

SACRAMENTO METROPOLITAN



CULTURAL
EQUITY
AUDIT

Observations and Recommendations

PREPARED BY MJR PARTNERS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2018, the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission adopted the Creative Edge (a new arts and culture plan). This robust plan included goals for investing in strategies toward arts education, strengthening the creative economy, and focusing on artists, while also considering the current and potential vision for the cultural sector in the agency's service area. The plan reflects the collective ideas, goals, and expressions of Sacramento area residents, and it provides guidance for strengthening the local creative economy.

Around the time the Cultural Planning process was underway, the Arts Commission appointed a Race and Cultural Equity Task Force. The Task Force put forth a mission statement that was adopted by the Commission, and the group further recommended that a Cultural Equity Audit (CEA) of the Arts Commission be conducted.

The scope of the CEA is to review the programs, policies, structures, practices, and culture of the current work and workplace of the Arts Commission. The CEA is not intended to be a critique of the agency; rather it is intended to review the agency's current effectiveness and make recommendations for improvements in matters related to the following: diversity, equity and access; the newly adopted arts and culture plan; and future performance through the lens of equity and inclusion.

The CEA scope includes consideration of stakeholder perspectives and expectations. Those considerations inform recommendations for achievable short-term action steps and sustainable long-term goals leading toward embedding new inclusive practices into the agency's operations and programs.

The methodology for gathering information during the CEA process included reviewing the following: current grant programs, review panelists comments, and decision-making processes in all areas related to distribution of public funding. The process also included documenting reflective conversations with staff and Commission members, small group meetings with thought leaders from the arts and cultural communities, individual conversations with other non-arts city department staff, and observations from dialogue sessions with the private sector.

Observations and recommendations are presented in this document.

THE CONCEPT OF EQUITY

Issues of equity (and inequality) are not new in the arts and cultural sector in most U.S. cities. In recent years, the conversation has moved up on the agenda in the public sector. Local arts agencies are not exempt from this discourse. Local arts agencies and their Commissions/Boards are committed explicitly to promoting equity. Generally, the conversations and policy language around achieving equity is shallow (with the exception of gender equity), and the term is often used only as another buzzword. A clear discussion of its meaning is lacking and is seemingly more of a review of operational practices rather than an attempt to forge a new policy agenda by drawing on the concept of equity.

Equity is concerned with equality, fairness, and social justice. Equity is based on the application of two basic principles: relevance and consistency. Relevance concerns how we categorize people/cultural groups and organizations. It's about the "importance" applied to cultural expression, which has a bearing on the way people are treated and in turn how decisions are made. Socio-cultural values, belief systems, and cultural norms underpin the idea of relevance and result in inequalities based on identities such as gender, ethnicity, race, religion, and economic status.

Consistency is connected to the application of a shared set of expectations and norms (policies) whereby citizens hold local government responsible for acting fairly in the distribution of public resources. The idea of peer review panels is one-way local arts agencies have responded to consistency. The cultural sector is finding, however, that 1) panels without representation of applicants favor naturally the mainstream and have little tolerance for innovation or for understanding the social order of immigrant or culturally specific applicants; and 2) that the "criteria" used by panels feature long-standing structures with measures that often discount non-traditional methods of producing cultural activity.

Although it is beyond the scope of this audit to present or address the full picture of the state of inequity in the Sacramento region, individual interviews revealed a number of significant issues beyond the constructs of arts and cultural funding systems. A follow up and cursory review of current civic concerns in Sacramento, such as social cohesion, unresolved public education issues, and citizen opinion related to uneven law enforcement also signals a level of perceived inequities in other aspects of civic life.

There are various approaches to understanding the causes of inequity and the factors that explain how inequity is sustained over time. For example, in the arts and cultural community, over time, power imbalances rather than principles of equal concern and respect have created cultural "institutions," meaning organizations with access to permanent exhibition and/performance space and/organizations successful in accessing public and private sector funding.

INDICATORS AND GUIDING QUESTIONS OF A CULTURAL EQUITY AUDIT (CEA)

From an equity perspective, qualitative and quantifiable data were used to measure race/ethnicity, gender, income, geography, and evaluations of funded programs. During the CEA process, the following **indicators** and guiding questions influenced how levels of commitment to equity are determined.

1. Local arts agencies are fully in service to both artists and the city as a whole.
2. Policies and practices integrate contributions of a diverse workforce (professional staff) to mitigate structural bias.
3. Staff and decision makers are adaptive and responsive to community needs and opportunities.
4. Implementation of guiding principles and plans follow a structured approach to achieving inclusion.
5. Policy reveals long-term commitments to investing in leadership development.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

These questions were developed from conversations in a variety of settings during the audit period.

- **How might SMAC honor and preserve Sacramento's diverse and unique history and culture?**
- **How might the agency foster new models of trust, welcome diverse view points, and confront racism in the process of distributing public funding designated for arts and culture?**
- **How might the agency create new systems that recognize the ability of underrepresented communities to co-create solutions to achieving greater access to funding and other cultural resources?**
- **How might the agency build its own capacities to ensure equitable and effective service delivery systems?**
- **How might the agency continue to engage the Cultural Equity Task Force in operationalizing their equity statement?**
- **How might the agency re-think its Public Art processes toward more intentional equity and inclusion outcomes?**
- **How can the agency support the development of and increase the number of arts administrators of color in Sacramento?**

THE REPORT

OBSERVATION 1.1

In most cases, it is considered that the primary role of the local arts agency is to invest public money in arts and cultural activity that makes positive impact in the lives of the entire community. The full spectrum of services of a local arts agency are typically:

- A Civic Cultural Policy Document (guiding principles or funding philosophy)
- Grant making programs
- Leadership Development initiatives
- Management and technical assistance support
- Arts education services and partnerships
- Civic and public art development

The Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission does not have an adopted Cultural Policy.

The agency's grant programs and categories are seemingly structured the way most local arts agencies are in how they provide access public funding for the arts. The following examples are examined through the lens of Indicator I.

Cultural Arts Awards grant program is a three-year funding category where *"grants are awarded through a competitive review process, ensuring that grantees meet high standards of artistic quality, show evidence of community involvement and outreach, and exhibit sound managerial and fiscal accountability."* This language is not uncommon in funding categories for mid-size local arts agencies. While the program offers the agency efficiencies, the three-year timeline locks out any new applicants who might meet funding eligibility before the next grant cycle opens. This timeline also offers some level of stability for successful applicants, but, at the same time, excludes new applicants during the three-year period.

Observation 1.1 cont

Cultural Equity Grants provides one-time funding for grants of up to \$20,000 for arts and cultural nonprofit organizations with organizational budgets of \$500,000 or less.

"The purpose of the Cultural Equity Grant Program is to bring arts and cultural opportunities to diverse audiences within the City of Sacramento and to individuals within the City with limited resources to engage with the arts. The Cultural Equity Grant will provide support to small budget arts and cultural organizations to 1) produce an arts or cultural project or 2) strengthen their organizations' capacity to offer high quality arts and cultural programs."

The future of that program is unclear. This funding opportunity did provide support for projects organized by artists and organizations of color and perhaps stimulated some groups' ability to broaden their programming. Twenty-four grants were funded in FY 2017. The project descriptions indicated funding was allocated for mostly one-time programs, although some organizations requested support for capacity building, social media updates, and strategic planning goals.

It is important here to look at the term "capacity building." Capacity building requires steady and constant knowledge building. Access to steady funding streams, over a period of years, builds internal structures and creates institutions. Institution building is yet another benefit of the previously mentioned Cultural Arts Awards funding category. The distinctions between project funding and long-term consistent funding have to do with more than the dollars awarded through public funding systems.

Samples of statements from reflective conversations with community stakeholders:
"artistic quality is subject to a panelist knowledge of my culture's artistic expression"

"everything our organization does falls in the bucket of community involvement - we have plenty of evidence to prove that - yet we still can't "qualify" for operating grants."

"the three-year structure is good for the larger groups, but if we don't get in that door-we are left out for three years."

The Cultural Equity Grant program represented a bold move on the part of the agency, which was probably timely and a financial boost for the successful applicants. The data reviewed for this grant program for 2016 and 2017 reveals the need for an even more focused investment in this group of applicants.

A review of applications, panel comments, and grant operations revealed several opportunities for the agency to rethink the operations of its grant programs if achieving equity in the delivery of cultural services is a priority.

Observation 1.1 cont

Opportunities to achieve equity have to do with the policy environment. Equity is achieved when funding policies not only encourage the efficient use of public resources but also stimulate private sector investment. In effect, a three-year commitment to funding organizations of color by the Arts Commission, like the commitment modeled in the Cultural Grants Awards, signals to private donors that emerging organizations and organizations of color are considered important civic investments. When public funding can be leveraged to secure private investments, projects can “build capacity” and in turn build the internal structures necessary to move from project status to institution status.

Creative Economy Grants were an interesting and innovative way to engage art makers with an eye toward cultural enterprise.

“The City of Sacramento has set aside one-time funding (\$500,000) for grants of up to \$25,000 for ideas that support the implementation of the Creative Economy Pilot Project. The purpose of the Creative Economy Pilot Project grants is to support arts and culture projects that stimulate economic development and activity.”

City staff facilitated management/technical assistance workshops for potential applicants.

The guidelines and aspirations of this grant program were quite visionary, so much so that the Review Criteria/Geographic Representation section includes policy language that, if applied across all grant categories, could have a significant impact on equity and inclusion goals.

“Geographic Representation: It is a priority for the City to build innovation capacity throughout the entire City of Sacramento. Geographically, projects will initially be ranked against each other citywide, followed by identification of the neighborhood/Council district served. It is the City’s goal to award a minimum of two microgrant projects and one grant project in each Council district. Projects will be funded in the order of meeting this goal. In the event the Council district minimum goal is not met, City staff will work with the Council office to solicit additional applications. This could result in a subsequent issuance of grants to meet the Council district minimum requirement.”

Grants staff received high marks from awardees who attended a small group discussion as part of this review process, as well as from members of the Cultural Equity Task Force in a separate meeting. These comments are commendable and worth noting here.

A review of applications, panel comments, and grant operations revealed several opportunities for the agency to rethink the operations of its grant programs if achieving equity in the delivery of cultural services is a priority.

Observation 1.1 cont**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Revise the Cultural Equity Grant program to invest in strengthening a network of six to eight legacy organizations that represent the cultural expression of Sacramento's diverse community. Like the traditional institutions that have benefited from a history of receiving operating and programming grants, a parallel investment in a cohort of organizations of color should fund facility costs; professional staff salaries; travel for professional development, marketing ventures, programming that allows for risk taking, procurement of fund-raising expertise, etc. This investment initiative should have at least a three-year timeline and dedicated agency staff to design learning opportunities that prepare the cohort for successful inclusion in the Creative Grants Awards category. The Arts Commission should engage the private sector as a funding partner for this legacy building initiative.

Modify the Cultural Arts Awards grant program to consider funding outside of the current three-year schedule.

Provide regular management assistance workshops, conducted by agency staff or outside facilitators, that support successful grant writing and evaluation planning for small and emerging organizations.

Clarify and set specific metrics for all funded organizations to demonstrate claims of outreach, engagement and community participation. These metrics should be incorporated into the panel grant review process.

OBSERVATION 1.2

The opportunity to participate in and observe the January convening, *“Elevating Voices: Creating a Culture of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Greater Sacramento Region,”* provided important background on the community’s positioning of diversity in their operations and programs. Participants in the one day mini-conference included staff or Arts Commission grantee organizations, representatives from the state arts funding agency, and private sector arts funders.

The general sessions and panel discussions were designed to advance understanding related to organizational activities and equity and inclusion issues that artists and arts leaders face and are working to understand. The conversation did not settle the practical questions about achieving equity in individual organizations or in the city as a whole, which brings the issue back to policy—the clear and specific measures that set expectations for the use of public funding.

This is the level of greatest concern to local arts agencies and the area where there has been the least accountability.

Equity seemed to be of intrinsic value to participants. The opening and plenary conversations were a powerful and fitting call-to-action for the Sacramento community. The general tone of responses to panelists’ presentations indicated that equity is valued by both art makers and cultural organizations across the community, including public and foundation funders.

The city’s newly constituted Office of Diversity & Equity must be viewed as an active partner with the cultural sector in its quest for equity and inclusion in the distribution and management of cultural resources.

Members of the arts community had varied levels of knowledge about their own organizations’ abilities to make operational and programmatic adjustments toward inclusion. In fact, one participant courageously said, *“Just tell us what to do.”*

In one of the small group conversations, participants pointed out that the Arts Commission itself should start with a more honest internal conversation about equity. The group shared concerns about the need for the agency staff to better reflect the population of the city/region, *“not just in how the staff looks, but we need the staff to be more visible in neighborhoods and communities where art and culture is happening everyday”*.

Observation 1.2 cont

This convening represented a great step forward in the conversation about diversity, access, and inclusion in the Sacramento Metropolitan Area. Funded in part by the Sacramento Region Community Foundation, the convening set forth the opportunity for the Arts Commission to be a change agent and leader in implementing new strategies for achieving equity and inclusion in the arts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Arts Commission should issue and distribute a report to the community that outlines learnings from the conference.

The Arts Commission should organize quarterly workshops around diversity, equity and inclusion practices.

Structural bias refers to the accumulation of layers of bureaucracy added over time to demonstrate accountability. These layers of bureaucratic practices have created and protected white “mainstream” cultural institutions that are considered anchors to a local cultural ecosystem. For example, the addition of requirements like “demonstration of community outreach” can qualify a mainstream organization for increased funding and have no weight or influence in increasing funding levels for organizations of color. In many cases, this “demonstration” has no logical and consistent measurement of achievement.

OBSERVATION 2.1

Internal staff interactions are key indicators of the agency’s commitment to equity and inclusion. Conducting the joint staff meeting was an opportunity to hear how the staff team interacts and/or works together or separately in carrying out equity goals.

The primary learning from that work session is that agency staff lacks a consistent set of agreed upon core values around the idea of achieving systemwide equity. Without a clear statement of “what we fight for,” there is only an open-ended collection of stories.

There is underutilized talent among the Arts Commission staff, which effectively limits the agency’s ability to broaden its reach and serve its diverse constituents.

The greatest discovery is the need for more staff interaction and knowledge sharing to build a shared statement of commitment to equity. The Arts Commission staff needs more opportunities to talk about race and racialization. As a team they would benefit from analyzing how every project, grant, and commission contributes to dismantling racial bias. The staff as a team has to practice putting these questions about inclusion and equity on the table and have open and honest conversations, challenging each other to be proactive in developing practices that begin to dismantle the system of structural bias.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide more opportunities for Arts Commission staff to exchange ideas and discuss objectives related not only to equity goals but team building in general.

Arts Commission staff must build their own shared statement committing cultural equity. This internal document should guide ongoing conversations and create measures throughout every aspect of the agency’s work.

OBSERVATION 2.2

Not all Arts Commission staff members realize their importance to the conversations regarding equity and inclusion. The team as a whole would benefit from structured training and open dialogue about strategies for embracing the community. The staff as a whole seems to operate in silos – solving transactional problems within their narrow program areas. The absence of a shared vision of equity allows that issue to be skimmed over, which can be obvious to constituent groups. It will be important that leadership is in place to motivate this staff to contribute openly in Division conversations, setting big picture goals and working as a unit to realize success for the agency.

RECOMMENDATION

The Arts Commission staff should participate in regular staff meetings. Agendas should be set prior to each meeting allowing team members to share progress on projects and solicit support across divisions. Mandatory attendance at these regular agenda-based meetings is required in order to maintain continuity.

OBSERVATION 2.3

The Cultural Equity Task Force has done important work to frame its own vision statement for the agency. However the Task Force is an advisory body with no power to influence policy. It is unclear however how that vision is being incorporated into the day to day work of the staff and the agency. Essentially, there is no direct accountability system or structured approach to aligning the goals of the Task Force with the functions of the agency. Members of the Task Force represent a broad cross section of the community. It would be unfortunate not to capitalize on their insight. This built in advisory team is a link to the kind of community input the agency and its grantees claim they want to embrace.

It is important to create a process for the voices of the Cultural Equity Task Force to become a regular contributor to work of the agency. For example: Task Force members can support the identification of panel members, locations for pop-up community conversations about resources available in the Arts Commission and serving as co-facilitators of community conversations organized by Arts Commission staff. An evolution of the Task Force could take on many forms, and their long-term contributions to the work of the agency should be more structured and codified.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The agency should establish structured and ongoing work sessions with members of the Task Force. The intent of these sessions is to set benchmarks for achieving success throughout the agency's work.

OBSERVATION 2.4

The Public Art program is a prime opportunity to take the work of the Task Force forward. No doubt strong work is being done by the Public Art team, and the volume of work is impressive. However, the selection processes and routine work of the Public Art Division is laser focused on project completion. While it is not realistic for the public art portfolio to slow down, shifting priorities does require intentional examination of practices to result in structural change. This examination of the Public Art program(s) is critical and most timely. In order to see progressive shifts in engagement, local artists' capacity development and community impact, the practices must be future conscious and conscious and consider twenty-first century practices through the lens of diversity, inclusion and equity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Outside expertise needs to be contracted to review policies and practices.

The ideal consultants should have progressive public art programming experience and demonstrative work around equity and community impact.

The result of this work will address contemporary social issues through resources within the public art realm and lead to innovative practices that impact programming and opportunities for local artists, artists of color and neighborhoods.

OBSERVATION 3.1

Conversations with both staff and community members indicate a lack of skills, knowledge, and, on some levels, interest in understanding the nuances of the city's under serviced neighborhoods. Program staff appear to be focused primarily on meeting internal structural goals. Granted, pursuing new relationships in neighborhoods is time consuming. Interviews with non-Arts Commission staff confirmed that several city departments have deeper knowledge and access to the city's diverse neighborhoods and residents. Facilities located in neighborhoods offer a range of classes in art-making and creative engagement. These are the spaces where community histories are preserved and shared by local tradition bearers who do not consider themselves to be "artists". Thoughtful collaborations with other city departments presents a number of rich opportunities for consideration toward achieving inclusion and equity in the arts.

RECOMMENDATION

The Arts Commission should establish intentional collaborations with other city departments, particularly the Department of Youth, Parks and Community. A well-planned collaboration could positively influence program design, provide neighborhoods access to culturally relevant experiences, and assist in the discovery of emerging arts leaders.

OBSERVATION 4.1

Two important planning documents reviewed in this process: Creative Edge and the Agency Strategic Plan present ambitious yet achievable goals. Both documents represent strategic foresight and vision and seem to be on pause as far as actual metric-based implementation is concerned. Potential changes in leadership, funding allocations and relationships with the County were reported as factors affecting the next steps. In the case of the Strategic plan, staff indicated their role in the development of strategies was minimal - leading to shallow buy-in.

Interviews with grantees indicated an excitement about the planning process, however confidence in the Arts Commission's commitment to implementing the plan was questioned.

OBSERVATION 4.2

Both documents focus heavily the idea of equity and inclusion as aspirational. More specifically, the draft Strategic Plan opens with this mandate: *"We strive for a vibrant, culturally diverse Sacramento that is alive with the arts"*. This review process did not identify any actionable, scaffolded steps in the draft Strategic Plan document.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Arts Commission staff should become more familiar with the outcomes of the Creative Edge Plan.

The Strategic Plan must also be revisited. The proposed 2018-2023 timeline should be reconsidered. Longer timelines are often easily dismissed, particular when "it's no one's job" to monitor progress. A three-year workplan allows for shorter term benchmarks and demonstrates progress to the public.

Part of the equity conversation revolves around leadership development in the arts sector. The long-standing culturally-specific organizations in Sacramento are led by founders/directors whose passion and commitment have sustained the organizations through tough and limited funding cycles. These organizations are kept alive to fill gaps in the cultural sector not addressed by mainstream institutions, particularly in communities where heritage and cultural sustainability are in decline.

OBSERVATION 5.1

The talented people in Sacramento, who have kept arts learning programs and cultural experiences alive, have done so under strain and personal sacrifice. Access to capital has been limited, although participation numbers are steady. Replacing these cultural workers and identifying new arts management leaders of color is a concern in the region. One organization founder interviewed indicated that the organization had managed to attract an intern who is being groomed to take on the CEO role as the founder begins to step aside. The concern is not about the candidate's potential for success as the CEO but whether salary and benefits will be attractive enough to guarantee retention.

The non-profit arts sector as a whole faces significant challenges around leadership transfer, as emerging leaders question their abilities to build successful careers in the field of arts management and leadership. If you do not see people who look like you in positions of leadership, you're less likely to pursue the career growth opportunities that might get you to those positions. This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that affirms a lack of diversity in senior leadership.

An interview with a young artist in the community revealed that her peers do not define themselves as leaders; however, they are visible role models with either the potential, or the power, to make positive change happen.

RECOMMENDATION

Funding should be identified to launch a stipend-based leadership initiative. The initiative should focus on developing emerging arts leaders and more specifically arts leaders of color.

OBSERVATION 5.2

There is a lack of support for leadership development for the staff at the Arts Commission. This represents a huge gap in building the internal capacity of the agency to learn the nuances of working with a diverse community.

RECOMMENDATION

Arts Commission staff should actively and regularly participate in national level conversations about trends and achievements in the area of diversity and inclusion. This kind of learning should be mandatory, and would certainly energize the staff and stimulate their responses to an issue that is often difficult to operationalize. Allocating resources for this knowledge building could also transform outcomes around staff retention, workforce diversity and effectiveness.

ADDITIONAL GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- A bi-lingual or multi-lingual **Community Engagement Specialist** position be added to the Arts Commission's organization chart.
- Develop New Community Engagement Grant Making Initiative to be Implemented Against an Incremental and Realistic Schedule

Community engagement is generally defined as action steps designed by residents and stakeholders that identify and address issues of public concern. The term "community" may have many different constructs - but in all cases "community" is a self-designed group, a specific geographic location, and/or individuals who share a vision for the results. The Arts Commission is missing an opportunity to respond to and highlight the Folk and Traditional arts of the city's amazingly diverse population.

For Example: A joint venture that merges the transactional expertise of the grants staff with the knowledge platforms established by the Public Art and/or Arts Education teams might lead to the co-creation of an "Art of the Community Grant". (There may be systems in place that would allow this initiative to move forward expeditiously.)

The idea is to provide new opportunities for Sacramento residents to work with artists and tradition bearers to produce cross discipline, community-based projects. In the development phase of the proposed "Art of Community Grant" staff should convene residents from a select group of Council Districts to help set goals, evaluation components and a framework for the proposed grant program.

- Intentional investment in legacy organizations of color and those whose missions respond to racial and cultural expression.
- Development of an Arts Leadership Initiative would be a significant asset to the community as a whole and more importantly for arming emerging leaders of color with the skills necessary to elevate cultural projects organizations to institution status.

CLOSING THOUGHT

Local arts agencies across the country are focused on building meaningful, enduring and respectful policies and practices that emphasize equity, diversity and inclusion. Their approach is simple – create access through opportunities that reduce barriers. The overarching goal in the arts sector is to develop inclusive programs and projects that respond to constituents with different experiences and backgrounds.

The Arts Commission in Sacramento has an opportunity to consider the complexities of diversity: age, ability, ethnicity and race, gender, religion or belief and sexual identity. When these distinctions intersect with socio-economic status and geography of neighborhoods, they form the city's identity. However, not unlike other civic challenges, issues of race are generally given limited attention in the conversations about equity in the arts.

The observations and recommendations included in this Equity Audit, are only a partial solution to a complex, deep and wide challenge. Success relies on constructive engagement with this report; and acceptance of the responsibility to dismantle historical practices that have invested in some organizations and communities and marginalized others.

No research methodology can fully capture the cross-cultural nuances and perspectives in a discussion about equity. We want to thank members of the Cultural Equity Task Force, staff from other city departments, the private sector funding community and area arts administrators who took the time to meet with us and provide important insight.

The audit report is a dynamic document. It should be kept under review by everyone involved in the management of arts and cultural resources on behalf of the residents of Sacramento.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with your agency.

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