

Canada's Arts Sector at a Crossroads: Persistent Inequities, Urgent Need for Structural Change, and Promising Solutions to Watch

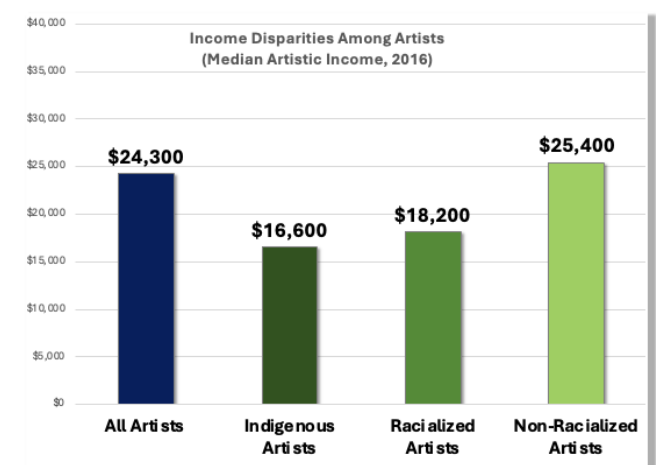
Sabrina Richard (2025). *State of the Arts: Equity, Decoloniality and Racial Justice in the Canadian Arts and Culture Sector*. [You can read the full report here.](#)

Artists who are Indigenous, Black, or people of colour (IBPOC) make up roughly 25% of artists in Canada, yet continue to face disproportionate funding challenges, limited representation in leadership, institutional bias, as well as cultural misappropriation. These systemic issues are known and well-documented - and they are solvable if institutions pursue real accountability and transformational change.

The Challenge: Persistent Systemic Inequities

Income and funding disparities

- Indigenous and racialized artists **earn 30–40% less** than non-racialized peers.
- Only 4%** of Canada Council's COVID-19 recovery funding was going to artists who were "Indigenous, culturally diverse, Deaf, disabled, or official language minorities" - **far below the population share** which is 25% for IBPOC artists alone.



Adapted from Hills Strategies/2016 Census

Leadership and institutional bias

- Indigenous and racialized arts workers are **markedly under-represented in the positions that control resources and set artistic agendas** across the sector.
 - Only 5.7% of CEOs in Canada's largest arts institutions (Canadian Arts Summit members) identify as racialized.
 - 81% of staff and 85% of board members identify as white.¹
- IBPOC artists continue to **experience tokenism as well as cultural misappropriation**, marginalization of non-Western art forms, and Eurocentric definitions of "excellence."

The Response: Sector Reforms and Emerging Solutions

Institutional shifts since 2020

- Arts institutions and councils increasingly adopted **anti-racism policies, equity action plans and equity language** integrated in strategic plans (e.g., OAC's Priority Groups; National Gallery's "Transform Together").
- Protocols from the arts councils and artists associations **emphasize engagement, consent**, and cultural stewardship

Policy and funding developments:

- Targeted government funding programs exist but **remain small relative to need** (e.g., Toronto's Black Arts Program or the federal Changing Narratives fund - e.g., the latter had \$5 M/year to distribute to non-profits in screen-based industries in all of Canada).
- Innovative artist-led models and programs** such as the IBPOC Touring Network (Organization: Wind in the Leaves Collective), the Emerging Filmmakers Program (Organization: OYA Media Group), or Longhouse Labs, an Indigenous-centered fellowship (Organization: University of Waterloo) are showing promise

1. Wall-Andrews et al. (2022) *The State of Diversity Among Leadership Roles Within Canada's Largest Arts and Cultural Institutions*, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 41, no. 2



- Discourse, policies and some program structures have moved in the direction advocates have long demanded— however, the underlying distribution of resources and decision-making power has only shifted marginally.
- True transformation requires redistribution of resources, institutional accountability, and sustained leadership diversification.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen structural accountability

- Require transparent demographic reporting on funding, hiring, leadership, and programming.
- Tie public funding to measurable equity outcomes.

2. Expand long-term funding for IBPOC-led organizations

- Permanent operating grant support for Indigenous, Black, and racialized arts organizations.
- Dedicated grant streams mirroring Indigenous and Black arts priorities.

3. Transform leadership pipelines

- Establish IBPOC leadership fellowships, succession plans, and governance reforms across major institutions .

4. Advance ethical cultural practices

- Mandate protocols for cultural representation and community engagement.
- Support Indigenous sovereignty in cultural narrative and artifact stewardship.

5. Fund research to fill the data gaps

- Fund national studies on intersectional barriers and mental health impacts.
- Build sector-wide strategies for burnout prevention and economic stability.

6. Support artist-led innovation

- Scale models like Longhouse Labs, OYA, Oddside Arts, and the IBPOC Touring Network.

“Without strong institutional commitment, policy enforcement, and accountability, progress is easily stalled or reversed.”

- Report, p. 30

