

EXAMINING CULTURAL EQUITY IN THE ARTS

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Examining Cultural Equity in the Arts

Defining the Cultural Equity Gap

There is a “cultural equity gap” within the United States arts landscape. This equity gap constitutes the unequal representation in the arts of various identities,¹ including, but not limited to: race, disability, gender, sexual orientation and socio-economic status (class).² The cultural equity gap arises from a systemic inequity in access to the arts, as well as access to positions of power within the arts.

In 2013, Americans for the Arts published a study on arts managers across the U.S., finding that 86% of all respondents, and 92% of CEOs, self-identified as white, with 72% identifying as female.³ In 2015, Grantmakers in the Arts conducted an exploratory demographic study of arts managers, finding that 78% of respondents self-identified as white, 77% as female, 12% as part of the disability community, and 14% as part of the LGBTQIA+⁴ community.⁵ Comparatively, 2016 U.S. census data report the population as 61% “white alone”⁶ and 50.8% female.⁷ 2010 U.S. census data report 19% of the U.S. population as part of the disability community⁸ and a 2016 report by the Williams Institute showed 3.8% of the U.S. population as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.⁹

Both the Americans for the Arts and Grantmakers in the Arts studies show an underrepresentation of non-white identifying arts managers. Further, the Grantmakers in the Arts study shows an underrepresentation of people with disabilities as arts managers. This data also indicates an overrepresentation of females and LGBTQIA+ identifying arts managers; it is, however, unclear if female and LGBTQIA+ identifying members hold positions of power within the industry, particularly at high levels of leadership. In other words, representation within the industry alone is not adequate for equality if there is still an imbalance of power.

The inequities found within arts management, which is the focus of these studies, only illuminate a small scope of the greater inequities within the arts, as seen and reproduced in academia, artist sales, and donor and foundation demographics and priorities. Recognizing inequities in access to the field, as well as to positions of power within the arts industry, Americans for the Arts published a statement on cultural equity in 2016, defining it as:

... embodying the values, policies, and practices that ensure that all people—including but not limited to those who have been historically underrepresented based on race/ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion... —are represented in the development of arts policy; the support of artists; the nurturing of accessible, thriving venues for expression; and the fair distribution of programmatic, financial, and informational resources.¹⁰

Releasing this statement on cultural equity was a seminal step for the field as it named the various identities of historically underrepresented individuals and groups. However, there is still a large gap in baseline demographic data in the arts, as well as lack of understanding as to how these terms are conceptualized and operationalized within the arts industry.

Objectives & Questions

In an effort to draw attention to this cultural equity gap, Arts Connect International (ACI) and the School for Global Inclusion and Social Development at the University of Massachusetts Boston conducted a baseline attitudinal study in 2017, which aimed to: 1) elucidate influencers' understanding of the cultural equity gap and, 2) understand if influencers are motivated to eradicate the cultural equity gap.¹¹

This study led to an examination of the barriers to access, focusing on the systemic reasons that perpetuate the cultural equity gap's existence, seeking to better articulate why it persists. In addition, the study examined levers for change, focusing on forward oriented action (i.e. on how to eradicate the gap).

For the purposes of this study, influencers were defined as leaders in the arts world who hold institutional decision-making power. This includes arts managers, educators, funders, board members, individual artists, universities, small non-profits, large non-profits, museums, foundations, for-profit companies and government. Further, when referring to the arts landscape, this includes all the spaces and seats which said influencers occupy, taking a field level perspective.

Methods & Recruitment

The study employed community-based participatory action research and a transdisciplinary mixed-methodological approach.¹² This research produced qualitative and quantitative data through a national survey and Boston-based focus groups.

The research team used SurveyMonkey to conduct the national survey, which was open to participants for three weeks in July 2017, and which received 332 complete responses. Arts Connect International distributed the survey electronically through their social media, as well as by asking community partners to disseminate it, providing sample tweets and posts. The research team incentivized participation by offering a random drawing that rewarded three respondents with \$100 each.

The focus groups took place over six weeks in the summer of 2017, bringing together 39 Boston arts influencers who represented 29 different organizations and institutions, spanning for-profits, universities, small non-profits, large non-profits, funders, government, sole proprietors and museums. There were six focus groups, each lasting approximately 90 minutes.

ACI intentionally recruited organizations and leaders who are often underrepresented in power conversations, ensuring representation of both smaller community-contextualized organizations and arts leaders of color, along with standard power brokers (i.e. funders, government, etc). ACI sent printed invitations via the mail and follow-up correspondence took place via email. The focus groups did not have paid advertisement outside of the printed invitations, but were incentivized with a random drawing that rewarded two participants with \$100 each.

The research team coded the qualitative data using Nvivo software, employing splitting methodology with multiple researchers, thus ensuring inter-coder reliability throughout. The research team input the quantitative data into SPSS software for statistical multi-variant analysis. This study was supported by the Social Science Research Center and the University of Massachusetts's Dissertation Proposal Development Program, funded by the Andrew Mellon Foundation.

Findings

National Survey

The national survey provided insights from a sample size of 332 respondents. Of the respondents, 85% currently work in the arts, 15% previously worked in the arts, 43% work as arts managers, 25% as artists, 14% as curators, and 16% as arts educators. Additionally, 70% are from Massachusetts, 22% identify as people of color, 77% identify as female and 17% identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Regarding experience, 35% have more than 15 years of experience in the field, 15% have 10-15 years of experience, 25% have 5-10 years of experience, and 26% have less than 5 years of experience.

332
respondents
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in the arts

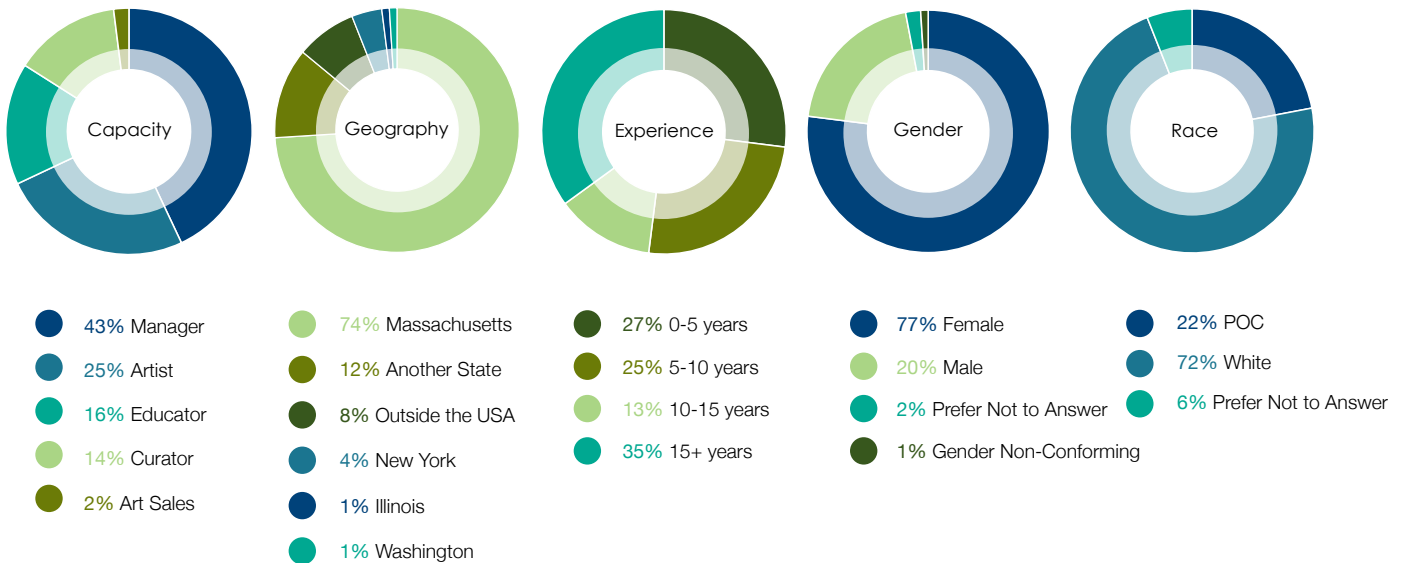


Figure 1: Demographic Distribution of National Survey Respondents

When asked if there is a cultural equity gap in the U.S., 91% of respondents affirmed that there is a gap and 90% of those respondents said that it is important to work to close the cultural equity gap. Further, 92% of survey respondents cited that art is a tool for social change, with several respondents writing in descriptive information on how this manifests in their own lives and work.

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Representation

To get a baseline understanding of perception in the field, the survey asked respondents to rate visibility (representation) of the following categories on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = no representation and 5 = over representation, for: a) people of color (POC), b) people with disabilities, c) women, d) LGBTQIA+ identifying, and e) diverse socio-economic status.

The survey yielded results with a high degree of statistical significance. These findings indicate that all of the above categories lack representation in the arts, with people with disabilities (1.6) being the least visible followed by people of diverse socio-economic status (1.9), people of color (2.1), people identifying as part of the LGBTQIA+ community (2.4), then women-identifying (2.7). For this question, a mean score of 3 would indicate equal representation, thus all five identities were reported as being underrepresented within the arts field.

5 Point Likert Scale

- 5 = over
- 4 = strong
- 3 = equal
- 2 = some
- 1 = none

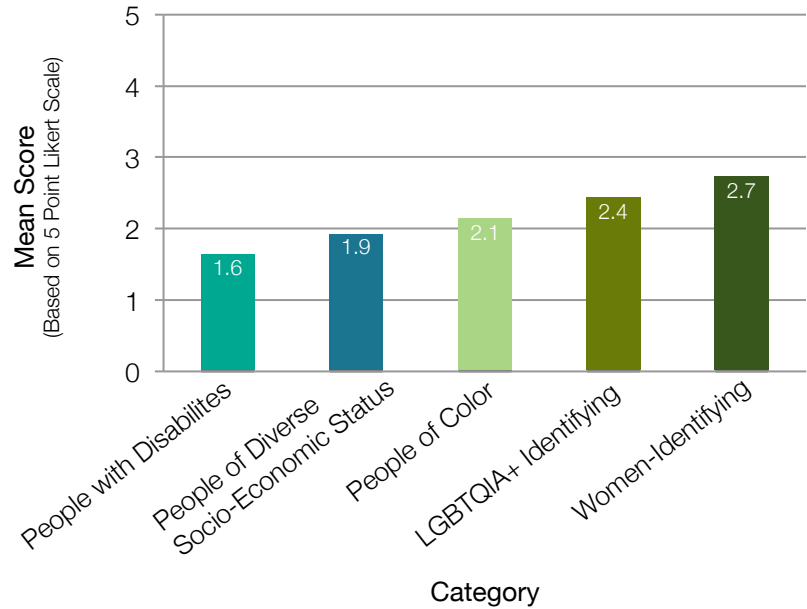


Figure 2: Perceptions of Representation

Areas of Focus

The survey asked respondents to choose the most vital area of focus for reducing the cultural equity gap. The research team structured the question to reflect the priority areas set forth in the Americans for the Arts statement on cultural equity,¹³ which include: race, socio-economic status (class), gender, disability, LGBTQIA+, age, nationality, geography, and religion. Respondents' first prioritized race and socio-economic status (class), followed by gender and disability, LGBTQIA+, age, nationality and geography, then religion.

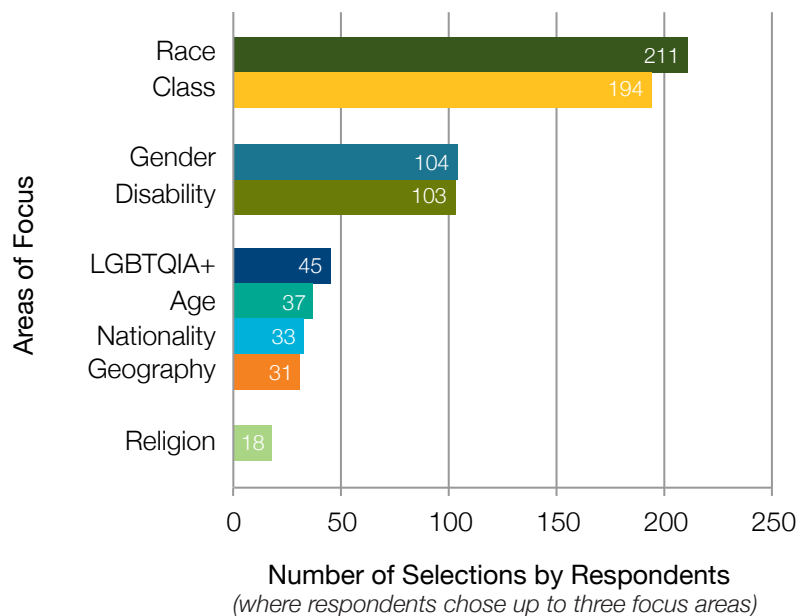


Figure 3: Areas of Focus

There was significant difference between how POC-identifying and white-identifying respondents rated socio-economic status, with white-identifying respondents rating socio-economic status significantly higher. Additionally, the data show that LGBTQIA+ identifying respondents were 13% more likely to identify LGBTQIA+ equity as a focus area.

There is a surprising disconnect between how disability was identified, as it was identified as the least represented within the arts landscape, and yet is fourth in areas of prioritization for focus in closing the cultural equity gap. This appears to be potential cognitive dissonance amongst respondents, self-prioritization, or is perhaps indicative of trending exposure to social issues.

Levers for Change

Lastly, using another Likert five-point scale, the survey asked respondents to rate the perceived efficacy of nine levers for change (i.e. ways to build equity), where 1 = not effective and 5 = exceptionally effective. The survey randomized options to avoid bias. Respondents were asked about the following levers:

- increased access to education in the arts
- increased support in effective recruitment and retention of diverse, qualified candidates for positions
- increased equitable funding (i.e. access to capital) in the arts
- increased funding for entry level positions in the arts
- increased representation of marginalized communities within the arts
- increased exposure for underrepresented communities
- increased capacity of organizations and institutions to include and encompass all community members
- increased access to gateway internships
- increased entrepreneurial training for emerging artists

The survey yielded statistically significant findings, with three tiers of priorities emerging, listed here from highest to least perceived efficacy:

Tier 1: recruitment & retention, equitable distribution of funding, and education

Tier 2: representation, exposure, capacity of institutions, and increase to entry level funding

Tier 3: gateway internships and entrepreneurial training

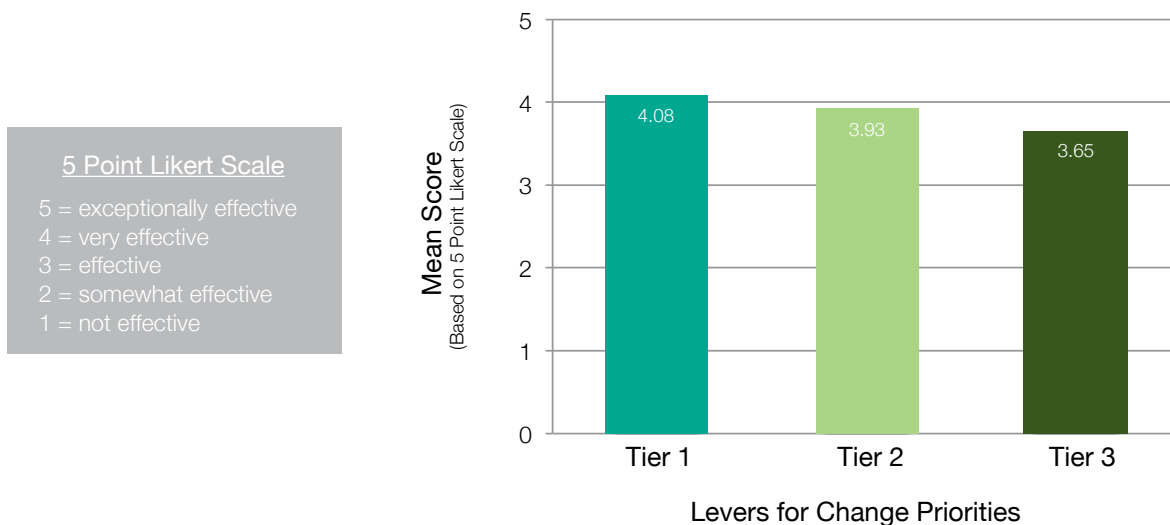


Figure 4: Levers for Change Priorities

The data also suggest that the number of years worked in the field significantly impacts perceptions of efficacy for the following levers of change:

- equitable distribution of funding
- organizational capacity
- recruitment and retention
- representation

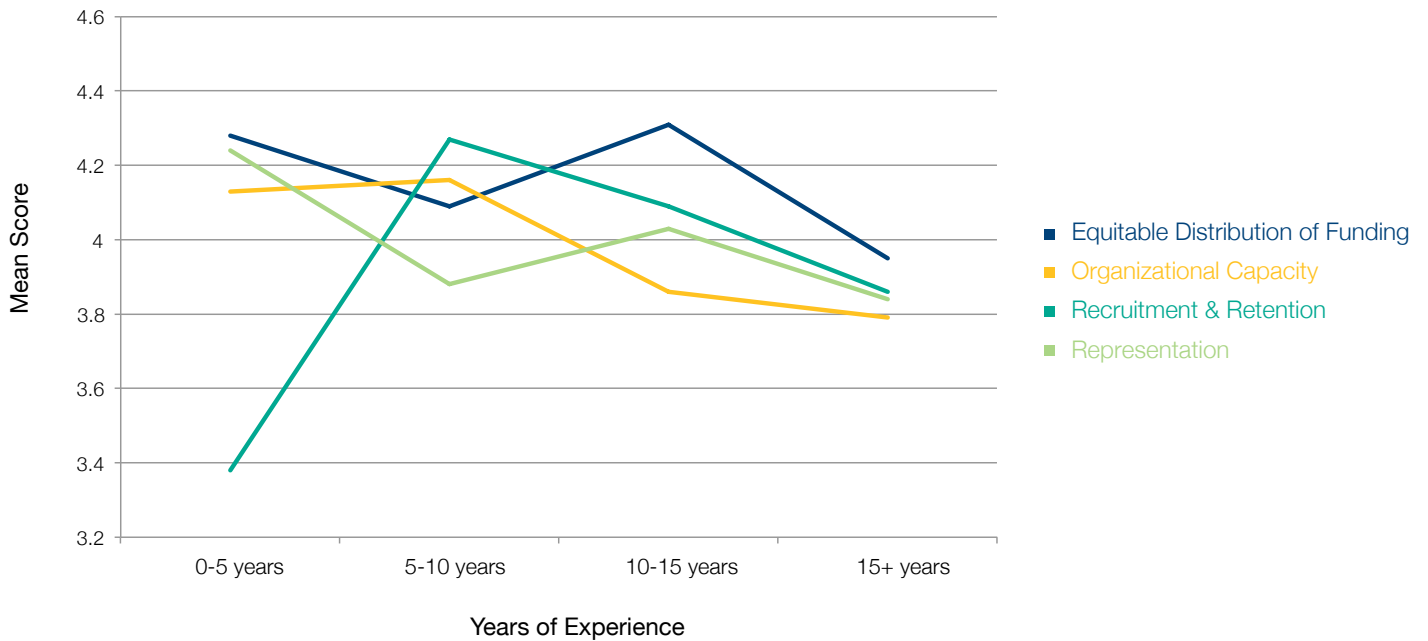


Figure 5: Years Worked in the Field & Levers for Change

Findings indicate that respondents who had spent less time in the field were overall more optimistic for the efficacy of the levers for change, with the exception of recruitment and retention, which was significantly lower. Interestingly, there was a smaller divide in perceived efficacy of the various levers in the 15+ years of experience group.

Further analysis also showed a significant difference around the most efficacious levers for change, with POC-identifying people selecting education and increased equitable funding as more efficacious than white-identifying respondents. Additionally, LGBTQIA+-identifying respondents chose access to gateway internships as more efficacious than did straight identifying respondents. Likewise, female-identifying respondents ranked recruitment and retention efficacy significantly higher than male identifying respondents.

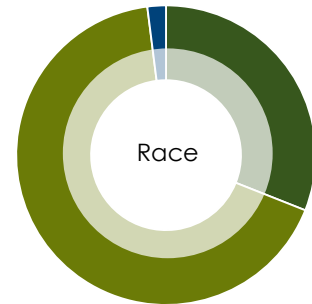
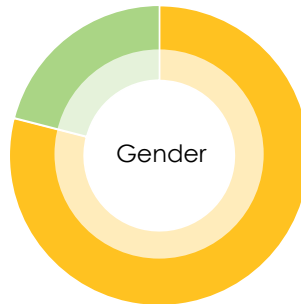
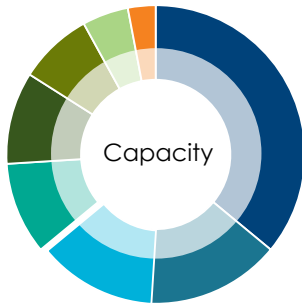
National Survey Summary

In sum, the national survey found that equity needs to be addressed within the arts. The perceived efficacy of specific tactics and the barriers to access depended on how long someone has been in the field, as well as their identification across lines of gender, race, and sexual orientation. In the aggregate, the greatest perceived underrepresentation within the arts field was people with disabilities and people of color. Further, the strongest perceived levers for change to address inequities within the arts were recruitment and retention, equitable distribution of funding, and education.

Focus Groups

The focus groups provided insights from 39 arts influencers.¹⁴ Of these influencers, 36% work in small non-profits, 15% work for foundations, 13% work in museums, 10% work in large non-profits, 10% work for the government, 8% work for universities, 5% are sole proprietors, and 3% work for for-profit companies. 31% identify as a person of color and 79% identify as female.

39
arts
influencers



- 36% Small Non-Profit
- 15% Foundation
- 13% Museum
- 10% Large Non-Profit
- 10% Government
- 8% Universities
- 5% Sole Proprietor
- 3% For-Profit Companies

- 79% Female
- 21% Male

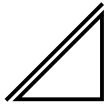
- 31% POC
- 67% White
- 2% Prefer Not to Answer

Figure 6: Demographic of Focus Group Respondents

A semi-structured interview schedule guided conversations, with two initial focus areas: **barriers to access** and **levers for change**. Language emerged as a pressing third area for reflection and analysis.

29
unique
organizations &
institutions

Barriers to Access



Examining barriers to access, three key themes emerged: 1) lack of representation, 2) inequity in funding and capital, and 3) inequity in educational access. These three barriers relate to one another in a domino effect, where one leads to the other.

Lack of representation includes a lack of:

- visibility within the workforce
- visibility in top level positions, both within organizations and on boards
- visibility in hiring pools
- diverse mentors and role models
- diverse artists and museum collections
- audience diversity
- diversity in programs and program design
- diversity amongst people pursuing arts degrees
- demographic data in research

At its core, representation matters because if one does not see themselves reflected in a space it is very difficult to imagine assuming a formal role or position there. As one arts influencer described, “The clear sign of when I (as a person of color) tap out of the game... When I am not represented in these spaces I know two things—first that that space is not made for me, and second that I won’t have the support I need to be successful.” If a space, both physical and metaphorical, is not created with intersectional diversity and representation at its core (or is built around priorities of a single demographic) it becomes an assimilatory instead of inclusive space, i.e. one that demands conformity in order to have a seat at the table.

When discussing inequity within funding and capital on a macro level, the arts are described as marginalized and not seen as a priority compared to other fields, citing that jobs in the arts tend not to pay as well as other comparable fields. When it came to examining the distribution of resources, influencers cited that there are inequities related to government funding, within and to schools, and amongst small and large organizations in Boston. When referring to funding and payment for artists with disabilities, there was concern about losing healthcare and disability benefits as related to payment for work. Further, social networks (in-person and virtual relationships) were seen as driving funding and capital access. This is incredibly important, particularly as it relates to obtaining executive management positions, which are largely focused on fundraising. Discussions about valuation of the arts also came through, especially in relationship to how certain art forms, like hip hop and rap, are less likely to be monetarily supported by traditional non-profits and government entities than other more Eurocentric art forms, like the ballet and opera, for example.



At its core, representation matters because if one does not see themselves reflected in a space it is very difficult to imagine assuming a formal role or position there.

This investment in art forms shows a hegemonic valuation of culture as it is tied to capital within the arts ecosystem. Lastly, there was a distinct thread of conversation surrounding unpaid internships within the arts as a ubiquitous and problematic practice. This was seen as deeply tied to recruitment and retention as well, where if an individual cannot afford to work for free, it is nearly impossible for them to gain entry into the field as an intern, which significantly reduces social capital and connections, as well as credentialing.

Tied to these barriers to access, is access to education. Education was described as inaccessible due to cost and lack of opportunity, with participants citing inherent inequities from a young age with geographical and funding distribution amongst schools in Boston. This nods to structural problems in K-12 education, which extend through to advanced studies. Participants articulated that advanced degrees face structural problems, both in how they are created through a Eurocentric lens (i.e. in prioritization of art form) as well as in their applicability to the job market. There was a perceived disconnect between academic credentialing and job placement, particularly in relationship to pay scale. In other words, there was little to no perceived pay bump for advanced degrees, but rather advanced degrees were an assumed threshold for most arts management positions. Given the cost of advanced arts degrees, respondents suggested this could present a barrier to access for a number of aspiring arts leaders. In addition, influencers also discussed a lack of representation of mentorship and teachers in educational spaces. Further, there was explicit conversation about micro-aggressions within education, which played a large role in creating barriers to access, indicating a potential need for training of influencers.

These three barriers to access are interconnected in a multiplicity of ways, with several reinforcing feedback loops creating a cycle of inaccessibility.

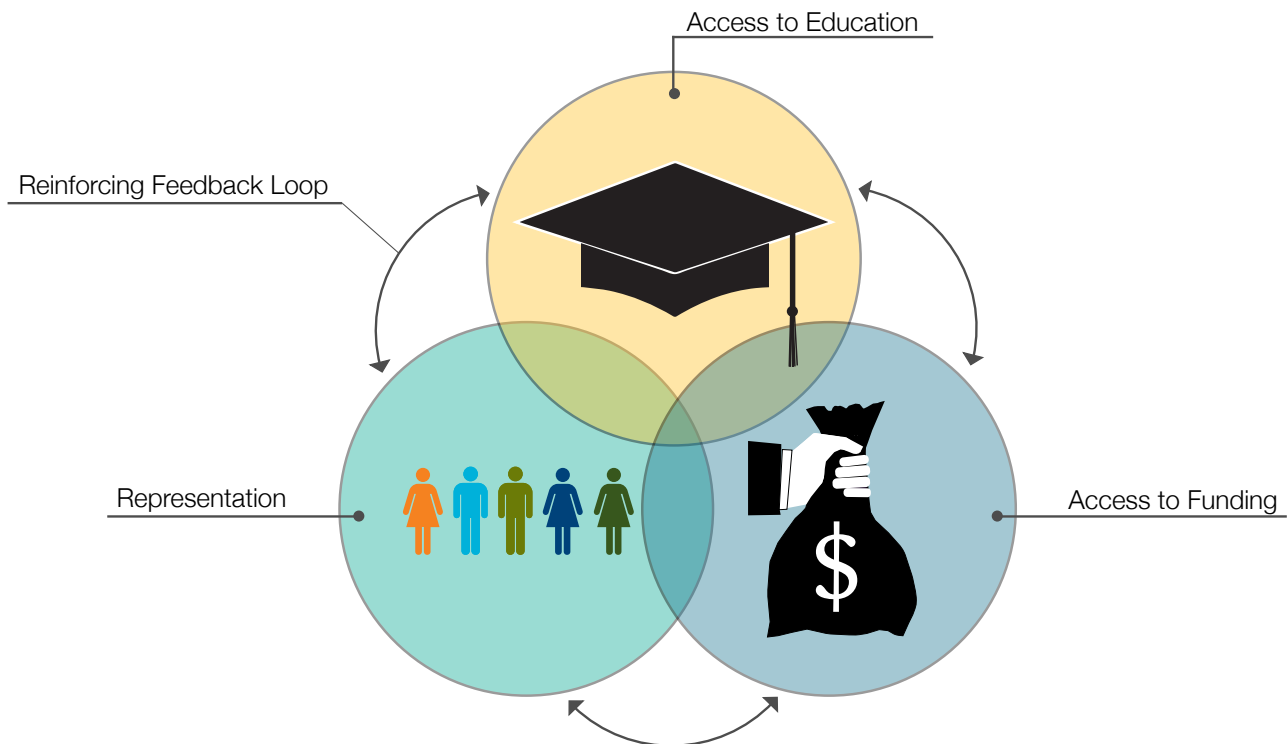


Figure 7: Reinforcing Feedback Loops

Levers for Change



Levers for change examine potential areas to engage and actions to take in order to close the cultural equity gap. When discussing levers for change, influencers identified three main ways to spark positive change: 1) training of influencers, 2) increased representation, and 3) training of emergent leaders.

Training of influencers entails effective diversity, equity, and inclusion training that can challenge organizations (particularly senior management and board members) to adopt best practices in cultural competence, cultural humility, and authentic inclusion. This includes raising awareness about the cultural equity gap in general, specifically around language and terminology, so as to avoid codification and micro-aggressions. This work is specific to individuals and organizations and should focus on their unique context, as well as the evolution of personal and intersectional identities.

Increased representation entails having more diverse and reflective leadership where decisions are being made, particularly at the highest levels. This includes diversification of boards and senior leadership across organizations. Increased representation of diverse mentors was also stated as efficacious, as was more visibility in programming. There is an overarching discourse of moving away from a deficit to asset-based lens, looking at the contributions of communities and individuals as opposed to the things that are missing. This is a shift in espoused philanthropic values, which often create hierarchies between individuals and communities as those served and serving. An asset-based lens creates a more lateral leadership style, one that is shared and less hierarchical, leading to more inclusive and equitable structures and relationships.

Training of emergent leaders was discussed as an efficacious lever for change with gateway internships and access to social networks, both of which are seen as components to higher levels of leadership later in one's career. For artists, there is discussion of developing more entrepreneurial skill sets, and looking at business models for success. A shift was also described in moving away from formal education credentialing due to cost and time, creating the need for increased informal training opportunities. Further, it was stated that hard skills, such as management skills, should be embedded in arts degrees. Influencers of color in the focus groups also spoke distinctly about being ready to take on the higher-level positions, that they were trained thoroughly, but that there was a lack of turnover within the industry to occupy said positions.



A shift was also described in moving away from formal education credentialing due to cost and time, creating the need for increased informal training opportunities. Further, it was stated that hard skills, such as management skills, should be embedded in arts degrees.

Language



Although we did not set out to examine language, throughout the focus groups it became apparent that this area requires focus, as influencers rely on coded and ambiguous language. This poses a problem because ambiguity creates difficulty in building understanding, which manifests in a lack of specificity in who is being addressed and included or excluded. For example, “culture” was often used to describe race, and “urban” and “inner city” were used to describe race and socio-economic status. Further, there was great variance in understanding of the cultural equity gap and cultural equity as a concept. During focus groups, influencers were directly asked to define diversity, equity, and inclusion. There were wide-ranging definitions of these words, which provided for rich interpretation, and yet little congruence in understanding of what the terms actually mean. When referring to the disability community, it was incredibly difficult to understand who was actually included within this defined group. Further, intersectionality, as a term, was used consistently, but often out of context — failing to reference identity. It is therefore apparent that this space requires focus when working on trainings with the influencer population.

Focus Group Summary

From focus group transcripts, it is clear that influencers are aware that there is a cultural equity gap and that they can easily identify gaps from multiple perspectives. However, when it comes to addressing the gap, the sector is less consistent on corrective action. There was also variation in suggested levers for change based on race, institution, and experience level of the influencers interviewed. Influencers seem overwhelmed by the system-wide changes that need to occur and seem wanting for actionable steps and accountability measures to motivate and guide their progress.

Across the focus groups, funding and funders were brought up in every discussion, as was the importance of reporting board and staff demographics to funders. This also instigates funders to take action, allocating funding based on the diversity and inclusive practices of an organization. This research points towards influencers pushing beyond the mindset of solely having diverse representation in an organization, to a mindset of co-building an equitable and inclusive environment that is sustainable and welcoming for a wider set of community members.

Lastly, unpaid internships within the industry came across as a systemic inequity in every group, creating a clear call to action for immediate remediation.



This research points towards influencers pushing beyond the mindset of solely having diverse representation in an organization, to a mindset of co-building an equitable and inclusive environment that is sustainable and welcoming for a wider set of community members.

Next Steps & Call to Action

Throughout the study, the largest call to action was in moving the locus away from being solely on the individual and their training, to instead focusing on deep-rooted and systemic organizational reform for addressing the cultural equity gap. This places the onus on the influencers within the arts industry to “do the work,” and it is difficult work that challenges the hegemonic power structures which are so deeply rooted. These data help us to hold a mirror up to reflect on our attitudes, perceptions, and biases as an industry in addressing the cultural equity gap. Further, the study demonstrated that across the arts industry, influencers deeply care about making actionable steps towards change, even if they are not sure exactly what steps to take.

To that end, the following is a list of potential measures for moving forward. Arts Connect International and the authors of this study offer them as a starting point for discussion, with a call for leadership to co-create these solutions. It will take coordinated and system-wide efforts to create actionable and sustainable change.

Big Ideas for Change

<p>The creation of a representation inventory for the arts industry—a human rights score card—through which individuals and organizations can identify and track areas of equity they need to focus on, and which they are focusing on. This includes efforts and outcomes.</p>	<p>Creation of awards for beacons of excellence in the arts industry surrounding equity, diversity, and inclusion. The School for Global Inclusion & Social Development at the University of Massachusetts Boston does a similar “Beacon Awards” annually, across multiple sectors.</p>	<p>Creation of an “Equity Toolkit” specific to the arts industry, with variability for funders, boards, and organizational structures. This could include a series of case studies, best practices within the industry and from other sectors, as well as processes to support building equity.</p>
<p>Creation of an internship access pipeline program that trains both the incoming interns and the institutions, focusing on essential skills for both to be successful in partnership.</p>	<p>Workshops and taskforce creation around equity statements for each organization with SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound). This could be modeled after equity statements from both Grantmakers in the Arts and Americans for the Arts.</p>	<p>Secondary study focused on understanding barriers to access, and levers for change, focused specifically on emerging and established artist leaders of color, artists with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ artists.</p>
<p>Continued conscious elevation of counter-narratives that are often left out of public discourse, both with public programming, and internally within organizations.</p>		<p>Work with local partners to incubate programs and ideas towards equity, creating case studies that elucidate sticky points and difficulties while highlighting successful implementations. Working groups could be created to solve these sticky points.</p>

Limitations of the Study

This is only Phase I of a two-phase study; thus the present report illustrates only half of the perspective necessary. Phase II will focus on perspectives and knowledge held by artist leaders of color, artists with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ artists, whether emerging or established. Regrettably, we did not ask survey nor focus group participants to disclose if they identify as part of the disability community, which is essential for understanding representation within the arts landscape from an intersectional lens. The research team will be highly cognizant of doing so in future studies.

About the Authors

Marian Taylor Brown is the Founder and Executive Director of Arts Connect International, a studio artist, and a Ph.D. candidate in Global Inclusion & Social Development at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She has worked at the nexus of art and equity nationally and internationally, focused on public health, education access, inclusive educational practices, racial justice and disability rights. Brown earned her Ed.M. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and her B.A. from Colorado College.

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Acknowledgements & Gratitude

Many thanks to all of the individual leaders and organizations who participated in this study. Your generosity of time and knowledge, as well as your commitment to closing the cultural equity gap, are seen, appreciated, felt and held with great value. We look forward to continuing this important work together.

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Endless gratitude for the Arts Connect International family and community that tirelessly work to promote equity in, and through, the arts on a daily basis. Particular gratitude and recognition to ACI's artist leaders who are leading the charge in this work.



Endnotes

¹ These multiple identities can be explored through Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality, which maps the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group. Crenshaw's theory demonstrates overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

² Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 1241-1299.

³ Americans for the Arts (2014, January 29). Local Arts Agency Salaries. Retrieved January 8, 2018, from <http://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/networks-and-councils/local-arts-network/facts-and-figures/local-arts-agency-salaries>.

⁴ LGBTQIA+ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, intersex, asexual and other (+).

⁵ Cuyler, A. (2013). An Exploratory Study of Demographic Diversity in the Arts Management Workforce. Retrieved from <http://www.giarts.org/article/exploratory-study-demographic-diversity-arts-management-workforce>

⁶ White alone, not Hispanic or Latino are individuals who responded "No, not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" and who reported "White" as their only entry in the race question.

⁷ QuickFacts U.S. Census Data. (2016, July 1). Retrieved January 8, 2018, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045216>.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau Public Information Office. (2016, May 19). Newsroom Archive. Retrieved January 8, 2018, from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/miscellaneous/cb12-134.html>.

⁹ Same-sex Couple and LGBT Demographic Data Interactive. (2016, May). Retrieved January 8, 2018, from <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=LGBT#density>.

¹⁰ Americans for the Arts. Statement on Cultural Equity. (2016, October 26). Retrieved from: <http://www.americansforthearts.org/about-americans-for-the-arts/statement-on-cultural-equity>.

¹¹ Stroh, D.P. (2015). *Systems thinking for social change*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company.

¹² Leavy, P. (2011). *Essentials of transdisciplinary research: Using problem-centered methodologies*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

¹³ Americans for the Arts. Statement on Cultural Equity. (2016, October 26). Retrieved from: <http://www.americansforthearts.org/about-americans-for-the-arts/statement-on-cultural-equity>.

¹⁴ For the purposes of this study, influencers are defined as leaders in the arts world who hold institutional decision-making power. This includes arts managers, educators, funders, board members, individual artists, universities, small non-profits, large non-profits, museums, foundations, for-profit companies and government.

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