

Smith College Museum of Art (SCMA)
Diversity Assessment Request for Proposal
October 2020

1. Summary

At SCMA—as in the broader museum field—we are reckoning with the persistent discrepancy between our stated DEAI values and the actual lived experiences of BIPOC who work at and visit our museum. We have articulated a commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion as values that are vital to achieving our mission of connecting people to art, ideas and each other. Over the last few years, we have taken steps to enact these priorities, including developing a DEAI roadmap for the museum, introducing trainings on microaggressions and unconscious bias, prioritizing equity and inclusion in our exhibitions, programming and collecting plan, and establishing DEAI working groups at staff and board levels. But feedback from BIPOC staff at SCMA about the persistence of white supremacy, anti-Blackness and microaggressions at our museum has demonstrated that our DEAI work so far has been at the periphery of what we do, rather than fundamentally reshaping what we do. In order to fully center DEAI priorities and the experiences of BIPOC staff, we need to more deeply understand our current working culture and the steps needed to become a genuinely inclusive and antiracist institution.

We are requesting proposals from individuals or firms to conduct a diversity assessment of our museum that will concentrate on our working culture, as understood through perspectives from both internal and external stakeholders. We are focusing on internal culture since we believe that this is a critical first step to creating a consistently supportive and respectful environment not just for all museum staff, but also for all museum visitors. Our mission of connecting audiences with works of art and each other depends on ensuring that all visitors feel acknowledged and supported in our space, and we believe that we can only fully achieve this if all staff members feel seen and respected in their work.

In acknowledgement of the especially profound need to support Black staff and visitors as we work on dismantling white supremacy at SCMA, we are seeking proposals from Black consultants in particular. The primary goals, described in more detail below, are to assess the DEAI work we have done so far; to better understand our current working culture, including the factors that have limited our progress on DEAI work and the key opportunities to transform our workplace for the better; to give our senior staff stronger skills in inclusive leadership; and to establish specific practices and strategies that will allow us to maintain a core commitment to DEAI work going forward and create real accountability for achieving our goals.

We initially issued this RFP with the aim of selecting a consultant in November 2020. We received feedback that for most people in this field, the fall-winter of 2020 was already fully booked. So we are reissuing the RFP with a proposed date of February 1, 2021 to receive proposals, and the aim of selecting a consultant by early April 2021. Additional considerations on the project timeline are described below.

2. Project Objectives

Working collaboratively with the museum's staff and key stakeholders including representatives from the Smith College Office of Equity and Inclusion, the consultant will serve as the lead on an initiative with the following objectives:

- 1) Benchmark the current state of DEAI at SCMA by conducting an assessment of the DEAI work we have undertaken so far, our workplace culture as perceived and experienced by staff members and key stakeholders, and the current diversity of our staff;
- 2) Create shared understandings among staff members about our current work culture and the different ways in which individuals perceive and experience our workplace;
- 3) Strengthen the inclusive leadership skills of the museum's Executive Committee, which includes the museum Director and five department heads;
- 4) Establish clear priorities and steps to become a genuinely inclusive and antiracist workplace;
- 5) Establish tools for evaluation and accountability so that we can deliver on these commitments.

3. Expected Deliverables

Our key expected deliverables for the project, which we are conceiving in two phases, are below. We anticipate developing and refining this list with the consultant and with input from project collaborators.

Phase 1 -- Information gathering (spring 2021-fall 2021):

- 1) Develop and conduct a diversity mapping, including a review of current diversity initiatives and practices and those in progress;
- 2) Develop and conduct a climate survey for museum staff that captures current staff diversity and solicits feedback on individual experiences and perceptions of our workplace;
- 3) Conduct 5-10 in-depth group and individual interviews about the workplace culture with museum staff across seniority levels and with stakeholders including:
 - a) Smith students with experience of the museum's working culture;
 - b) Smith faculty who have worked with the museum;
 - c) Members of the Museum Visiting Committee DEAI Working Group (the board-level DEAI working group);
 - d) Local community members.
- 4) Conduct interviews with the members of the Executive Committee in order to develop an inclusive leadership training plan;
- 5) Share key takeaways and next steps with all museum staff in a format shaped with input from museum staff members.

Phase 2 -- Implementation and next steps (winter 2021-summer 2022):

- 6) Conduct the inclusive leadership training with all members of the Executive Committee;
- 7) Develop a set of key priorities and recommended steps for SCMA to become a consistently inclusive and antiracist workplace:
 - a) Steps could include recommendations on the specific DEAI trainings that should be required for all staff, strategies for hiring more diverse staff, specific policies to embed antiracism in our processes and ways of working, recommendations on the evolving roles of the staff and MVC DEAI working groups, and new structures to better support staff and to promote staff retention.
 - b) In identifying these steps, factor in the SCMA DEAI priorities that are currently underway, as well as feedback collected during Phase 1 of the project.
- 8) Develop a set of recommended tools for evaluation and accountability to achieve these priorities;
- 9) Communicate survey results and recommendations to all museum staff in a format shaped with input from museum staff members.

4. Timeline

As described above, we aim to begin work with the consultant in the spring of 2021 and to complete this engagement and all of the project deliverables by the summer of 2022. We would determine exact timelines for the project phases and deliverables in discussion with the consultant, since there are a number of factors at play. We are weighing the sense of momentum around our DEAI work against the facts that almost all of our front-of-house staff (about 35 people) are currently furloughed, and the majority of our back-of-house staff (about 25 people) are working remotely for the foreseeable future.

We anticipate remaining closed to the public into 2021, and hope to reopen at some point in the summer or fall of 2021. As part of our reopening plans, and in order to advance our DEAI goals and the museum's current strategic priority of improving visitor experience, we are planning to restructure our front-of-house staff as part of this reopening. The restructuring will entail reframing job descriptions and rehiring and retraining staff. Ideally, we would still be engaged with the consultant when this rehiring and retraining takes place, so that all of the museum's staff would have an opportunity to participate in this diversity assessment. We will also need to factor in the dates of the College's academic terms, which have been rearranged to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 on campus. Our workflow is dependent on the academic calendar and student feedback will be an important component of this assessment.

We are eager to coordinate with the consultant on strategies for achieving the project goals under these conditions and in a way that prioritizes the wellbeing of staff members and of all project participants.

5. Budget and Payment Schedule

The proposed project fee, including completion of all project deliverables, is \$30,000. In keeping with the Museum's and College's best practices for consultant engagements, we will develop a payment schedule in coordination with the consultant that will include an initial payment on signing a project contract; additional payments upon completion of Phase 1 deliverables and Phase 2 deliverables; and a final payment upon completion of all deliverables.

A limited amount of additional funding will be available for other project costs. These costs will need to be approved by the Museum in advance.

6. Proposal Content:

We ask that proposals outline:

- Why you are interested in this project;
- A consulting/training plan;
- What you perceive as the primary challenges of achieving the work;
- Why you are positioned to be successful;
- Examples of similar projects that you have completed, including a description of deliverables and outcomes;
- Three or more references for related projects;
- Resumes for all relevant team members.

7. Proposal Submission and Questions

Proposals can be submitted by email to the attention of Lily Foster, Associate Director of Museum Administration, at lfoster@smith.edu.

We ask that proposals be submitted by February 1, 2021. We are glad to discuss any questions that would help in preparing a proposal.

8. Evaluation Criteria

We will review proposals based on the following criteria (maximum points = 40):

- Expertise in DEAI issues and a proven ability to help organizations meet the need to embody DEAI values across their activities and decision-making (12 points);
- Demonstrated familiarity with non-profits/museums or higher education, with experience of academic museums a plus (10 points);
- Experience successfully developing and implementing the deliverables imagined for this project, notably diversity mapping, climate surveys, effective tools for accountability and evaluation, and inclusive leadership training (10 points);
- Demonstrated experience working collaboratively and with staff across seniority levels (8 points).

9. Anticipated Selection Timeline

Proposals will be reviewed and references taken by museum staff and key project stakeholders. We aim to select the consultant and complete a contract for this project by early April 2021.

10. About SCMA

SCMA's mission is to cultivate inquiry and reflection by connecting people to art, ideas and each other. We aim to do this by engaging people with firsthand experiences of art, artists and museum practice; collecting, researching, presenting and preserving an expansive collection of art in the service of learning, teaching and critical dialogue; and fostering an environment that welcomes diverse perspectives and inspires imagination. We believe that the priorities of equity and inclusion are fundamental to our mission. We are committed to working proactively to acknowledge and embrace differences of perspective, experience and background in order to engage all visitors with art and museum practice.

The museum welcomes about 35,000 visitors a year, including Five College students, staff and faculty, and visitors from the region and around the world. SCMA's collection comprises nearly 28,000 objects, representing the diversity of art and material culture across periods and geographies.

We currently have about 25 permanent staff members in Administration, Collection Management, Curatorial, Education, Marketing & Communications, Security and Visitor Services. We have about 35 staff members in Security and the Museum Shop who are currently furloughed.

Our 2017-2022 Strategic Plan and annual reports (available [here](#)) provide further information on our recent projects and activities.

ADDENDUM ON PROJECT SCOPE

In addition to the deliverables outlined above, the members of the Museum Visiting Committee DEAI Working Group are interested in engaging the consultant for this diversity assessment in deeper work with the full Museum Visiting Committee, which includes about 25 alumnae and other experts who support and advise the museum. We are in the process of discussing this possibility with the Working Group members and shaping the proposed goals and scope. The work would likely focus on aligning the Museum Visiting Committee with the staff by establishing a DEAI plan and priorities for the Museum Visiting Committee that supports staff DEAI goals. In order to promote this coordination between the staff and the Museum Visiting Committee, we would hope that this engagement could take place during the same timeframe as the deliverables outlined above.

We are asking that proposals submitted for this project include as an addendum suggestions on an approach for the work with this advisory group and the additional fee that would be involved.