



Racial Equity Principles
A Framework and Shared Commitment

As adopted by the Board of the

Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County, MD

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The arts have a unique power to inspire, to bring people together, to help us all imagine different possible worlds, to illuminate and amplify diverse experiences, to catalyze transformation, and to allow us all to build empathy and connection. As stakeholders of cultural organizations, we are all leaders; this means we have a powerful responsibility to engage in the urgent, essential, and nuanced work to build a more equitable world for us all through building racial equity. We recognize that we have a special responsibility to do this work in ways that welcome others to join us, because fighting oppression and making change requires both leadership and broad participation.

We commit to engaging in this incredibly important work with humility, commitment, integrity, accountability, patience (for ourselves and others), courage, and joy, because we believe that a world which acknowledges past injustice and builds authentic and meaningful equity into organizations and systems will be a richer, more vibrant, more powerful, and more just world. We believe in working toward this world, and that by pursuing racial equity, we will create more just and inclusive organizations and communities, open our institutions to more people, right historical wrongs, deliver more impactful arts and cultural programming, and become stronger, more resilient and more vital organizations.

The social construct of race in the US is deeply and painfully ingrained in our national and personal psyches. The long journey of equity analysis and reflection will reveal how we're all affected by the divisive ideology of race and how we can begin the individual and group work needed to proactively counteract inequity.

To guide us in creating more equitable workplaces and communities, we've crafted the following three principles:

1. Brave conversations
2. With us, not for us
3. Power sharing

Brave Conversations

Equity Principle #1

We commit to having brave conversations. The path to racial equity is fraught with deep-seated emotion and conflicting perspectives. As leaders, we will create cultures where learning is valued above being right and where individuals are invited to bring their whole, vulnerable selves to the conversation. We will model this by engaging in deep listening, asking questions, and not being afraid of acknowledging tension in a conversation. We will actively seek disconfirming information to challenge our own assumptions. We use the term “conversation” but know that this journey to equity has a longer timeline and more complex dynamics than a single meeting or discussion.

We commit to:

- Using our positional power to call others into our racial equity work
- Speaking up when we identify racist structures and actions and engaging in conversations around them
- Creating an inclusive (but not conflict-averse) space for every person and every perspective
- Leaving combative debates and point-scoring behind in favor of getting curious
- Getting below the surface to what is real, honest, difficult and sometimes deeply troubling
- Emphasizing the importance of ‘going on together’
- Acknowledging that a really brave conversation will not be finished, completed or concluded in a single gathering. Instead, the gathering should begin the relational work that’s foundational for continuing collaboration, by opening the members of the group up to one another’s underlying aspirations
- Listening deeply to identify potential alignment instead of seeking to antagonize
- Actively seeking disconfirming information to challenge our own assumptions
- Adopting grace on this sometimes messy, sometimes awkward, never linear journey to understanding

With Us Not For Us

Equity Principle #2

We commit to the creation, implementation, and transformation of programs with – not for – the people we serve. The path to racial equity is a continuous effort that must actively facilitate self-representation, meaningful input, leadership, and shared decision-making with those who have lived the experience of being in the groups we seek to know and serve through

partnership. We recognize that we cannot and should not assume that one under-represented community speaks for all communities, nor assume that one member of a community represents all members of their community. We understand that diversity is complicated, multifaceted, inelegant and iterative, but pursuing inclusive and equitable practices is critical to building organizations that connect with their communities in authentic, responsible and sustainable ways.

We commit to:

- Acknowledging the power dynamics at play in our organizations between various groups of people and identities, and working to make visible and mitigate the disparities
- Acknowledging the biases we hold, being willing to listen and change our perspective
- Managing the vulnerabilities and emotions we experience in order to give space for the voices of others
- Creating space for the diversity of opinions and beliefs in any conversation
- Affirming intersectionality (understanding that people are made up of many different identities) and supporting the expression of complex identities
- Paying attention to who is at the table, asking who is missing and why they are missing; finding ways to bring them into the conversation
- Ensuring that the decision-making power dynamic is shared with the community/communities that is/are being impacted by those decisions – not only through opportunities to represent their own voices, but also by raising their voices, ideas, and concerns to others who hold power
- Enhancing our understanding of how systems of power and oppression operate in both daily and larger societal contexts and using this understanding as the lens through which we interpret the context of our programs.

Power Sharing

Equity Principle #3

We commit to engaging in power sharing. Reaching racial equity cannot be possible unless we recognize and challenge power imbalances within our communities and professional structures. We must recognize that racial inequality is one of the greatest injustices of all time and work toward more balanced power dynamics. We will question socio-historical contexts and structural factors that will hopefully lead to community-driven, shared leadership with a balance of power amongst all partners.

Many of us inherited structures and systems that do not serve our power sharing principle. As we commit to the below points, we acknowledge that much of will this feel like uncharted



territory and mistakes will undoubtedly be made. Our intention is to continue working towards these commitments, despite any missteps we experience along the way.

We commit to:

- Using our power to empower others, as opposed to a “command and control” approach
- Nurturing an environment and creating processes where all voices can be heard
- Acknowledging that great leaders come in all forms, races, ages and backgrounds; they use different styles and approaches; and can be found in any position in an organization’s hierarchy
- Distributing power through cooperative decision-making processes, when appropriate
- Building awareness of how our own privileges influence how we experience the world as leaders
- Analyzing how perspective is different between those in formal positions of authority and those who are not
- Acknowledging that we all have implicit biases, and that as leaders we need to check our biases by inviting other voices and perspectives to the table
- Acknowledging and messaging that dismantling the racial power structure has to be intentional