



**DIVERSITY EQUITY INCLUSIVITY & ACCESSIBILITY
STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND ACTION PLAN: 2023-2025**

PRESENTED BY SHROPSHIRE NONPROFIT CONSULTING LLC

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OVERVIEW

Darlington Arts Center vows to master the art of community as the community masters the arts.

Imagine a place where all people feel that they belong. They are eager to visit so they can make, create, exhibit, or perform in community. Ideas flow in form many avenues, and are exchanged, changed, and carried back to communities throughout the region.

This Strategic Framework and Action Plan uses DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity & Accessibility) themes as pathways for building such a place.

Mission – Darlington Arts Center builds community by providing every art for everyone

A series of intentional activities within this framework breathes very particular life into the mission. They speak directly to the heart of what Darlington seeks on a daily basis.

Through three, interconnected, pillars, the activities also point to what might be more fully realized:

- Engagement of Underrepresented People and Communities
- Equity and Inclusivity for Staff & Teaching Artists
- Board Commitment to Support and Advance DEIA

This is a three-year plan. Darlington needs time and opportunity to move forward – in both incremental and giant steps – building its capacity, continuing to learn, strengthening partnerships, and enlisting expertise to undertake the more ambitious initiatives.

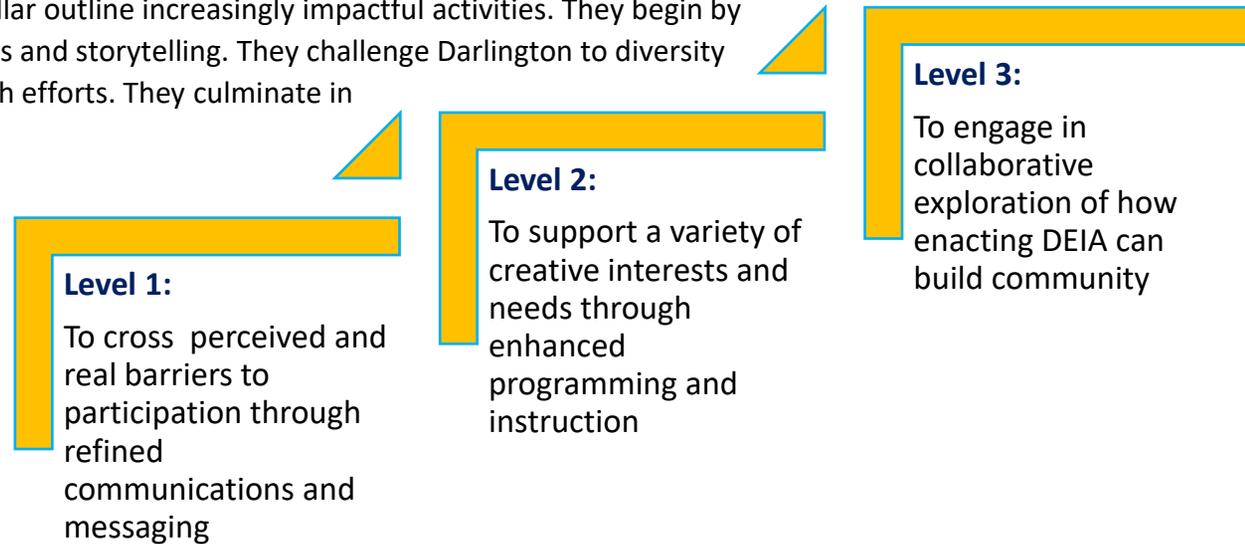
This plan is a challenge to all to be accountable to fulfilling the mission: Is Darlington truly building community? If not, what doors can be opened? What barriers can be knocked down so that everyone can feel that they belong and fully pursue their own creativity?

PILLAR A: ENGAGEMENT OF UNDERREPRESENTED PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

This pillar focuses activities for more fully involving, serving, and engaging people and communities who currently are underrepresented at Darlington despite living within a half-hour or less of the Center. This includes urban communities in Wilmington and Spanish-speaking communities in Kennett Square and West Chester as well as older adults, people of color, people with disabilities, and people of the LGBTQ+ community. A number of people are likely to identify with more than one of these groups.

Objectives

Three levels of objectives for this pillar outline increasingly impactful activities. They begin by using a DEIA lens to shape narratives and storytelling. They challenge Darlington to diversity and enhance programs and outreach efforts. They culminate in community-wide interactions.



ENGAGEMENT OF UNDERREPRESENTED PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

| Level 1 Activities | | Measures of Progress | Lead |
|--------------------|--|---|------------------------------|
| A1.1 | Refining post-class surveys to ask for feedback to learn more about who is involved, their experience, and their sense of engagement and belonging at Darlington | High participation in post-class surveys | Program Manager |
| A1.2 | Featuring stories and profiles that give voice to a multitude of perspectives, presenting the breadth and depth of Darlington's impact on people's lives | Increased engagement of underrepresented groups | Assistant Director |
| A1.3 | Showcasing images and the contributions of artists who have been underrepresented in mainstream societies | Increased engagement of underrepresented groups | Assistant Director |
| A1.4 | Hosting community-based fundraisers that are financially accessible to a broad base of people | Profitable, mission-centered events | Development Committee |
| A1.5 | Refining messaging at every touchpoint between a person and Darlington to enhance the experience of welcoming and inclusivity | Increased engagement of underrepresented groups | Executive Director (for now) |
| A1.6 | Designing physical spaces to convey a welcoming spirit and encourage people to feel that they belong | Increased engagement of underrepresented groups | Executive Director |
| Level 2 Activities | | Measures of Progress | Lead |
| A2.1 | Creating an outdoor Sensory Play Space to open new avenues for experiential learning | High use of Play Space | Executive Director |
| A2.2 | Creating a safe space for older adults to embrace their artistic journey | Strong on-site older-adult participation | Program Manager |
| A2.3 | Engaging older adults in embracing their artistic journey in their own spaces | Strong off-site older-adult participation | Assistant Director |
| A2.4 | Collaborating with outreach partners to reimagine school-age experiences so they reach outcomes in learning, skill development, and building self-confidence | High student achievement in identified goals | Program Manager |
| A2.5 | Emphasizing student-centered instruction by all Teaching Artists | Strong positives in post-class survey responses | Program Manager |
| A2.6 | Promoting advanced programs for kids and adults to accelerate development of their craft | High participation in advanced classes | Registration Manager |
| Level 3 Activities | | Measures of Progress | Lead |
| A3.1 | Gaining insights into the root causes of low participation of underrepresented people and communities through targeted outreach and networking | Deeper understanding of barriers to engagement | Executive Director |
| A3.2 | Hosting community conversations to foster dialogue around the arts and DEIA themes | High community participation | Executive Director |
| A3.3 | Making Darlington's higher purpose and intended community-building impact visible | Deeper connectedness to the mission | Executive Director |

PILLAR B: EQUITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR STAFF & TEACHING ARTISTS

This pillar focuses activities to enhance Darlington's healthy work environment by directing energies and resources toward fair wages and supportive systems, professional growth, skill building, and sustaining a culture of community and adaptability.

Objectives

The three levels of objectives for this pillar outline an evolution from codifying existing habits to embedding DEIA into the Darlington's culture. This includes fostering a supportive environment where Staff and Teaching Artists avail themselves of opportunities to learn and to access resources. There is a feeling of freedom to teach as creatives with a welcoming ambience that promotes belonging and freedom to teach amid a creative community.

Level 1:

To translate current behaviors into policy and intentional practices that are sustained over time

Level 2:

To direct time and financial resources toward meaningful opportunities for personal growth and organizational learning

Level 3:

To embed DEIA thinking and themes into the fabric of the organization in sustainable ways

EQUITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR STAFF AND TEACHING ARTISTS

| Level 1 Activities | | Measures of Progress | Lead |
|--------------------|--|---|--------------------|
| B1.1 | Conducting an annual audit of wages and benefits to help ensure market competitiveness and equitable compensation with regard to role within Darlington | Competitive and equitable compensation for all | Executive Director |
| B1.2 | Budgeting funds so that Teaching Arts receive a stipend whenever asked to participate in Darlington activities outside a class | Increased TA participation in non-class activities | Board |
| B1.3 | Crafting job positions/postings that reflect Darlington’s values, present transparent salaries, and seek those committed to furthering a welcoming and affirming culture | Strong responses to job postings | Executive Director |
| Level 2 Activities | | Measures of Progress | Lead |
| B2.1 | Designing onboarding programs for Staff and Teaching Artists that underscore expectations around fostering an environment of inclusivity and belonging | Strong positive responses in Satisfaction Surveys | Assistant Director |
| B2.2 | Investing in professional development for Staff and Teaching Artists specific to trauma-informed instruction, first aid, and teaching across student neurodiversity | High instructional competencies | Board |
| B2.3 | Encouraging staff to self-identify annual professional development opportunities to facilitate individual learning and growth | High engagement in professional development | Executive Director |
| B2.4 | Orchestrating annual training around microaggressions, unconscious bias, and cultural sensitivity | High engagement in training | Executive Director |
| Level 3 Activities | | Measures of Progress | Lead |
| B3.1 | Maintaining a healthy Staff environment of wellness and work-life balance through empathetic leadership and flexibility | Strong positive responses in Satisfaction Surveys | Executive Director |
| B3.2 | Redefining the Board’s Teaching Artist Representative role to become a compensated position that serves as a communication bridge between Staff/Board and TAs, facilitates networking among TAs, and celebrates TA accomplishments | Enhanced communication between Teaching Artists and the Board | Board |
| B3.3 | Supporting TA-led efforts for Teaching Artist socializing and community-building activities | Strong participation in activities | Assistant Director |

PILLAR C: BOARD COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT AND ADVANCE DEIA

This pillar focuses activities to channel the Board’s passion for Darlington’s mission toward action-oriented intentionality. This includes setting policies, internalizing equitable practices, and prioritizing investment of resources to support and advance DEIA themes. Darlington will need to rely heavily on Board members sharing their expertise, training others based on their experiences, and activating their networks in order for the Center be sufficiently positioned to launch innovations or new systems.

Objectives

The three levels of objectives for this pillar outline the Board’s multi-pronged role to set policy, steward the organization, and make sound decisions to direct resource allocations to further greater accessibility and engagement. The Board’s committee structure and focus are essential to leveraging Board talents and maintaining forward momentum.

Level 1:

To ensure effective and consistent implementation through strong committee functioning and relationships

Level 2:

To set policies that codify guidelines for advancing DEIA principles

Level 3:

To enrich the student and member experience by investing in systems that lower economic and other barriers to full participation

BOARD COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT AND ADVANCE DEIA

| Level 1 Activities | | Measures of Progress | Lead |
|--------------------|--|---|---------------------------|
| C1.1 | Reimagining outreach, recruitment, and vetting practices to increase Board diversity by filling identified gaps with people who possess additive backgrounds and experiences | Diversity in Board composition | Governance Committee |
| C1.2 | Reconstructing Board meeting agendas to emphasize generative discussions grounded in equal access to relevant information and shared decision making | Strong positive responses in Board Self-Assessments | Board & Committees Chairs |
| C1.3 | Embedding DEIA themes in the committee charter and annual committee agendas | Identified DEIA outcomes generated by committees | Committee Chairs |
| C1.4 | Serving as responsible stewards of the land and good neighbors of people in surrounding communities | Low carbon footprint | Board |
| C1.5 | Participating in training around microaggressions, unconscious bias, and cultural sensitivity | High participation in training | Board |
| Level 2 Activities | | Measures of Progress | Lead |
| C2.1 | Recalibrating the fiscal planning to help ensure that annual operating budgets explicitly reflect Darlington's strategic priorities and values | Resource allocations that reflect equitable practices | Finance Committee |
| C2.2 | Approving policies that inform a refined Employee Handbook that incorporates progressive thinking and language as well as contemporary/post-pandemic HR philosophies | Links between belonging and accountability | Governance Committee |
| C2.3 | Refreshing the bylaws and other policies with the intention of shedding outdated structures that perpetuate concentrated authority and power as well as inequities | Governance grounded in collective responsibility | Governance Committee |
| C2.4 | Setting policies that prioritize sourcing and working with local, women, and BIPOC vendors | Representative vendor relationships | Board |
| Level 3 Activities | | Measures of Progress | Lead |
| C3.1 | Growing the fund for Agape scholarships to lower a financial barrier and enable more people to participate in classes and other events | Increased number of scholarships accepted | Board |
| C3.2 | Investing in digital technologies to enhance the accessibility of Darlington's communications for people who are blind or visually impaired or deaf or hard of hearing | Strong utilization of digital accessibility features | Board |
| C3.3 | Investing in physical accessibility features at the Center to ease people's mobility on campus | Strong student/member feedback | Board |
| C3.4 | Investing in a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system to facilitate data collection and analysis in support of building student, volunteer, and donor relationships | Deeper knowledge of stakeholder motivations | Board |

IMPLEMENTATION

Embedding DEIA themes in policies, processes, and practices is an ongoing journey that will never be complete. By design, the journey is powered by a promise to continuously interrogate intentions against outcomes. These principles are reminders of how to keep DEIA themes close to hand while setting goals, making decisions, and assessing continued relevance and success.

Principles for Enacting DEIA With Intentionality

Consider who might be harmed by a decision as well as who might be helped

Embrace DEIA as a journey rather than a destination

Name the fear or trauma and find ways to meet and sit with it

Listen to understand rather than to affirm your assumptions

Strive for inclusivity instead of more accessible exclusivity

Identify and name the cultural norms and standards that you want

Engage those who aren't in "the room" or at "the table"

Seek to learn and evolve

Elevate authenticity over optics

Lean in to collective action and accountability

Compatibility with Strategy, Values & Identity

The pillars, objectives, and activities connect seamlessly to Darlington's 2021-2024 Strategic Plan, which articulates a compelling vision of "Reaching Beyond." The core values of **Learning, Opportunity, Multi-generational Commitment**, and **Inclusion** work in concert with DEIA principles to illuminate the paths ahead especially in times of crisis, ambiguity, or opportunity. Together, they will inform marketing initiatives to spark interest, build momentum, and support a brand where DEI is core to Darlington's identity.

DEI Champions

The ad hoc committee that led the creation of this framework and action plan has been an early driver for strengthening diversity, equity, inclusivity, and accessibility at Darlington. Representative of all Board committees, it will continue to meet periodically to reflect on progress and identify which directions might need support or new energy.

Going forward, everyone will be called to infuse DEIA themes into their work. At the Board level, committees will be essential mechanisms for focusing agendas and communicating how each activity is advancing toward intended outcomes.

Resource Allocations

Darlington will examine the budgeting process to ensure that it is used as an opportunity for engaging multiple perspectives in decision making around resource allocations. The operating budget would then become a tool that illustrates shared values, strategic priorities, and how each program/function contributes to advancing the mission.

Mechanisms for Assessment

Identified Measures of Progress will be refined more specifically as each activity is addressed. Some activities are well suited to quantifiable targets. Others will be demonstrated in more intangible ways.

Assessment will become a joint enterprise by ensuring that all voices and ideas are heard in the formulation of priorities and approaches. Strong mechanisms for making input and providing feedback will encourage mutual trust and shared commitment to Darlington's future. This would include periodic climate surveys, employee satisfaction surveys, and hiring and compensation audits as well as a host of informal and formal communication platforms.