

Equity Operational Plan v.1

We commit to actionable, measurable, and reportable ways to respect, honor, and embrace all of humanity. We recognize the importance of diversity, inclusion, equity, and access, and will foster environments that promote these values.

This staff-level document outlines the first iteration of Arts Midwest's Equity Operational Plan (v.1, 10/2023). Though extensive, it is not intended to be exhaustive*; instead, it seeks to highlight the current and future directions the organization is taking to operationalize its adoption and expansion of National Arts Strategies' Racial Equity Principles (2020).

I. Definition of Equity:

Equity embodies the relentless pursuit of fairness, aiming to rectify current and historical injustices and systemic disparities that have marginalized communities and individuals based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. It calls for confronting entrenched structures and narratives perpetuating inequality, advocating for equal opportunities and resources to unlock everyone's potential, and striving for a just, inclusive society where every individual's worth is acknowledged and celebrated.

We recognize the existence of myriad structural and systemic equity issues and will be steadfast in our dedication to uncovering and remedying these injustices in our workplaces.

II. Equity Initiatives:

We are committed to implementing the following equity initiatives:

A. Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access Training:

We believe that education is a key component of achieving equity in the workplace. Therefore, all staff will receive related training during their initial onboarding, as well as ongoing opportunities to strengthen their awareness of Arts Midwest's commitment to equity and deepen their own personal equity analysis.

- Provide access to accessibility training, such as attendance at the annual LEAD Conference.
- Provide resources for staff intercultural development on an individual basis.
- Ongoing training, including topics such as
 - Understanding diverse cultures and backgrounds,

- Recognizing unconscious bias,
- Fostering inclusion and empathy.

B. Hiring Practices:

We are committed to ensuring that our hiring practices are equitable. To achieve this goal, we will:

- Ensure that hiring teams are racially diverse.
- Conduct structured interviews with standardized questions to reduce bias in the selection process, providing questions in advance for candidate preparation.
- Communicate to candidates the approximate time commitment requested for the hiring process.
- Work towards offering compensation for work sample requests of final interview candidates.
- Ensure that job postings emphasize transferable skills and include criteria for determining successful candidates.
- Post salary information on all job descriptions, as well as our commitment to not negotiating salaries.
- Use a variety of platforms and networks to promote job openings to reach a diverse pool of candidates and actively encourage applications from underrepresented groups.
- Collaborate with organizations that focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, and access to broaden our candidate pools and receive referrals from increasingly diverse networks.
- Regularly track and analyze data (e.g., recruitment sources, applicant demographics, interview-to-hire ratios) to identify any disparities and make data-driven improvements.
- Annually report to staff and board on the progress we are making in these and related areas.

C. Organizational Culture:

- Physical space: Maintain an office space that is accessible, welcoming, and reflective of our staff and region.
- Technology: Provide on-the-job training to improve technological skills among staff. Leverage technology to get clearer understanding of the reach of our programs and services.
- Policies: Involve staff in reviewing and updating policies to identify opportunities to further embrace equity.

D. Staff Development:

We recognize that professional development is essential for career advancement. Therefore, we will:

- Provide all staff with equal access to training and development opportunities.
- Ensure that all supervisors are equipped to mentor staff, providing guidance and support.
- Encourage staff from underrepresented groups to pursue leadership roles within the company as well as leadership opportunities outside of Arts Midwest.

E. Pay Equity:

We are committed to ensuring that our pay practices are equitable. To achieve this goal, we will:

- Conduct regular pay equity audits to identify and address any disparities in pay based on gender, race, or other characteristics.
- Maintain and regularly revisit paid leave policy.
- Use transparent and objective criteria to determine compensation and ensure that staff members understand the basis of their pay.

F. Programming and Grantmaking:

We are committed to fostering an equitable arts environment, empowering underrepresented voices, and working towards more inclusive, diverse, and accessible communities.

- Ensure diversity (gender, race, age, occupation, and geography) in decision-making bodies such as grant review panels, program selection committees, and leadership positions. Compensate panelists and selection committees fairly.
- Develop guidelines and criteria that prioritize funding to artists and organizations who have historically been under-supported by or systemically left out of traditional philanthropy, aiming for equitable distribution of our resources.
- Seek input from community stakeholders, grant recipients, and program participants through regular feedback sessions, surveys, and focus groups to inform program development and grantmaking strategies. Follow up with stakeholders to continuously improve policies, procedures, and practices.
- Simplify grant application and reporting processes, provide clear guidelines, and ensure that they are accessible and easy to understand for all potential applicants.

- Promote transparency in grantmaking and program decisions, clearly articulating the selection criteria and rationale for funding decisions.
- Share resources and knowledge in advancing equity in the arts sector with organizations, community groups, and funders. Share via collaborations, the Ideas Hub, and other platforms.
- Establish metrics to track progress toward equity goals and regularly report on outcomes to stakeholders, adjusting as needed.
- Implement strict policies against discrimination, harassment, and microaggressions within the organization and during grantmaking processes.

G: Financials and Investments:

We will actively work towards greater financial-based social responsibility and transparency, aligning our financial practices with our mission and values.

- Provide transparent and accessible financial reports that detail how funds are allocated, invested, and utilized, demonstrating a commitment to accountability and equity.
- Prioritize working with diverse vendors and suppliers, particularly those from underrepresented communities, to support economic inclusion and promote equitable business practices.
- Develop a comprehensive Investment Policy that clearly outlines our investment objectives, risk tolerance, and ethical guidelines.
- Imbed ethical investing by utilizing environmental, social, and corporate governance management strategies with an emphasis towards diversity, equity, and inclusion into our investment decision-making process. Prioritize investments that align with our values and mission.

H: Communications:

- Establish guidelines that encourage representation of diverse voices, cultures, genders, abilities, and perspectives in all marketing materials, including images, videos, and narratives.
- Develop guidelines for using inclusive and respectful language that avoid stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory language in all marketing and communication materials.
- Actively collaborate with and fairly compensate diverse communities and artists to ensure that their perspectives and experiences are accurately represented in marketing campaigns and communications.

- Ensure that marketing materials are accessible to all, including those with disabilities, by following accessibility standards (e.g., Web Content Accessibility Guidelines published by the Web Accessibility Initiative of the World Wide Web Consortium).

I: Fundraising:

- Conduct ongoing and comprehensive equity audits of fundraising practices to identify any biases or inequities in fundraising strategies, donor engagement, and allocation of funds.
- Ensure that donor engagement efforts are inclusive and representative of diverse communities. Tailor communication strategies that resonate with diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.
- Develop protocols for recognizing and acknowledging donors that are fair and unbiased, avoiding preferential treatment based on factors like race, gender, or wealth.
- Seek input from the communities impacted by our work, to inform fundraising strategies and ensure that our efforts align with their needs and priorities.
- Clearly communicate how funds are raised, allocated, and used to ensure transparency and trust among donors, supporters, and constituent communities.

III. Implementation:

To implement our Equity Plan, we will:

A. Assign Responsibility:

The office of the President & CEO will oversee the implementation of our Equity Operational Plan and be responsible for:

- Creating a plan matrix with timelines and responsible parties.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of all parts of the plan.
- Providing regular updates to the management team, staff, and board.

B. Communicate with Staff:

We will communicate our Equity commitment progress to all staff through:

- Regular all-staff meetings and updates.
- Training and workshops.
- Annual work planning.

C. Collect and Analyze Data:

We will collect and analyze data related to our Equity commitments to measure their effectiveness. This data will include:

- Demographic data on our staff.
- Data on hiring and promotion rates.
- Data on pay equity.

D. Continuous Improvement:

We are committed to continuous improvement and will regularly assess and update our Equity Operational Plan based on input and feedback from staff, board members, and constituents.

** Other recent and ongoing equity-based changes at Arts Midwest are intentionally omitted. These include the adoption of a 4-day work week, supporting a staff BIPOC Solidarity Space, official celebration of more cultural holidays, a public commitment to Native Nations, and the continuation of the Midwest Award for Artists with Disabilities.*

Additionally, it is important to note that much of this work is already in progress and has been for several years.