What do we mean by Diversity and Inclusion?
Essentially, every organization will need to answer this question for itself. A starting point however might be to recognize the many distinctions between these two concepts.

Diversity is often referred to as the extent which an organization has people from diverse backgrounds represented throughout. It is recognition of individual differences. These differences can be along the dimensions race, ethnicity, age, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, physical abilities, nationality, language, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic background.

Inclusion on the other hand is seen as the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement of the diversity of an organization, organizational culture, production of art on stage (essentially all of the ways that an individual might connect and interact with the organization, systems, and community) in order to create equal access, well being, and a sense of belonging for all members of the organization.

Inclusive organizations not only have diverse individuals involved but, more importantly, they are learning-centered organizations that value the perspectives and contributions of all people, and they incorporate the needs, assets, and perspectives of women, communities of color, individuals with disabilities and other underrepresented groups into the design and implementation of programming.

Why Diversity and Inclusion? Why Bother? Why now?
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Because we want to create quality art
Historically, some of the most creative periods have emerged when people of different backgrounds have come together. The Renaissance grew in part from the meeting of peoples from the East and the West. America's energy and inventiveness have been attributed to the diversity of thought born from this nation of immigrants. More recently, research has shown that effective diversity management coupled with inclusive work environments improves organizational performance, creativity, and innovation. Employees from varied backgrounds bring different perspectives, ideas and solutions to the workplace that result in new ways of working, new services, and new collaboration.

When organizations tap into the diverse experiences of team members, when employees are trained in team building, decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution, organizations not only uphold the principles of diversity and inclusion, they actually get better results.

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Because we want to hire and retain the very best talent
One of the biggest budget items in any organization is the amount it spends on human resources in the form of salaries, benefits, training, development and recruitment. In order to get a healthy return on it’s investment in
people, an organization must engage in recruitment and retention efforts that focus on acquiring the best and the brightest talent.

Organizations cannot secure the best and brightest talent unless they are willing to reach out broadly to all communities. And organizations cannot keep the best talent with conditions that do not foster inclusion.

➤ Because we want to reduce costs
Environments where all employees feel included and valued yield greater commitment and motivation, which translates into fewer resources spent on employee turnover, grievances and complaints. With these facilitating conditions, the return on hiring the most talented team is maximized. Employees are engaged and productive, resulting in more effective resolution of conflicts, which can save time, increase productivity, and avoid costly litigation and settlements.

➤ Because we want to effectively manage change
If there is one single thing that an organization committed to diversity and inclusion does well, it is to manage change. People in inclusive organizations react more quickly when their environment changes because there is a higher level of communication and collaboration.

Time and time again, research has shown that organizations that are committed to diversity and inclusion find that they end up with employees who are:

- More able to identify and manage conflict
- Look to the future of the organization with optimism
- Exhibit more consensus building and shared decision making skills
- Work collaboratively
- Use more creative problem solving
- Are open to new concepts
- Produce higher quality ideas when brainstorming
- Have higher morale and job satisfaction

➤ Because we value every person within our organization
Most people want to work in an organization that values and strives towards the inclusion of everyone. Employees feel safer when they know they work in a place that strives for equity.

American theater was founded on the spirit of collaboration, an ideal that a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. To gain the maximum benefit from the increasing diversity of our communities, organizations must make every member feel welcome and motivated. It is possible to work better together because of differences, not despite them.

➤ Because we value the diversity of our communities
According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the workforce and broader communities are growing in the number of women, people with disabilities,
people of color and immigrants each year. Currently, 54 million men, women and children have disabilities, but just over one third of working-age Americans with disabilities are employed. This number is expected to increase by ten percent a year as the population ages and the number of residents older than 65 doubles by 2050. By that same year, it is expected that at least 54 percent of the US population will be people of color.

When organizations draw on the wisdom of a workforce that reflects the population they serve, they are better able to understand and meet the needs of their community, donors, and audience members. Diversity and inclusion efforts increase an organization’s capacity to reach out to, and connect with, people who have varying experiences and backgrounds.

➤ Because it is tied to our mission and our values
Ultimately, there is no better reason to work towards diversity and inclusion except that as an organization you are committed to these values and are ready and able to take on the work. It is socially responsible, and for some organizations, it is a moral imperative.

➤ Because we want to change the world
Art inspires us - it propels us to imagine what moments before seemed impossible. Toni Cade Bambara said, the role of the artist is to make the revolution irresistible. The American theater is a part of the ongoing creative tradition that inspires thought and action. Theater that is rich in diversity and fully inclusive will create work that will inspire us to be agents of change – work that will ultimately change the world.

Sources:


