

# Equity, Inclusion and Diversity in Arts & Culture Philanthropy

By Maryse Pearce and Susan Eaton

Grantmakers can redress long-standing inequalities in arts and culture philanthropy by directing more dollars to historically marginalized communities and by adopting strategies that upend traditional funding structures that have excluded artists of color and under-resourced communities. This brief draws upon the numerous recent research studies and reports related to equity, diversity and inclusion in arts funding in order to provide concrete recommendations and elevate inclusionary grantmaking models. We define “arts and culture” broadly to include music, dance, theater, visual arts, and literature as well as podcasts or jewelry making.

**1. The arts help to sustain engaged, healthy and bonded communities and drive constructive social change. This is especially true for historically marginalized communities.**

Peer-reviewed research, roundtable reports, and statements from a wide variety of organizations culminate in a consensus that arts and culture benefit communities and their residents in numerous ways. The benefits seem particularly strong for historically marginalized and racialized communities.

In 2017, Grantmakers in the Arts issued a statement that drew on previous research and noted that arts and culture “play a unique role in witnessing, demonstrating, and providing inspiration to resolve societal inequity and

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injustice.”<sup>1</sup> That same year, the New York City Mayor’s Office and the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs reported that arts and culture can “build camaraderie” and “unite people.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2015, a diverse group of tenant leaders, artists, advocates, funders, and representatives of city agencies gathered at the Rockefeller Foundation in New York to explore ways to use arts and culture to heal and transform New York City’s public housing communities.<sup>3</sup> The roundtable consensus echoed previous research

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on the wide-ranging benefits of community-based arts, particularly for racialized, marginalized, and under-resourced communities. Some of the benefits listed by roundtable participants were: “humanizing residents by acknowledging and celebrating their cultures;” “creating more inclusive spaces for families and children to plug into community activism;” and building community engagement through experiences “that break down isolation.”<sup>4</sup> A 2011 report from the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) concluded that arts and culture “can reflect a society’s customs and fortify its conventions and ideologies or they can catalyze processes of change and propel social and political movements.”<sup>5</sup>

Prior studies have suggested that if art and cultural projects are not developed in collaboration with community residents, they can contribute to gentrification, which is often correlated with displacement of residents.<sup>6</sup> However, meaningful community involvement in design can serve to reduce isolation of community residents and create public gathering spaces. For example, in the San Francisco Bay Area, a community organization called Staying Power painted a mural educating residents about their rights around rent control, eviction, and other housing laws.<sup>7</sup>

Scholars at the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP), based at the University of Pennsylvania, have conducted some of the most compelling research on what they call the “non-economic impact of the arts.” The benefits are particularly strong for urban communities, as shown by research in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Austin, Texas. In a 2017 study, two SIAP-affiliated scholars sought to measure the “social value” of the arts in New York City. They found that “cultural assets” are an important part of a “neighborhood ecology” that promote numerous measures of wellbeing. This is because the arts and culture are an important “means

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1 Grantmakers in the Arts, “Racial Equity in Arts Philanthropy: A Statement of Purpose and Recommendations for Actions,” 2015. Revised 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.giarts.org/sites/default/files/GIA-racial-equity-statement-of-purpose.pdf>

2 New York City, Office of the Mayor & Department of Cultural Affairs, *CreateNYC: A cultural plan for all New Yorkers*, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://createnyc.org/en/home/>

3 Sen, Nayantara, *Creative Transformation: Arts, Culture, and Public Housing Communities*, Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY, 2015.

4 Ibid., 11

5 Sidford, Holly, *Fusing Arts, Culture, and Social Change: High Impact Strategies for Philanthropy*, National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2011, 4.

6 Sen, 4.

7 Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, “New Bay Area mural humanizes housing crisis,” October 18, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/new-bay-area-mural-humanizes-housing-crisis>



through which social connection” is fostered. The researchers also concluded, “Although lower income communities have fewer cultural resources, these resources are more likely to be associated with measurable benefits in other dimensions of wellbeing.”<sup>8</sup>

In May 2018, one of the nation’s largest supporters of the arts, Bloomberg Philanthropies, issued its annual report, which found that its Public Arts Challenge not only offered “new perspectives on important topics” in participating cities but also “engag[ed] the community” and generated \$13 million in economic activity across the participating cities and created more than 800 full- and part-time jobs.<sup>9</sup> In 2018, Bloomberg Philanthropies launched its second Public Art Challenge, again inviting U.S. cities to submit proposals.

## **2. Long-standing inequities in arts funding grow from bias and perceived social hierarchies that need to be identified and redressed.**

The 2011 NCRP report reminds us that arts and culture funding was born out of a desire to preserve “the canon” of classical European music and visual arts and to “validate America’s position as a ‘civilized’ world power.”<sup>10</sup> This narrow definition, NCRP demonstrates, continues to influence contemporary arts funding. For

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8 Seifert, Susan C., and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Wellbeing of New York City's Neighborhoods: The Contribution of Culture and the Arts*, Culture and Social Wellbeing in New York City, 2017, 6-7.

9 Bloomberg Philanthropies, *Annual Report*, May 2018, 42. Retrieved from: <https://annualreport.bloomberg.org/>

10 Sidford, 7.



example, NCRP found that in spite of the numerous nonprofits dedicated to the arts and culture of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and to Native Americans, “distribution of funding does not reflect or respond to this pluralism.”<sup>11</sup> Rather, foundations tend to fund arts and culture organizations that are well established and already have relatively more monetary resources. This tendency greatly disadvantages organizations that focus on the arts and culture of marginalized groups.

On average, African-American and Latinx museums and theater and dance companies have budgets that are 90 percent smaller than their mainstream counterparts and are more likely to run a deficit.

Research on individual donors also reflects bias in favor of well-established, white-led arts and culture organizations. A 2015 report from the DeVos Institute found that arts organizations that primarily serve Black and Latino communities get only 5 percent of their revenue from individual donors. Mainstream arts organizations, meanwhile, receive 30 to 60 percent of their funding from individual philanthropists. The study also found that on average, African-American and Latinx museums and theater and dance companies have budgets that are 90 percent smaller than their mainstream counterparts and are more likely to run a deficit.<sup>12</sup>

11 Sidford, 8.

12 DeVos Institute of Arts Management, “Diversity in the Arts: The Past, Present, and Future of African American and Latino Museums, Dance Companies, and Theater Companies,” Commissioned by University of Maryland, College Park, September 2015.

In separate studies, UPenn's SIAP researchers and research by the New York City's Mayor's Office each documented arts funding inequalities in New York City. In a city known for its world-class arts and cultural attractions, researchers found that unequal distribution of funding correlates with racial and socio-economic differences, with communities of color and low-income communities receiving significantly less funding from both private and public sources. SIAP also found that the lack of arts programming in under-resourced communities does not reflect a lack of interest among people who live in such communities. Rather, it reflects a lack of funding and resources necessary to transform interest into actual programs and events.

### **3. Several foundations and philanthropy-serving organizations are working to counteract these biases and redress inequalities. Promising practice models illuminate paths toward equalizing arts funding.**

In 2017, Grantmakers in the Arts (GIA) updated its statement on racial equity in arts philanthropy. GIA is a 320-member network of funders that advances the use of monetary resources to “support the growth of arts and culture.”<sup>13</sup> Its statement outlined the ways in which structural racism has privileged European art forms and hurt communities of color. GIA pledged to devote resources to educating its staff and board about structural racism and suggested ways grantmakers can educate themselves and consider racial equity in their grantmaking.

The Philadelphia-based Leeway Foundation, for example, aspires to “promote artistic expression that amplifies the voices of those on the margins, promotes sustainable and healthy communities and works in the service of movements for economic and social justice.”<sup>14</sup> Leeway's 2017 grantees include an author and illustrator of children's books about gender non-conforming children of color, a metalworker who teaches jewelry-making classes to the Latinx community, and a filmmaker working on a documentary about depression and mental illness in the local Black community.

In Memphis, Tennessee, the grantmaker and arts program provider Memphis Music Initiative (MMI) models philanthropy that actively remedies what a 2018 report calls “the gross maldistribution of Memphis's abundant resources.”<sup>15</sup> MMI provides in-school music programming of many types through partnerships with local musicians, students and school leadership. It also offers grants to arts organizations to expand out-of-school programs by remedying historical barriers to such opportunities and investing in planning support, transportation and program growth. Additionally, MMI provides consulting support for executive-level leadership of organizations that primarily serve communities of color.

### **4. A review of the research, reports, and experience on the ground leads us to make recommendations designed to reverse historical and contemporary inequalities in funding so that the well-documented benefits of arts and culture can be more widely shared.**

The Memphis Music Initiative, discussed above, offers the model of disruptive philanthropy as a frame for creating and evaluating efforts designed to redress funding inequalities in arts and culture philanthropy. A 2018 report about MMI describes disruptive philanthropy as a practice that intentionally “reveals, critiques,

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13 Grantmakers in the Arts, *Annual Report*, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.giarts.org/annual-reports>

14 The Leeway Foundation, “Our Mission, Vision, & Values.” Retrieved from: <https://www.leeway.org/about/mission/>

15 Burden-Stelly, Charisse, Jarvis Givens, and Elizabeth Burden, *Toward the Future of Arts Philanthropy: The Disruptive Vision of the Memphis Music Initiative*, Participation INK, 2018, 28. Retrieved from: <http://memphismusicinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/MMI-Disruptive-Philanthropy-Study.pdf>

challenges, and seeks to upend philanthropic redlining.”<sup>16</sup> The report’s authors describe philanthropic redlining as a set of funding practices “in which an organization’s size, racial or ethnic constitution, demographic served or artistic designation (eg: high art vs. community art) or location results in being excluded from funding, receiving relatively less in funding or in short-term funding that does not help organizations and artists build more power.”<sup>17</sup> We believe the following recommendations align with the disruptive philanthropy model.

## **Recommendation 1:** *Democratize funding processes and requirements*

The standard industry process for applying for foundation grants is to submit a letter of inquiry and then, if invited, a full proposal. In June 2018, the Foundation Center’s database showed that of the nearly 5,000 foundations that fund the arts in New York State, only 23 percent accept proposals. The remainder are designated “invitation-only” meaning an organization needs to have an existing relationship with a foundation or be lucky enough to be discovered by them. This process favors organizations that are well established or that have the staff resources to dedicate to research and proposal writing. But there are many other ways to seek out and evaluate potential grantees. This might include interviews with foundation staff or videos as substitutes to formal letters of inquiry or long proposals.

The Metropolitan Nashville Arts Commission created a simplified application form for first time applicants and also offers online tutorials and in-person workshops to help prospective grantees with the process.<sup>18</sup> This initiative, called Thrive, funded 200 artists in its first year, 67 percent of them artists of color. The Seattle Office of Arts and Culture awards grant applicants additional points for working with underserved communities or having a diverse board and staff.<sup>19</sup>

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In 2017 the think tank PolicyLink released recommendations for supporting arts and culture in communities of color that also included the suggestion that government agencies “address barriers in grant application processes to enable arts and culture organizations who serve underserved communities to successfully compete for funds.”<sup>20</sup> The success of funding agencies such as the Nashville Arts Commission shows that when a funder takes the time to meet people and organizations where they are, a funding portfolio can change.

## **Recommendation 2:** *Check assumptions, norms and biases*

Acknowledge the subjective nature of assigning value to various forms of arts and culture and that your position in society, and socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, may affect those judgments and tastes. Some grantmakers, for

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16 Ibid., 18.

17 Ibid., 18.

18 Rose, Kalima, Milly Hawk Daniel, and Jeremy Liu, *Creating Change Through Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development: A Policy and Practice Primer*, PolicyLink, 2017, 13.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 14.

example, may not view particular art forms that emerge from communities of color as “art” in a traditional sense because they are embedded in religious or cultural practices. These biases may also lead some arts funders to focus primarily upon creating more affordability and access for people of color and people from low-income communities to traditional mainstream institutions such as the symphony. It is surely important to ensure equal access to all cultural institutions. But it is equally important to fund forms of arts and culture and institutions both that resonate with people from communities of color and that are created by people who live in the communities.



### **Recommendation 3:** ***Redefine art — Expand “arts” funding to non-arts organizations***

Many organizations that provide arts and cultural programming may not define themselves primarily as arts organizations. As SIAP researchers found in New York City and other urban centers, many providers of art and cultural programming are immigrant/ethnic/religious organizations, libraries, or civic organizations. For example, the New York City Housing Authority, which oversees public housing, also provides arts programming to residents.<sup>21</sup> Not fitting neatly into a category can stymie organizations seeking funding, especially if they aspire to use arts to further other goals such as youth development, racial justice, or enrichment of the lives of seniors. But funding arts to realize other important social goals can also create more alignment for funders who may not see themselves as “arts” funders.

### **Recommendation 4:** ***Invest in neighborhood cohorts***

As the 2015 DeVos Institute report shows, many Black and Latinx organizations receive relatively small program grants.<sup>22</sup> To reverse this trend and to engender sustainability, foundations could create grantee cohorts in traditionally underserved communities and neighborhoods. This neighborhood cohort approach has been used successfully by foundations for decades for a variety of reasons, such as achieving efficiency and promoting collaboration. For example, Unbound Philanthropy’s Good Neighbor Committee, a staff initiative dedicated to grantmaking in the New York City metro, sought to reduce gang violence in central Long Island by supporting several organizations that were working on the problem from different angles. These included a youth development organization and a parent advocacy organization. The Memphis Music Initiative uses community cohort grants to support “innovation spaces” in collaboration with nonprofit organizations, community leaders and musicians.<sup>23</sup> The Heinz Endowments launched its “Advancing Black Arts in

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21 Sen.

22 DeVos Institute.

23 Burden-Stelly, 30.

Pittsburgh” program in 2011 to sustain Black arts and culture organizations, support individual artists and build connections across the arts sector.<sup>24</sup>

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## A final word

In our increasingly divided society, the case for more equitable, inclusive and diverse arts and cultural programming has never been stronger. Art can be affirming and empowering as a mirror to an individual’s or a group’s experiences. As a window into other worlds, it can also encourage empathy and understanding. In 2018, our elected leaders routinely scapegoat marginalized groups while partisan news outlets and social media reinforce beliefs we already have. Arts and cultural programming can surely spur economic development. But, in the best of cases, arts and culture also have the power to build kinship, and to challenge, surprise, uplift and unite us in our humanity.

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24 The Pittsburgh Foundation and Heinz Endowments, “Advancing Black Art in Pittsburgh,” 2011. Retrieved from: <http://www.heinz.org/UserFiles/File/Black%20Art%20in%20Pittsburgh/Advancing%20Black%20Art%20in%20Pittsburgh%20Program%20Description.pdf>

## SOCIAL JUSTICE FUNDER OPPORTUNITY BRIEFS

draw upon research, policy analysis and practitioner experience to identify promising grantmaking opportunities that aspire to create a fairer, more inclusive and more equitable society.

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