Defining Diversity
Chicago Children’s Museum strives to create an environment of expansive thinking on the subject of diversity and to continuously examine it through the lens of healthy child development. CCM’s understanding of diversity is not limited to race and ethnicity, but rather a recognition that all individuals experience the world through various dimensions, such as age, ethnic heritage, gender, mental/physical abilities and characteristics, race and sexual orientation. Dimensions can also include communication style, education, family status, first language, geographic location, income, military experience, organizational role and level, work experience, expertise and work style.

Impact on Children
Biases and negative stereotypes undercut all children’s healthy development and can ill-equip them to interact effectively in a diverse world. Children are aware of differences in color, language, gender and physical ability from infancy. Numerous research studies about identity and attitude development conclude that children learn by observing the differences and similarities among people and by absorbing the spoken and unspoken messages about those differences (Katz, 1976, 1992; Aboud, 1988; Phinney & Rotheram, 1987).

Consequently, Chicago Children’s Museum seeks to nurture the development of every child’s fullest potential by actively addressing issues of diversity and equity.
Our Position on Diversity

Diversity is fundamental to Chicago Children’s Museum’s mission and vision. The museum aspires to be welcoming to everyone and known for promoting and honoring diversity. This applies not only to CCM’s audience but to the organizational culture.

**Recruit, retain and value a diverse, high-performing staff.**
Modeling an inclusive environment begins with effective internal operations. Recruiting, training and retaining a diverse staff are central to this process. Chicago Children’s Museum acknowledges the reality of an established, operational structure but continuously works toward an open environment that engages staff at all levels of the organization. Through constant evaluation of the institutional power structure and the use of multiple forms of communication, CCM is able to identify new opportunities to empower staff effectively and engage them in decision-making processes.

Therefore, CCM will:

- Encourage staff diversity by reaching out beyond traditional or expected venues for job announcements, etc.
- Build staff expertise through diversity training and reflection.
- Leverage multiple forms of communication to engage staff at all levels of the museum.
- Share expertise through interdepartmental collaboration and all-staff dialogue.
- Create opportunities for staff to become more attuned to how diversity issues relate to their programs, the children they serve, and themselves.

**Create fresh, relevant experiences (exhibits, programs, workshops, performances) that engage, challenge, spark creativity and allow for reflection.**
At Chicago Children’s Museum, we recognize that individuals operate within and against belief systems and power structures that perpetuate forms of injustice and inequity, thereby impacting us all. This understanding guides our efforts to leverage play as a medium through which all visitors, especially children, are inspired and empowered to explore their own and others’ unique perspectives.

“Everyone and everything is a resource, and we need to be an artist of combining those resources to achieve new, magical and positive results.”

Wayne Meisel, Founder, Campus Outreach Opportunity League
Best practices include:

- Develop a full spectrum of playful experiences that appeals to a variety of ages, abilities and perspectives.
- Use broad universal themes, such as play, celebrations and identity, to bring people together.
- Recognize that an individual’s sense of identity is multifaceted, personally determined and constantly evolving. Do not perpetuate stereotypes.
- Design open-ended experiences that invite people to add their voices and perspectives.
- Encourage visitors to interact, share resources and learn from one another.
- Build and sustain mutually-beneficial community-based relationships with a diverse set of educators, organizations and families.
- Leverage partner engagement to inform museum decision making and reflect multiple perspectives.
- Strive to understand issues that impact schools and partner organizations in underserved communities.
- Foster a sense of community and teamwork by actively seeking opportunities for all CCM stakeholders to work and play side by side.
- Create ongoing opportunities, such as the Get Connected program, for all staff to participate directly with diverse audiences and frontline operations.
- Equip staff with tools and talking points for responding to visitors on timely and potentially sensitive topics (e.g., racism, LGBT issues, bullying).
- When feasible, create multilingual signage, and opt for universally-understood graphics, instead of text, to communicate instructions.
- Depict diversity in all internal and external visual communications.
- Recruit, develop, retain, and value a diverse, high-performing staff, volunteer base and board.

References


