



Profiles

Profile of DeEtta Jones, Vision Speaker at the 34th Annual NASIG Conference

Christian Burris, Profiles Editor

DeEtta Jones was one of the Vision Speakers at the 2019 Annual Conference. She serves as the founder of DeEtta Jones and Associates, which offers in-person and online leadership programs as well as consulting services including management training, D&I strategy, leadership team development, organizational change management, executive coaching, and communication strategy. Her areas of expertise include equity, diversity, and inclusion along with organizational effectiveness and assessment.

I completed my interview with Ms. Jones on March 11, 2020.



Photo Courtesy of DeEtta Jones

How did you get started in the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

I began as an undergraduate in college as a student activist. My mentor developed and taught a course on

leadership that integrated interculturalism and feminist theory. A year after completing that course I was a student co-teacher with her. I became a student of power and oppression and the impacts they have on culture. I also fell in love with understanding culture, from anthropological and sociological perspectives but also organizational culture and the role of leaders.

What are some of the challenges that libraries face in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

We've been pursuing what I call a "deficit-based" model of equity for years, as have many industries. In this model we are constantly looking for "additional" resources to allocate to those groups or individuals with specific needs. Specific needs typically means that there is underrepresentation due to unaddressed barriers to access. The deficit-based model is unsustainable. It relies on a) goodwill, b) consistent goodwill over time, and c) availability of "additional" resources. We don't have "additional" resources for things that are just about goodwill. We have, as do all industries, resources for things that are core and strategic. We have to move equity, diversity and inclusion to "core and strategic"—or as I often say, integrated and sustainable. The even more important challenge with the deficit-based model is that it assumes that certain people or groups have a deficit as compared with the norm. This is also called "centering whiteness", which can go beyond just racial affiliation to include many areas of privilege. In the deficit-based model, the groups with privilege are consistently reinforcing and benefiting from maintaining the dependence (and subservience) of those in nondominant groups.

In sum, our biggest challenge is our lack of ability or willingness to see past the current operating model and to act on new models—a new equity paradigm—that decenters whiteness and shares power.

What is the role of library management in this work?

Library managers are the core of this work. I cannot overstate this. Of any group, managers have the most ability to shift culture. Charismatic and visionary senior leaders are great, but they are few and their portfolios heavily weight external pursuits, such a donor development and capital campaigns. Individual contributors are the majority of the workforce, but they lack cohesion through organizational systems. Siloed structures and unique discipline-based work means that individual contributors have limited access to information that would allow them to see the bigger picture of the organization. Middle managers, on the other hand, are the sweet spot—and most underutilized group of employees in every library I've ever visited.

Middle managers are in the tough position of being individual contributors as well as having responsibility for meeting departmental goals and overseeing the work of others. Further, in the library community, many of our organizations are not structured to identify, develop and incentivize management. Often people become middle managers because they are good at being individual contributors and taking on more responsibility is the only way to get a promotion. That's a tricky model, and many of our organizations have paid the price over the years.

I feel a sense of urgency about transforming our organizational and professional cultures. It is my opinion that well-identified, skilled and capable middle managers are the key to this transformation.

What is a facet of diversity that can be overlooked when libraries address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

I think overlooked is the connection between equity, diversity and inclusion and organizational effectiveness.

EDI has been pigeonholed as something that is separate from the core strategy and functioning of organizations. It is my belief the EDI and overall organizational effectiveness—talent management, human resources, organizational structure, systems and policies—are all interconnected. This interconnection is vital if EDI is going to be sustainable over time, rather than set aside when other priorities emerge.

Unconscious bias has been one factor that comes up during the hiring process. How can libraries address this concern in their procedures?

The major fad right now is unconscious bias training. I think that, alone, misses the point. Just knowing that I have unconscious bias doesn't equip me with alternative behaviors to mitigate its negative impact. In my work I design and encourage clients to use structured tools for intentional intervention in processes where unconscious bias lives and can play out in ways that are problematic. One of the most practical tools I can encourage is an Equity Lens, which I share with clients who seek to have different outcomes related to everything from hiring to tenure.

How does cultural competency play a role in library services?

Cultural competence is like EDI, seen as separate from and in addition to our real work. It's not. Cultural competence is a skill set that is core to effectively working with people and across groups. It begins by understanding the lenses through which I see and make meaning of the world, and then expanding to how those lenses impact how I perceive and interact with others. Cultural competence is like any other skill set, like emotional intelligence or learning how to use the latest version of my iPhone; it takes commitment to learning over and over again, not assuming that one course or one book or having a values statement that mentions EDI is enough.

In libraries we are facing a new era, an era when people are speaking up, organizing, and demanding new levels of cultural competence of individuals and of their

organizations. If we are to seriously demonstrate our stated values, and have a chance at making positive strides with recruitment and retention, a commitment to cultural competence is going to need to be a standard expectation—for all of us.

Do you have any additional comments?

At DeEtta Jones and Associates we've been creating a lot of resources to support the broad introduction and development of cultural competence and inclusive management practices. I encourage you to check out our [Inclusive Manager's Toolkit](#), our signature offering that was designed to meet the specific needs expressed in this article, and by the vast majority of people with whom we work in libraries.