

## **Progress Report on the 2021 ACTAA Diversity & Inclusion Working Plan**

**July 18, 2024**

Prepared by  
Zackery Tucker (ASU-Beebe)  
ACTAA President

The following report documents the achievements and shortcomings of the association in implementing the ACTAA 2021 Diversity & Inclusion Working Plan adopted by the Board of Directors on August 28, 2021, during its Fall Conference meeting. The Diversity & Inclusion Working Plan was developed from recommendations made by members-at-large who participated in a series of working sessions on inclusion and engagement at the 2021 Summer Workshop. Across the three-day conference, forty-plus members participated in eight sessions focused on dialogue of how ACTAA could facilitate better inclusivity and more honest engagement with five different groups of people within the association, namely:

- Student competitors
- Former student competitors (or student alumni)
- Members of color
- Members of the LGBTQ+ community
- New members of the association.

The original working plan document is available following this report for readers to reference.

### **PROGRESS REPORT BACKGROUND**

This report will outline the recommended initiatives from the 2021 Diversity & Inclusion Working Plan by constituent groups and highlight their status with an explanation or update on the initiative. Initiative statuses will be limited to three categories, namely:

-  Achieved
-  In Progress
-  Not Attempted
-  Change in Priority

### **2021 INITIATIVES BY CONSTITUENT GROUPS**

Student competitors:

- *Student Recognition* - Establish an All-State Award process similar to athletics or band/choir with AAA and/or Governor's endorsement. Nominations can be from program directors or state-wide selection.

❌ Not Attempted—No progress or sufficient attention has been made on this initiative. As a priority, this initiative should be recommended for inclusion in the 2024 ACTAA in Action strategic planning document.

- *Student Advisory Council* - Establish a student leadership program within ACTAA to facilitate opportunities for students to voice ideas, and concerns, and give their viewpoints on issues with the speech & debate community while providing leadership development training.

✅ Achieved—On August 28, 2021, the Board of Directors approved the creation of a Student Advisory Council program and President Box-Higdem appointed Dawn Tucker and Jennifer Aalaquinez to serve as advisors. Since its creation, the Student Advisory Council has provided the Board of Directors recommendations for tournaments and has been entrusted with coordinating community engagement at the Arkansas State Championship tournament.

- *Expand Social Media* - Expand ACTAA's social media content beyond communication with coaches and members to engage students indirectly served by the community by hosting content and use student-focused images similar to NSDA.

🟡 In Progress—In recent years, social media campaigns focused on student engagement, advocacy and member resources have been planned and executed around the Arkansas State Championship Tournament, Arkansas Speech & Debate Month, and posting teacher openings in our disciplines. More work needs to be done to develop a communication plan for social media that includes year-round engagement. As a priority, this initiative should be recommended for inclusion in the 2024 ACTAA in Action strategic planning document.

Former student competitors (or student alumni):

- *Alumni Membership Reform* - Make alumni membership free and promote alumni membership to recent high school graduates post-Fall Conference.

✅ Achieved—On August 28, 2021, the membership amended the ACTAA Constitution to outline alumni membership benefits (no voting rights) and the Board of Directors voted to set alumni membership to \$0.00.

- *Alumni Engagement Committee* - Establish a committee dedicated to engaging with recent high school graduates.

✅ Achieved—On August 28, 2021, the membership amended the ACTAA Constitution to establish the Alumni Engagement Committee, and President Box-Higdem appointed members. (Note. No action has developed from the committee since its conception, and consideration for its purpose might need to be reevaluated by ACTAA Leadership.)

- *Alumni Incentive System* - Established an incentive system to reward alumni members for volunteering and judging within the speech and debate community.

 Not Attempted—No progress or sufficient attention has been made on this initiative. As a priority, this initiative should be recommended for inclusion in the 2024 ACTAA in Action strategic planning document.

- *Alumni Database* - Create an alumni database using the ACTAA website to allow for more coordinated judge recruitment efforts.

 Not Attempted—No progress or sufficient attention has been made on this initiative. As a priority, this initiative should be recommended for inclusion in the 2024 ACTAA in Action strategic planning document.

Members of color:

- *Resource Guide for Diverse Literature* - Utilize the website to create a resource guide and database of diverse literature that educators can use in the classroom and students can draw inspiration from in piece development.

 Not Attempted—No progress or sufficient attention has been made on this initiative. As a priority, this initiative should be recommended for inclusion in the 2024 ACTAA in Action strategic planning document.

- *Caucus Group/ Support Network* - Develop caucus groups to allow members within ACTAA to connect and engage with each other in safe spaces on common issues and concerns, and provide a platform to bring issues to leadership as a group.

 In Progress—At the 2022 Summer Workshop, July 10-12, President Box-Higdem led members through a proposal to restructure the Board of Directors to replace appointed-level representatives with discipline representatives elected by the membership. The membership adopted the constitution amendment on August 28, 2022, at the Fall Conference. At the 2023 Fall Conference, caucus meetings were established for members to engage based on discipline led by newly elected representatives. Although discipline caucuses have been established, the development of other identity-based caucuses. As a priority, this initiative should be recommended for inclusion in the 2024 ACTAA in Action strategic planning document.

- *Structural Change to Organization* - Explore structural changes to the organization and design of leadership to better ensure diverse leadership and participation in decision-making.

 Acheived—At the 2022 Summer Workshop, July 10-12, President Box-Higdem led members through a proposal to restructure the Board of Directors to replace

appointed-level representatives with discipline representatives elected by the membership. The membership adopted the constitution amendment. on August 28, 2022, at the Fall Conference.

Members of the LGBTQ+ community:

- *New Logo & Mission Statement* - Revise the logo and mission statement of ACTAA to reflect the organization's commitment to inclusivity and diversity.

✓ Achieved—At the 2022 Summer Workshop, July 10-12, ACTAA Leadership led members through a review of the association's mission statement and the development of a vision statement and core values. The finalized Mission, Vision and Value Statements were presented to the membership for adoption on August 28, 2022, at the Fall Conference. The document included endorsing a new logo that reflected the newly adopted values, which is the value of inclusion. The brand includes colorful speech bubbles overlapping like a Venn diagram to represent the work of ACTAA is at the intersection (or heart) of its four values (critical thinking (think), self-expression (speak), active citizenship (act), and inclusion (include) and four disciplines (Communication, Debate, and Theatre Arts).

- *SafeZone Training* - Consider facilitating and promoting members to being SafeZone certified to provide more inclusive programs and classrooms.

✗ Not Attempted—No progress or sufficient attention has been made on this initiative. On March 14, 2023, Governor Huckabee Sanders signed Act 237 of 2023 into law. Also known as the Arkansas LEARNS Act, the new law established a legal prohibition on the indoctrination of students in public schools and discussion of sex education, sexual orientation, and gender identity without written parental consent. The nature of the law and its application has shifted ACTAA priorities to provide proactive support and advocacy in these topic areas at this time.

- *Guidance for Facilitating Inclusive Team Environments and Tournaments* - Consider utilizing NDSA resources to develop Arkansas-specific guidance and frameworks to assist members in providing more inclusive programs and classrooms.

✓ Achieved—On December 18, 2023, the Board of Directors approved Zackery Tucker (2022-2023 1st Vice President), to draft a professional standards document for membership. Tucker presented a draft document at the Fall Conference, September 7-9, 2023, for member feedback. On December 16, 2023, the Board of Directors considered the proposal and approved for an electronic vote. A unanimous vote was certified on February 12, 2024 by, ACTAA President Brandon Box-Higdem.

- *Outreach to Administrators* - Consider developing materials to share with school administrators state-wide about engaging with students and supporting a more inclusive environment for students and programs.

● Change in Priority—On March 14, 2023, Governor Huckabee Sanders signed Act 237 of 2023 into law. Also known as the Arkansas LEARNS Act, the new law established a legal prohibition on the indoctrination of students in public schools and discussion of sex education, sexual orientation, and gender identity without written parental consent. The nature of the law and its application has shifted ACTAA priorities to provide proactive support and advocacy in these topic areas at this time. (Note. At Fall Conference 2023, the Board of Directors published a statement on discrimination/ indoctrination, and guidance for educators to comply with the law.)

New members of the association:

- *New Teacher Toolbox* - Continue to expand resources made available to new members and new teachers on the website.

● Not Attempted—No progress or sufficient attention has been made on this initiative. As a priority, this initiative should be recommended for inclusion in the 2024 ACTAA in Action strategic planning document.

- *Mentorship Based on Needs* - Reestablish a new member mentor program based on needs communicated by each respective new member.

● Not Attempted—No progress or sufficient attention has been made on this initiative. As a priority, this initiative should be recommended for inclusion in the 2024 ACTAA in Action strategic planning document.

- *Standardized New Member Orientation* - Review how new members are welcomed and introduced to ACTAA, and establish standards for a comprehensive and consistent orientation for all new members.

● Not Attempted—No progress or sufficient attention has been made on this initiative. As a priority, this initiative should be recommended for inclusion in the 2024 ACTAA in Action strategic planning document.

**Report from the  
ACTAA 2021 Summer Workshop  
on Inclusion & Engagement**

**August 13, 2021**

Prepared by  
Zackery Tucker (ASU-Beebe)  
ACTAA 1st Vice President

The following report details recommendations made by members-at-large who participated in a series of working sessions on inclusion and engagement at the 2021 Summer Workshop. Across the three-day conference, forty-plus members participated in eight sessions focused on dialogue of how ACTAA could facilitate better inclusivity and more honest engagement with five different groups of people within the association.

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## **Background on the Report**

In the wake of the national discourse on social justice centered on the public death of George Floyd in the spring of 2020, the ACTAA Executive Council recognized the shortcomings of the association and the need for intentional reflective work to improve the inclusivity of the association to create an environment that welcomes diverse participation from professional educators and students alike. Many organizations, such as the NFHS, NSDA, and its member state associations, have already taken steps to make their staff and operations more culturally diverse. They continue to look for additional ways to do so. Organizations often see the value of cultural diversity in bringing different approaches or solutions to the workplace. At the 2020 Summer Workshop, the Diversity, Ethics, & Inclusion Ad Hoc Committee (hereinafter “the Taskforce”) was established by the Executive Council to be tasked with leading a community-wide discussion on diversity and inclusion and recommending to the association initiatives and substantive changes.

The Taskforce membership was open to any member that attended meetings. In the weeks following the 2020 Summer Workshop, the Taskforce adopted a series of strategies for the association to implement over the next school year, namely:

- *Diversity Panel* - Use the POI “Debate Like A Girl” to center a recorded discussion of the panel. and develop a lesson plan resource for educators to use in the classroom.
- *Book Club* - Organize a monthly or bi-monthly common reader and discussion hosted via Zoom on literature on diversity, inclusion, white fragility & self-reflection.
- *Diversity Page on ACTAA's Website* - Develop a page on ACTAA's Website to share resources and educational content and communicate the association's commitment to diversity & inclusion.
- *Diversity Training for ACTAA Leadership* - Partner with an outside organization (e.g., UCA's Office of Institutional Diversity & Inclusion, etc.) to conduct a series of diversity training for the Executive Council as associational leaders.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its added stress on educators, the focus on these projects and the work of the Taskforce waned over the 2020-2021 academic year.

To ensure a renewed focus on intentionally promoting a more inclusive association and speech & debate community in Arkansas, the 2021 Summer Workshop was dedicated to community conversations about inclusion and engagement within ACTAA. Across the three-day conference, forty-plus members participated in eight sessions focused on dialogue of how ACTAA could facilitate better inclusivity and more honest engagement with five different people groups within the association, namely:

- Student competitors
- Former student competitors (or student alumni)
- Members of color

- Members of the LGBTQ+ community
- New members of the association.

Each session was led by a facilitator through an intentional conversation with the goal to brainstorm pragmatic strategies ACTAA may adopt and support to promote a more inclusive and responsive speech and debate community in Arkansas.

Although, in its isolation, this report does not have the authority to adopt or prioritize the action of the association, the report hopes to document the interest of the membership and continue intentional conversations about making ACTAA more inclusive and responsive to its diverse membership and student populations it indirectly serves.

Throughout nearly 12 hours of discussion, the summer conference resulted in a series of strategies detailed in this report. This report hopes to publicly present the outcome of the 2021 Summer Workshop's Inclusion and Engagement sessions to the membership and to formally report the strategies developed by the membership to the Executive Council for prioritization.

Beyond this report, it is hoped this document will be developed into a "working plan" for the association. With the goal to never be "shelved," but constantly referenced, worked, and updated, as strategies are prioritized, implemented, and achieved continually working toward an inclusive ACTAA and speech & debate community in Arkansas.

## **Rationale for Inclusive Programming**

As the foundation for this report, it is important to outline a rationale for investing in inclusive programming for the membership and readers. It should be understood that ACTAA, like many volunteer non-profits, has limited resources, human capital, and time to invest in a multitude of programming and services for its members that are not core to the mission of the association. This section is written to provide, as an organization, foundational text to justify how inclusive programming is the foundation of the mission of the ACTAA and, as such, an endeavor that must constantly be a priority for the association's resources.

### **The mission of ACTAA.**

Formally, the mission statement of ACTAA is “community of professionals devoted to the rigorous study and ethical practice of oral communication, debate, dance, and theatre arts as an essential discipline, life skill, and art form as components of the core curriculum. Through continuing teacher education, student participation, and scholarly publication, the association supports the efforts and continued growth of communication and theatre arts teachers, students, and researchers.”

The current formal mission statement details what activities might be included for ACTAA in carrying out this mission, including offering “professional development to educators in the areas of, but are not limited to, instructional strategies, lesson plan sharing, building and maintaining a collaborative learning environment, parental involvement, principles of learning, college forums, debate forums, competitive speech forums, curriculum alignment, mentoring/coaching, advocacy and leadership in communication, theatre arts and humanities, and cognitive research.”

Informally, and perhaps more succinctly outlined, the mission of ACTAA might be valued to promote state-wide opportunities for Arkansas’ students to express themselves. Whether the activity is debate, forensics, acting or public speaking, whether it's hosting a competition or supporting local educators in the communication and theater arts in the classroom, whether it's constructing an argument or discovering a piece of literature, or all the above, the more abstract mission and focus of ACTAA might be interpreted to provide students a platform to learn how to positively and professionally formulate their independent feelings and thoughts and how to communicate or express said thoughts to others respectfully.

At the core of the association, self-expression is our mission.

### **Programming for our Students and educators**

The association must agree with the National Federation of High School Associations’ (NFHS) position that "participation in education-based interscholastic [events] fosters involvement of a diverse population." This is one of the NFHS six “We believe” statements in its 2011- 2016

Strategic Plan that highlights the opportunity and value provided by participating in education-based interscholastic athletics and performing arts activities.

The student population of public schools is becoming increasingly diverse in race and ethnicity. According to data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for the 2017-18 school year, more than 82 percent of public school students are part of underrepresented groups. They are students of color, they are female, they are non-binary students, they are students with expendtionaties.

The University of Arkansas' Office of Education Policy, reports in the 2020-2021 school year, only 59.6% of students reported as "white," with 84.2% of students being part of underrepresented groups in Arkansas. In specific regions, where speech and debate are more prominent as interscholarship events, 48.7% of students in Central Arkansas are reported as being "minority (not including females in the ADE definition), and 34.3% are reported as being a minority in Northwest Arkansas.

Just in the focus of racial and ethnic representation, in the 1970s, less than 25 percent of public school students were part of minority racial and ethnic groups. Thus, the percentage of public school students who are members of racial or ethnic minority groups has doubled in the past 40 years. The expectations are that this trend will continue and that by the middle of this century, racial and ethnic "minority" students, or students of color, will be the majority of U.S public school students.

It is obvious that the expectation of ACTAA, and its educators membership, should be that those students who participate in speech, debate, and theater in the state and nation would mirror this public school student diversity. Yet, national or state data doesn't appear to be available to substantiate this.

There is also the question of how much of this diversity student activity participants may experience with their team or group or even in interscholastic competitions. For a variety of reasons, there is still much segregation in living areas between racial and ethnic groups, which can often lead to individual schools with a predominant racial or ethnic makeup and less diversity than the picture painted by the national data of students in public schools. One further complication is that economics is one of the factors for racial and ethnic separation in living areas. Overall, most racial and ethnic minority students live in situations where there is less disposable or discretionary income. This can affect these students' opportunities to participate in school activities. They may not be able to afford the costs associated with interscholastic participation. This may not only include activity fees but also prior costs to develop the skills necessary to make the team or participate in a group. They may also need to work to help support the family or take care of siblings and other children so other family members can work. Transportation difficulties can also limit these students' participation.

Reflecting on these facts, if ACTAA seeks to develop a more inclusive speech and debate community within the state, supporting educators and facilitating conversations to ensure equitable access to decision-making and participation is key.

*“Working in and with diverse groups is an important value of the NFHS and state associations. If diversity is important for those participating in interscholastic athletics and performing arts, it is important that those governing these activities also showcase that diversity in their leadership and among others who represent these organizations to their schools.”*

NFHS Rationale for Minority Inclusion Program, 2019

## **Inclusion & Engagement Recommendations**

Across the three-day Summer Workshop in 2021, forty-plus members participated in eight sessions focused on dialogue of how ACTAA could facilitate better inclusivity and more honest engagement with five different people groups within the association, namely:

- Student competitors
- Former student competitors (or student alumni)
- Members of color
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The following is a summary of the more tangible and thought-out strategies reported to conference attendees during special report-out sessions. For full notes on each break-out session's brainstorming, each session includes a link to a shared document used by the break-out session to capture comments and walk through the brainstorming process.

### **Student competitors**

- *Student Recognition* - Establish an All-State Award process similar to athletics or band/choir with AAA and/or Governor's endorsement. Nominations can be from program directors or state-wide selection.
- *Student Advisory Council* - Establish a student leadership program within ACTAA to facilitate opportunities for students to voice ideas, and concerns, and give their viewpoints on issues with the speech & debate community while providing leadership development training.
- *Expand Social Media* - Expand ACTAA's social media content beyond communication with coaches and members to engage students indirectly served by the community, by hosting content and use student-focused images similar to NSDA.

Full workshop planning worksheet:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uaYBxhTLUK56hBdYAoCoco-zKyLsnOGiVU5LsMaA-s8/edit?usp=sharing>

### **Former student competitors (or student alumni)**

- *Alumni Membership Reform* - Make alumni membership free and promote alumni membership to recent high school graduates post-Fall Conference.
- *Alumni Engagement Committee* - Establish a committee dedicated to engaging with recent high school graduates.
- *Alumni Incentive System* - Established an incentive system to reward alumni members for volunteering and judging within the speech and debate community.

- *Alumni Database* - Create an alumni database using the ACTAA website to allow for more coordinated judge recruitment efforts.

Full workshop planning worksheet:

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### **Members of color**

- *Resource Guide for Diverse Literature* - Utilize the website to create a resource guide and database of diverse literature that educators can use in the classroom and students can draw inspiration from in piece development.
- *Caucus Group/ Support Network* - Develop caucus groups to allow members within ACTAA to connect and engage with each other in safe spaces on common issues and concerns, and provide a platform to bring issues to leadership as a group.
- *Structural Change to Organization* - Explore structural changes to the organization and design of leadership to better ensure diverse leadership and participation in decision-making.

\*The planning worksheet was not used in this session.

### **Members of the LGBTQ+ community**

- *New Logo & Mission Statement* - Revise the logo and mission statement of ACTAA to reflect the organization's commitment to inclusivity and diversity.
- *SafeZone Training* - Consider facilitating and promoting members to being SafeZone certified to provide more inclusive programs and classrooms.
- *Guidance for Facilitating Inclusive Team Environments and Tournaments* - Consider utilizing NDSA resources to develop Arkansas-specific guidance and frameworks to assist members in providing more inclusive programs and classrooms.
- *Outreach to Administrators* - Consider developing materials to share with school administrators state-wide about engaging with students and supporting a more inclusive environment for students and programs.

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### **New members of the association.**

- *New Teacher Toolbox* - Continue to expand resources made available to new members and new teachers on the website.
- *Mentorship Based on Needs* - Reestablish a new member mentor program based on

- needs communicated by each respective new member.
- *Standardized New Member Orientation* - Review how new members are welcomed and introduced to ACTAA, and establish standards for a comprehensive and consistent orientation for all new members.

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