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The Association of Children's Museums: Honoring, Practicing and Promoting Diversity

Janet Rice Elman, Executive Director

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The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) promotes a set of recommendations for respecting and responding to diversity in families and young children that includes the following:

develop and provide alternative, creative strategies to promote all children's participation and learning; provide children with many ways of showing what they know and can do; and convince families that their home's cultural values and norms are honored. (<http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/diversity.pdf>)

While we have a long way to go in creating truly diverse institutions, children's museums are uniquely aligned with these recommendations: we provide multiple opportunities for learning in different ways, we are places where children proudly master new skills and concepts, and we celebrate a world of cultures through our exhibits and programs.

Yet despite these strengths, currently there is a significant disparity between the diversity of our communities and the people who visit, work in, and lead our cultural institutions. The Association of Children's Museums' Diversity in Action Initiative began in 2004 with the formation of the Diversity Taskforce, which is now a standing committee of the ACM Board. The Diversity in Action Committee is comprised of ACM board members, ACM staff, children's museum professionals and diversity experts committed to advancing the inclusiveness and diversity of children's museums.

Guided by the Committee, ACM has taken a number of steps to stimulate change in the field. ACM has brought grant and recognition opportunities to museum members, published a diversity statement, actively participated in a national consortium of associations and museums about diversity and launched the InterActivity Diversity Showcase and Scholarship Program to encourage the professional development of ethnically diverse professionals in the children's museum field.

In 2006, ACM retained AWP Research to conduct a field-wide survey to gauge member impressions and action on making children's museums more diverse. The data, collected from 100 ACM member museums, has effectively benchmarked the status of ACM member museums regarding diversity issues and will help ACM closely monitor areas where the membership needs additional resources, information or direction.

Among the key findings discovered in the survey's examination of this complex topography, the executive summary report lists some revealing facts. First, attracting diverse audiences is very important to most museums: nearly 60% of the museums responding track the diversity of their visitors, at least

informally (observations), based on racial/ethnic backgrounds, age, gender and perceived physical ability/disability. A majority of the respondents (57%) feel their museum's attendance is highly reflective of the diversity of their communities. Response levels increase with museum size, peaking at 71.4% among the largest museums. Still, even among the smallest museums, a sizeable number (47.1%) feels their attendance is highly reflective of their communities.

At the same time, a near majority of respondents characterize the present staff diversity levels at their museums as "low" while diversity levels have generally increased over the past five years for the board/trustee category.

Like report cards, the survey highlights areas where children's museums are doing very well, but also provides a clear map of those areas marked "room for improvement." The complete Diversity Survey report is available on the ACM Web site along with an excellent compilation of readings and resources on the subject of diversity: books, articles and additional Web sites of interest to all museums as they work to become more inclusive on all levels.

Looking forward, ACM will convene InterActivity 2007: *Embracing Diversity in Your Town Square* in Chicago. The last day of InterActivity 2007 will be ACM's first Diversity Summit. To help frame the discussion about integrating diversity in the children's museum field, summit participants will organize by topical area during breakfast roundtables and review a draft diversity pledge. All participant comments will be recorded so that ACM may refine a field-wide diversity pledge. It is the hope of the Diversity in Action Committee and ACM Board of Directors that the resulting diversity pledge will be a catalyst for change in children's museums around the world.

ACM DIVERSITY STATEMENT

April 27, 2005

The Association of Children's Museums: Honoring, Practicing and Promoting Diversity

The Association of Children's Museums supports the goals of the museums and diversity national Initiative. ACM has also developed more specific goals for supporting diversity; our organization's diversity statement follows.

The Association of Children's Museums is an international professional organization representing children's museums and institutions dedicated to serving children. Our mission is to build the capacity of children's museums to serve as town squares where play inspires creativity and lifelong learning. The Association and its members are committed to honoring, practicing and promoting diversity, and believe that children's museums have unique opportunities to do so by:

- Engaging children and families in exploring and appreciating their own cultures and the diverse cultures and lifestyles of others.
- Enhancing children's cultural competency, their skills and ability to be active and successful in an increasingly diverse and global society.
- Playing an active role in building inclusive communities through exhibits, programs, advocacy and partnerships that reflect and celebrate our diverse communities.
- Enhancing staff and organizational capacity to attract, welcome and serve a diverse audience and membership.
- Modeling Diversity-In-Action for children by ensuring that our boards and staff at every level reflect and benefit from our diverse communities.