATED as a melting pot of cultures—where different values, sensibilities, and struggles serve as a wellspring for innovation. In reality, we have tremendous work to do to live up to this vision and to our founding ideals. The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that white nationalist hate groups have risen 55% in the three years since 2017, largely motivated by fear of demographic change. The violence, rhetoric, and disparities that have been spotlighted in recent years underscore the urgency of reckoning with our shameful history of genocide, slavery, and white supremacy—and the resulting legacies that endure to this day.

How can our museums play a leading role in combating hate and disinformation in such a divided nation? How can we do the essential work of creating safe and welcoming spaces for the most marginalized and at-risk in our communities while also bringing others along, guiding them towards more inclusive attitudes for the benefit of the entire country?

The answers to these questions are not quick, easy, or comfortable. Museums have the power to create learning environments that inspire our curiosity, challenge our thinking, and help us develop greater empathy and understanding. As educational institutions mandated to serve the interests of our publics, it is our responsibility to engage in this critical work.

The American Alliance of Museums is pursuing multiple strategies to support greater diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) in museums. Some of those strategies aim to help individuals understand why DEAI is integral to excellence in museums. Others explore social justice, anti-racism, and truth and reconciliation in our field. To use the language of this primer, our work spans the spectrum of zero-to third-stage inclusive attitudes (page 46).

A key tenet of effective education is to meet learners at their current level of competency. As our field takes on the challenge of countering racism and white supremacy (both internally and through our public-facing work), we must first know where people are in their understanding and how best to reach them. That's where this primer comes in. It provides a clear, evidence-based approach to guide museum-goers along a path of inclusive attitudes and values.

To those at stage 3 (advanced in their understanding of inclusion), the zero-stage work can seem devastatingly slow, criticized for catering to those who, knowingly or not, are causing harm. To those at stage 0 or 1 (just beginning to learn), the third-stage work can feel confusing or inaccessible. Our work is to serve all those who are open to learning, using the most effective strategies to create permanent behavior change as quickly as we can.

As cornerstones in communities across the country, our museums have the power to create greater inclusion, empathy, and belonging; therefore you, the museum professional, are a critical part of the future vitality of our country. Use this primer to better understand your museum-goers, how you can move them towards more inclusive attitudes, and how those attitudes could shape the behaviors that better your community for generations to come.

—Laura Lott,
President and CEO

"Is there space among the woke for the still-waking?"
- Anand Giridharadas

"It is easy to imagine that whether a presentation is considered 'revisionist' or 'revealing' might differ substantially depending on the viewer's background and willingness to consider different viewpoints."
— Survey Respondent, Inclusive History in America

LESS THAN HALF of American museum-goers are seeking inclusive content from museums.

Let that sink in for a moment.

That means the majority of museum-goers are likely satisfied with white, hetero-normative content, and some are also actively avoiding inclusive content or even publicly criticizing museum efforts to be inclusive.

Museums today are striving to be inclusive … and this is work that I believe is morally right and, in an ideal world, would happen quickly.

But we don't live in an ideal world. We live in a messy, emotional, identity-protecting, polarized world.

If we want to have the most long-term inclusive impact on our society, we have to grapple with the fact that the majority of our audiences have not yet embraced inclusion … and that this is an opportunity for museums to do vital work. Indeed, by helping more people become inclusive, we can effect widespread societal changes that yield more positive outcomes for more people.

Thus, this primer.

Over the past three years, numerous research projects have allowed me to examine not only how people feel about inclusion, but also the underlying values, attitudes, and beliefs that drive that position in the first place. In this primer, we'll look at the role of curiosity in opening minds and worldviews … and why that puts museums in a prime position to expand the number of people who seek and demand inclusion.

Some might say, however, that this focus makes this primer white-centered. To some extent this is true in that the majority of those who are not proactively inclusive are white people, as are the majority of our current audiences. But this primer also considers gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and more. (Additionally, those who are content with the "status quo," as well as those who are actively anti-inclusive, are not homogeneously white.)

But there is another practical reason for this focus: if we don't consider the most effective approach for growing inclusive attitudes, we are only shifting, and narrowing, our audience to one that is already inclusive. That's an approach that doesn't address the problem … and alienates over half our audience.

Instead, we offer an approach that provides a pathway for effecting critical societal change while also maintaining and broadening our audiences.

I'll be honest, though. This work is slow in a way that feels very unfair. But if our ultimate goal is a more inclusive society, we have to think long-term, and accept our challenge to use radical curiosity and courageous empathy to crack open worldviews and cultivate inclusion in more individuals.

—Susie Wilkening

WILKENING CONSULTING RESEARCH

THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS CONTRIBUTED TO THIS RESEARCH:
- Inclusive History in America *(client proprietary; fielded 2018)*
- Patriotism and History in America *(client proprietary; 2019 – 2020)*
- Mississippi: Art, History, and Civic Engagement *(Mississippi Museum of Art; 2019 – 2020)*
- Annual Survey of Museum-Goers *(fielded annually 2017 – present; with AAM)*
- COVID-19 Pandemic Qualitative Panel *(fielded spring 2020 on behalf of AAM)*

OVERALL RESEARCH SCOPE:
- Quantitative ➔ 60,000 Survey Participants
- Qualitative ➔ 500 Participating in In-Depth Panels

METHODOLOGY NOTE:
RESEARCHER AND PROJECT BIASES

- My lived experience is as a white woman
- My ideology, attitudes, and my behaviors skew heavily liberal
- I also feel strongly it is our moral imperative for museums to share inclusive content
- To mitigate my biases, particularly around more conservative attitudes, I:
  - Was careful to ground my research in evidence, quantitative and qualitative
  - Looked carefully for qualitative responses reflecting multiple perspectives, and noted when any perspectives were particularly strongly expressed
  - Fielded panels that were open to all perspectives and were deliberately populated with diverse positions; panelists reflecting multiple perspectives commented that they felt heard in the panels
  - Tapped into a small network of self-identified conservative advisors to assess if the findings were fairly represented, or if my bias was coming into play

Susie Wilkening

REVIEWERS TO PRIMER

Melanie Adams
Director | Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum

Dina Bailey
CEO | Mountain Top Vision

Betsy Bradley
Director | Mississippi Museum of Art

Norman Burns
President, Chief Executive Officer | Conner Prairie

Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko
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Trevor Jones
Director & CEO | History Nebraska

Anthony Pennay
Chief Learning Officer | The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Research participant quotes used in this primer were graphically represented with a figure that generally matches their demographic profile (age, gender, race and/or ethnicity). Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from the 2020 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers.

This primer includes data points that are troubling, and some comments from museum-goers that are anti-inclusive and disturbing. We thought long and hard about including them in this primer.

But if we, as a field, are going to most effectively take responsibility to be inclusive in the content we share and the audiences we invite to our museums, we need to understand overall societal attitudes as well as the attitudes of those with whom we disagree. This primer seeks to share understanding of those perspectives rather than to endorse or condone them.

American attitudes towards inclusion are divided, complicated, and messy.

They are also tied into emotions, values, and identity.

National research indicates that there is a steep road ahead towards building a truly just and equitable society.

39% of U.S. adults say there is discrimination against men in our society[2]

Just 34% of registered voters in the US think white people benefit "a great deal" from advantages in society that Black people do not have[3]

44% of white Americans think discrimination against white people has become as big a problem as discrimination against Black Americans and other minorities[4]

49% of Americans describe immigrants as a "burden to local communities"[5]

Nearly half of white people say a majority nonwhite population will "weaken American culture"[6]

But what about museum-goers?
How do they feel about inclusion?

The good news is that museum-goers are about twice as likely to want inclusive content as they are to reject it … but less than half of museum-goers are proactively inclusive.

For us to be most effective in sharing inclusive content, we have to grapple with the fact that the majority of our audiences *do not have inclusive attitudes.*

ANTI-INCLUSIVE	LEANS LESS INCLUSIVE	STATUS QUO	LEANS MORE INCLUSIVE	INCLUSIVE
18%	8%	18%	10%	41%

Yet we can have major societal impact by helping our audiences become more inclusive.

⊗ **ANTI-INCLUSIVE:** Can range from extreme white nationalists to those who actively avoid any inclusive content.

▤ **STATUS QUO:** Neither seeks out nor avoids inclusive content; largely satisfied with long-standing presentations of history and art. Exposure to inclusive content can range from none to quite a bit.

◍ **INCLUSIVE:** Actively seeks out inclusive content and/or explicitly wants museums to include inclusive stories and artworks of the past.

Because inclusion matters, and research is consistently showing that the broader population is *more likely* than museum-goers to want museums to be inclusive. That means that not only is inclusion the morally right thing to do, it is also the path to audience growth.

Inclusion.

In this primer, we'll examine our visitors more closely so we can understand what we need to do to expand inclusive attitudes.
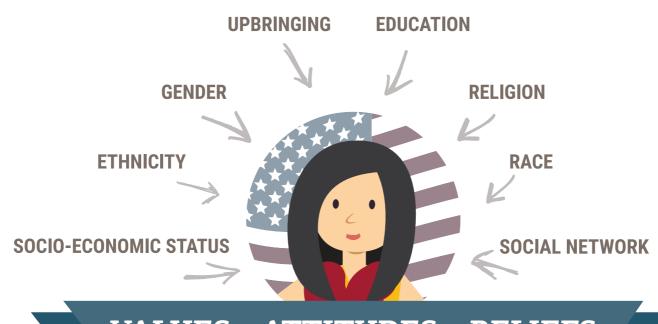
Because those attitudes around inclusion vary widely.

ANTI-INCLUSIVE

"I will not see racially or homosexual related programs."

STATUS QUO

"By taking 'no position' but 'accurate reflection' it gives the visitors the space to digest it all in appropriate context and to come up with their own thoughts and opinions. I believe that is the crux of the mission of all museums."

INCLUSIVE

"Expose us to different customs and perspectives, but also expose the majority straight white audience to different customs and perspectives. Many gardens and museums seem to still mainly cater to white affluent audiences ... they don't offer many programs of interest to my community."

All quotes in this primer are from museum-goers, unless otherwise noted.

To understand how inclusive attitudes can vary so widely, it is helpful to back up and examine what influences us all in the first place.

UPBRINGING

EDUCATION

GENDER

RELIGION

ETHNICITY

RACE

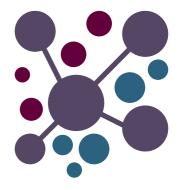SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

SOCIAL NETWORK

VALUES – ATTITUDES – BELIEFS

Turns out, it is a lot of things. From our upbringing to our race (and more), each of us develops our own unique set of values, attitudes, and beliefs that shape our worldviews.

In the aggregate, that means our audiences comprise a spectrum of worldviews.

SPECTRUM OF VALUES, ATTITUDES, AND BELIEFS
Of Likely Museum-Goers

TRADITIONAL	MIDDLE	NEOTERIC

But while individuals have their own unique blends, there are key traits that *tend* to cluster together, forming "Traditional" and "Neoteric" segments that reflect our society's polarization. (There is a "middle," but most people tend to lean one way or the other.)

TRADITIONAL:
More likely to have these traits

Status quo... or non-inclusive

Museums should be "neutral" and not take positions

Politically/socially conservative

Traditional, often celebratory approach to history and their own culture; pride in past and own cultural heritage

Somewhat less engaged with museums and culture

Somewhat less curious

Generally less engagement with community, broader world

Demographically: tend to be older, more male, less educational attainment

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NEOTERIC:
More likely to have these traits

Inclusive
(*some* status quo)

Museums can take an evidence-backed position

Politically/socially liberal

Additive approach to history and culture; curious about other cultures and worldviews

Somewhat more engaged with museums and culture

More curious

***Generally* more engagement with community, broader world**

Demographically: tend to be younger, more female, more educational attainment

Neoteric: adjective that describes new or modern ideas; from the Greek *neos*, for new

DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS!

"... times when a docent has directly targeted me or assumed I think a certain way based on my age/ gender have been very unpleasant."

It is tempting to use these trait clusters, especially the demographic ones, to make assumptions about individual visitors.

Don't do it!

Just because certain traits cluster together doesn't mean they apply to the individual standing in front of you. In other words, an older white male can certainly be Neoteric in his worldview, and similarly a young woman of color can be Traditional. You have to get to know that visitor, and their worldviews, to begin to understand where they may fall on the spectrum.

So, now we have a sense of our audiences and the spectrum of values, attitudes, and beliefs.

How do they come together in ways that affect attitudes towards inclusion?
And is there anything that specifically seems to affect inclusive attitudes?

The Landscape of Inclusive Attitudes

Open Minds → Inclusive Attitudes

Moving at the Speed of Trust[1]

The 10-Step Primer of Inclusive Practice

Research is consistently finding that **curiosity** is a strong predictor of an individual's openness to more inclusive content in museums.

Why?

Curious individuals are more open to learning about other perspectives and cultures.

SPARKED INTERESTS

KEEPS ME COMING BACK

DISCOVERY

AMAZEMENT

CURIOSITY

WONDER

INSPIRATION

LIFTED HORIZONS

EXPLORATION

ENDLESS IDEAS

HUNGER TO LEARN

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HOW CURIOSITY AFFECTS PROSOCIAL LIFELONG LEARNING OUTCOMES

Among museum-goers, those who identify as curious are:

1.6x more likely to want inclusive content in museums

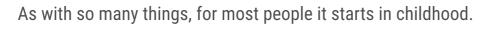1.6x more likely to want museums to cultivate empathy and understanding

1.7x more likely to want museums to facilitate civic conversations, including on potentially divisive issues

So, let's explore curiosity itself, and how museums can do more to cultivate curiosity (with long-term prosocial outcomes, especially around inclusion, in mind).

First, childhood.

As with so many things, for most people it starts in childhood.

Curious museum-goers overwhelmingly shared how important their childhood experiences were for developing a curious and open mindset.

"My father was a very curious person and his amazement at new and interesting things was infectious."

We could even say that, generationally, curiosity is hereditary, with parents and other caregivers passing it down to their children. They do this by:

- **Modeling curiosity behaviors**
- **Encouraging inquiry**
- **Providing resources to nurture curiosity**
- **Emotionally supporting their children's curiosity confidence**

"My parents definitely fostered it. Letting me explore the answers to my own questions, rather than giving me the answer outright; putting me in contexts where open exploration led me to question and experiment with the world around me."

Engaging children in ways that allow them to embrace and cultivate their innate curiosity is crucial, not only for the prosocial outcomes but also for them to flourish as individuals, reaching their full capacity.

Of course, it isn't only parents. Other adults can be influential in children's lives. But the vast majority of the time it is parents who wield the most influence.
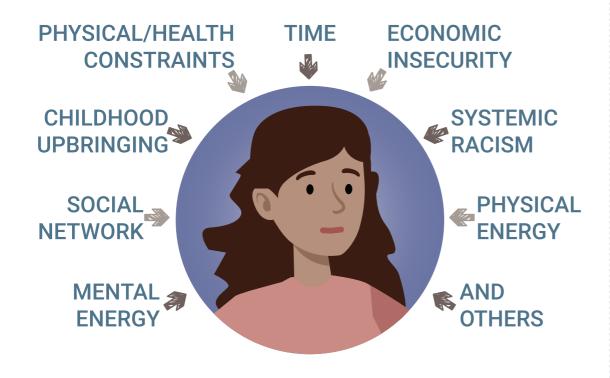
But … curiosity is extraordinarily expensive to cultivate.

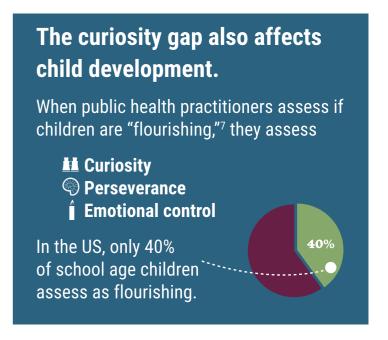And when we think of the constraints in parent and guardian lives, cultivating curiosity may be out of reach for many, maybe even most, children.

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WHAT ARE THE CONSTRAINTS?

PHYSICAL/HEALTH CONSTRAINTS

TIME

ECONOMIC INSECURITY

CHILDHOOD UPBRINGING

SYSTEMIC RACISM

SOCIAL NETWORK

PHYSICAL ENERGY

MENTAL ENERGY

AND OTHERS

The evidence also suggests that this curiosity gap actually promotes inequality and reinforces systemic racism and other societal challenges.

The curiosity gap also affects child development.

When public health practitioners assess if children are "flourishing,"[7] they assess

- **Curiosity**
- **Perseverance**
- **Emotional control**

In the US, only 40% of school age children assess as flourishing.

40%

Thinking of these constraints, what can museums, along with other informal learning organizations, do to cultivate and make equitable curiosity in more children ... and to help them with their personal outcomes as well as their prosocial ones?

Let's also consider how museums can cultivate curiosity in adults.

There are two types of curiosity that museums need to think about.

CURIOSITY TYPE #1: **Hedonic curiosity**

Think of hedonic curiosity as the pursuing of interests and information gaps … the finding of answers

We all experience hedonic curiosity. It is a bit like clickbait.

! It is that transient curiosity that comes from immediate stimulation. We need to know an answer, and typically that curiosity leads to a certain ending.

Hedonic curiosity is generally a good thing as those who respond to it gain new information.

Such as: "Who won the election?"
Or: "What was that loud noise?"

In museum settings, hedonic curiosity is a powerful tool that can engage visitors in your content (or attract them to visit in the first place).
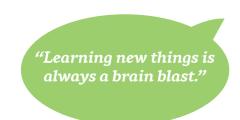
And when the information gaps of hedonic curiosity are closed, it feels really good to visitors, creating a positive feedback loop.

That's because when curious people have their curiosity fed, and when they make unexpected connections, it causes their bodies to release a surge of dopamine.

Thus, it isn't surprising that they use words like "fun" and "enriching," and even "euphoria."

"Learning new things is always a brain blast."

In museum settings, when hedonic curiosity is strategically cultivated, it can be used to crack open worldviews in ways that promote prosocial outcomes, particularly around inclusion, tolerance, and anti-racism.
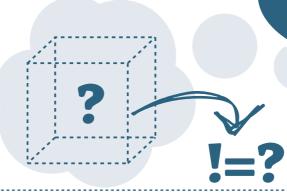
And the more that people get "hooked" on curiosity, the easier it is to cultivate a different form of curiosity: eudaemonic curiosity.

CURIOSITY TYPE #2: **Eudaemonic curiosity**

Think of eudaemonic curiosity as the sustained pursuit of new questions.

!=?

"The thing that really makes me think I'm curious is how willing I am to go down rabbit holes ..."

When people pursue new questions, that takes them outside the metaphorical box.

It yields broader knowledge from which to draw, including:

Expanded world views

Greater cultural understanding

More compassionate perspective taking

Comfortable with conflicting truths

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It appears that those who practice eudaemonic curiosity regularly also have better personal outcomes, including:

Stronger social support
"My life has been so enriched by sharing my learning experiences with others -- friends, family ... Learning new things together is a wonderful bonding experience."

Improved educational and career outcomes
"Informal learning has fueled both my academic and career achievement because nurturing my curiosity informally led me to seek more education and a career that relies on critical thinking, creativity, and the integration of many sources of knowledge."
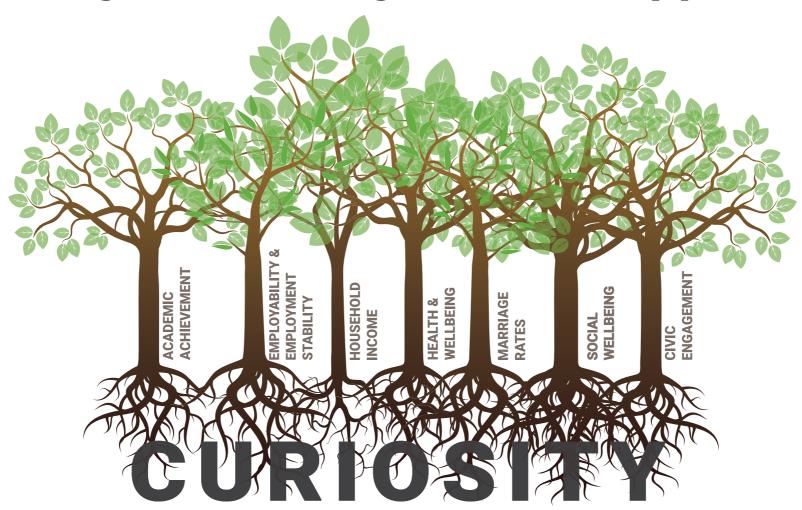
A greater sense of well-being
"Without my level of curiosity ... my overall well-being would have been stunted."

At least, that's what museum-goers say. But it turns out, they are on the right track. Social science research also indicates that there are many benefits of curiosity.
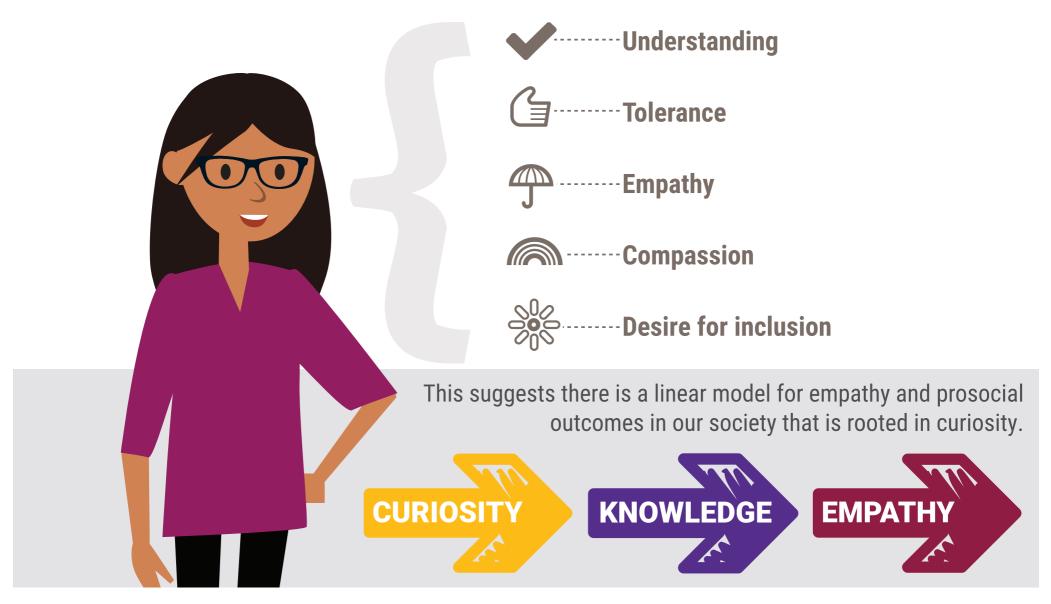
ACADEMIC RESOURCES

For a comprehensive list of curiosity resources, visit:

wilkeningconsulting.com/ curiosity-resources

Yet curiosity has a visibility problem. Eudaemonic curiosity in particular provides vital nourishment that supports and benefits all of us, but because no one is paying attention to it, no one sees it. It is hidden beneath the ground, supporting us from our roots ... and not receiving credit for the flourishing forest of outcomes it helps provide.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

EMPLOYABILITY & EMPLOYMENT STABILITY

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

HEALTH & WELLBEING

MARRIAGE RATES

SOCIAL WELLBEING

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

CURIOSITY

Thus, it appears curiosity increases prosocial outcomes including:

- Understanding
- Tolerance
- Empathy
- Compassion
- Desire for inclusion

This suggests there is a linear model for empathy and prosocial outcomes in our society that is rooted in curiosity.

CURIOSITY → **KNOWLEDGE** → **EMPATHY**

That ultimately makes curiosity crucial for three huge things:

🎓 ········· **Practical life outcomes**

⭐ ········· **Self-actualization**

👤 ········· **Prosocial outcomes**

And since curious people are significantly more likely to care about the challenges our planet and society are facing, we need more curious people!
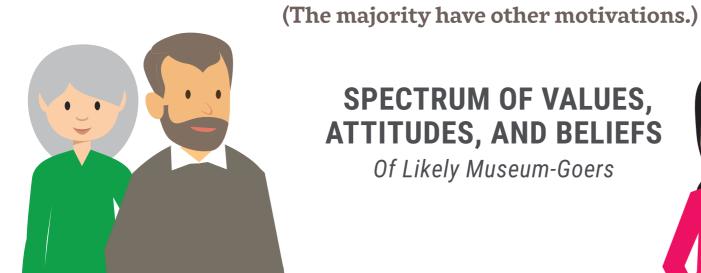
So how do we use curiosity to expand worldviews and promote inclusive attitudes?

That's tricky, because not all visitors to museums are highly curious.

In fact, less than half of museum-goers visit museums out of curiosity.
(The majority have other motivations.)

SPECTRUM OF VALUES, ATTITUDES, AND BELIEFS
Of Likely Museum-Goers

TRADITIONAL	MIDDLE	NEOTERIC

**Generally lower
levels of curiosity**

**Generally higher
levels of curiosity
(particularly eudaemonic)**

Why the difference?

Traditional | more likely to:

Be interest-driven

"See things I've studied."

Search for certainty, e.g., "just the facts"

"Present the facts and let me draw my own opinion."

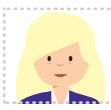**Seek identity and/or values validation**

"I just want to know what it was like and contemplate the situation based on my own worldview without being blasted with political correctness on every front, including museums."

Want museum experiences to be safe and comfortable

"There are enough organizations and places taking positions. Don't let that happen to this museum. Stay neutral and be a sanctuary for knowledge and beauty."

Think museums should always be neutral, e.g., "don't tell me how to think"

"I'm not an idiot who needs to be told how to think and feel. I'd rather make an assessment on my own with TRUE FACTS presented in a neutral (as possible) fashion."

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Neoteric | more likely to:

Seek to broaden worldview		*"I love to be exposed to new things and challenged. To me, that it is the root of every growth and learning experience."*
Be comfortable with conflicting truths, ambiguity		*"Even if I don't agree with every perspective shared by a museum, I think it's important for multiple voices to be heard. I think we can have a better understanding of others that are different from us when we hear their stories. We can learn to appreciate and empathize with others even when we don't agree with them."*
Seek growth, expanded thinking		*"I like science to back up opinions -- that helps me appreciate the viewpoint and likely adapt my own based on the information I am receiving. That way, I am learning more and increasing my worldview (and hopefully others are too!)."*
Be comfortable with being challenged or to experience intellectual discomfort – by a factor of 2.5x		*"I need to go to places that question and discuss nearly every angle of a subject and not just a 'safe place.' "*
Think museums should take a position … and that "neutral" reinforces white hetero-normative perspectives		*"Museums have always taken a position– a white, cis-gendered position."*

THE "STATUS QUO" OR "MESSY MIDDLE"

But what about the "Status Quo" group — that middle group that isn't seeking inclusive content — but is not rejecting it either?

This group represents our biggest opportunity! Since they are not rejecting inclusive content, we can help them become more inclusive in their own attitudes — if we move at their "speed of trust." (Indeed, our 10-Step Primer of Inclusive Practice is aimed at this audience.)

"I like being challenged in my beliefs in a private way. Having a discussion about this before I am ready is uncomfortable and off-putting. But having a cultural institution prompt this change in thinking is very appropriate."
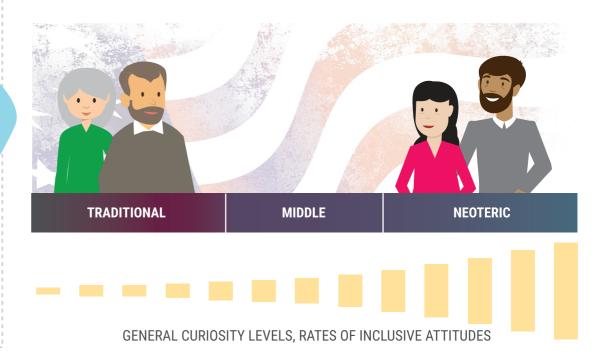
The result?

A curiosity gap that has some seeking understanding and inclusion ... and others looking for validation of their in-group.

That is, those with lower levels of curiosity have markedly lower rates of inclusive attitudes, and greater rates of anti-inclusive attitudes.
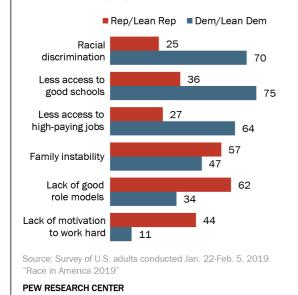
This results in polarization on curiosity and inclusive attitudes that reflect the political polarization we see in society today.
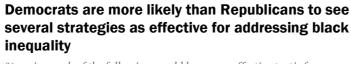
TRADITIONAL	MIDDLE	NEOTERIC

GENERAL CURIOSITY LEVELS, RATES OF INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES

We see this polarization in national research from Pew Research Center and PRRI:
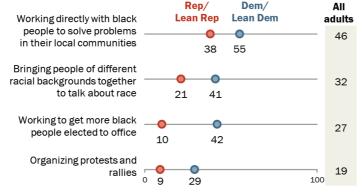
White Democrats much more likely than white Republicans to say discrimination is a major obstacle for black people

*Among **whites** who say being black hurts people's ability to get ahead, % of **Republicans** and **Democrats** saying each is a major reason why black people in our country may have a harder time getting ahead than white people*

Legend: ■ Rep/Lean Rep ■ Dem/Lean Dem

Category	Rep/Lean Rep	Dem/Lean Dem
Racial discrimination	25	70
Less access to good schools	36	75
Less access to high-paying jobs	27	64
Family instability	57	47
Lack of good role models	62	34
Lack of motivation to work hard	44	11

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 22-Feb. 5, 2019. "Race in America 2019"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to see several strategies as effective for addressing black inequality

% saying each of the following would be a very effective tactic for groups and organizations that work to help black people achieve equality

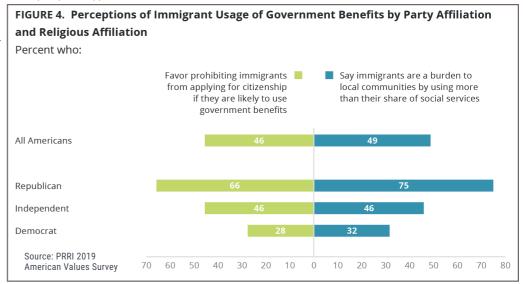|	Rep/Lean Rep	Dem/Lean Dem	All adults
Working directly with black people to solve problems in their local communities	38	55	46
Bringing people of different racial backgrounds together to talk about race	21	41	32
Working to get more black people elected to office	10	42	27
Organizing protests and rallies	9	29	19

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.
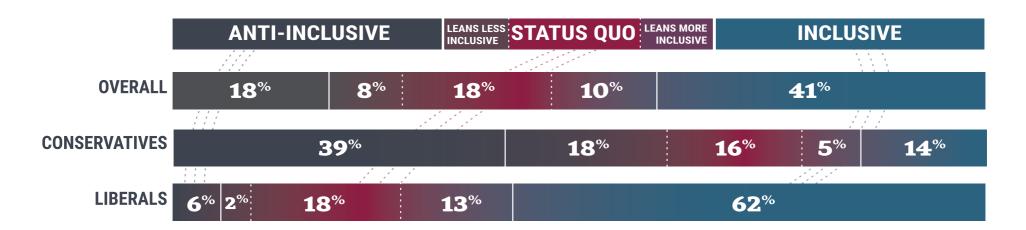"Amid Protests, Majorities Across Racial and Ethnic Groups Express Support for the Black Lives Matter Movement"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

FIGURE 4. Perceptions of Immigrant Usage of Government Benefits by Party Affiliation and Religious Affiliation

Percent who:

Legend: ■ Favor prohibiting immigrants from applying for citizenship if they are likely to use government benefits   ■ Say immigrants are a burden to local communities by using more than their share of social services

	Favor prohibiting immigrants from applying for citizenship	Say immigrants are a burden to local communities
All Americans	46	49
Republican	66	75
Independent	46	46
Democrat	28	32

Source: PRRI 2019 American Values Survey

And we see it in our own research.
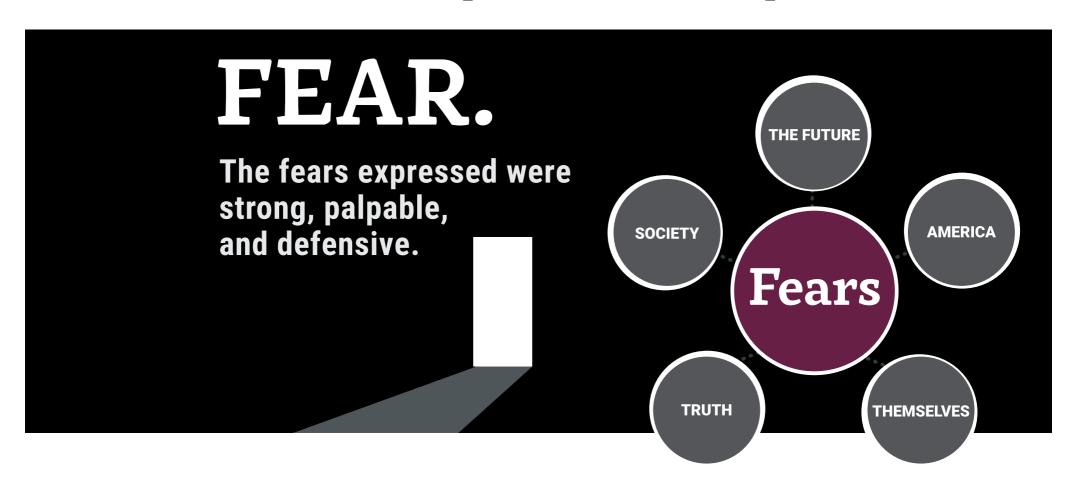
MUSEUM-GOERS: INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES BY POLITICAL IDEOLOGY (ESTIMATE)

	ANTI-INCLUSIVE		LEANS LESS INCLUSIVE	STATUS QUO	LEANS MORE INCLUSIVE	INCLUSIVE
OVERALL	18%	8%	18%	10%		41%
CONSERVATIVES	39%		18%	16%	5%	14%
LIBERALS	6%	2%	18%	13%		62%

⊗ **ANTI-INCLUSIVE:** Can range from extreme white nationalists to those who actively avoid any inclusive content.

▤ **STATUS QUO:** Neither seeks out nor avoids inclusive content; largely satisfied with long-standing presentations of history and art. Exposure to inclusive content can range from none to quite a bit.

◉ **INCLUSIVE:** Actively seeks out inclusive content and/or explicitly wants museums to include inclusive stories and artworks of the past.

Everyone wants their identity to be recognized and valued in cultural spaces. But for those with a more Traditional worldview, inclusive content can feel like a threat to their understanding of the world, to their own beliefs and customs, and even to their identity.

That results in a potent emotional response:

FEAR.

The fears expressed were strong, palpable, and defensive.

THE FUTURE

SOCIETY

AMERICA

Fears

TRUTH

THEMSELVES

So how do we mainstream inclusive content when our audiences are so divided, and when emotional responses are so strong?

That's tricky, because while we provide informal learning opportunities — and that is our perceived role for most visitors — expanding knowledge through evidence doesn't work.
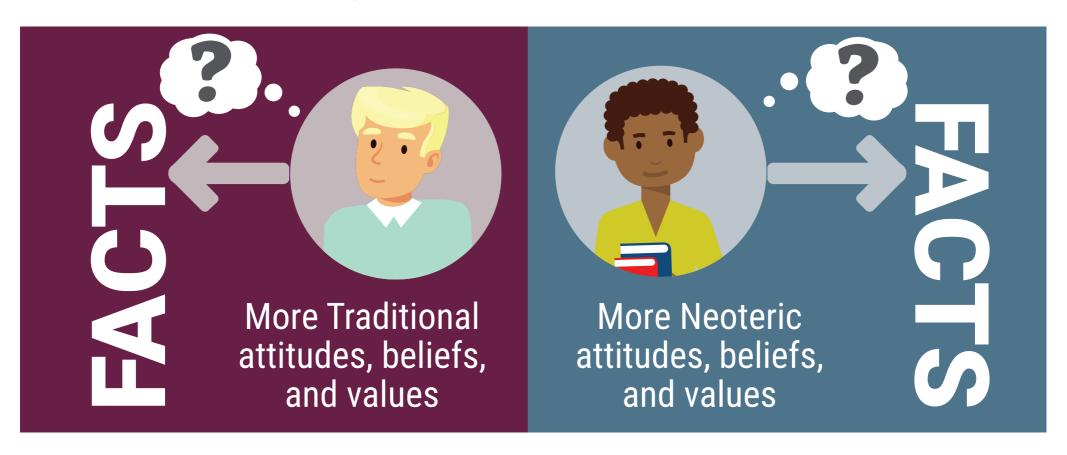
Especially when fear drives a defensive response in a sizable segment of our audience.

We need to understand, then, how values, attitudes, and beliefs, and even emotions and curiosity levels, affect how individuals approach information in the first place.

A Theory of Intuitive Epistemology:[8] a process and study of establishing facts that acknowledges how individual values and life experiences deeply affect the questions individuals ask of a subject, and thus the answers (facts) found.

FACTS

More Traditional attitudes, beliefs, and values

More Neoteric attitudes, beliefs, and values

FACTS

We all practice intuitive epistemology all the time. The questions we ask of the past, of science, of social issues, of art all vary based on our worldviews. And when we ask different questions of museum content, we then use that content to find answers that validate our individual worldviews, ignoring content that creates dissonance.

This is how two people can approach a single topic, such as climate change or the Civil War, and come to radically different conclusions.

And we all do it. All of us.
It is human nature.

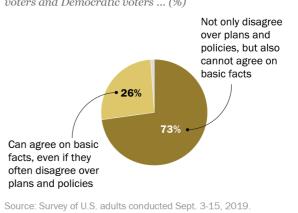Which is why the dueling facts that result only further divide us and feed into a culture of alternative facts, polarization, and cancellation.

ⓘ **In fact, one thing most of us seem to agree on is that we can't even agree on facts.**

Republicans and Democrats say they can't agree on 'basic facts'

On important issues facing the country, most Republican voters and Democratic voters ... (%)

Not only disagree over plans and policies, but also cannot agree on basic facts

26%

73%

Can agree on basic facts, even if they often disagree over plans and policies

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 3-15, 2019.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

It is practically impossible to use evidence to change minds in a world of dueling facts …

$$E = MC^2$$

… instead, you have to change the questions being asked.

And the good news is, this is less threatening as it tends to make visitors feel good!

That's because dialogic questions are very appealing to a wide swath of visitors and potential visitors, but they are *particularly* appealing to more Traditional visitors.

Why? Because it fits into a desired pattern of museum engagement:

for museums to present facts, and allow them to make up their own minds.

Only now, you are asking them what they have decided, and to share that back with you.

Your job, then, is to use questions to help visitors consider ideas that they may not otherwise think of, and crack open those worldviews (whether a tiny amount or significantly).

But, of course, there is more to inclusive practice than asking good questions.

True inclusive practice, and our work to expand the number of people who have inclusive attitudes, begins with us, the practitioners in the field.

To start, we have to deploy **radical curiosity** and **courageous empathy** in our practice. We have to strive to understand different worldviews, what shaped them, and thus anticipate how those with differing worldviews will respond to the content we wish to share. That more complex understanding can then be used to help visitors ask new questions that just might broaden their worldviews in ways that matter.

And we have to do this while also mainstreaming inclusive content and expanding our audiences to those who desperately want more inclusive and equitable content shared.
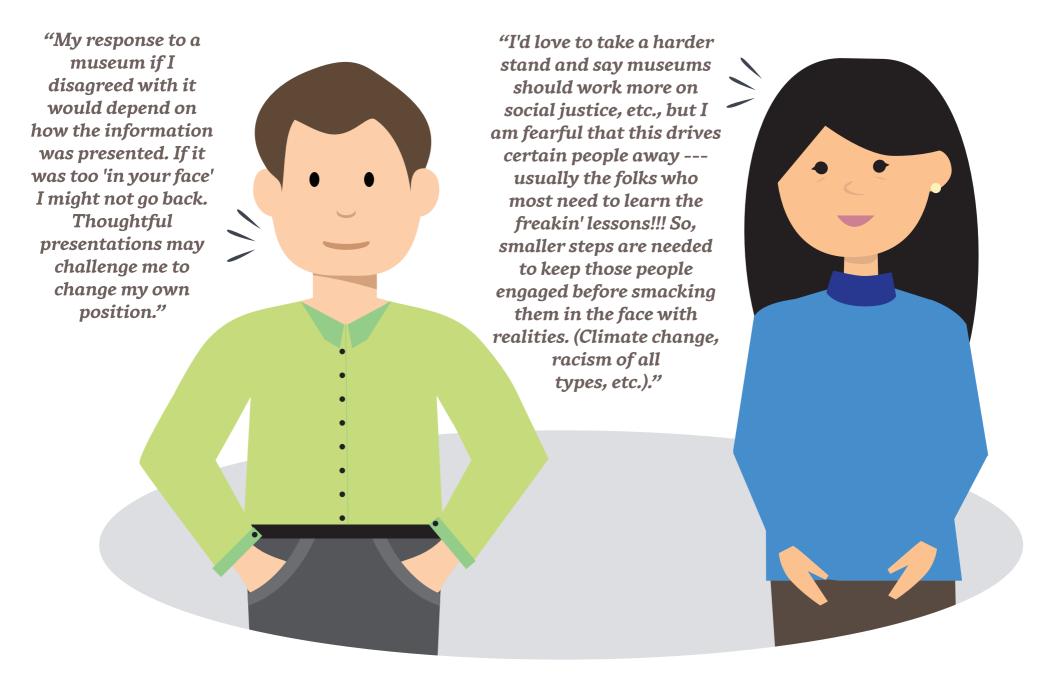
The Landscape of Inclusive Attitudes

Open Minds → Inclusive Attitudes

Moving at the Speed of Trust[1]

The 10-Step Primer of Inclusive Practice

"My response to a museum if I disagreed with it would depend on how the information was presented. If it was too 'in your face' I might not go back. Thoughtful presentations may challenge me to change my own position."

"I'd love to take a harder stand and say museums should work more on social justice, etc., but I am fearful that this drives certain people away --- usually the folks who most need to learn the freakin' lessons!!! So, smaller steps are needed to keep those people engaged before smacking them in the face with realities. (Climate change, racism of all types, etc.)."

So let's first consider where our audiences and the broader population are, and where we as a field are.

ANTI-INCLUSIVE
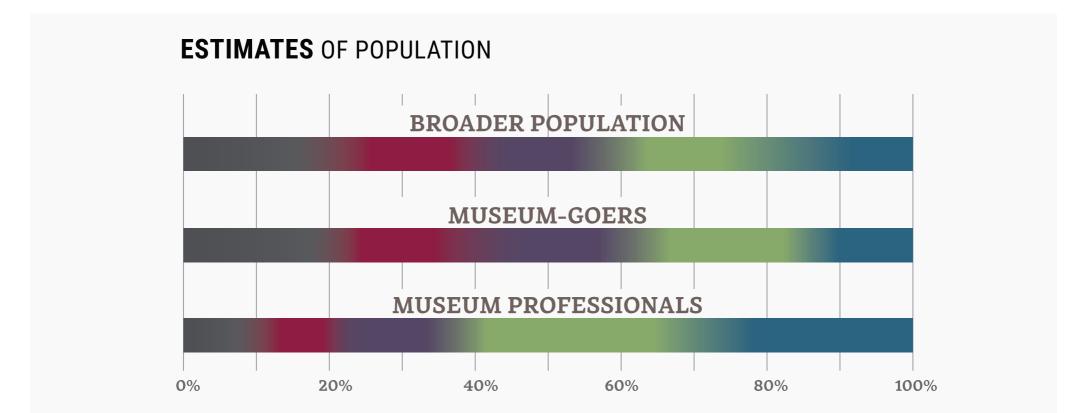
•actively avoiding or resisting inclusion

ZERO-STAGE INCLUSIVE

•not yet considering inclusion

FIRST-STAGE INCLUSIVE

•exposure
•learning about others
•sharing perspectives

SECOND-STAGE INCLUSIVE

•dialogues and conversations
•correcting of misunderstandings /biases of past

THIRD-STAGE INCLUSIVE

•reconciliation

ESTIMATES OF POPULATION

BROADER POPULATION

MUSEUM-GOERS

MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%
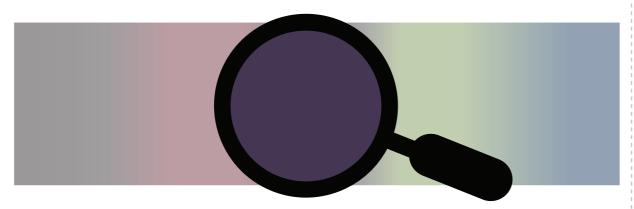
For those that are anti-inclusive, it is unlikely there is anything museums can do to change their minds. For this reason, this primer is not focused on them (though we hope they still benefit from it).

And second-stage and third-stage inclusive audiences are already embracing inclusion and will welcome your work to mainstream inclusive content. They are motivated; your efforts to expand inclusion will validate and encourage them as well.

INSTEAD, we are focusing on the zero-stage and first-stage inclusive audiences — the "status quo"/middle group — and how we can effectively reach those audiences.

Our 10-Step Primer of Inclusive Practice was written with this audience in mind.

MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS

As a field, museum professionals tend to be much more inclusive than our visitors.

If we want to be effective in engaging visitor empathy in ways that promote inclusion, we have to move at their "speed of trust." Even if it is a slower pace than we would like.

Yet that slower pace is still moving our audience forward, and is likely to be much more effective in reaching our long-term goal: more people who want inclusion.

 The Landscape of Inclusive Attitudes

 Open Minds → Inclusive Attitudes

 Moving at the Speed of Trust[1]

 The 10-Step Primer of Inclusive Practice

STEP 1:

Acknowledge your bias from the beginning…
… and then encourage your visitors to do likewise.

STEP 1A Create a plan to address your bias, e.g., advisors, team approach, etc., and be upfront about it with your audiences.
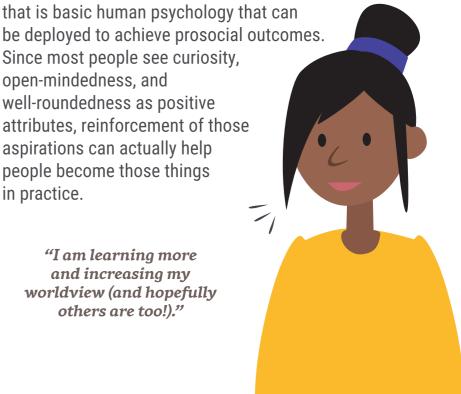
STEP 2:

Reinforce their aspirational identity as curious, open-minded, and/or well-rounded individuals.

(This aspirational reinforcement makes it more likely they will live up to those descriptors and consider new content or perspectives.)

We are all human, and so we all have biases. Acknowledging them from the beginning engenders trust, and (gently) asking your audience to consider their own biases puts them into a mindset that is more open to nuance.

You don't have to be as obvious about a bias statement as we were on p. 4 of this primer, but consider ways to proactively share your own biases and how you strove to mitigate them.

"Everyone has bias. We all perceive from our vantage point. Museums should keep their core content with the bias shared. This would allow people to reaffirm what they believe or be challenged to reexamine their bias."

There is something lovely about aspirations: they make it more likely someone will strive to achieve those aspirations. And that is basic human psychology that can be deployed to achieve prosocial outcomes. Since most people see curiosity, open-mindedness, and well-roundedness as positive attributes, reinforcement of those aspirations can actually help people become those things in practice.

"I am learning more and increasing my worldview (and hopefully others are too!)."

STEP 3:

Spark curiosity: Hedonic curiosity to provide positive feedback loops while also providing new content and ideas, and eudaemonic curiosity to enjoy the ride to unexpected conclusions.

Since we just validated aspirational identity, now is the time to create information gaps that stretch visitors just a bit. This stretching happens in two ways: 1 – ideas just outside of their normal worldviews; and 2 – helping visitors be more comfortable with uncertainty or even ambiguity. Both help them approach a complicated world more openly.

"Sometimes I will discover something cool at a museum that leads me to become really interested in a topic I otherwise never knew about."

STEP 4:

Engage in dialogic questions.

STEP 4A: Present them with questions that their worldviews may not have considered.

STEP 4B: "Consider this…"

STEP 4C: And practice courageous empathy by being open to their answers.

Because of the **intuitive epistemology** we all practice, reframing questions is crucial. Now that visitors are in a more open mindset, and are seeing information gaps, help them formulate new questions that continue to help them stretch. "Consider this" is a great way to introduce a new question in a non-threatening way. But mutual respect is important here. Sometimes, the answers visitors give may still not be inclusive. If we disparage those answers, we lose our credibility and our opportunity to try again.

"I prefer to learn without being force-fed … I suppose that means I prefer to be left with open-ended questions to ponder, as opposed to feeling challenged in a confrontational way."

STEP 5:

Give them the facts. ALL the facts.

STEP 5A: That includes multiple perspectives.

STEP 5B: And it includes telling the truth, even when it changes our understanding of the past, different cultures, or others.

STEP 5C: This means trusting audiences with the facts, the perspectives, and our changed understandings.

More Traditional audiences often say "just give me the facts, and I'll make up my own mind." Thus, it is entirely appropriate to do just that, and give them all the facts. The trick is that sometimes those facts you share may not be what is expected. Hopefully, their curiosity has been sparked enough to consider those new facts thoughtfully and respectfully.

"I like when facts or multiple viewpoints are presented, but done in a way that is evidence based and allows the viewer to make decisions for themselves."

STEP 6:

Show your work.

Trust cuts both ways, so you need to share your process and sources, and identify advisors.

In a time of alternative facts, showing your work is more important than ever. This can be as basic as footnotes in an exhibition or tour guides saying a list of sources can be located on your website. To be honest, it doesn't matter if few, or any, visitors actually check your references. The fact that you are providing that evidence signals credibility.

"Everything should be sourced so that you know it has not been sourced from a lie."

STEP 7:

Mainstream inclusive content.
And *never* apologize for being inclusive.

When museums, as highly-trusted community institutions, mainstream inclusive content, it helps community belief systems shift to embrace it as well. And when that happens, visitors better contextualize detractors as outliers, and instead are more likely to choose acceptance, tolerance, and understanding. Besides, mainstreaming inclusive content is the overall goal for all of our inclusive practice. Period.

"Museums can be an important place to show voices that are left out in mainstream discourse."

STEP 8:

Pace your work at the "speed of trust."

Some of the content you share may be difficult for some visitors, especially if it represents a change from what they thought they understood.

STEP 8A: Do not make them feel dumb.

STEP 8B: Do not preach.

Pacing. It is so hard to slow down our work to bring others along with us. Yet that is crucial if we are going to expand the number of people who want inclusion. So think through how we are presenting content, and ensure it allows for empathy to grow.

"If we're just exposed to things that are new & different, but we're not prepared for these things, we close ourselves off and resist changing our hearts. If our beliefs are challenged but we do not feel as though our experiences are understood, we become hostile and defensive. But when we are met where we are and gently guided to new ideas, if we can see our own experience reflected in the perspectives of others, then our hearts become fertile ground for empathy, understanding, and transformative change."

STEP 9:

Be a forum for civil discourse.

Here's the thing: most museum-goers are not asking museums to be places of civil discourse. But when museums do it effectively, it can be transformative. This is a case of do it even when we are not being asked to.

"Teaching people how to peacefully disagree about topics and positions is how you open dialogue and teach non-violent communication skills."

STEP 10:

Your visitors are human, as are you.
There will be bias on both sides.
There will be controversy.

STEP 10A: Accept that, despite your best efforts, you will not be 100% successful.

A few will simply not accept more inclusive (and "changed") content.

Accept the failure and accept the controversy. Have the confidence to know you are doing your best and planning the most effective path. That also makes it easier to keep your focus on your goal (and not let detractors stop your work). The controversy can also be an asset, as it lets those from the broader population of non-visitors know your work is more inclusive than they thought, enabling you to expand your audience as well.

"So many organizations and individuals are afraid to take a stand for what is right – and ironically, those organizations and individuals become irrelevant because they are afraid of being controversial … I think people are actually drawn to organizations and individuals who are willing to make powerful enemies by saying what needs to be said. The worst thing you could say about an exhibit is that it is boring. If an exhibit prompts heated, passionate conversation – if you go home and have long conversations with family and friends – if people are posting all over social media about what you are doing – you have succeeded."

"History shows us where we have been so we can understand how to move forward. If we only see one version of history, we only see how the group that benefits from that version moves forward. We can only move forward collectively, as a community, when the experience of every member of the community has a place in the history and we understand the disparities among them. I respect history organizations which are able to show that history belongs to everyone, and depict differing experiences in history with equity, sensitivity, accuracy, and thoughtfulness."*

"I want the Mississippi Museum of Art to be a refuge during times like these, but not in the typical sense of the word. I believe when most people hear that term they immediately think of an 'escape' from the weightiness resulting from certain topics or awful things going on in the world. However, I want the museum to be a refuge as in being a place where they acknowledge and don't shy away from what's happening and where discourse is welcomed and encouraged. I want MMA to be a place where their actions align with whatever they've personally pledged to do, for their part, to encourage inclusion."†

* Inclusive History in America, 2018
† Mississippi Art, History, and Civic Engagement, 2020

Inclusive practice takes work.

But with **radical curiosity**, **courageous empathy,** and thoughtful engagement, museums can make a tremendous difference in promoting a more equitable and just world.

Because it matters.

EXTERNAL SOURCES

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[5]"A Nation of Immigrants?" PRRI (*Public Religion Research Institute).* March 2020.

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Visit The Curated Bookshelf at **wilkeningconsulting.com/curatedbookshelf**
for summary/reviews of some of the above resources.

For a bibliography of curiosity resources, visit **http://www.wilkeningconsulting.com/curiosity-resources.html**

The Curated Bookshelf

GLOSSARY

Anti-inclusive
Term used to describe individuals ranging from those who actively avoid any inclusive content to extremes of white nationalism, racism, etc.

Anti-racism
Active policies and practices of opposing racism.

Eudaemonic curiosity
The sustained pursuit of new questions. Doesn't rely on immediate stimulation, but can be a relatively constant desire to have new experiences, try new things, and learn new things, even when outside of day-to-day interests or comfort levels.

Hedonic curiosity
Transient curiosity that comes from immediate stimulation. It is the pursuing of already-existing interests and newly-formed information gaps; the finding of answers.

Inclusion
Refers to the intentional, ongoing effort to ensure that diverse individuals fully participate in all aspects of organizational work, including decision-making processes. It also refers to the ways that diverse participants are valued as respected members of an organization and/or community.

Inclusive
Term used to describe individuals who seek out inclusive content and/or explicitly want museums to include inclusive stores of the past and artworks, etc.

Inclusive content
Term used in research instruments used by Wilkening Consulting. Research participants are told inclusive content includes "stories and perspectives of women, people of color, religious minorities, LGBTQ, etc."

Messy middle
See status quo.

Museum-goers
"Regular" museum-goers are individuals who visit museums three or more times a year or are connected to an individual museum enough to participate in audience research on their behalf; typically captured by Wilkening Consulting in surveys and qualitative panels recruited via contact lists of museums. (Often referred to as simply "museum-goers" in research results.)

"Likely" museum-goers are individuals who are likely to visit museums, either casually (1 - 2 times a year or even every year or two) or regularly. Typically captured by Wilkening Consulting as a segment within broader population samples.

Neoteric Cluster
Comprised of individuals whose values cluster tends to be more inclusive and curious. *See p. 15.*

Prosocial
Describes attitudes or behaviors that are intended to benefit other people or society as a whole. Can include acts of charity, volunteering, cooperation, attitudes towards inclusion, helping, sharing, etc.

Status quo (or "messy middle")
Term used to describe individuals who neither seek out nor avoid inclusive content; they are largely satisfied with long-standing (typically white, hetero-normative) presentations of history and art. Exposure to inclusive content can range from none to quite a bit.

Tolerance
Definition varies depending on where an individual's values cluster tends to fall.

"Traditional" definition: a conditional willingness to tolerate differences, so long as people can find unity and common purpose; tolerance is not always seen as a positive attribute.

"Neoteric" definition: acceptance of differences in the belief that those differences strengthen us/society; generally seen as a positive attribute.

Traditional Cluster
Comprised of individuals whose values cluster tends to support their in-group, making them somewhat less inclusive and often less curious about others. *See p. 14.*