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# Exploring Needs for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Practices in Arts and Culture Nonprofits in Denver, Colorado

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**Keywords:** *Diversity, equity, and inclusion; arts and culture nonprofit organizations; Bonfils-Stanton Foundation; Denver, Colorado; diverse workforce*

## Introduction

Metropolitan Denver, Colorado, is home to a rich arts and cultural community. Since 1989, the seven-county area's Scientific & Cultural Facilities District, funded by sales and use taxes, has supported organizations involved in the visual and performing arts, cultural and natural history, and the natural sciences. A National Endowment for the Arts (NEA, 2016a) study of arts participation found a particularly high rate among Coloradans, who ranked second in the nation for watching movies, visiting art galleries, seeing plays, or reading books, and third for attending live music, theater, or dance performances. In 2018, the Colorado Business Committee for the Arts (2018) reported that cultural events in metro Denver drew 15 million people annually, increasing at nearly twice the rate of population growth in the area.

Yet alongside this evidence of interest and enthusiasm for arts and culture, there has been notably more limited participation among some of the area's communities of color. Denver Arts and Venues, an agency of the city and county of Denver, commissioned Corona Insights (2018) to conduct public phone surveys in 2013 and 2017 as part of the city's cultural plan. In these surveys, both Latinx and Black respondents expressed interest in the arts, but reported that they currently were not participating in them as much as they would like; both also reported more difficulty finding out about arts and culture in Denver than did the overall survey group. Both groups of respondents described barriers to participation that differed slightly from those faced by the overall group, including

## Key Points

- To foster a more welcoming, inclusive, and effective arts and culture community in the metropolitan Denver area, the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation seeks to promote promising practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) among nonprofit arts organizations. The foundation partnered with a researcher to explore how local organizations are implementing such practices and to learn how it could best support these efforts.
- This article summarizes the findings of a qualitative survey of leaders from 10 Denver arts and culture nonprofits and discusses them within the context of a review of literature on diversity efforts among other arts organizations in North America. Interviewees were asked to reflect on what their organizations understand DEI to mean, what they consider promising practices for building DEI efforts, how they define success, what challenges exist in addressing DEI, and what structures can support the work.
- Drawing from these findings, this article recommends that arts grantmakers can most effectively support nonprofits in their DEI work through building the field, supporting a diverse workforce, and measuring progress.

*To foster a more welcoming, inclusive, and effective arts and culture community, the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation, the sole private foundation in Colorado chiefly supporting the arts in Denver, seeks to promote promising practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) among arts organizations both locally and nationally.*

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lack of parking and information; not feeling welcomed; and not feeling represented, in either participation or employment, in local arts and culture organizations and events. Latinx and Black residents were also less likely than others surveyed to believe that the arts had a positive impact on Denver.

Nationally, white populations are overrepresented in attendance and participation in arts and culture, which calls into question the viability of those companies and presenters (NEA, 2016b). By 2044, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), no single racial or ethnic group will constitute a majority in the United States. With a population of just over 700,000 in July 2017 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.), Denver already reflects this trend: Data from the Colorado State Demography Office (2018) show over 53% of Denver County's population under age 17 identifies as Latinx.

To foster a more welcoming, inclusive, and effective arts and culture community, the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation, the sole private foundation in Colorado chiefly supporting the arts in Denver, seeks to promote promising practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) among arts organizations both locally and nationally. In 2015, Donna Walker-Kuhne,

an audience development consultant, worked with the foundation to assess needs and develop strategies for engaging and building diverse audiences. Her resulting recommendations for nonprofit arts and culture organizations included the following:

- Develop a common understanding of and language for such terms as “diversity” and “privilege.”
- Improve staff recruitment and development through increased organizational commitment, support, and capacity for engaging diverse audiences.
- Change organizational culture by making DEI work a part of every department and position.
- Develop long-term partnerships to tackle the work together through sharing knowledge and effective strategies.
- Embrace diverse communities as part of core audiences (Steuer, 2015).

Building on this work, Walker-Kuhne and the foundation explored how local organizations are implementing DEI practices and, to learn how to best support these efforts, conducted a qualitative survey of 10 Denver arts and culture nonprofits in the spring of 2019.

## Defining DEI

Initiatives to build DEI are core to the development of effective organizations, where differences lead to success, participation, and empowerment (Ferdman, 2018). This work continues to gain attention and emphasis in the fields of philanthropy and the arts. However, specific intentions of DEI initiatives vary among organizations, and many of them create DEI or equity values statements to clarify their terms. The D5 Coalition, a five-year initiative of 18 organizations that sought to advance DEI in philanthropy, defined diversity as focused on broader representation of racial and ethnic groups, LGBTQ populations, people with

disabilities, and women (Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2018). Americans for the Arts<sup>1</sup> (AFTA, 2016) and Grantmakers in the Arts (GIA, 2019) have released DEI statements focusing specifically on racial equity. Other organizations have changed their internal definitions of DEI: After an 18-month effort at the Ford Foundation to create an initiative challenging inequality, the foundation realized it had not considered the needs of people with disabilities — an omission that led it to rethink its definition of inclusion (Walker, 2016; Khan, 2017).

### Strategies for and Challenges to Building DEI Initiatives

The GIA (2019) recommends the following strategies for DEI initiatives:

- Establish an advisory committee.
- Promote DEI in regular communications.
- Collect internal and external demographic data.
- Train board and staff in DEI practices.
- When choosing staff and board members, intentionally consider, select, and support diverse candidates and those who value racial equity.
- Use a racial equity lens throughout the organization.
- Collaborate with other organizations to share best practices.

The importance of board commitment to DEI is echoed by BoardSource (2019) and has guided the work of the James Irvine Foundation to encourage participation in the arts among diverse and underresourced communities (Ramirez, 2016). Another national organization,

the League of American Orchestras (LAO, 2019a), released a DEI strategic plan and funded grants to support capacity building; training and peer learning; DEI planning and audits; and measuring internal progress; and LAO grantees, participating in a cohort, are paired with an experienced DEI practitioner (LAO, 2019b).

Measuring progress toward DEI, internally and across the field, can be particularly challenging for the nonprofit sector. Third Sector New England (2011), a management consultant to fellow nonprofits, recommends infusing evaluation at the beginning of DEI work and engaging consultants to bring outside perspectives to the organization. Equity in the Center (2019) presents seven strategic elements or levers: senior leaders, managers, boards of directors, community, learning environment, data, and organizational culture. Mauldin, Kidd, and Ruskin note, data collection “varies by type of organizations, programs and partnerships involved, as well as by funder mandates and the socioeconomic makeup of target populations” (2016, p. 36). Nonprofits may also struggle to find the resources necessary to measure progress; Chung and Tran (2015) found that in Colorado, limited staff capacity and funding made evaluation a low priority.

There are also data showing limited opportunities for people of color who seek advancement in arts administration. The William and Flora Hewett Foundation found not only a lack of diversity among arts administrators, but also few opportunities for early to mid-career leaders due to delayed retirements (Ono, 2016). Kunreuther and Thomas-Breitfeld (2017) found more similarities than differences in background and preparation among people of color and their white colleagues; they also learned that while aspiring to greater opportunities in nonprofit leadership, people of color often report frustration with expectations to serve as representatives of an entire community. Paid

<sup>1</sup> While Americans for the Arts continues to be a leading organization advocating for the arts in the U.S., in December 2020, the organization announced that its director would take a paid leave of absence while several independent investigations into AFTA's workplace environment and internal DEI policies and procedures are being conducted. See <https://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/press-releases/statement-of-the-americans-for-the-arts-board-of-directors-on-the-commencement-of-independent>.

*Paid internships, mentorships, and establishing and supporting networks for leaders at all career stages could help to create individual career pathways and to cultivate and retain leaders of color.*

internships, mentorships, and establishing and supporting networks for leaders at all career stages could help to create individual career pathways and to cultivate and retain leaders of color. Recommended strategies in the literature for fostering DEI in arts leadership include changes in organizational culture and hiring and promotion practices, as well as systems of support for up-and-coming leaders. Americans for the Arts, for example, sponsors a Diversity in Arts Leadership internship, an arts and cultural equity fellowship, and various demographic constituency networks (Lord, 2019).

With its Landscape Project, the Denver Foundation (2018) sought to “establish a baseline of the nonprofit sector’s self-assessment of its diversity, inclusiveness, and racial equity work” (p. 3). The study’s participants — a cross-section of metro Denver nonprofit leaders — agreed that an organization’s successes in achieving racial equity are rooted in how well that organization is a reflection of its community, and that commitment and consistency are key to long-term change in organizational culture, including the ability to have difficult conversations about these issues. Among the identified barriers to achieving racial equity were divergent narratives among staff members of different identities, an absence of a diverse talent pipeline for new staff, and the lack of an agreed-upon measurement for advances in racial equity. Recommendations for removing those barriers included looking beyond educational levels to recognize lived experience and transferable skills when making hiring decisions and working to retain diverse

talent; cultivating growth opportunities; and building supportive organizational cultures, including creating common progress measures across organizations.

### **DEI in Arts and Culture in Several Cities**

Several cities in North America have examined organizational approaches to DEI among arts and culture nonprofits:

- In Alberta, Canada, a DEI survey by the Calgary Arts Development authority (2018) of the more than 160 nonprofits it funds in that city found greater diversity among younger members of arts nonprofits; noted that Calgary’s population was more than half as ethnically diverse as its arts and culture organizations; and revealed that the nonprofits’ board members, in general and among those members with higher incomes, tend to be older and male.
- Quantitative data from a New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (2016) survey indicated the arts and culture workforce did not reflect the city’s racial and ethnic diversity. Respondents also identified peer-to-peer sharing of successful practices and diversity workshops as valued services, and partnerships with schools and educational organizations were recommended as an approach to diversifying staff.
- In Los Angeles County, a DataArts (2017) study found the arts and culture workforce was more homogenous (60% white non-Hispanic) than the overall population (27% white non-Hispanic), and that younger workforce members were more racially diverse and board members were least diverse. The study recommended that nonprofits explore pipelines to draw talent from colleges and universities, citing findings that only 30% of the population over age 25 in Los Angeles County has a degree and that 59% of that group identifies as white.

**TABLE 1** Project Interview Subjects

Annual Operating Budget	Organizations (Leaders Interviewed)
Small (under \$1 million)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Phamaly Theatre Company (managing director, artistic director, director of production)</li> <li>Youth on Record (executive director)</li> </ul>
Midsized (\$1 million - \$10 million)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Art Students League of Denver (executive director)</li> <li>Children's Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus (vice president of development and communications)</li> <li>Cleo Parker Robinson Dance (executive director)</li> <li>Curious Theatre Company (managing director)</li> <li>Newman Center for the Performing Arts, University of Denver (executive director)</li> <li>RedLine Contemporary Art Center (executive director)</li> </ul>
Large (\$10 million - \$50 million)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Denver Botanic Gardens (community relations manager)</li> <li>Denver Museum of Nature &amp; Science (director community research and engagement strategies)</li> </ul>

Similar research in metropolitan Denver has been quantitative and focused on audience experience, or focused on the nonprofit sector as a whole. The lack of qualitative data, therefore, creates an opportunity for research to examine successes in and challenges to implementing DEI initiatives in the area's nonprofit arts and culture organizations. Drawing on the literature, this researcher and the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation identified two primary research questions for a qualitative study of promising DEI practices, supportive structures, and challenges to these efforts:

1. What are promising practices for increasing DEI efforts among arts and culture nonprofits in Denver?
2. What structures can support progress in DEI in these nonprofits? What challenges to this support exist?

## Methodology

The study for this project was based on data from semistructured interviews with the leaders of 10 Denver arts and culture nonprofits. (See Table 1.) The interview subjects were selected by the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation with criteria guided by the foundation's equity values

statement; knowledge and awareness of practices gained from reviewing grant applications; and the subjects' participation in the foundation's Arts and Diversity Leadership Council. Five of the selected organizations are also led by Livingston Fellows, a foundation program recognizing exceptional nonprofit leaders.

Interviews each lasted approximately one hour and occurred in person. After being recorded and transcribed, they were analyzed via thematic analysis using inductive reasoning. Open coding was conducted, followed by pattern coding and categorizing, including identifying quotes to illustrate categories. The development of 10 open-ended questions and follow-up probes used in the qualitative instrument and accompanying descriptive data form were guided by the literature review, Denver-specific data, and the foundation's knowledge and relationships. Data analysis identified a number of manifest and latent themes. (See Table 2.)

## Results: Promising Practices

Interviewees were first asked to identify promising practices for increasing DEI efforts among Denver arts and culture nonprofits. Three sub-questions were posed to lay the groundwork for that discussion: 1) What do arts and culture

**TABLE 2** Key Findings From Interviews

Research Question	Sub-Question	Summarized Findings
What are promising practices of increasing DEI efforts in arts and culture nonprofits in Denver?	What do arts and culture nonprofits understand DEI to mean?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcoming</li> <li>• Co-creating with communities</li> <li>• Accessible to all, including people with disabilities and of different gender identities</li> </ul>
	What does addressing DEI successfully in an arts and cultural nonprofit look like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A diverse board and staff</li> <li>• Demonstrating written and spoken organizational commitment to DEI through such strategies as an equity values statement, an internal DEI committee, and a DEI plan, embedded in overall organizational plans</li> <li>• Considering DEI in program development</li> <li>• Sharing information and practices with the field</li> </ul>
	How do arts and culture organizations know they are successful in DEI work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition from audiences and those in the field, locally and nationally</li> <li>• Diversifying audiences, staff, and boards</li> <li>• Ability to have open conversations about diverse experiences and perspectives among staff and board, particularly relating to race</li> </ul>
What structures can support progress in DEI in arts and culture nonprofits in Denver?	What challenges exist in addressing DEI in arts and culture nonprofits?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges include measuring progress (organizations need more capacity, time, funding), hiring diverse staff, both for administrative and artistic roles and addressing accessibility</li> <li>• Creating understanding that there is no one-size-fits-all approach, sharing resources, and promoting willingness to take risks and make mistakes would be supportive toward DEI progress</li> </ul>

nonprofits understand DEI to mean? 2) What does addressing DEI successfully those organizations look like? 3) How do they know their DEI work is succeeding?

**What Does DEI Mean?**

From interviews about what Denver arts and culture leaders understand DEI to mean, two themes emerged: welcoming and co-creating with communities. The leaders said they believed creating an organization where audiences and participants have a welcoming, comfortable experience would indicate a strong grasp of DEI, and they defined co-creating with communities as building relationships and partnerships over time with diverse communities through authentic connection, seeking from them feedback and long-term engagement. Many interviewees said they had changed their organizational approach to facilitate their efforts

to engage these communities; Curious Theatre Company (2018), with support from Bonfils-Stanton, published a white paper on this subject. Examples of poor strategies for co-creating included assuming that a theater production with a diverse cast would automatically draw diverse audiences, and trying to engage community participation in an organization’s event without building a relationship first.

The interviewees were familiar with current discussions about the lack of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity among national arts audiences (NEA, 2016a). Some local organizations had been urged by communities of color to become more representative in terms of their staff, board, and programming as a way to stay relevant. Other issues that arose included the disproportionate impact of limited affordable housing, gentrification, and displacement in

metro Denver over the past five to 10 years on people of color and communities with relatively lower socioeconomic status. Some interviewees indicated an awareness that as Denver's high cost of living led many families to move to surrounding counties, barriers such as transportation had become a greater factor in the underrepresentation of some communities in arts audiences.

The nonprofit leaders also consistently agreed that a definition of DEI should include access. One aspect of this issue involves ensuring that the needs of people with disabilities (e.g., transportation, accessibility to facilities and equipment for wheelchair users and those with low vision) are being included in discussions of DEI, as has been addressed by Walker (2016) and Khan (2017). Gender identity and expression was also discussed, especially the need among arts organizations to be inclusive of those who identify as transgender and to gain a deeper understanding of how to be welcoming to these audiences, including expanding access by creating gender-inclusive restrooms.

Interestingly, the definitions offered by the interviewees differed in emphasis from those informing the approach of a number of national organizations (AFTA, 2016; GIA, 2019; Equity in the Center, 2019) whose focus has been primarily on racial equity. Some interviewees said that when they heard racial equity emphasized in DEI discussions, they felt issues of access were being excluded. In addition, there was a sense that the intersectionality of different identities was not receiving as much attention in DEI work across the sector.

Several of those interviewed agreed that DEI issues were integral to the founding of their organizations, such as the importance of creating opportunities in arts and culture for those of historically marginalized identities. At the time, however, they were not using the term DEI to characterize their efforts. All said they were now aware of DEI as a significant concern in arts and culture, and many noted how achieving inclusion and equity would require moving beyond representation to truly incorporate diverse

perspectives into an organization's approach to its mission. More than half of respondents discussed how their understanding of DEI developed from personal experience and interactions and emphasized it as a process of learning and growth; as one said, "The deeper you go, you're never going to go back."

### DEI at an Arts Organization: What Does It Look Like?

The leaders of arts and culture nonprofits interviewed for this study agreed on the importance of diversity within their organizations and among audiences, and some more specifically defined that as reflecting the racial and ethnic diversity of the seven-county metro Denver area. Half of interviewees said they had noticed more diversity in audiences over the past five to 10 years. Half of them also noted increased diversity on their board, and the others indicated movement toward this type of diversity was in progress. A few interviewees also mentioned gains in building a more diverse staff; a similar shift in the makeup of volunteers was not mentioned. Several brought up intentional efforts to increase diversity on boards, among staff, and in audiences while also acknowledging a gentrification-driven decline in racial and socioeconomic diversity in the metro Denver area.

Some organizations were using demographic quotas to create more representational boards or were considering this strategy; others did not see the need or did not want to use that approach, instead focusing on building and maintaining community relationships. The Denver arts and culture leaders emphasized caution in these efforts, citing their unwillingness to tokenize community members and the need to ensure particular skill sets were represented on their boards — concerns Brennan and Forbes (2019) highlighted in a report on board diversity among U.S. nonprofits. Interviewees also pointed out that a racially diverse board does not by itself constitute board engagement in DEI work, and emphasized the importance of such a commitment. Boards represent organizations in the community, as do company members, faculty, contractors, and other affiliates, but they are not necessarily entrenched in organizational



*In terms of communicating the importance of DEI to current staff, several leaders mentioned discussing the issue and sharing DEI-related articles during staff meetings, and including DEI implementation in performance goals and evaluations.*

culture. Ensuring all of these parties get the same training and have the same discussions to create a shared understanding of DEI emerged as a priority.

The importance of solidifying the commitment of organizations to DEI in terms of language, especially from their boards and leadership, was a prominent theme across interviews. For those who called DEI integral to the formation of their organizations, this is a process of formalizing policy and institutional knowledge. Almost all organizations had developed an equity values statement in some form, either internal or external. Having a written commitment to DEI integrated throughout the organization and supported by leaders who recognize its value was identified as important due to the challenging and ongoing nature of DEI work.

The Denver arts and culture leaders expressed a concern that also surfaced in studies of DEI efforts in Calgary, New York City, and elsewhere: the importance of a diverse staff in their organizations and the struggle to find a diverse pool of candidates to fill these administrative and artistic roles. Homogeneous perspectives brought by homogeneous staff were identified as a problem. And some organizations mentioned that few people of color had applied for their open positions — which many attributed to the relative lack of diversity overall in the Denver area's arts and culture arena — though some interviewees mentioned that they were

currently examining their hiring practices with an eye toward this issue. Some larger organizations reported gains in diversity among lower-level staff, but said similar success remained a challenge at leadership levels, where people tended to remain in their positions for a longer time.

Interviewees had less to say about the retention and experiences of staff who identify as people of color. Some of those interviewed referred on their own to issues identified in the research, such as people with these identities being tasked with taking on a significant burden of DEI work and being re-traumatized as others in their organization are introduced to basic DEI concepts (Kunreuther & Thomas-Breitfeld, 2017; Denver Foundation, 2018). In terms of communicating the importance of DEI to current staff, several leaders mentioned discussing the issue and sharing DEI-related articles during staff meetings, and including DEI implementation in performance goals and evaluations. In this vein, those interviewees emphasized the importance of ingraining a DEI focus in staff culture as part of establishing an organizationwide responsibility for its success.

Arts and culture leaders were also asked about the presence in their organization of the following DEI practices:

- considering DEI in terms of programs, fundraising, and/or vendors;
- collaborating and/or sharing information with other organizations;
- an equity values statement;
- an internal DEI committee;
- a DEI plan; and
- a staff position responsible for leading DEI work.

Everyone interviewed consistently considered DEI in terms of their programs — from shaping decisions about performances and presentations

to holding an LGBTQ family day and offering admission discounts to those eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. Grant applications contained questions related to DEI. Few, however, were considering DEI in terms of vendors, and beyond the general support for DEI seen from donors, little was discussed about the relationship between diversity efforts and fundraising.

All were sharing information related to DEI with other organizations. Nearly all organizations either had an equity values statement or were in the process of creating one. The majority had formed DEI internal committees. When asked about DEI plans for their organizations, many said those were part of strategic or master plans; few existed separately.

Several interviewees emphasized the importance of infusing DEI work throughout organizational culture rather than compartmentalizing it. Few organizations had the capacity for a dedicated DEI staff role; this work was often shared among positions, sometimes including the executive director, and/or part of community engagement or outreach efforts. Sometimes carving out DEI capacity meant prioritizing it over another organizational need, such as marketing. While one organization that began by sharing the DEI work eventually decided to hire for a dedicated DEI role, another that had such a position found it ineffective due to lack of authority and opted to share the work among several positions and departments.

#### DEI Work: What Does Success Look Like?

When asked how arts and culture organizations know they are successful in DEI work, interviewees brought up receiving positive feedback; being recognized by peers, audiences, funders, and policymakers; and seeing and creating change in their organizational culture. They consistently identified positive recognition, by both audiences and those in their artistic discipline and field, as a sign of success. Audience feedback came most often in the form of compliments for members of the organization. Indicators of positive notice in their field included receiving grants for DEI work;

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invitations to lead training, to present at conferences, and to create and share documents and tools; and compliments from new staff to organization colleagues.

The Denver arts and culture leaders also viewed demographically diverse audiences, staff, and board members as a marker of success, though intentionality and their methods of achieving that diversity differed, and continuing to build authentic relationships with enthusiastic community partners. Another gauge of success was the ability to have conversations about diverse experiences and from diverse perspectives, particularly relating to race, among staff and board members. This achievement was attributed not only to diversity within the organization, but also to an openness in the organization's culture that left staff comfortable speaking about their experiences, knowing they would be heard even if the conversations caused discomfort.

As was the case among organizations in other regions (Denver Foundation, 2018; Lord, 2019; Mauldin et al., 2016), the measurement of progress in DEI work was not consistent. Some organizations used demographic tracking, surveyed audiences and staff about their experiences, conducted performance evaluations, and worked with focus groups to establish baselines and track change, sometimes tied to goals and

**TABLE 3** Recommendations for Arts Grantmakers

<p>Building the Field</p>	<p>Arts grantmakers have the opportunity to convene networks to expand DEI work in nonprofit communities, such as through public and invite-only online channels, forums, workshops, learning cohorts, and site visits. A group approach can build confidence to take risks and make mistakes on the part of nonprofits. Groups can also be convened for tasks like defining DEI (e.g., whether to focus on race equity or include issues of access and gender equity). Such networks can also be collaborative outside the arts, promoting exchange with fields such as public health, social justice, and the nonprofit sector as a whole. Through these networks, effective practices can be shared, such as pairing expert organizations with those just learning about DEI.</p>
<p>Supporting a Diverse Workforce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with other foundations to support nonprofit leaders of color</li> <li>• Encourage hiring practices that re-examine educational requirements and put value on lived experience and transferable skills</li> <li>• Create constituency networks, like an arts administrators of color group, to build community and decrease isolation</li> <li>• Support mentorship opportunities, regardless of age</li> <li>• Partner with educational institutions</li> </ul> <p>Implementing these structures must be accompanied by promoting inclusive organizational cultures to be effective. Nonprofits must understand issues of racial equity and implicit bias to ensure success, retention, and growth of diverse employees.</p>
<p>Measuring Progress</p>	<p>Many organizations struggle with evaluation and measuring progress. As addressing DEI is already complex, support for a DEI consultant or staff member for technical assistance could aid in capacity building. Further, creating common progress measures allow nonprofits to get started while making it possible for arts grantmakers to track progress across organizations.</p>

performance indicators laid out in organizational plans. Others had no formal systems of evaluation, and relied on a mix of what they described as a “gut check” and public feedback. Some interviewees mentioned feeling not up-to-date on established practices when it came to how to measure DEI progress.

**Results: Supportive Structures**

In discussing existing challenges in addressing DEI, the 10 Denver leaders emphasized benchmarking and measuring progress; diverse staff, both administrative and artistic; and broadening and deepening access. The interviewees agreed that despite much discussion of DEI, they knew of few organizations that were exemplary in addressing these challenges and those discussions centered on how to do it better. They also agreed that a “one size fits all” approach is not likely to be effective.

They also identified a number of structures and strategies that could support DEI progress in Denver arts and culture nonprofits; and some pointed to hesitance on the part of certain organizations as they sought to avoid approaching DEI implementation in the wrong way as evidence of the importance of supportive structures. Capacity and time were consistently mentioned, with funding necessary especially for evaluation and measurement. Responses were mixed in terms of the need for more resources, toolkits, and guidelines. Some said those resources were sufficient and that implementation should be the focus; others desired more support and looked to local and national funders and member-based organizations to provide it. There was interest in sharing resources among organizations doing DEI work; some said participating in structured learning cohorts was useful in implementing DEI practices. Overall, arts and culture leaders emphasized that DEI

work requires boldness and confidence from organizations, and a willingness to take risks and make mistakes.

## Discussion

This research generated three recommendations for arts grantmakers to consider: building the field, supporting a diverse workforce, and measuring progress. (See Table 3.)

### Building the Field

To build the field, grantmakers can increase their role as conveners for arts and culture organizations interested in implementing DEI work. Potential strategies include establishing networks through online channels; large gatherings and presentations, by invitation and open to the public; workshops and cohort-based learning; and tours and site visits with leading organizations. Diving into this work through such convenings, regardless of form, could create a welcoming and supportive environment for arts and culture organizations that are worried about making mistakes as they begin their DEI work. Taking a group approach can provide a forum and platform for learning, discussion, and exchange on questions shared among organizations, such as understanding the needs of audiences with disabilities.

Grantmakers could also facilitate shared understanding within the field on how to define DEI, whether specific to racial equity or a broader definition. The Bonfils-Stanton Foundation, for example, has partnered with Denver Arts & Venues, an agency that operates many of the region's event facilities, to provide a series of DEI trainings in the Denver region. Finally, as many of this project's interviewees identified resources from outside the arts and culture field, collaborating with a broader range of organizations could produce innovative results; for Bonfils-Stanton, these include Philanthropy Colorado and the Colorado Nonprofit Association.

### Supporting a Diverse Workforce

Supporting a diverse workforce has emerged as a major issue in the arts and culture field, both in the literature and in the interviews with

*As the literature indicates, hiring diverse staff is only a first step — supportive organizational cultures, versed in the challenges of race equity and implicit bias, must be cultivated to ensure success, retention, and growth.*

the leaders from the Denver organizations. To address this, Bonfils-Stanton helped launch and support the Diversity in the Arts Internship, a paid summer opportunity for college students now in its second year. Other approaches include collaborating with other organizations, including foundations, to support people of color in nonprofit leadership; encouraging arts and culture organizations to examine education requirements in hiring, and valuing lived experience and transferable skills; creating constituency networks to build community and decrease isolation, such as an arts administrators group for people of color; supporting mentorship opportunities, regardless of age; and partnering with educational institutions (Denver Foundation, 2018; Lord, 2019; Ono, 2016; New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, 2016; DataArts, 2017).

As the literature indicates, hiring diverse staff is only a first step — supportive organizational cultures, versed in the challenges of race equity and implicit bias, must be cultivated to ensure success, retention, and growth. In addition, exploring the needs of diverse staff already in place, as well as supporting a leadership pipeline, are opportunities for future research in this area, particularly given findings from interviews and in the literature pointing to stress and negative experiences among people of color working at arts and culture nonprofits.

## Measuring Progress

Finally, both the literature and project findings suggest that measuring DEI is extremely challenging. Few self-assessments are available; those that are, such as the one created by Equity at the Center (2019), while valuable, primarily come from fields outside arts and culture and are not geared to organizations just beginning this work.

To increase capacity for measuring DEI progress, supporting an evaluator and/or experienced DEI practitioner to provide consultation to organizations, either as a shared contractor or staff member could be an effective strategy (Third Sector New England, 2011; LAO; 2019b). Supporting the creation of common progress measures, perhaps by such an evaluator, could further strengthen this approach, giving organizations a starting point to customize and making it possible to measure progress across organizations (Denver Foundation, 2018).

## Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

There are several limitations to this project. The sample size for interviewees was small ( $n = 10$ ) and the sampling purposive, rather than random. Further, this research design, with semi-structured interviews conducted and analyzed by one researcher, creates opportunities for general and confirmation bias. During the interview process, to ensure accurate understanding and interpretation of responses, the researcher conducted sporadic member checks. The content analyzed in the interviews seems to have reached saturation, as similar themes began appearing again and again. Conducting additional research with a larger sample and multiple researchers could address bias concerns.

In large organizations, one person may not know the full extent of the scope of DEI work; for this project, only paid staff (no board members or volunteers) were interviewed. There was a large variance in organization size and

discipline, and future research might utilize a more narrow focus. Further, while four out of the 10 interview subjects identified as people of color, a deeper exploration of the working experience of members of these communities in arts and culture nonprofits could be a rich area of research. Given the identified theme of lack of diversity in the Denver arts and culture workforce, and as the arts and culture sector nationwide grapples with its role in addressing centuries of racial injustice, this could be compelling and useful to the field.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the power dynamic existing in this research project. All of the interviewed organizations have been Bonfils-Stanton Foundation grantees. The interview subjects were assured that their participation (or their lack of it) would not affect future funding and their responses seemed candid, but nonetheless there is always a potential for skewed responses. Future research could be done in partnership with a more neutral party.

As arts and culture organizations continue to discuss both concepts and implementation of promising DEI practices, this researcher hopes these findings will inform the growing body of research. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on communities of color and the calls to confront racial injustice that have continued to intensify since the 2020 killing of George Floyd while in police custody, the urgency to advance this work has only increased.

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