EQUITY STATEMENT
Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA)

Adopted by the Board of Directors of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art Foundation, Inc., on October 16, 2020.
The Ringling Museum has long been committed to inclusivity and community outreach. This commitment was formalized in 2018 when we created our IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity, access) Team to address our efforts in a more systematic way. The IDEA Team, made up of staff from every department, actively strives to identify and remove the financial, logistical, cultural, and institutional barriers that prevent full, active engagement with all members of our community.

In 2019, the IDEA Team engaged an outside consultant to help guide the museum through this work. Through this engagement, we realized we needed to begin by examining our own institutional culture. We shifted our emphasis from external, project-driven work to an internal analysis of systems and policies that might impede our progress. While The Ringling has continued to engage and serve our community throughout this process, the focus of the IDEA Team is to build an institutional foundation to better support future equitable programs and decision-making.

In 2020, while we grappled with both the pandemic and the charged socio-political climate arising from the killing of George Floyd and others, we continued to press forward with this work. Our efforts culminated in a formal equity statement and commitments, which was adopted by the board of directors on October 16, 2020. This statement, which will be realized through specific strategies, action items, and metrics for measuring success, will serve as our roadmap for the next several years. It will help us integrate IDEA into the museum’s core values and will form the foundation of our next strategic plan.

The statement, in full, is presented on the following page. It is the result of many conversations with our consultant, our staff, our volunteers, and our valued community partners. It represents a multitude of voices and perspectives, united by a strong commitment to equity and anti-racism, formed into a cohesive vision for the museum.
The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art inspires, educates, and entertains through arts and culture, and is a place that encourages creative ideas, innovative thinking, open dialogue, and meaningful exchange. When all people are included and see themselves reflected in our mission, we can transform our communities, our institutions, and our world into better places for everyone.

Societal inequities have shaped our field in ways that continue to impact it today, as evidenced by the limited engagement and representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), Latinx and Hispanic people, and other marginalized groups. The Ringling believes that inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) are essential to its mission and vision. In our role as a cultural, educational, and civic leader, we have a moral obligation for our institution to include the diverse perspectives and narratives of people from the local to the global communities.

In looking to the future, we need to acknowledge our past as an institution where BIPOC and Latinx and Hispanic people were historically excluded. To this end, we believe that a focus on race equity is critical and serves as a starting point from which to address other forms of inequity. We understand that IDEA work is difficult, but we commit to keep learning, evolving, and improving on our journey to become an anti-racist institution.

OUR COMMITMENTS
IDEA is critical to our work, our community, and our shared future. To actively dismantle systems of discrimination and exclusion, The Ringling commits to the following:

1. Remove barriers to full inclusion of historically marginalized groups, with an emphasis on equity for BIPOC and Latinx and Hispanic communities
2. Engage underrepresented artists and organizations through exhibitions, performances, programs, and collaborations that reflect and celebrate the diversity of our local, regional, national, and global communities
3. Improve organizational ability to attract, welcome, and serve a diverse audience and membership
4. Ensure The Ringling’s board, staff, and volunteers reflect our diverse communities
5. Center the voices of people of diverse cultures, backgrounds, abilities, and identities
6. Provide resources, training, tools, and space for learning together
COMMITMENT 1
Remove barriers to full inclusion of historically marginalized groups, with an emphasis on equity for BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, People of Color] and Latinx and Hispanic communities

To many, The Ringling already seems like an inclusive place: anyone can walk through the doors, purchase a ticket, and enjoy the splendors of our collections. But upon closer consideration, it is apparent that there are many barriers—historical, financial, situational—that make the museum inaccessible to many. We also recognize that we are located in a town that, within this lifetime, was segregated into spaces that excluded people of color. Although we’ve made great strides in collecting new work by artists of color and diversifying our board and senior leadership, we know we have a lot of work to do to earn the trust of everyone in our community.

To that end, we are committed to listening to the leaders, individuals, and organizations directly connected with BIPOC and Latinx and Hispanic communities to better understand their relationship to, and perception of, The Ringling. In discovering these opportunities and barriers, we will be able to implement concrete improvements to increase inclusivity. We plan on sharing key findings and regular updates on our progress in order to hold ourselves accountable. We will also commit to researching the museum’s complete history so we can more accurately situate ourselves within the larger story of our community.

Throughout this process, the key questions we will strive to answer include: where has trust been broken? What barriers can we remove? Where do bridges need to be built?

COMMITMENT 2
Engage underrepresented artists and organizations through exhibitions, performances, programs, and collaborations that reflect and celebrate the diversity of our local, regional, national, and global communities

Given its unique range of collections, The Ringling has many opportunities to tell stories that encompass the full spectrum of human experience. While we can continue to celebrate the astounding quality of John Ringling’s original art collection, we can also make room for new, diverse voices in our galleries. The Art of Our Time program has always created platforms for underrepresented artists, and the Art of Performance program is likewise committed to showing the work of performers from across the globe. The Circus Museum and Ca’ d’Zan both contain previously-untold stories, including those of BIPOC and Latinx and Hispanic people, that we can bring to the fore more prominently than ever before.

We will establish community advisory groups to inform our exhibitions, performances, and programs, helping us ensure that they are welcoming to those who may have traditionally been excluded. Our community partners are an essential component of our commitment to celebrating diversity. By inviting these partners to engage in conversations and participate in programs, we hope to create many opportunities for open dialogue and meaningful exchange. We will also have the museum serve as a gathering place, not only for our partners, but also for other non-profits working to advance equity in our community. We want to make our campus a place where people can come together to make positive change.
COMMITMENT 3

*Improve organizational ability to attract, welcome, and serve a diverse audience and membership*

An ongoing examination of our internal culture will allow us to improve our capability to welcome visitors and members from all backgrounds. We will continue to leverage the rich resources on diversity and inclusion available to us from our parent organization, Florida State University. The museum is strengthening our collaboration with the FSU Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Office to enhance our IDEA work locally. Our ultimate goal is to have a diversity officer situated within the museum itself.

As we work to infuse IDEA principles throughout the museum, we will hold ourselves accountable to the equity and inclusion metrics imbedded within our annual evaluation process. Expectations of inclusivity and equity will be integrated into position descriptions for all staff and volunteers. We will also develop a collective organizational values statement prioritizing anti-racism, so that all Ringling stakeholders are clear about the purpose of our work.

COMMITMENT 4

*Ensure The Ringling’s board, staff, and volunteers reflect our diverse communities*

We have made great strides in diversifying our board of directors; we will continue to make this a priority moving forward.

We continue to work with Florida State University to ensure that every hiring decision is equitable and fair. Moving forward, the museum will stay abreast of current best practices that contribute to promoting diversity within our staff and expand upon our practices to attract a more diverse applicant pool.

Taken as a whole, museums in the United States do not currently reflect the diversity of their communities. We must take deliberate action to increase the diversity of the next generation of museum professionals and better reflect the diverse communities being served by our institutions. To that end, we are revising our existing paid summer internship program with a focus on developing a pathway for underrepresented groups to enter the museum field and reduce financial barriers that many students face when considering a career in the arts.

Likewise, we are committed to revising our volunteer program to ensure volunteer opportunities are accessible to, and welcoming of, a broader array of community members. Specifically, we will be re-imagining our docent program to make participation easier for people from a wider variety of backgrounds and circumstances. We know that our volunteers serve as the face of the museum, and it is in recognition of their hugely important role that we undertake these transformations.
COMMITMENT 5
Center the voices of people of diverse cultures, backgrounds, abilities, and identities

What does it mean for a museum to center other voices? For most of their history, museums have been regarded as both bastions of authoritative knowledge and vessels of high culture. While the public still puts their trust in museums to provide accurate information, a truly responsive twenty-first century museum must engage with its audience in a more reciprocal manner. We will continue to evolve away from the traditional top-down model of information dissemination, stepping back or stepping aside to allow other voices to shine.

We will develop mutually-beneficial partnerships that place equal value on the contributions of both parties. We will make a more deliberate effort to invite the contributions of staff, volunteers, and the community in major decision-making processes. We will also offer greater transparency in policies for participation in museum partnerships, programs, and events. In making these efforts, we will recognize and correct the power imbalance inherent in many of our previous professional relationships. We understand that the museum looms large in our community. Our reputation and resources must be leveraged in the service of true equity.

COMMITMENT 6
Provide resources, training, tools, and space for learning together

All of the public-facing work embedded throughout this plan must be met with equally solid commitments to internal improvement. Until we address lingering prejudices, misinformation, or systems of discrimination inherent in our own structures, we cannot move forward in a meaningful way.

To that end, we will work with Florida State University to design an organizational learning plan that includes ongoing mandatory training for all staff and volunteers on unconscious bias, micro-aggressions, anti-racism, and other relevant topics. We will also foster a culture of curiosity by encouraging staff participation in The Ringling’s exhibitions, performances, and programs, as well as by creating other informal opportunities for dialogue. All of these opportunities will lead to increased cultural competency and a more expansive worldview, which will ultimately serve to both shift our institutional culture and deepen our community connections.