

Threads That Become Tendrils: Exploring EDI in the Settler-Canadian Arts and Culture Sector

Shanice Bernicky¹

Carleton University, Canada

Abstract: The settler-state of Canada continues to reconcile with the genocide of the original Indigenous custodians of the lands on which we operate, alongside the underserving and discriminating against racialized, black, disabled, and LGBTQ2+ peoples all while navigating a climate crisis, the proliferation of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) nomenclature and plans permeates every social and financial sector. EDI initiatives, while called many names throughout history such as social inclusion and affirmative action, experienced a rise in creation in 2020 because of public outcries for the acknowledgement of systemic racial injustice and pressure to address this ongoing form of violence. Canada's arts and culture sector is not immune from this scrutiny. Having a long history of engaging in social services, the arts and culture sector is often tasked with "fixing" issues when funding is cut to education, health, and community programs, yet arts institutions are not equipped to do this. This paper follows one resident researcher's journey as they were tasked with developing an arts civic impact framework suggesting equity practices in the arts. The study used a mixed-methods approach, drawing from the walking interview, reverse photo-elicitation, feminist manifestos and research-creation to bring cultural workers across the country together to develop an accessible tool to carefully engage in equity practices within the sector. As a critique and response to flat and prescriptive EDI plans, what was created based on this cross-country collaboration was a non-linear, spiraling framework existing online that arts organizations can make use of and adapt based on their circumstances. Weaving together a historical account of arts administration, Western managerialism, and the EDI in the arts sector, this article responds to the research question: How can access to the arts and culture sector from coast-to-coast-to-coast be more equitable?

Keywords: Arts' Civic Impact; Indigenous, Creative Research Methods; Canada; Arts and Culture Sector; Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Arts Administration; Managerialism

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Résumé : L'État colonisateur du Canada continue de se réconcilier avec le génocide des gardiens autochtones originels des terres sur lesquelles nous opérons, tout en maltraitant et en discriminant les personnes racialisées, noires, handicapées et LGBTQ2+ et en naviguant dans une crise climatique. La prolifération de la nomenclature et des plans d'équité, de diversité et d'inclusion (EDI) imprègne tous les secteurs sociaux et financiers. Les initiatives EDI, bien que connues sous de nombreux noms au cours de l'histoire, tels que l'inclusion sociale et les mesures d'action positive, ont connu une augmentation de leur création en 2020 en raison des crises publiques pour la reconnaissance de l'injustice raciale systémique et de la pression pour répondre à cette forme continue de violence. Le secteur des arts et de la culture au Canada n'est pas à l'abri de cet examen attentif. Ayant une longue histoire d'engagement dans les services sociaux, le secteur des arts et de la culture est souvent chargé de "réparer" les problèmes lorsque le financement de l'éducation, de la santé et des programmes communautaires est réduit, bien que les institutions artistiques ne soient pas équipées pour cela. Cet article suit le parcours d'un chercheur résident chargé de développer un cadre d'impact civique des arts suggérant des pratiques d'équité dans les arts. L'étude a utilisé une approche de méthodes mixtes, s'appuyant sur l'entretien en marchant, la photo-élicitation inversée, les manifestes féministes et la création-recherche pour rassembler des travailleurs culturels à travers le pays afin de développer un outil accessible pour s'engager soigneusement dans les pratiques d'équité au sein du secteur. Comme critique et réponse aux plans EDI plats et prescriptifs, ce qui a été créé sur la base de cette collaboration nationale était un cadre en ligne non linéaire et en spirale que les organisations artistiques peuvent utiliser et adapter en fonction de leurs circonstances. Tissant ensemble un récit historique de l'administration des arts, du gestionnarisme occidental et de l'EDI dans le secteur des arts, cet article répond à la question de recherche suivante : Comment l'accès au secteur des arts et de la culture d'un océan à l'autre peut-il être plus équitable ?

Mots clé : L'impact civique des arts, autochtone, Méthodes de recherche créatives, Canada, Secteur des arts et de la culture, Équité, diversité et inclusion, Administration des arts, Gestionnarisme

Introduction

Three years have passed since this project, where to begin when you're still in the thick it?

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) plans have become essential signs of liberalism in public and private sectors across what is now known as Canada and abroad. These plans typically outline detailed steps to enact a "culture change" with an arbitrary projected completion deadline typically on the scale of five years. EDI plans are also one of the few ways to hold institutions accountable for ensuring equitable access to opportunities (Boykin et al., 2020). These plans—which have been implemented in places like universities, private corporations, the public service, and beyond—are manifested and supported by a corporate logic that encourages structured and calculated problem-

solving of injustices (Knights & Omanović, 2016). The Canadian arts and culture sector is not immune to this trend. During a one-year research opportunity (which has exploded into an unending journey), I was paired as a researcher in residence (RinR) with Culture Days, a national arts and culture support network and yearly cultural festival, to develop a civic impact measurement framework and indicators for a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive sector. During the residency, I held two focus groups with cultural workers of equity-seeking backgrounds and reviewed Culture Days' organization representative survey data. I also facilitated five roundtable sessions, three in Whitehorse, Yukon and two in Edmonton, Alberta with arts practitioners, grassroots organizers, policymakers, and arts service organization representatives to explore the current EDI landscape in the sector. EDI plans in their current state may not be conducive to longstanding, equitable change, but my conversations with collaborators, peer residents, and supervisors generated a strange middle space. In this space, I fused feminist manifesto styles and EDI initiatives to develop a spiralling, living framework. Drawing from the works of arts administration theorists and feminist decolonial scholars, this paper foregrounds the methodological process of this RinR project to-date and provides an analysis of the focus groups. What follows is a reflexive account of the spiraling journey this project has taken thus far, guided by the conversations with folks I had the privilege of collaborating with.

Setting the Scene – Project Background

Sometimes an email really starts it all.

On February 24, 2021, I received a cold call email from a recent doctoral graduate in my program, Dr. Lowell Gasoi. He was unable to take on the research in residence opportunity and so scanned our program website for students with relevant research interests to the project. He landed on me. Before the project even began, I learned my first valuable lesson. Share resources with your peers when possible. That email shaped my research trajectory. By March, I wrote my section of the Mitacs application. By April, I met my fellow resident researchers for the first time while preparing for my first comprehensive examination. Fast-forward to October 2021, and we were fielding applications of interests for organizations that each of us would later work with to develop civic impact frameworks. After reviewing the circumstances of Culture Days, they provided a unique opportunity to develop something that would need to be both broad and specific.

Culture Days began in 2010 after a series of large arts and culture organizations across Canada banded together to host a nationwide weekend festival celebrating cultural events and the work of a large network of artists ([Culture Days, 2024](#)). With over ten years of programming, the festival now lasts over three weeks from late September to mid-October, featuring thousands of free artistic performances, exhibitions and cultural events for all ages (see figure 1). Culture Days does not organize the events, instead encouraging arts and culture organizations to sign up to become part of their list of highlighted events. Organizers thus have complete control over the rollout of events.

2023 Events

Search events, hubs, or locations...

Found 2367 results near you.

TYPE

IN-PERSON

DIGITAL

HUB

DATE

Today Tomorrow This weekend

Include activities available for all of Culture Days

Include past activities

REGIONS

ON BC NB SK
 AB NS NB NT
 YT

TAGS

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

AGRICULTURE

ARCHITECTURE

CLIMATE ACTION / COMEDY

CRAPP / CULINARY & FOOD

DANCE / DESIGN

DIGITAL & NEW MEDIA

+ Show more

LANGUAGES

ENGLISH FRENCH

SPANISH CHINESE

MANDARIN PUNJABI


HINDI CANTONESE

CREE UKRAINIAN

+ Show more

Hide filters **SAVE SEARCH**

ACCESSIBILITY
 WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE
 GENDER-NEUTRAL WASHROOMS
 RELAXED PERFORMANCE
 CLOSED CAPTIONED
 SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION
 AUDIO DESCRIPTION




Geometric patterns in Islamic art

Faten Trabelsi (Artist)

Ottawa, ON

SEP 23 2:00 PM - 3:15 PM




ArohaFest Navaratri Edition (For the whole family!)

National Arts Centre

Ottawa, ON

OCT 14 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

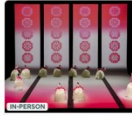


ArohaFest Navaratri Edition (Anoushka Shankar pre-show event)

National Arts Centre

Ottawa, ON

OCT 18 6:45 PM - 7:15 PM




National Dance Company of Korea + Compagnie ODD

National Arts Centre

Ottawa, ON

OCT 19 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM



ArohaFest Navaratri Edition

National Arts Centre


Ottawa, ON

OCT 9 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM

OCT 10 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM


OCT 11 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM

And 2 more times




Full Spectrum

DIGITAL




Toddler Mornings at the

IN-PERSON




Art Talk: NOTES ON

IN-PERSON



"NOTES ON PLAY"

IN-PERSON



Creative Sundays at the

IN-PERSON

Figure 1: Culture Days events search page

While I was paired with the national branch of the organization, each region of the country had a dedicated team to serve their communities. Culture Days Ontario, for example, develops cultural guides specific to towns and cities in that province ([Ontario Culture Days, 2024](#)). As a registered charity, Culture Days releases [a public report](#) following each iteration of the festival with statistics on the events' impacts on participants (figure 2).



Figure 2: Culture Days Participation Data

For instance: based on their data, because of attending Culture Days 2023, 65% of participants had an increased desire to contribute to truth and reconciliation, while 86% of participants had an increase in pride and/or care for the community where they live in.

Based on the breadth of the festival and the numerous communities Culture Days National supports, their situation provided a challenge for me in developing a civic impact measurement framework. I had to consider how to develop a framework that could be useful for any organization that signs up to participate during the festivities.

Arts Administration in Settler-Colonial States

Ask me about this content after I've completed my second comprehensive examination (or maybe don't). This brief literature review just scratches the surface.

I pitched my intervention proposal for the RinR project at the height of EDI plan development and circulation by institutions both private and public across the country. Having been interested in and committed to inclusive public broadcasting and cultural policy, I thought the natural next step was not only to critique existing plans but to develop one that had realistic and human-centred qualities for adopting the argument that the arts sector had some “special” quality for enacting change. To do this, understanding how the sector came to be was necessary. While this brief historical account and literature review could begin in 1949 with Canada's Massey Commission¹, this period is well documented elsewhere (Beauregard, 2022). Instead, I choose to jump through moments in time that begin to build the bridge between the seas of bureaucracy and arts management.

An official arts and culture sector was cemented into global Western societies by establishing governing bodies, funding agencies, and administrative protocols. For this to happen, the 1960s saw an increase in arts management post-secondary programs taking root in Western countries (Redaelli, 2012). This coincides with a more overt adoption of managerialism in all sectors within those same countries (Glow & Minahan, 2008; O'Connor, 2015). These workers can be classified as middle management-mediators with the ability to aid artists in accessing resources by helping with applications to ensure they adhere to the strict guidelines outlined by funding agencies. Within governing institutions like the Arts Council of Britain, The Canada Council for the Arts, or Creative Australia, are several tiers of administrative workers who are most associated with surveying the sector, conducting national and local research, and the awarding of public grants drawing from tight government purse-strings, among other tasks. The arts and culture sector in settler-colonial countries has had a history of using the arts as a Band-Aid for social problems due to the decrease in funding for social services creating the strategic endowment of funding by workers based on socially-focused works and causes (McLean, 2014). This continues to be the case in countries like Canada and Australia (Working Group on Large Performing Arts Organizations, 2001). These countries, influenced by the United Kingdom's Thatcherism policies which peaked in the 1990s, cut state support of social programs in favour of free market activity. Securing funding under this

philosophy came with a bigger catch than it did with the Keynesian model of “public good” during the welfare state era. The public good model simply trusted that all art and culture were a source of nutrients in order for a society to thrive (Belfiore, 2004). With funding cuts across all social sectors, the arts and culture sector has to prove it is a positive investment through concrete data: “It was this marriage of entrepreneurship and culture – and the paradoxical alliance between left-wing local authorities and right-wing central government – which laid the foundations for Britain’s influential creative industries policies more than 10 years later” and this alliance is still present in Canada today (Bilton, 2010, p. 257). The existence of this alliance places administrators in a position to have to understand the policies and procedures that agencies and organizations must adhere to for government financial support.

Arts administrators or managers also exist in the in-between because of how they are perceived by artists and funders. While conducting interviews with the arts managers of symphony halls, Keusters (2010) notes:

The most astonishing insight is that the arts manager does not fraternize with his counterparts—and that they distrust him. He is not an ally to the artist or to the administrator or financier. He acts like an *advocatus diaboli* for all of them. (p. 50)

In this perspective, the allegiances of the arts manager appear muddled. The distrust of arts managers may stem from the incompatibility of managerialism and the arts practice within the sector. By weaving in interview quotes with an artistic director at an arts and culture organization, Glow & Minahan (2008) demonstrate the need to evaluate whether managerialism is the best intervention in certain fields. Their research is eye-opening as they draw on Clarke & Newman’s (2006) concept of ‘cultural imperialism’ to denounce the practice of infantilizing artists and assuming that corporate logic is the only effective and useful way to run any organization. Their article also addresses how staff members are expected to go above and beyond their hours to think through artistic programming and how to best respond to community needs. This is because most of the time during board meetings and organizational operations events is spent thinking about economic strategies and governance. It appears then that allegiances of arts administrators are muddled not because of their actual allegiance, but because of the *perception* of what an administrative job within arts organizations even is. Studying the day-to-day routines of arts administrators is crucial to fully comprehend how much work they do to adapt traditional materialism to fit their unique sectoral circumstances (Bilton, 2010).

Contradictorily, while specialized arts administration programs continue to exist, not all administrators and cultural workers find their way into these positions through education. Many who fill this role do so from within the arts community to achieve a stable income and support themselves as artists (Bataille et al., 2020). In Canada, there are over 150 documented artist-run centres (Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference, [n.d.](#); Gallery 101, [n.d.](#)). Some were established as early as the 1960s and 1970s, coinciding with the community arts movement (Jeffers & Moriarty, 2017). Many have direct mandates engaging in social justice praxis. For example, [La](#)

[Centrale Galerie Powerhouse](#), established in 1973, is committed to showcasing and supporting multidisciplinary works engaging in themes of intersectional-feminisms. In 1992, following the production of a play by Qu'Appelle Valley residents, [Common Weal Community Arts](#) was created to hold space for those who are “marginalized, underserved, or historically misrepresented” (Common Weal Community Arts, [n.d.](#)). These artists-run centres are different from formal arts institutions because of their varying leadership structures, some of which are non-hierarchical. As well, staff identify as artists first, and administrators second. Meeting with arts administrators over the course of my residency, many expressed that they were artists themselves. Assuming a role within an arts organization was one way to provide stability while not straying far from their interests. Many also felt the need to contribute to the sector in this way to better address the diverse needs of artists within their communities via focusing on helping others secure funding and developing programming that their community members want. This positional of occupying the in-between offers researchers a unique and complex perspective. During interviews and conversations with administrators, they could not split themselves in two when discussing their work, thus providing insight as an artist-cultural worker, not an artist and cultural worker.

The entanglement between arts and culture organizations, managerialism, and government funding offers an ever-shifting terrain of conditional relationships. The increasing importance of administrative positions to document community engagement, benefits of specific programming, and subject matters of successful funding applications hinges on the ‘positive externalities,’ or what the arts can contribute to society based on the benchmarks of social policy (Feder, 2020). The bond between arts and culture and the state is one that cannot be unlinked. State agendas and allocation of funds based on the dissemination of values, while not new, have experienced a more intentional rise in the last half-century. The question then is: how do arts and culture organizations make do, and how do they answer the call for equity in their sector in this latest rise of equity, diversity, and inclusion?

Methodology in Praxis

My MA advisor, Dr. Monika Gagnon, once said that some scholars prefer to research and write about methods – I think I am becoming one of them...

This project is anchored by two research questions: 1) How can access to the arts and culture sector from coast-to-coast-to-coast be more equitable? 2) How can participatory methods be used to engage [more] community members in the move towards more equitable cultural spaces? ⁱⁱ

The above questions required participatory research design due to their dependence on multiple perspectives and effects on a wide range of people.

This research, and the framework that resulted from it, do not come from one singular mind. Approaching this project informed by my academic and workforce background in artistic creation, I adopted the anti-colonial methodology of research-creation (RC). In the case of the RinR project, one of its core components is the ability to work alongside others to attend to complex queries. Our

projects, related to climate change, disability and accessibility, and social inclusion all require the input and reflections of not just those part of our immediate research teams, but the development of relationships across the sector with community members and cultural workers. RC as a method can be defined as “theses’ or projects [that] typically integrate a creative process, experimental aesthetic component, or an artistic work as an integral part of the study” (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012, p. 6). Attempting to fuse together artistic brainstorming practices and sociological interview methods was done to generate a familiar environment for collaborators while also yielding interview data for the creation of a visual civic impact framework. My use of RC goes beyond its experimental qualities and adopts Loveless’s (2019; 2020) approach, elevating it to a grounded, queer, anti-racist, affective, and anti-colonial methodology. Loveless identifies a crucial element of RC: the experience of the self (not to be confused with the capitalist unit of the individual). To be able to position the experiences of oneself is a rare opportunity for us on the margins. Claiming our own narratives on our own terms brings a sense of embrace and validation.

To engage collaborators, I employed a mixed-methods approach, making use of an adaptation of the walking interview, reverse photo-elicitation, and feminist manifestos. A walking interview is where interviewees are asked to respond to a series of questions while moving through an environment. The interviewer notes the ways in which the interviewee’s responses are informed by their relationship to the space (Kinney, 2018). The fieldwork for RinR commenced during the COVID-19 pandemic and the researchers involved were working in different parts of the country. While access to physical artistic spaces is generative for experimentation and collectivization (Campbell, 2021; Jeffers & Moriarty, 2017), this period of quarantine and social distancing necessitated alternative methods of engagement.ⁱⁱⁱ Further, by being paired with Culture Days, my call for participation was circulated to organization representatives across the country, making online engagement the most efficient way to bring us all together. I made an adjustment to the walking interview by using the task-based interview. This method, while well-established in education and mathematics, is less theorized and practiced in communication and media studies. It centres the analysis of a study on the way participants undertake a particular task (Houssart & Evens, 2011). Having experimented with this method before (see [Bernicky, 2019](#)), it was adapted to not centre the analysis on the engagement to the tasks, but rather to use group tasks as an anchor for broader discussions surrounding the research topic. Framed as makerspace gatherings to draw from the arts sector, I facilitated two focus groups over Zoom with four collaborators on the line each time. To simulate a space for us to creatively respond to the questions asked, the online platform [Miro](#) was used to create a private digital collaborative board.

To respond to questions along the lines of “How do you feel about EDI plans broadly?” or “As a cultural/arts worker, what are some of the challenges of fostering a more equitable and diverse space/program?” collaborators were invited to search through a creative commons image and sound database. Simultaneously, sensory prompts were displayed on the board, including prompts such as: “If you could describe EDI using a texture, what would it be?” or “If you could describe EDI using a sound, what would it be?” This approach is reminiscent of photo-elicitation, soliciting reactions based on visuals, but in reverse (Rose, 2016). The shapes, sounds, and textures not only

prompt deeper reflections, but also provide much-needed relief from heavy, and triggering subject matter.

The final method, feminist manifestos, has three characteristics that I hope to adopt as this project is still ongoing. First, feminist manifestos elicit a radical tradition that amplifies the importance of collective thinking. The RinR framework that was developed, broken apart, rearranged, and built repeatedly has strong links back to the voices of the 8 collaborators who joined the makerspace gatherings. Responding to myriad inequities across the sector is not something any one person can do alone. Second, manifestos act as political interventions and disrupt typical procedures (Taylor et al., 2023). This characteristic is one that is peppered throughout the framework's text by using quotes from collaborators and prompting the reader with questions or moments for reflection regarding their own commitments. Third and finally, "Another admirable aspect of collective feminist declarations is their tendency to contain elements of both theory and practice [while still being] written in ways that prioritize accessibility" (Weiss & Brueske, 2018, p. 23). One of the main goals of the RinR project was to ensure accessible access to each of the frameworks developed. The public has been able to follow along with the research every step of the way because it was published on the Mass Culture website. We've also prioritized using accessible language and creating video explanations of the frameworks. This paper is published in an open-source journal so that there is no restrictive paywall to engage with the paper.

The methodology and methods I equipped myself with to undertake this project highlight community engagement, dialogue, and process. While this stage of the research only had two formal focus groups, as the following section will demonstrate, it was the conversations, sitting in awkward silence, stickiness, flowing of tears, uncontrollable laughter, and sighs that power the core of the research and generate its outputs.

The Settler-Canadian Arts and Culture Sector– Spiraling Outward for Equity

Framework... I am so tired of reading corporate EDI plans, the smiles of those photographed on each page making us feel like everything will be okay – But I am writing this article as the world burns (but you and I have to believe that everything will be okay...OK?).

I sit here writing this piece reviewing several threads. Each thread in the palm of my hands pulled taut under fear that they might slip away. While holding on tight, the threads began to come alive with each research stage, spiralling around my fingers to become tendrils. The first iteration of the framework was developed with the guidance of 8 collaborators drawn from Culture Days' network: Elana Bizovie, Annalissa Crisostomo, Em Ironstar, Jackie Latendresse, Crystal Massier, Shauna R., Valeria Duarte Reyes, and Johnny Trinh. It was also influenced by the many virtual meetings with National Culture Days Executive Director Shannon Bowler, Research and Registration Manager Samuel Bernier-Cormier, Community Engagement and Programs Manager Fernanda Sierra Suárez, and Communications Coordinator Christie Carrière. Based on those conversations, acknowledging

the realities of Culture Days’ network, anything which was to be created needed to be flexible. The framework itself is a spiral existing in an open terrain that encourages movement, winding down onto itself into a core point, only to spring out, becoming larger and larger after each component is engaged (figure 3). There are four pillars (or guiding principles) that frame the spiral, each with its own series of indicators, questions, collaborator quotes, and sometimes reflections. This approach acknowledges that process and progress are two distinct entities. The former presupposes that each choice builds one articulation of a constructed assemblage, while the latter assumes there is a final destination. In the case of equity, there is no destination, because if we assumed there was, we would have missed the point. During the process, as the spiral becomes larger, the pillars begin to intertwine, and their interventions become natural processes to all parties engaging with them. Moreover, the four pillars act either for process through guidance, or as communal qualities, depending on the level of engagement by an organization. In this section, I provide a description of each pillar, using them as anchors to discuss the RinR journey interrogating the arts and EDI. The full framework can be accessed on the [Mass Culture website](#). For the organizations that were not yet ready to commit to the recommendations of the framework, a [toolkit for anti-colonial EDI practices](#) was made.

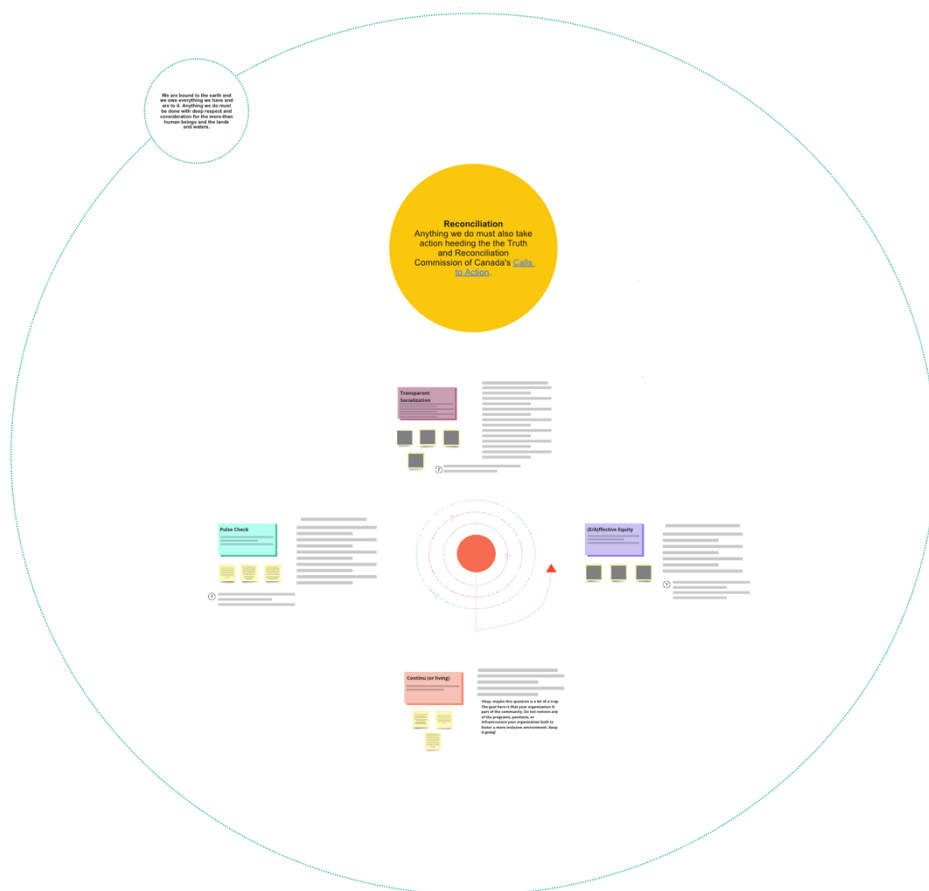


Figure 3: Bird's eye view of the Spiralling Outwardly for Equity in Public Arts Framework. For a detailed and readable image, please refer to the full framework via [this link](#). For an accessible version of the framework, navigate to [this PDF](#). The PDF has been recommended by cultural workers as a less overwhelming way to begin navigating the framework and is personally this author's favourite rendition of the work.

Pulse Check

The commitment to equity should be considered the beating heart of any organization. This means constantly scanning the terrain to identify barriers and providing the option of anonymity to employees and community members to detail more inferential barriers. This is the beginning of a never-ending cycle. Equity does not just mean checking off boxes of tangible things that can be done but instead working to improve lives as our communities and environments evolve. As such, you will always find yourself checking for a pulse with the hope that it gets stronger, understanding that it will flutter, falter, or stall at times.

Pulse Check meets us at a crossroads, confronting the reality that the arts and culture sector is complicit in the systemic Othering of diverse-mind bodies. Pulse Check acknowledges the need for both quantitative and qualitative data for two reasons: quantitative as a recognized form of "proof" large funding bodies expect (Yúdice, 2003) and quantitative and qualitative reporting methods simultaneously for staff to voice their concerns, anonymously (or without economic consequence if anonymity is not possible). Pulse Check goes further to consider the transparency of data and ownership. It is unrealistic to completely forgo quantitative reporting at this time, however, it is necessary to move towards open access to data and full ownership of contributions by those community members involved. For instance, Boykin *et al.* (2020) argue for the continued release of yearly diversity statistics to the public to ensure that previously stated goals are met. The first indicators of Pulse Check require organizations to scan the trends in programming subject matter and intersections of artists they routinely seek out for contract work. The next stage asks organizations to identify barriers to access through observation and anonymous feedback from staff and community members. Jackie, in their own experience managing an arts organization, noted:

As we develop, I know I have come across a lot of barriers that are only still there because they are not my barriers or the company's barriers, or the strategic plan's barriers. Barriers that are in place by municipal, federal, and provincial governments that prevents any sort of advancement. For instance, my building qualified for a half a million-dollar federal grant to install a wheelchair ramp and it got blocked municipally. It got blocked, they would not allow it because of whatever little, small thing that was going on and ultimately it was harmful to the city's own EDI plan. (Jackie)

This messy heap of barriers that Jackie describes is not uncommon. Pulse Check aids in documenting this reality and finding a way forward by leveraging community feedback and anonymized staff experience. The pillar of metric-level exploration requires interpersonal reflection:

Also doing some individual work, I think. Therapy, maybe? For a lot of people. Like, mental health for folks because a lot of this is also rooted in fear of like 'oh my god what are people going to say if I start talking about racism? I don't want to have this conversation; I am a manager. (Valeria)

The current nature of EDI strategic planning allows for organizations to get stuck in an unactionable routine. When staff members and management do not engage in deep thought about why it is they are engaging with equity-work, then any actions can come off as superficial. It is also important to continually reflect as you conduct the work.

There's three things to help change and the first one is that personal transformation and I think we as a person need to start with that education first. And [...] that relationship building and helping have someone with you to help educate and help correct you and maybe you're reverting back in your thinking and before you can do those policies and 'this is what we're doing' you really need to have that personal transformation. (Shauna)

Transparent Socialization

After completing a Pulse Check, review the barriers signalled from this round; how have they manifested themselves? Are there items that can be immediately addressed without the consultation of community members? If so, start with those. Some barriers will be more systemic, requiring work ranging from leveraging local plans to implementing new federal strategic plans. As such, when building a strategic plan, be realistic about what your organization can do for communities in the very near future. Furthermore, emphasize bureaucratic hurdles with government representatives that are seriously hurting the possibility of equitable access. Throughout the process, it is also necessary to consult and compensate community members whose barriers you are always addressing. Try to prioritize building trust and sustaining relationships with community members rather than calling on them for a finite amount of time to develop solutions for your organization.

Transparent socialization makes use of the sociological term "socialization" to consider how we are taught the appropriate behaviours and traditions of our culture. In the case of transparent socialization, the art organization is responsible for respecting and following the customs of whichever community they are engaging with.

There is also perhaps a lack of relationship building because it's usually the people way up here that are making those plans and then it's like the administrators and the folks on the ground that have the real connections and relationships with the communities or are part of those communities - positions that would actually benefit the strategic planning process and actually serve those they were meant to serve. (Annalissa)

I think also there's that conflict, and I don't know if conflict is the right word but how do you invite people to the space to be a part of those conversations without tokenizing people or asking people to do work if we don't have funding to pay people for their time and energy. (Elana)

Annalissa and Elana identify breaks in the chain of command of arts organizations. More specifically, they identify a disconnect between funders or board members, day-to-day employees, grassroots organizers, and community members. Transparent socialization recognizes this, by beginning to restructure organizations to include community liaisons as permanent staff. It can be tricky when an organization serves so many different communities with distinct interests, but in this case, engaging well-connected grassroots organizers and providing compensation is a start. In the case of collapsing the space between funders and arts administrators, the best way to do this is with regular check-ins such as symposiums, online networks and newsletters, or full-scale conferences. For instance, in the winter of 2023 Mass Culture hosted the Arts Support Organization Convergence, bringing together over 60 funding bodies, arts organizations, and academics from across Canada. Over two days we came together as one community to explore how best to move forward together, considering current and ever-changing economic, social, environmental, and cultural challenges. I had the opportunity to co-facilitate a session with printmaker and arts educator Skye Louis on developing flexible and equitable approaches to arts impact. In this hands-on session, participants were invited to play with two emerging impact measurement tools. We explored the current impact measurement landscape in the arts and cultural sector alongside qualitative aesthetic approaches and discussed challenges and equitable practices. While playing with the developed framework, many participants noted the systemic issues that affected their ability to meet the needs of their communities. Just being in the same place and at the same time allowed cultural workers to speak back to funders. It also provided a space for them to commiserate and brainstorm how to proceed.

The idea of having an EDI plan is important but I think that in maybe the actual formal planning of it and maybe having this thing or this idea—this document that you can go forward with and say 'these are the things that we're gonna do to become more diverse and inclusive...' While I understand that it's hard to navigate a different way, I think that sometimes it takes away some of the authenticity from it. I think that true inclusion and diversity comes from relationship building and you can't really prescribe that. (Em)

Em urges us to be cautious when going down the path of creating EDI plans. They also identify the pitfalls of such documents as they tend to remove the affective layer required for sustainable change. I felt an internal struggle before I finally produced the spiral and pillars because I was afraid of falling into the same pattern. Transparent socialization centralizes community building while recognizing the many intricate links that need to be created and maintained. When everyone feels ownership over a “plan”/“directive”/“strategy”, drive and accountability come from all directions. When the work is placed on the shoulders of one person or a small team, they inevitably burn out. When many are implicated, the chances of continued momentum are higher.

(E/A)ffective Equity

Equity is a complex principle to measure as it includes an affective, personal layer. The “effective” component of this stage is where your organization implements programs and strategies to push equity forward. “Affective” is the level of care, support, and inclusion marginalized community members feel when entering and engaging with the organization in question.

(E/A)ffective Equity was one of the hardest pillars to construct because it moves from the internal experience of marginalized community members outward to external improvements in the organization. By setting up closed spaces for marginalized community members, artists, grassroots organizers, and others, they have the autonomy that is currently lacking due to micromanagement and requirement to perform. This experience is expressed by Johnny:

I arrived in this region – this land, in 2017 and right away I got to work with an incredible theatre company and the artistic director said to me (because we’ve had a lot of ongoing conversations) he said that, ‘for a lot of artists who identify with equity-seeking communities, we are often tasked with somehow being these consultants and I mean, that’s fine, the money is useful for sure at times. Let’s be honest, we don’t do it for the money, we are putting in so much labour and holding space and exhausting ourselves’ and he goes ‘that’s the thing though.’ ‘We are born and made to be artists, and to create art and engage with this dialogue through our practice and then yet, we are being exhausted because we are asked to academically, critically, politically address it or perform about it in a way that is not our modality and that can really burn people out. (Johnny)

The pigeon-holing that Johnny describes is a routine practice not unique to the arts and culture sector and can be found throughout all industries in settler-colonial, especially multicultural, societies. This by no means should be taken to say that all consultancy is exploitative and restrictive. Rather, that equity-seeking folks, artists particularly, can be left with little opportunity to engage in their artistic practice, unless the subject matter fulfills some EDI mandate. (E/A)ffective Equity might

be interpreted as counterintuitive by making special space for marginalized artists and creators. This is contrary to being surrounded by kin and allies, which facilitates more nuanced and generative discussions, art, and programs. Especially since, as expressed by Annalissa, this allows us to dig deeper, to consider intersectionality:

We talk about intersectionality, but we don't really necessarily apply that lens to different aspects. It's sometimes like "BIPOC folks" and it's like "folks with disabilities" but we don't really look at those intersections and embed them into the strategic plan. It almost feels like these pools exist in like silos. (Annalissa)

Intersectionality is difficult to capture through quantitative diagnostics, going all the way back to the Pulse Check pillar. Developing multi-pronged approaches to capturing qualitative experience, at Pulse Check, Transparent Socialization, and (E/A)ffective Equity, can start to capture a more robust and living snapshot of the complex identities of all those engaging within an organization, and around it. This is why the same liaison can be tasked with collecting this data at the Transparent Socialization and (E/A)ffective Equity stage. As the framework is currently in a use-case study with two organizations, I hope to further develop tangible ways to implement the recommendations of (E/A)ffective Equity in the future.

Continu (or living)

Evaluating equity is a continual process with no end. Nothing is truly perfect, and that is okay. Continu (or living), the final pillar, acknowledges the messiness of ensuring equity for as many folks as possible at any given time. As a result, the cycle continues over, and over again, building on top of itself with no end.

Producing an EDI plan for Culture Days with measurable indicators was impossible because of the way the festival operates. At this time, Culture Days cannot provide prescriptive requirements to all organizers who participate because each has unique mandates and community needs. Moreover, when communing with makerspace collaborators, the thought of creating another plan to offer into the vast sea of other plans, felt unimpactful, even trauma-inducing:

I'd also like to add that it is always so quick. People want to make these changes—like they want that immediate change like 'okay now we're diversified.' But what did you do? How did you build that so that it actually meets the needs of what your end goal? So that's always where for me, these things take time and I know that's difficult, and it feels awkward and horrible that it is taking that much time but there really isn't a quick fix. So that's also something that I often hear that feedback too where 'yeah it's great that this organization is doing this but they're still doing it so quickly that it's not actually benefiting anybody. It's sort of like spinning your wheels or just ticking off boxes. There are ways to get people maybe just to slow down a little bit and really think? In the end, I feel like that's a stronger approach. (Crystal)

Inclusion that is meaningful inclusion, so not having someone there just to cross them off from a list or something but to actually have a space where people feel comfortable to share their ideas and actually have the space to disagree with someone and building a safe space for difficult or uncomfortable conversations that people sometimes don't want to have but the only way through is through, so we have to actually have these conversations and have these spaces. (Valeria)

The question became “how do we capture anti-colonial guiding principles such as justice and self-determination (Tyner, 2006), recognizing the need for some direction, without the practice of checking boxes while on autopilot?” Continu (or living) reminds users that building an equitable space is an iterative, ever-expanding process. The goal of this pillar is to assert that organizations are part of the community. It reminds cultural workers, managers, and funders that the work is never done and urges them to keep going. Waiting for the perfect tool or way forward, when it comes to equity, does not exist. A fruitful way forward is to get started, letting on-the-ground community members lead the way to minimize harm.

A Non-Conclusion, not a Non Sequitur: Scratching at the Seams of a Feedback Loop

I wish I could say “to conclude, this work is never-ending.” While I'll say that directly below in different words, I want to assert that this is a non-conclusion – nothing here comes to a close. The tendrils continue to grow, curling around my fingers, hands and up my arms...

Yes, it has been three years since the start of this project, and it is nowhere near over. It took me one year to write this paper because I felt I needed some concrete ending, a point final. Feeling like I had nothing to offer as an ending, I pushed this exercise from my mind, instead focusing on the editing of the framework whenever possible. I realized in the process of reviewing collaborator's interventions, with roundtable participants across the country, and through conversations with peers at conferences, that finding an answer or solution, a conclusion, is what keeps us all in a feedback loop when it comes to equity work. I hold dear Twyla Tharp's (2003) process of “scratching” because:

Even though I look desperate, I don't feel desperate, because I have a habitual routine to keep me going. I call it scratching. You know how you scratch away at a lottery ticket to see if you've won? That's what I'm doing when I begin a piece. I'm digging through everything to find something. It's like clawing at the side of a mountain to get a toehold, a grip, some sort of traction to keep moving upward and onward. (p. 65)

Finding an ultimate path to some abstract end is not the goal. Scratching, like the Continuum or the spiral at the center of the framework, reminds us that it is those bits and pieces we find along the way that are the rewards. Occupying a virtual space with collaborators committed to social justice and equity, we had very few lulls in the conversation. When there was dead air, it was because each of us was scratching through the heaps of discomfort and confusion of how many times we'd have to have conversations about equity, diversity, and inclusion, specifically what to do, rather than what we have been doing and where to go next until we were out of this strange cycle, and something that expanded outwardly instead. Furthermore, how could we archive and study arts policy the same way we catalogue art:

For a moment, what if we treat these artists' collections not as a site for providing evidence and clues about what went into the making of artwork or about contexts in which the artist practiced? Instead, I would propose we see those archives as sites that have the potential to tell a different story of the flows, accumulations, and sedimentations of memory, history, and places. (Ahmed, 2012, p. 32).

If I am following Ahmed, we must gather a holistic picture of our archives and see each contribution as a layer in the foundation upon which we stand, finding trends in our own cataloguing approaches. What if we begin to think of previous arts policies as an archive of tools of the oppressors, distinct from the nurtured collective memory of the oppressed? Rather than building upon past policies? Instead of collecting and sharing resources created by organizations that have been committed to equity work for their entire existence? From high to low culture, public good, social inclusion, equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, belonging, and beyond. This research is still ongoing, as it will be the subject of my doctoral dissertation. But for now, I end with the poetic reflection of Valeria, as it encompasses the framework and the process thus far: "You can have clouds that are here today and not here in five minutes and just the idea of a system that is working but changing all the time." (Valeria Duarte Reyes)

ⁱ Officially known as the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, the Massey Commission was chaired by Vincent Massey. This commission spearheaded the creation of our national arts commission and yielded broadcast policy for the project of a distinct image of Canadian-ness to legitimize Canada's sovereignty.

ⁱⁱ These research questions will change as the project evolves. My original research questions were the following: 1) How can an [artistic approach] be used to reimagine [equity, diversity, and inclusion] [initiatives] in the public arts sector across [Canada]? 2) How can Culture Days' cultural reach from coast-to-coast-to-coast and supportive structure be harnessed to develop inclusivity indicators based on participant survey data and makerspace gatherings? 3) How does a [student-researcher] exist between the bounds of academia and the arts and culture sector? The words in square brackets are the ones I wasn't sure about using.

ⁱⁱⁱ It should be noted that organizations have long been responding to concerns of accessibility, foregrounding the responsibility to produce programming that all folks can contribute to and engage with. For instance, Tangled Art + Disability based out of *Tkaronto* (colonially known as Toronto, Ontario) has a history of this.

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