

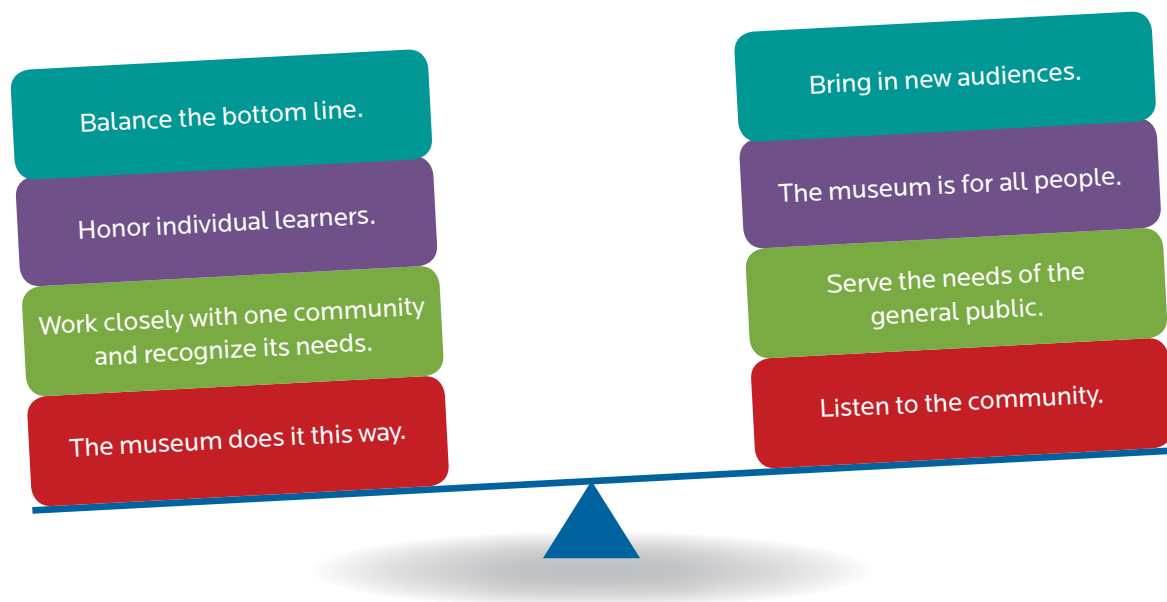
Cultural Competence Learning Institute: Learning in Real Time with Real Issues

By Jenni Martin

Embracing the ideals of inclusivity can be challenging for an institution—a constant effort to balance and prioritize operational issues, audience goals, new innovations, longtime processes, financial goals, and the needs of individuals, groups, and the museum itself. Ultimately, though, inclusion work is uplifting and strengthening. This important endeavor is grounded in the fundamental belief that change triggering more inclusive and reflective practice for audiences and staff alike is worthwhile and beneficial for the institution in many ways.

While many museums strive to reach different or new audiences, hoping to change museum visitor demographics or build an ethnically diverse staff, research and experience indicate that these efforts are only the first steps in changing institutional practice. Cultural competency—a set of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes that allows individuals to work effectively with others from different cultural backgrounds—is both a frame of reference and a lifelong learning process. Organizations embracing

a cultural competence mindset can maximize the benefits of diversity within their workforces and improve the services they offer to various stakeholders. Inclusive organizations are adaptive and flexible, responsive to community needs and emergent trends, and willing to listen to voices that are already loud and to those that are not currently heard. To become truly culturally competent, institutions must engage in reflective practice by examining their assumptions, changing the ways they work, inviting





A team from the Long Island Children's Museum engages in an interactive reflection activity during the Cultural Competence Learning Institute Introductory Workshop. Photo courtesy the CCLI Planning Team

new voices to the planning table, and adopting a learning mindset throughout the institution.

THE HISTORY OF THE CULTURAL COMPETENCE LEARNING INSTITUTE

Always focused on community, Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose (CDM), California, launched an audience development initiative in 1998 to increase the number of visitors from the Latino community. The success of this effort inspired a new investment in the region's next largest ethnic community, Vietnamese families, for which the museum employed similar community engagement techniques. Subsequent projects involving the autism community and the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) community were influenced by senior staff's growing realization that to be nimble and relevant, the museum needed to develop its organizational capacity within the broader concept of cultural competence rather than just for specific communities.

CDM recognized that its efforts to become more culturally competent as an institution could be helpful for other museums and the field as a whole. With strong support from ASTC, the Association of Children's Museums (ACM), and Garibay Group (a research and evaluation firm), CDM applied in 2012 for funding from the (U.S.) Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to launch the Cultural Competence Learning Institute (CCLI, *community*.

My awareness of cultural differences has increased tremendously, and I now have that lens when issues arise between visitors and staff. It has helped me ask questions in situations to try to get a sense of the underlying issues. I have also been able to apply what I've learned to understanding generational differences in the workplace, which is an emerging issue at our museum.

CCLI has given me greater clarity.

—CCLI participant

astc.org/ccli/home). This effort, designed to engage the science center and children's museum fields in the complex work of developing cultural competence awareness, has been underway since 2013. Envisioned as a yearlong learning opportunity for museums, CCLI utilizes a cohort model emphasizing collaborative teamwork, peer learning, and leadership development. CDM, ASTC, ACM, Garibay Group, and a group of museum and diversity professionals developed the institute collaboratively.

Three years and three cohort groups later, the Cultural Competence Learning Institute has successfully engaged 50 museum professionals in the deep work of organizational change—moving their institutions beyond a simple fix such



This model, from the Detroit Zoo, captures the team's conception of organizational strengths and growth areas that contribute to cultural competence. Photo courtesy the CCLI Planning Team

as a new outreach strategy for a new audience to more comprehensive approaches that promote dialogue, include different voices in discussions, examine assumptions, and work toward integration. Participants so far have represented 10 science centers and children's museums, a history museum, a zoo, two international museum associations, and the ASTC Equity and Diversity Committee.

Midpoint evaluation indicates that CCLI has successfully prompted all of the participating institutions to address challenges and/or deepen engagement with inclusion work, and that involvement in CCLI has strengthened the organizations' cultural competence as a whole. Staff interviews, analysis of progress on strategic initiatives both during the yearlong process and following it, and reflective year-end presentations all provide evidence of organizational change relating to cultural competence.

The program has a number of features fundamental to its success, including its process, its philosophy, and its framework, all of which are described below.

PROCESS AND RESOURCES

CCLI is an organizational change model that encourages institutions to launch conversations, listen, and identify areas for growth toward more inclusive and equitable practice. The yearlong

When I've been in conversations about making exhibits accessible or the board diverse, I've tried to take what I've learned in CCLI to go beyond the traditional/"obvious" definitions. Maybe the board doesn't just need someone of a different ethnicity, maybe they need to be a different age, maybe they need to think differently, have a different background, have different abilities, etc.

—CCLI participant

process begins with a leadership checklist in which institutions identify and build upon their strengths, followed by an anonymous all-staff survey on diversity and inclusion issues. Participants then design a yearlong strategic initiative that is specific to their needs and situations and that advances organizational thinking and reflective practice. Museums have addressed staff training issues, developed diversity statements, engaged board and staff together in diversity projects, and created human resources practices and procedures that encourage open and honest communication among departments and staff.

PHILOSOPHY: CULTURAL COMPETENCE AS A CONTINUUM

In the CCLI process, "culture" is defined as "integrated patterns of human behavior that include the language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups." Culture is not just ethnicity, as is often assumed; it is instead a compilation of many characteristics that define a person or a group.

A day-and-a-half-long introductory workshop outlines CCLI's foundational philosophy: cultural competence is a continuum along which individuals and institutions travel. Those involved identify where they begin on that spectrum and endeavor to move toward inclusion. This evolving process requires constant work and constant learning, with participants and institutions learning something in one area and then realizing there is more to learn in another.

Throughout, there is continual interplay among individuals and with their organization. Along this journey, an organization might acknowledge that it is progressive in its work with the Latino community, but might not have addressed areas of need for the LGBTQ sector. Or a museum that already incorporates signage for dual language learners might realize that it can further engage many within this audience by adjusting its membership structure to accommodate extended family members.

The CCLI philosophy recognizes that each institution is composed of individuals who are on their own path toward a better understanding of diversity and inclusion. Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity is a central piece of CCLI's work (community.astc.org/ccli/resources-for-action/group-activities/bennett-model-activity). As participants apply this model to various situations and scenarios in the workplace, they begin to think about how to communicate more effectively and how to see, hear, and respond to different perspectives.

Cultural competence has a spectrum that allows you to understand where you are as an individual and as an organization and formulate where you aspire to be.

—CCLI participant

BUILDING BLOCKS FRAMEWORK

CCLI builds upon *Museums, Libraries and 21st Century Skills* (www.imls.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/21stCenturySkills.pdf), a 2009 IMLS report that describes how museums and libraries can help people develop skills crucial to life in the current era. The institute focuses on three “21st-century skills” as defined by IMLS that are particularly relevant to helping institutions advance their cultural competency: creativity and innovation, communication and collaboration, and global awareness. CCLI provides a framework for thinking about these skills within the context of cultural competence and diversity, and offers accompanying tools and resources. The CCLI website provides a

series of reflective questions that help participating museums identify areas of strength and potential improvement for strategic thinking, staff diversity, and communication approaches (community.astc.org/ccli/philosophy-approach/ccli-framework). During the introductory workshop, participants build structures with foam blocks representing creativity, communication, and global awareness. This activity helps identify areas of strength and strategies for growth.

Other elements of the model that have proven successful include

- **Team focus:** Each institution chooses a cross-departmental planning team of two to three members to participate in CCLI. Ideally, one of these members is the CEO or a member of the senior leadership.
- **Baseline staff survey:** All staff members at each participating institution complete an anonymous survey about equity, diversity, and inclusion issues. The survey results, which are compiled by an outside group, help each institution's CCLI planning team shape the strategic initiative to address staff's concerns.
- **CEO involvement:** Senior leadership participates throughout the yearlong process, including quarterly conference calls for CEOs from participating museums and the CCLI leadership team, which comprises staff from CDM, ASTC, and ACM.
- **Peer learning:** Cohorts of four to five museums anchor the learning in the real work and “stuff” of museums.
- **Accountability:** Monthly conference phone calls for the full cohort with the CCLI leadership team ensure that in the busyness of daily operations, cultural competence stays at the forefront and participants continue to learn from each other's experiences.
- **Organizational change model:** Self-identified strategic initiatives and a strength-based model (where institutions identify their strengths and work from those strengths to initiate change) guarantee investment by individuals and institutions.

CCLI created opportunities and tools to reach out to our local populations and really hear what their needs are and look internally to create change within our institution based on real data from real people that we had no contact with prior to this work. CCLI has made it clear that this is an ongoing process of change and the path is the product.

—CCLI participant

IMPACT AND NEXT STEPS

CCLI-participating museums have implemented a variety of strategic initiatives that are responsive to their institutional and community needs, ranging from redesigning staff training to incorporate new topics and voices, to implementing CEO walk-in hours when staff members can share perspectives with leadership, to crafting new diversity statements. Based on CCLI strategies, participants have reported successful changes in human resources policies, receipt of new federal grants due to inclusion programming, listening campaigns with

community groups, and increased board engagement with diversity issues. CCLI participants gather regularly at ASTC and ACM conferences and have the opportunity to learn from and be mentored by past participants.

Institutional commitment to engage in cultural competence dialogue does not necessarily mean choosing the simplest or most direct path. But it is an expression of institutional willingness to learn, explore, ask questions, and delve into our rich and complex world. And isn't that what science centers are all about, anyway? ■

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The Cultural Competence Learning Institute encourages participants to use a building blocks framework for organizational change. Photo courtesy the CCLI Planning Team