

Executive Statement

For the past 50 years, the DC Commission of the Arts and Humanities (CAH) mission has been to develop, initiate and evaluate programs and matters relating to the arts and humanities, and to encourage programs and the development of programs that promote progress in the arts and humanities. However, the world has changed over the past 50 years and systemic issues of the commission have been illuminated during the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020.

As a call to action, Commissioner Cora Masters Barry (she/her) wrote an in-depth letter to the commission urging us to reimagine the commission so that we can reconcile and support the communities and organizations that have been left out of our funding models, communications strategies and activities, and have often been left to fend for themselves. This letter brought the commission together to form the ad-hoc Task Force for Equity, Inclusion and Belonging led by now Commissioner Chair, Reginald Van Lee. After six months of interrogating, dismantling, analyzing, and reimagining the commission, the Task Force came together to recommend over 40 recommendations for the commission to implement over the next 1-2 years.

The statement below describes the commission's identity: who we have been, who we are now, and where we're going; acknowledges the harms that may have been created, whether intentionally or unintentionally; recognizes the root of the systemic issues of being a government agency within a larger bureaucratic structure; and create solutions so that we can hold ourselves accountable to better support, include, and build transformational relationships with historically excluded communities not only into our funding but into the DNA of the commission.

Our Foundation:

The DC Commission of the Arts and Humanities is striving to be an anti-racist, diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible organization and is currently shifting our mindsets from blame, shame, guilt, and grievance to causes, effects, systems, and solutions. As a government agency, we recognize that we are working within the bigger system which is ingrained into the DNA of this country and we are working hard to dismantle any inequities that have caused harm to members of our community. Due to the white supremacy heteronormative patriarchal systems that are embedded in this country, Jim Crow policies have created intentional racial disparities in our health, finance, employment, housing, justice, and education systems. Specifically, redlining and boundary creation policies placed Black, Indigenous, Latinx, immigrant and Asian communities (BIPOC) and low-income communities into specific neighborhoods causing a denial of opportunity for success in generational and institutional wealth. The implications of these policies directly align with what is going on in the arts and culture and grantmaking sectors to this day. For the commission, these policies have inherently affected our processes and how we have historically distributed funding.

We come to the arts and culture community of Washington, DC to humbly acknowledge this harm and to promise that we are aiming to be better and do better. Although there is nothing that can immediately fix the situation, we will be continuously working towards regaining trust and collaborating with the communities in which we serve, especially our BIPOC communities.

With this statement, we aim to not only write about our position but to begin a culture of transparency about the future direction and actions of the commission.

How do we define equity?

EQUITY is giving everyone what they need to be successful. Equity is operating from the understanding that individuals arrive at a given situation from very different starting points. These starting points are determined by certain social hierarchies often involving race, class, gender, age, sexual identity, etc. An equitable framework centers awareness of these hierarchies and creates systems that are actively anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-ableist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic.

We know that equity and equality are not the same. Equality is the outcome and what we strive to achieve one day, meanwhile, equity is the strategy. **Equity does not mean ALL.** Equity means investing (financially, in-kind, and/or with resources) and supporting communities that we know have had less access to arts funding which have historically been BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ communities, low-income communities, and disabled communities. The DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities believes in using equitable strategies to strengthen the arts and culture sector which is why we are invested in this work.

What have we done?

In 2020, the commission assembled an equity task force for a six-month intensive period. The task force was an inclusive group of staff, commissioners, and community members whose work is aligned around developing recommendations that address the objectives of the charter.

During this six-month period, the members of the commission surveyed the arts and culture sector around the district to not only learn how we can support the field but also to determine how we can become more reflective and responsive in our grantmaking practices. The survey, which was distributed in October 2020 had over 890 responses. As a way of digging deeper into the work, the task force facilitated focus groups to collect community input and grantees who might not have had the opportunity to have their opinions expressed in the initial survey. The survey and focus groups illuminated the following themes for us:

- Building practices, behaviors, and culture of fair and equitable processes
- Creating robust, varied, and fully accessible resources
- Addressing and supporting the needs of the broader community
- Becoming bold in our leadership
- Improving and Optimizing the ways we do business; and
- Resolving perceived barriers to access

The commission believes that systems and structures that are rooted in white supremacy heteronormative patriarchal systems must be dismantled and that innovative, collective structures need to be created in its place globally, within the arts and culture field, and within our own institutions. In order to do this, the commission had to be reflective about who we are and where we want to go as an institution.

In November 2020, the equity task force brought forth a list of 44 recommendations which were accepted by the full commission in January 2021. These recommendations aim to support and provide equitable resources and opportunities for all marginalized social identities. The most integral of these recommendations was the creation of an I.D.E.A. (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access) Committee. As of October 1, 2022, the new I.D.E.A. committee members are:

Quanice Floyd, Committee Chair (she/her)
Cora Masters Barry (she/her)
Maggie Fitzpatrick (she/her)
Reggie Van Lee, ex officio (he/him)

What's Next?

This I.D.E.A. committee is tasked with operationalizing the equity task force recommendations as well as reexamining any equity issues not addressed in the recommendations. As the commission gets deeper into this work, we ask the arts and culture community to hold us accountable. We value our community's voices and want to make a greater Commission for the Arts and Humanities - you all deserve nothing less.

The committee will be making regular reports during our commission meetings. To attend these meetings, please visit our live YouTube page. Our upcoming meetings are:

Please take time to review the task force recommendations. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to reach out to CAHIDEA@dc.gov

Timeline:

- Nov 2 special commission meeting for full vote
- Nov 3, press release
 - Quanice reached out to a few media folks who are interested, just need to talk to them more
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