

# How To Build a Successful Inclusion-based Organization in Philadelphia

*Building an organization based on inclusion in Philadelphia requires intentionality about who is invited to the metaphorical table.*

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA, UNITED STATES, November 20, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- How To Build a Successful Organization Based on Inclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are often introduced in response to progressive societal changes; however, DEI deserves more than an afterthought. Organizations centered around diversity, equity, and inclusion have proven successful and impactful. A UK-based [Cloverpop study](#) that covered 600 business decisions made by 200 teams found that diverse teams outperformed individuals by about 87% of the time during business decision-making processes.

We can appreciate unique complexities and contributions by untangling the distinctions between diversity, equity, and inclusion. Race, ethnicity, sex, gender, and other factors can all contribute to organizational diversity. Equity is the practical counterbalancing of efforts or the elimination of structural obstacles to ensure fair opportunities. Combined, diversity and equity are vital organizational behaviors, such as maintaining an employment rate for culturally diverse individuals and disclosing wages, respectively. Diversity and equity are measurable; however, inclusion requires far-reaching thoughtfulness.

A simple Google search describes inclusion as giving everyone a voice at the metaphorical table. This simplistic wording leaves much to be desired in its non-explanation of the who and where of



Nile Livingston, founder of Creative Repute LLC and Visual Artist based in Philadelphia

the table analogy. To address these two critical aspects, we must be open-minded about the definitions of inclusivity and its foundational tenet of integration.

## Growth and Empathy

Sharing knowledge and leading by example is one way to think about inclusion. Consider TED talks, school tutoring, “how-to” books, and cooking shows on The Food Network. When we share our ideas and victories, we offer that achievement to others and allow for the improvement or renewal of a practice. This is incredibly helpful for small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs because it helps teams grow together.

Small businesses are crucial for community job creation and building wealth. Their sustainability often involves business-oriented mentorship. For example, the Service Corps of Retired Executives, or SCORE, is a nonprofit organization that offers free mentoring services for prospective and established small business owners. SCORE has 300 chapters in the United States and comprises active and retired business professionals. Mentors volunteer their time and expertise to over 7,000 entrepreneurs. The Philadelphia Chapter of SCORE fosters growth by teaching best practices for business planning, product development, marketing, relationship building, and hiring. The Philadelphia Chapter of SCORE guides startups and small businesses toward success through education and consultation.

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*Chris Bartlett, Executive Director of the William Way Community Center*

The Philadelphia Chapter of SCORE is 100% mission-aligned, with inclusive values informed by core DEI tenets.

In 2018, SCORE added a Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee to provide diversity, equity, and inclusion training to volunteers and advance its efforts to have diverse professionals. Mentors follow a SLATE method with each client to stop and suspend judgment, listen and learn, assess and analyze, test ideas, and teach with tools and expectations. It is essential to lead by



Mary Livingston has been involved with SCORE since 2006, working with 3 past Chapter Chairs serving as Vice President of Client Services and Vice President of Education.

example and be able to offer solutions to clients that one has experienced firsthand when addressing DEI needs.

### Accessibility and Visibility

Accessibility to resources maintains inclusion by providing goods or services to a broad range of people. By having easily attainable resources that meet the specific needs of marginalized groups, organizations create a space where their community is seen and considered.

The William Way LGBT Community Center is an accomplished organization that has served queer Philadelphians for nearly fifty years. Named after city official and activist William “Bill” Way, the center orchestrated its accessibility mission by supporting the gay community before extending its services to bisexual and transgender individuals. The center facilitated a library and archives, youth programs, peer counseling, and cabaret events. In the early 2000s, the William Way Community Center raised funds for renovations and thus developed an art gallery, a senior program, and other volunteer-based programs. In 2013, the center received a grant to host the first LGBTQIA+ Jazz Festival in the United States. In 2019, the center was awarded a generous grant to open a transgender resource center and expand the archive space.

In addition to these significant achievements, the William Way Community Center has completed numerous projects and added



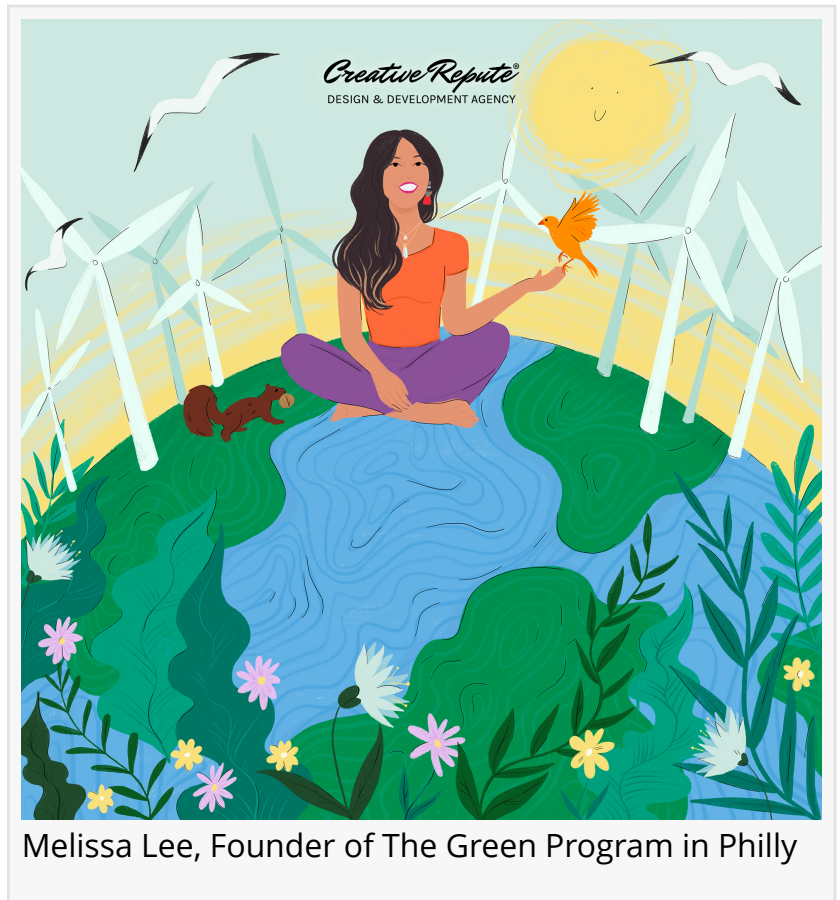
Chris Bartlett, Executive Director of the William Way LGBTQIA Community Center



Vernoca Michaels, previous Executive Director of the Paul Robeson House

countless inclusive programs, such as museum exhibits, cultural music concerts, art shows, empowerment against intimate partner violence, HIV/AIDS remembrance, book clubs, tobacco cessation, recovery meetings, employment support, and a cyber center with computer and Wi-Fi access. Services can be found on the William Way Community Center's website.

To quote the current Executive Director, Chris Bartlett, "The more the center is used, the better." Bartlett has worn many hats, serving the queer community in Philadelphia for over twenty years. To be successful, the center keeps up with emergent needs and "follows the breadcrumbs." The center also utilizes a pop-up method to provide services efficiently and quickly; for example, it became a vaccine hub in response to the recent monkeypox outbreak.



Melissa Lee, Founder of The Green Program in Philly

Bartlett describes inclusion as "visibility" and has taken an integrated approach across departments to maintain inclusion. Putting himself in others' shoes, Bartlett asked, "Do I have power? Am I considered in the budget? Does the staff look like me? Can I see myself in the artwork? What relatable stories are told in the archives?". Bartlett explained that inclusion stems from an organization's mission and flows from there. Beyond engaging in DEI initiatives with Your Way tours that invite thirty new guests each month, the center has also redistributed vital leadership and staff roles to individuals with diverse backgrounds.

When asked if there are misconceptions about inclusion, Bartlett encouraged maximizing and celebrating our differences and refraining from thinking about ourselves as the same. Inclusion should combat assimilation—the loss of culture once accepted. "Humans may want to be around people who are like them, but creativity thrives when the people around you challenge you." He strongly advocates for solidarity to bridge intergenerational gaps in the queer community. "Elders should be treasured and valued, despite not understanding new concepts of gender or sexuality." Inclusion raises marginalized voices, but "confrontational language like 'TERF' [trans exclusionary radical feminist] hinders solidarity," Bartlett noted regarding complicated relationships between lesbian feminists, gender-nonconforming individuals, and transwomen. "Complexity is beautiful."

Inclusion is Preserving History

Seats at the inclusion table should also be reserved for past influencers so that we can remember the lessons from our history.

The Paul Robeson House and Museum celebrated its 125th birthday in 2023. Under the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance umbrella, the Paul Robeson House & Museum is where Paul Leroy Robeson lived for the last ten years of his life. Robeson was an athlete, actor, singer-turned-activist, and author. He was one of the highest-paid entertainers until he began heavily speaking out against injustices targeting African Americans. He suffered financially after his concerts were canceled and record companies rejected him. He was accused of being a Communist by the US government, and the stress from continuous harassment affected his health. At one point, Robeson had his passport revoked. The FBI monitored him until he died in 1976.

Fifteen years later, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission declared his home a historical landmark. Frances P. Aulston and the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance purchased the vacant home in 1994. They sought to restore Robeson's legacy and renovate the space for cultural events. It was essential to preserve his outspokenness against race and oppression and to remind us of the limits of a not-so-far-gone past.

Vernoca Michael was a neighbor of "Uncle Paul" and is now the former executive director of the house. After Aulston's passing, Vernoca inherited her aspiration for a mortgage-free museum. In 2020, volunteers celebrated its success. Then, the COVID pandemic hit, and the Paul Robeson House & Museum, like many organizations, experienced lost revenue. Michael described the reopening effort as "taking a village" to raise money, write grant proposals, support GoFundMe, and accommodate COVID restrictions. "I have a reputation for success in almost everything I do, but I also have a reputation for surrounding myself with people who have the 'get up and go' and drive that I have," Michaels stated in a video on the house's YouTube page. Like Michael, the Paul Robeson House & Museum shares an impactful vision for the future. By preserving Robeson's legacy and the history of those around him, younger generations are inspired to achieve more and dare to be a part of impactful actions.

Robeson's powerful voice and message live on. The establishment currently details his achievements through the exhibit Paul Robeson: Up Close and Personal, where his albums, paintings, photos, books, and other belongings can be viewed. The Paul Robeson House and Museum hosts art shows, annual porch festivals, parlor talks, chess clubs, and more.

### Inclusion in Art and Community

Public art offers an accessible viewing experience for spectators simply because the artwork is public. Although there is often a shared understanding, it allows for individual interpretation and dialogue. For muralist and entrepreneur [Nile Livingston](#), art and success are about having an imagination and a vision and bringing those ideas to life.

Livingston was an artist-in-residence at the Paul Robeson House & Museum in 2020. Vernoca

Michael welcomed her inside, and she used the rowhouse next to the museum to work on her large-scale commissioned paintings. The Black-queer artist's graphic design, website development, and marketing agency, Creative Repute, LL, is also a consultant for the William Way Community Center's capital campaign to raise funds to help renovate the center and expand programming for the LGBTQIA+ community in Philadelphia.

"Inclusivity fosters belonging for everyone." Livingston looks for the corner historians and folx on the margins, along with the more visible stakeholders, when diving into Discovery on new projects. It's vital to gather as many points of view as possible to inform considerations for the direction of a design because there should also be a sense of community input and pride in a completed mural or rebrand for a client. For example, when designing an exhibition like the Chronicling Resistance exhibition that was on display in 2022 at the Free Library of Philadelphia, Livingston learned how important it was to consult with the cleaning and maintenance crew to ensure the exhibition could be maintained.

Another example is the summer of 2020 when Livingston created a virtual mural titled "Philly Rising," a collage of local Philadelphians' photographic submissions. Residents were encouraged to send in pictures that depicted the spirit of Philadelphia. Livingston painted the city skyline, and Mural Arts Philadelphia embedded the submitted photos over the artwork in a mosaic style so that at a distance, the eyes would see the skyline, but zoomed-in viewers could see all of the photo submissions that made the larger picture.

[Creative Repute, LLC](#), (founded by Nile Livingston) is a women-led, Black-owned, and queer-owned business that utilizes a multi-disciplinary approach to offer clients impactful design solutions.

The team at Creative Repute intentionally hires and empowers other diverse experts. Livingston explained that when inclusion is lacking in an organization, the organization sometimes misses out on how a range of perspectives can offer more competent, relevant outcomes, as opposed to an organization that only consists of team members with similar backgrounds and professional abilities. Team members at Creative Repute bring skillsets to the table that collectively resolve tangible needs. Livingston warns against performative inclusion or campaigns when asked about misconceptions about inclusion. They challenged fads, such as posting blackouts on social media for twenty-four hours, to raise awareness for the Black Lives Matter movement. Another example is when large companies rebrand their online presence for Pride Month but continue to sponsor anti-LGBTQ politics. "Another thing to look out for is a company that does not include people of color in leadership positions."

Inclusion is Sustainability for the Future

Inclusion is both past-preserving and forward-thinking. The Paul Robeson House & Museum and the William Way Community Center's archival work show us how to learn from our past, while SCORE and Creative Repute focus on impacting the community and the future. When we make

decisions, who in the future do we have in mind, and where are they located?

The Green Program is a woman-owned and minority-owned public benefit corporation. Founded in 2009, the GREEN Program has offered short-term sustainability study abroad programs to nearly 4,000 students and young professionals worldwide. The unique program allows hands-on global experiences and cultural immersion at 85% of the cost and duration of standard study-abroad courses. These 10-day opportunities empower individuals through sustainability processes, challenges, and solutions. Nearly all participants in the GREEN Program continue to be active in sustainability initiatives, and many go on to work for NASA, Tesla, and National Geographic.

Founder and CEO Melissa Lee said she always had a passion for the oceans and the environment. Climate change and the vulnerable communities that will suffer most inspired Lee to create the Green Program. The participants' shared passion for protecting this world ignites by connecting with nature.

### Inclusion is Imperfect and Intentional

Building an organization based on inclusion can be overwhelming because of its variability. Inclusion stretches unendingly across time, people, and locations. It can take time to prioritize what an organization should build upon and how far it can reach. To mitigate the risk of exclusion or tokenizing for benefit, the best thing is to be intentional about who is invited to the metaphorical table. Who has a place card at yours—an ancestor, an elder, a successor, an opposer, an outsider, a neighbor, a newcomer, a native, a nurturer, an inspirer, a leader, an educator, a student, a member, an observer, a receiver?

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