STATE OF THE ARTS

equity, decoloniality and racial justice in the Canadian arts and culture sector

by Sabrina Richard 2025

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Arts and Culture Research Summary
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Executive Summary

This **Arts and Culture Research Summary** (2025), commissioned by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) to support the Canadian Network for Equity and Racial Justice (CNERJ), provides a comprehensive scan of equity, decoloniality, and racial justice within Canada's arts and culture sector. The report explores sectoral shifts since COVID-19, highlighting persistent structural inequities as well as promising artist-led interventions.

Purpose and Methods

The study draws on desk research, census and survey data (including responses from 78 Indigenous, Black, and racialized artists), interviews, and the author's professional expertise. It reviews terminology, funding, policies, and practices related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism (EDI-AR), while incorporating four case studies—Longhouse Labs, IBPOC Touring Network Initiative, OYA Emerging Filmmakers Program, and Oddside Arts—to illustrate practical models of structural change.

Key Findings

Persistent Inequities

- Indigenous, Black, and racialized artists continue to face systemic barriers, including lower incomes, underfunding, and lack of representation in leadership.
- Indigenous and racialized artists report median artistic income significantly below their non-racialized peers.

- Only 4% of COVID-19 recovery funds from the Canada Council were directed to Indigenous, culturally diverse, Deaf, disabled, or official language minority groups—far below their demographic share.
- Representation in leadership remains starkly unequal: 94% of CEOs at major Canadian arts institutions identify as White.

Sector Responses

- Arts councils and cultural institutions have increasingly embedded equity language into strategic plans and created targeted programs, such as the Canada Council's "Creating, Knowing and Sharing" Indigenous Arts Program and Toronto Arts Council's Black Arts Funding Program.
- National and provincial initiatives, including Canada's $860M commitment under the UN Decade for People of African Descent, have begun to address resource gaps.
- Grassroots and artist-led organizations (e.g., SEARA in Vancouver, CPAMO in Ontario) are driving accountability, advocacy, and mutual aid.

Case Studies

- **Longhouse Labs**: An Indigenous-centered fellowship program embedding Indigenous knowledge and leadership into arts education.
- **IBPOC Touring Network Initiative**: A forthcoming national touring model designed to address systemic exclusion of IBPOC artists.
- **OYA Emerging Filmmakers Program**: Training and mentorship for Black youth in film and digital media, directly addressing anti-Black racism in creative industries.
- **Oddside Arts**: A Toronto-based collective merging art, technology, and wellness to amplify Afro-diasporic and 2SLGBTQIAP voices.

Terminology and Policy Shifts

- The sector has moved from "visible minorities" and "culturally diverse" to "racialized" and IBPOC, in part to emphasizing the distinct experiences and historic inequities faced by of Indigenous

and Black communities in Canada.

- Equity is increasingly framed as both a principle (fairness and dignity) and a process (active removal of barriers), while decoloniality emphasizes dismantling Eurocentric structures.

Research Gaps

Despite progress, major gaps persist:

1. **Insufficient disaggregated data** on Indigenous, Black, and racialized artists.

2. Limited study of **intersectional discrimination** (e.g., impacts of race combined with gender, sexuality, disability).

3. Inadequate recognition of the **psychosocial toll** of racism, including stress, burnout, and economic precarity within the sector.

Conclusion

The report concludes that inequities in Canadian arts remain entrenched, despite widespread adoption of equity frameworks. Structural change has been slow, with many reforms symbolic rather than transformative. Accountability, data transparency, and leadership diversification remain the most pressing needs. Moving forward, the sector must commit to **sustained, systemic transformation**—shifting beyond token representation to true redistribution of resources, authority, and opportunities.

The report positions **CNERJ** as a critical platform to amplify best practices, ensure accountability, and advance racial justice across Canada, the US, and Mexico. Without stronger institutional commitment, however, the vision of a just and inclusive arts ecosystem risks remaining aspirational rather than realized.

Introduction

This Arts and Culture Research Summary is focused on equity, decoloniality[1] and racial justice in the Canadian arts and culture sector, with a particular emphasis on sectoral changes since the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2023). It examines the legacy of colonialism and racism in the arts, with a focus on the structural forms of discrimination facing Indigenous[2], Black[3] and racialized artists. It examines the evolution of terminology used in equity policies and its specific definitions in the arts. It then reviews equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism (EDI-AR) initiatives across the sector, including:

- interventions in funding and resource gaps
- initiatives aimed at institutional and structural bias
- professional networks and mentorship
- confronting tokenism and cultural misappropriation

Each section concludes with a case study that provides examples of artist-led practices that disrupt and re-imagine existing structures within the sector to create a more equitable and just future for the arts. The case studies included are:

- Longhouse Labs
- The IBPOC Touring Network Initiative
- OYA Emerging Filmmakers Program
- Oddside Arts

Following the review of initiatives, the Summary details research gaps from within the sector.

This research has been commissioned by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) to support the newly established Canadian

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[1]Decoloniality, a term coined by sociologist Anibal Quijano, is a “commitment to route out what remains in culture, education, society, and so on from the colonial era”. See: Mignolo, Walter D. and Katherine E. Walsh. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis.* Duke University Press, 2018.

[2] The terms ‘Indigenous’ and ‘Indigenous peoples’ are used throughout this Research Summary to refer to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples inclusively. Whenever possible, culturally specific names are used.

[3] The term "Black" is a racialized classification most commonly associated with people of sub-Saharan African ancestry, Indigenous Australians, and Melanesians. While many view the concept of a unified "Black race" as a social construct, its usage in this report aligns with Canadian arts classifications.

Network for Equity and Racial Justice (CNERJ). Created in 2023 as part of a trilateral agreement between Canada, the US and Mexico, CNERJ is committed to sharing best practices and taking concrete steps domestically and trilaterally to combat systemic racism, discrimination, and hate. The intention is that this Research Summary contributes to the advancement of this Network.

Research Methods

Drawing upon desk research, statistical data, multiple interviews with Canadian artists and arts workers, survey data collected from 78 Indigenous, Black and racialized artists, as well as the author's decades of experience consulting in the arts sector, this research summary provides a comprehensive environmental scan of equity and anti-racism in the current arts landscape. A document review, which informs this research, includes academic articles, organization reports and non-academic publications from the Canadian arts and culture sector. Whenever possible, statistical and survey research was disaggregated to allow for a more detailed and nuanced understanding of trends, patterns, and disparities that may be hidden in aggregate data. Survey responses are included when relevant to add evidence of individual experiences. The four case studies provide texture and specificity to social justice issues and reveal how artists and arts organizations are embedding EDI-AR into their practices.

Evolution of Terminology

Canada's arts and culture sector has widely adopted the language of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) - sometimes expanded to EDIA or IDEA to include accessibility, and EDI-AR to incorporate anti-racism. Canadian arts funding bodies, arts organizations, and cultural institutions have actively incorporated EDI and anti-racism principles into their policies, strategic plans, and programs. This integration is not merely symbolic language — it directly impacts funding priorities, resource distribution, and actively drives organizational change.

The following are key terms were identified in the document review as foundational to creating a shared understanding and meaningful actions throughout the Canadian arts sector:

Defining Key Terms in Context

Anti-Racism: While diversity and inclusion are broad goals, anti-racism is a more targeted term that has gained prominence, especially in the last decade due to the increased awareness of systemic violence facing Black communities around the globe. Anti-racism in Canada denotes an active effort to identify, challenge, and eradicate racism in all its forms. In the arts sector, this has translated to many institutions examining their practices (hiring, programming, collections) for systemic biases and implementing anti-racism training or policies. For instance, many arts organizations have used the years during the COVID-19 closures (post 2020) to develop anti-racism action plans, Equity policies or formed committees to address racial bias.

Cultural Appropriation: Cultural appropriation is a term that has sparked much debate across Canada's arts sector. It refers to the use of elements of a culture (especially a marginalized or underrepresented culture) by members outside that culture in a way that exploits or misrepresents long held cultural meanings and values. The Canada Council offers a nuanced definition, saying *"'cultural appropriation' applies when cultural borrowings or adaptations from a minoritized culture reflect, reinforce or amplify inequalities, stereotypes and historically exploitative relationships that have direct negative consequences on equity-seeking communities in Canada."* [4]

In general, Canadian arts institutions have tread carefully on the topic of cultural appropriation: many have policies or guidelines to encourage respectful intercultural collaboration and to educate juries and artists on appropriation vs. appreciation.

Culturally Diverse Arts (arts of racialized artists):

The Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) defines "culturally diverse" artists as individuals of African, Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern, or mixed

[4] Canada Council for the Arts, Context Brief: Cultural Appropriation and the Canada Council's Approach, accessed Jan 3, 2025, https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/funding-decisions/decision-making-process/application-assessment/context-briefs/cultural-appropriation

racial backgrounds.[5] While this broad term helps to collectively identify populations that experience systemic racism, it is essential to acknowledge that each cultural group is unique, consisting of numerous sub-groups with diverse languages, histories, artistic traditions, cultural expressions and experiences. Culturally diverse organizations are characterized as focused on the artistic practices or expressions of a particular ethno-cultural community; and intercultural groups, which incorporate multiple cultures and art forms.

It is relevant to note that Canadian terminology has evolved in this area – where once terms like “visible minorities” or “culturally diverse” were used to refer to non-white ethnic groups, now “racialized” is preferred as it emphasizes race as a social construct and the processes of marginalization.[6] In 2017, CCA adopted “culturally diverse” to refer to racial minority communities, but by 2021 shifted to “racialized” across its public communications.

Decolonization: Decolonization in Canadian arts has a specific resonance due to the history of colonization of Indigenous Peoples and Canada’s history as a British colony. Momentum around decolonization intensified after Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) released 94 Calls to Action, which led many arts organizations to rethink governance (e.g., including Indigenous elders, knowledge keepers and/or arts leaders in positions of leadership) and programming content (e.g., ensuring respectful and accurate representations of Indigenous cultures throughout programming). Originally referring to the political process of former colonies gaining independence and self-rule, in the arts sector decolonization is practiced as ‘decoloniality’, that is a long-term process of undoing colonial structures and narratives. This means challenging Eurocentric dominance in cultural institutions, validating Indigenous and other colonized peoples’ voices, and shifting cultural power dynamics. In practice, decolonization and decoloniality may involve measures such as Indigenous-led programming, repatriation of Indigenous artifacts, incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems, land acknowledgments, and

[5] Canada Council for the Arts, Context Brief: *Culturally Diverse Arts (arts of racialized artists)* accessed Nov 14, 2024, https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/funding-decisions/decision-making-process/application-assessment/context-briefs/culturally-diverse-arts

[6] Julia Nicol and Beverly Osazuwa Race and Ethnicity: Evolving Terminology, Library of Parliament , Jan 2022. Accessed via Hill Notes https://hillnotes.ca/2022/01/31/race-and-ethnicity-evolving-terminology

structures into organizational practices.

Diversity: Diversity refers to the presence of differences within a group, including various identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, and cultural background. Diversity in the arts denotes the presence of a wide range of differences among people and artistic expressions. In practice, Canadian arts organizations often speak of diversity in terms of reflecting Canada's multicultural population in programming, audiences, staff and leadership. It is important to note that diversity is about representation, and although related is different from achieving equity. An organization can be diverse without being equitable, but true inclusivity requires both.

Equity: Equity refers to fairness and justice in access to opportunities. It acknowledges that treating everyone "the same" is not enough when systemic barriers exist. Within the Canadian arts sector, equity is understood as both a principle and an active process: as a principle it "values the inherent dignity and equal rights of all people" while recognizing not everyone has equal access; as a process it requires continuous action to remove barriers and remedy imbalances.[7] The CCA states it aspires to *"a just and equitable society where the consequences of colonialism, racism, and other forms of oppression and exclusion have been eliminated."*[8] This underscores that equity in arts is tied to confronting historical injustices and systemic biases.

IBPOC: The term IBPOC stands for Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour and is used in Canada to acknowledge the distinct experiences of racialized communities while emphasizing the unique histories and systemic barriers faced by Indigenous and Black individuals. The term IBPOC emerged as a more specific variation of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour), which originated in the United States as a way to highlight the particular struggles of Black and Indigenous people in relation to systemic racism, colonization, and oppression in that country. The Canadian adaptation—IBPOC—places Indigenous identity

[7] See: BC Arts Council Glossary https://www.bcartscouncil.ca/accessibility/glossary/#:~:text=Equity
[8] Canada Council for the Arts Equity Policy December 2023

first, reflecting Canada's historical and ongoing colonial structures and the need for Indigenous sovereignty and recognition.

In the Canadian arts sector, IBPOC is frequently referenced in arts policies, granting programs, and diversity initiatives to ensure that Indigenous, Black, and other racialized artists receive support and access to artistic resources.

Inclusion: Inclusion creates environments in which diverse people feel welcomed, respected, and valued. It moves beyond representation to ensure that people from equity-seeking groups (those who face systemic discrimination) can fully participate in and influence the arts sector. A common definition is “the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, represented, supported, and valued to fully participate.”[9]

In the Canadian arts sector, inclusion often means removing barriers to access (physical, financial, cultural) and actively inviting underrepresented communities into decision-making processes. For example, arts funders almost universally require inclusive outreach and consultation with Indigenous, Black and racialized artists in program design and evaluations. Many arts organizations have also actively recruited Indigenous, Black and/or racialized members to board positions - most notably the Canada Council for the Arts appointed the first Indigenous chair of the board when it named Anishinaabe writer and broadcaster Jesse Wente in 2020. This emphasis on inclusion aligns with Canada’s social narrative of multiculturalism, but takes a more proactive stance: not just celebrating differences, but integrating those who have been historically excluded into all levels of the arts.

Representation: In the context of equity, representation refers to who is present and visible in the arts – on stages, in exhibitions, on boards, in staff, and whose stories are told. The term is often used in calls to improve the representation of equity-deserving communities (Indigenous, Black, other racialized people, LGBTQ2+, people with disabilities, etc.) so that the arts reflect Canada’s population and diverse experiences. Representation is tied to both equity (fair opportunity for artists from all backgrounds) and inclusion (audiences seeing themselves reflected). For example, Canadian arts funders, such as art councils, now track the

[9] See: BC Arts Council Glossary https://www.bcartscouncil.ca/accessibility/glossary/#:~:text=Inclusion

diversity of grant recipients to gauge representation. Lack of representation in staff and senior leadership is a frequent and ongoing critique across the arts sector.

Environmental Scan: Equity, Decoloniality and Racial justice in the Canadian arts and culture sector.

Indigenous, Black, and racialized artists and arts organizations in Canada face a range of structural barriers and inequalities that can significantly impact their creative careers, professional, as well as organizational development. Far from unknown, these impacts are well documented throughout the arts sector.[10] In a 2023 study 'Concentration of Artists in Canada, commissioned by five Canadian arts funders including the Toronto Arts Council, explicitly stated in their key findings:

"At least one legacy of colonialism is a world where race and ethnicity determine, for many people, whether or not they enjoy fundamental human rights".

Source: E. Tendayi Achiume, Special Rapporteur, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

"Racism and other intersecting forms of discrimination persist within the sector. These issues play out in several different ways, including overt discrimination in public space, certain artistic practices or individual works being seen as not marketable to a broad audience, artists being tokenized in the commissioning of works, and more."[11]

The following scan provides an overview of the demographic diversity of the Canadian arts sector and summarizes the documented evidence of systemic inequalities. It also details sector based responses and artist-led interventions that address four key challenges:

- lack of funding and resource gaps
- institutional and structural bias

[10] Canada Council for the Arts, Context Brief: *Culturally Diverse Arts (arts of racialized artists) Issues and Analysis.* accessed March 3, 2025, https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/funding-decisions/decision-making-process/application-assessment/context-briefs/culturally-diverse-arts

[11] Toronto Arts Council. *Concentration of Artists in Canada*. Toronto: Toronto Arts Council, 2023. pg.9

- access to professional networks and mentorship
- tokenism and cultural misappropriation

The intent is to provide a snapshot of the current landscape of art and culture that Indigenous and racialized artists and arts organizations are navigating.

Diversity of the Sector

The need to address equity and representation has never been more relevant or impacted more Canadians. According to Statistics Canada's 2021 Census, racialized[12] people make up approximately 26.5% of Canada's population, which is twice the number recorded twenty years ago.[13] Projections from Statistics Canada's Centre for Demography indicate that by 2041, this figure is expected to increase, reaching between 38.2% and 43.0% of the population. According to the same 2021 Census, there were 1.8 million Indigenous people, representing 5.0% of the total Canadian population, up from 4.9% in 2016.[14]

While there isn't a single, comprehensive registry that specifically details how many artists in Canada identify as Indigenous, Black and racialized, sector-specific data and funding application statistics offer some useful estimates. In a 2022 study of professional artists undertaken by the Canada Council[15], out of 664 respondents, 159 or 24% self identified as IBPOC. Within those 159 respondents, 4% identified as Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, or Métis), 4% identified as Black, and 15% identified as racialized or a person of colour.

According to 2016 census data completed by arts think tank, Hills Strategies, there were 5,000 Indigenous artists in Canada which accounted for 3.1% of all artists in the country. There are also 23,300 racialized artists in Canada, representing 15% of all artists in the country

[12] The Statistics Canada concept of "racialized people" is based on the visible minority variable in the Canadian census (Statistics Canada, 2023). The Canadian Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour."

[13] Feng Hou, Christoph Schimmele, and Max Stick, *Changing Demographics of Racialized People in Canada*, *Economic and Social Reports*, Statistics Canada.

[14] Statistics Canada *Canada's Indigenous Population.* Accessed March 3, 2025, https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/3920-canadas-indigenous-population

[15] Toronto Arts Council. *Concentration of Artists in Canada*. Toronto: Toronto Arts Council, 2023.

at the time.[16]

These population figures allow for a better understanding of the number of artists impacted by racial discrimination, roughly 1 in 4 artists in the sector. It also signals the magnitude of interventions needed to address systemic inequities.

Funding and Resource Gaps

Although being inadequately paid for artistic work is a universal concern for Canadian artists, census-based data has shown that Indigenous and racialized artists make less income from their artistic practices than their non-culturally diverse peers. According to the Hills Strategy study titled *Demographic Diversity of Artists in Canada in 2016*;

- Indigenous and racialized artists had the lowest median incomes of all artists;
- Indigenous artists had a median income of $16,600 while non-Indigenous artists had a median income of $24,600.
- Racialized artists had a median income of $18,200 while non-racialized artists had a median income of $25,400.

Indigenous artists made $.68 for every dollar made by a non-Indigenous artist.

Racialized artists made $.72 for every dollar made by a non-racialized artist.

Source: Hills Strategies/2016 Canadian Census

Disparities in Funding

Advocates have long pointed to the fact that government and private arts funding in Canada continues to skew toward European-descended artists and art forms. This is undoubtedly one key reason for the significant disparities in art-based incomes for Indigenous and racialized artists. A stark example is a review of the arts recovery investments released in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the $116.5 million in new

[16] Hill, Kelly, Demographic Diversity of Artists in Canada in 2016, SIA Report 51. https://hillstrategies.com/resource/demographic-diversity-of-artists-in-canada-in-2016/.

funding that the Canada Council for the Arts disbursed post-COVID, only about 4% was earmarked for groups identified as “Indigenous, culturally diverse, Deaf, disabled, or official language minorities”.[17] This is significantly below the approximately 25% of Canadian artists who identify as Indigenous or racialized alone, not including the number of artists who also identify as Deaf, disabled, or official language minorities.

This funding pattern was echoed at the provincial level: emergency arts grants in Ontario during COVID-19 disproportionately went to classical institutions (typically opera, ballet, Shakespearean theatre), with far less for diverse arts organizations.[18] Funding specifically dedicated to “culturally diverse” or racialized artists is harder to quantify due to limited public reporting. For example the Ontario Arts Council offers two grants dedicated to Indigenous artists and two grants dedicated to racialized artists, however they do not always report on the portion of arts funding that each of these groups receives. Nonetheless, advocacy groups have long pointed out that funding for these communities lags far behind their share of the arts sector.

Another revealing statistic is the grant application success rate. With limited funding envelopes, competition is fierce for all artists, but it can be especially discouraging for marginalized artists facing additional systemic barriers. The 2023 overall success rate for a major Canada Council program (Explore and Create) was only 16.6%.[19] If an artist already faces bias or lacks mentorship in crafting proposals, their odds drop further. A study by Canada's Black Music Business Collective in partnership with Toronto Metropolitan University’s Diversity Institute published the following statistic: out of those Black artists who did apply for arts grants, 89% said they were unsuccessful in securing any funding.[20]

Private arts funding and patronage show analogous disparities. Large donors and sponsors tend to support established arts institutions – museums, orchestras, ballet companies – which continue to be predominately white-led and and focused on Eurocentric artforms. As a result, smaller and culturally specific arts groups often operate on marginal budgets. The cumulative effect is that Indigenous, Black, and racialized artists are under-funded from all sides: they receive fewer grants, and their

[17] Elisha Lim, “How BIPOC Artists Fight Canada’s Biased Art Scene,” *Hyperallergic*, August 5, 2021.
[18] IBID.
[19] Chawla, Michelle *Supporting the Arts Community.* February 29, 2024.
[20] ADVANCE and Diversity Institute. *Industry Analysis and the Value of Black Music*. Toronto: Toronto Metropolitan University, 2024.

organizations have smaller grants, endowments and sponsorship pools.

Sector reforms:

In recent years there has been growing recognition of these resource gaps, and steps are being taken by governments and arts organizations to foster equity in funding. The Canada Council for the Arts, in particular, has made some strategic shifts. It established a dedicated Indigenous Arts Program ("Creating, Knowing and Sharing") which by 2020 had more than tripled funding for Indigenous creation (reaching $23.7 million that year).[21] This program, co-designed with Indigenous advisors, marked a break from past policy and acknowledges Indigenous artists' rights and distinct needs. While no separate fund exists for Black or other racialized artists at the Council, there is an increased emphasis on equity within its regular programs. The CCA's 2021–26 strategic plan and equity policy commit to improving funding access for historically underserved communities.[22]

The federal government has also launched new funding targeted at underrepresented creators. Notably, the Budget 2022 allocated $5 million to Canadian Heritage to create a "Changing Narratives Fund", aimed at amplifying diverse voices in arts and media.[23] This fund was designed to help Indigenous, racialized, and religious minority artists and journalists overcome obstacles to presenting creative work. Although relatively small (critics have pointed out $5M spread across the country is symbolic at best), it is a pilot attempt to directly invest in equity-deserving creatives.

In parallel, Canada's commitment to the UN International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024) spurred various Black-focused initiatives. Since officially endorsing the Decade in 2018, the Canadian government has committed up to $860 million toward Black-led programs and projects ranging from anti-racism work to cultural entrepreneurship.[24]

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[21]Canada Council *Commitments/Indigenous.* Accessed March 3 2025. https://canadacouncil.ca/commitments/indigenous#:~:text=the%20relationship%20between%20Indigenous%20artists,9%20million%20by%202020%E2%80%9321

[22]Canada Council for the Arts. *2021–26 Strategic Plan: Art, Now More Than Ever*. Ottawa: Canada Council for the Arts, 2021.

[23]Canadian Heritage. *Stakeholder Feedback on the Changing Narratives Fund.* Government of Canada.

[24] Employment and Social Development Canada, "International Decade for People of African Descent," *Government of Canada*, accessed March 5, 2025, https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/social-development-partnerships/supporting-black-communities/international-decade.html.

Some of this funding has flowed into the arts and heritage sector – for instance, supporting Black cultural spaces, museums (e.g. the Africville Museum's infrastructure and program expansion)[25] and the Canadian Heritage Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism Program (MARP) fund support for not-for-profit organizations, including arts organizations.

Provincial and municipal arts councils are likewise adjusting their policies. In Toronto, after long-standing criticism from Black artists, the Toronto Arts Council in 2020 approved the creation of a dedicated Black Arts funding program. An initial fund of $300,000 was set aside (in partnership with the Toronto Arts Foundation) to support Black-led projects.[26] While a number of community members noted that $300k is quite small relative to need it was an important first step to respond to long standing inequities and has since been expanded to offering core operating funding to Black-led, Black-serving arts organizations.

Across the country, other initiatives have emerged. In Vancouver, a coalition of arts service organizations formed the Sector Equity for Anti-Racism in the Arts (SEARA) during the pandemic, initially as a mutual aid micro-grant program for BIPOC artists facing hardship.[27] SEARA provided emergency funds to dozens of artists and has since been working (with support from Canadian Heritage and city grants) to develop data-driven approaches to resource and cultural infrastructure equity.

This kind of community-led action is pushing institutions to rethink how they distribute support. The National Film Board released a detailed Equity, Diversity and Inclusion plan in 2021, Telefilm Canada created new funding streams for racialized filmmakers and set targets for diversity in its funding portfolios, and major museums like the National Gallery have hired curators of Indigenous and African descent to ensure programming (and acquisition budgets) better reflect Canada's peoples.

Importantly, data collection and transparency are becoming central to recent efforts. Advocacy groups successfully pressured some funders to start tracking who gets funding by race and Indigeneity. For example, the Documentary Organization of Canada in 2022 called on all public funders to publicly release data on the demographics of grant recipients and to set

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[25] Government of Canada. 2024. "Government of Canada Announces Funding for the Africville Museum's Travelling Exhibit Project." *Canada.ca*, February 29, 2024.
[26] Toronto Arts Council. 2020. *Black Arts Funding Report*. Toronto: Toronto Arts Council.
[27] SEARA Fund, "About SEARA," *Sector Equity for Anti-Racism in the Arts*, accessed March 5, 2025, https://searafund.ca/about/about-seara.

clear equity targets for funding distribution.[28]

Case Study: Artist-Led Initiatives

Longhouse Labs (LLabs) is an Indigenous-centered creative initiative founded by artist and scholar Logan MacDonald at the University of Waterloo. It aims to empower Indigenous artists and leaders within a traditionally Eurocentric arts education system through paid artist fellowships.[29]

The program offers three annual paid fellowships, providing Indigenous artists with studio space, mentorship, and resources. Aligned with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, LLabs integrates Indigenous knowledge and leadership into post-secondary arts education.

Through the Longhouse Fellows program, accomplished Indigenous artists (including those without formal academic credentials) are invited to campus as Fellows, where they act as role models for Indigenous students and provide culturally relevant mentorship.[30]

Key Contributions

Empowering Indigenous Artists & Leadership

- Offers three annual paid fellowships for Indigenous artists, providing funding, studio space, mentorship, and resources.
- Longhouse Fellows program invites accomplished Indigenous artists (including those without formal academic credentials) to mentor students and advance their own artistic practice.

Integrating Indigenous Knowledge & Reconciliation Efforts

- Aligns with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to

[28] Documentary Organization of Canada, "Documentary Organization of Canada Calls for Canada's Public Funding Institutions to Take Action on Recent Reports Highlighting Systemic Inequities for Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Filmmakers," *Documentary Organization of Canada*, accessed March 5, 2025, https://docorg.ca/advocacy/documentary-organization-of-canada-calls-for-canadas-public-funding-institutions-to-take-action-on-recent-reports-highlighting-systemic-inequities-for-indigenous-black-and-racialized-filmmak/.

[29] Longhouse Labs Overview, "Project Definition," LLabs, University of Waterloo, accessed March 2025

[30] IBID.

Action by embedding Indigenous perspectives in post-secondary arts education.
- Centers land-based and traditional knowledge, teaching practices like plant-based knowledge, hide tanning, and canoe and drum building.

Heritage Preservation & Cultural Stewardship

- Establishes a Heritage Lab to house, study, and repatriate Indigenous cultural artifacts.
- Trains the next generation of Indigenous curators in handling, preservation, and presentation of heritage materials.

Systemic Change & Equity in the Arts

- Challenges colonial and Eurocentric structures that have marginalized Indigenous artists in arts education and leadership.
- Serves as a model for other institutions, demonstrating how academia and the arts can collaborate to elevate Indigenous voices.

Longhouse Labs illustrates the far-reaching benefits of a dedicated, Indigenous-led approach to arts and equity. The project's impacts also extend beyond the university: it demonstrates how fulfilling key reconciliation goals in the arts – such as increasing Indigenous leadership and integrating Indigenous perspectives in cultural institutions – can enrich the cultural fabric of the nation. In fact, LLabs is envisaged as a model for other institutions across Canada, showing how academia and the arts can collaborate to elevate marginalized voices and knowledge systems.

Institutional and Structural Bias

Canada's major arts institutions have historically centered Eurocentric definitions of art and excellence, often to the exclusion of diverse cultures. Large arts organizations in Canada have been described as "bastions of white supremacy at the board, staff, and artistic production levels," built on models of "excellence" that ignored Indigenous cultural expressions and the contributions

"we aren't really who the country thinks of as 'artists'."

Elisha Lim, quote from "How BIPOC Artists Fight Canada's Biased Art Scene" *Hyperallergic*, August 5, 2021.

of waves of immigrant communities.[31] This entrenched bias has meant that the *"pluralistic reality"* of Canada – its diversity of peoples and art forms – has never been adequately reflected in Canadian galleries, theatres, and stages.

Lack of representation in staffing and governance

In a 2019 arts survey, undertaken by Hills Strategy, of 25 Canadian arts organizations, the findings affirmed the lack of representation within arts institutions.[32] Demographic data from the survey indicated:

- 81% of staff members identified as white
- 17% of staff members identified as culturally diverse/racialized
- 3% identified as Indigenous.

With regards to governance, the board members of arts organizations indicated:

- 85% (152) of board members identify as white,
- 7% (12) as Asian,
- 4% (8) identify with another ethnicity.
- 0% identified as Indigenous

Another study, conducted in 2022, examining leadership diversity within 125 of Canada's largest cultural institutions revealed that only 5.7% of CEOs are racialized, while 94.3% identified as white.[33]

Biases in artistic evaluation and content

In Canada, while overt racism/sexism in judging art is not usually blatant, implicit bias and lack of cultural competency among decision-makers remain hurdles to equity. Indigenous and racialized artists have long advocated for 'true' peer review, calling attention to the lack of knowledge as well as social and cultural biases that can influence how their work is

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[31] Mass Culture, *Towards an Intersectional Approach: Rethinking Arts Ecosystems*, 2020, accessed March 6, 2025, https://massculture.ca/intersectional-approach.

[32] Hills Strategy, *Diversity in 25 Canadian Arts Organizations Pilot project for the Canada Council for the Arts Report Summary* .November 2019

[33] Charlie Wall-Andrews, Rochelle Wijesingha, Wendy Cukier, and Owais Lightwala, "The State of Diversity Among Leadership Roles Within Canada's Largest Arts and Cultural Institutions," Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 41, no. 2 (2022): page number, https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-02-2021-0054.

evaluated, presented and received. Peer review panels, presenters or curators who do not share or understand the artist's cultural background may undervalue their work or push stereotypical expectations. For example, a recent poll of artists across the country, "Black artists in Montreal talked about feeling tokenized and pressured into creating art that fit a particular kind of blackness not defined by them".[34]

This systemic bias has led to structural discrimination, where even ostensibly neutral processes end up favoring artists from dominant groups. Indeed, the very concept of who is considered an "expert" or a "professional artist" was long defined in a way that excluded diverse cultural practices.[35]

In response to these institutional and structural limitations, culturally diverse artists are often obliged to take on the role of not only artist, but presenter, curator, art organizer and promoter. Artists have reported that in order to circumvent marginalization, they:

- self-presented their work
- taken advantage of alternative performance or exhibition opportunities in non-traditional venues and settings
- developed new platforms for their work, in particular new digital technologies
- pioneered their own festivals or presentations and touring networks to reach and develop their audiences

Sector Responses

A review of multiple art sector documents produced in the last decade, including strategic plans and policy reports, reveals four common approaches to addressing institutional and structural biases. These can be classified into

- Changing programming to increase the representation of IBPOC artists

[34] Toronto Arts Council. *Concentration of Artists in Canada*. Toronto: Toronto Arts Council, 2023. pg.27

[35] Mass Culture, *Towards an Intersectional Approach: Rethinking Arts Ecosystems*, 2020, accessed March 6, 2025, https://massculture.ca/intersectional-approach

- Changing funding initiatives to prioritize IBPOC artists
- Developing equity policies that govern institutional practices
- Diversifying personnel to be more representative and increase inclusion.

If the literature is accurate, programmatic changes and new policy development are by far the most dominant responses, with the majority of arts institutions now including language that speaks to equity in their strategic plans and developing equity policies that explicitly state their approaches to preventing discrimination. Federal institutions like the National Arts Centre, and the Canada Council have all created comprehensive Equity Policies and Action Plans. The National Gallery of Canada's first strategic plan, "Transform Together", positions the gallery as a space of *"justice, equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility"* and explicitly assigns a strategic pillar to *"Centre Indigenous ways of knowing and being"*.[36] The intent is to create a structural frame for revising their hiring, funding and programming practices to ensure equity across the sector.

Funding changes have also been increasing due to strong arts advocacy. The Ontario Arts Council (OAC), for example, formally identifies Priority Groups – including Indigenous artists, artists of colour, Deaf and disabled artists, Francophone minorities, and others – and gives these groups special consideration in grant assessments. OAC explicitly acknowledges that "historic and systemic barriers have affected access to opportunities and resources for many people of colour," resulting in marginalization and inequities in the arts funding landscape.[37] To counter this, OAC's strategic plan (Vital Arts and Public Value) elevates artists of colour as a priority group, and its assessment process incorporates equity principles. All peer jurors are instructed to consider the "context of historic or continuing barriers" faced by applicants from underrepresented communities when evaluating artistic merit. Crucially, if two applications are equally strong, OAC will award the grant to the applicant who is a member of a priority equity group. This *tie-break* mechanism, along with efforts to recruit more diverse jury members, is a concrete example of policy designed to mitigate structural discrimination in funding decisions.

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[36] National Gallery of Canada. *Transform Together: A Guide to the National Gallery of Canada's 2021–2026 Strategic Plan*. 2021.

[37] https://www.arts.on.ca/grants/priority-groups/artists-of-colour#:~:text=Artists%20of%20colour%20have%20an,This%20has%20led%20to

The most challenging approach to equity however appears to be diversifying staffing and adding Indigenous and racialized individuals in positions of leadership in arts and culture. The ongoing disparity between Indigenous, Black and racialized arts workers in major Canadian institutions highlights ongoing challenges in achieving equitable representation at leadership levels, suggesting that while some organizations may have equity policies, effective implementation remains a work in progress.

Case Study: Artist-Led Initiatives

The IBPOC Touring Network Initiative (ITN) was conceived in 2022 by the Wind in the Leaves Collective (WITL) as a response to the systemic barriers that hinder IBPOC artists from accessing touring opportunities in Canada. Supported by key arts organizations such as the Canada Dance Assembly, Canadian Stage and the Atlantic Ballet, the initiative aims to create an equitable touring landscape by fostering representation, artist development, and audience engagement. The Canada Council for the Arts funded a feasibility study[38] to assess the potential impact of the network, revealing its necessity in overcoming historical and financial obstacles for IBPOC artists and the initiative is currently developing its pilot touring year scheduled for 2026.

The ITN seeks to address the challenges faced by Indigenous, Black and racialized artists by fostering a sustainable, relationship-based touring ecosystem that amplifies IBPOC voices. Its potential impact includes:

- **Increased Representation and Equity:** By prioritizing IBPOC artists, the network will enhance cultural diversity in Canada's arts sector.
- **Artist Development and Knowledge Sharing:** The initiative will facilitate mentorship, training, and collaborative opportunities between emerging and established IBPOC artists.
- **Audience Expansion and Market Development:** Research indicates that arts attendance is higher among IBPOC communities, demonstrating an untapped market for culturally diverse performances.

[38] Wind in the Leaves Collective. *Feasibility Study to Support the Creation of an IBPOC Touring Network*, 2023.

- **Structural Change in Touring Models:** The network promotes slow touring and community-driven engagement, shifting the industry away from transactional models.

The ITN represents a pivotal step toward reshaping the Canadian arts touring sector. By tackling systemic inequities, fostering sustainable touring practices, and investing in IBPOC artists, this initiative has the potential to redefine how touring operates in Canada. As recommended in the feasibility study, institutional backing, long-term funding, and strong partnerships will be critical to ensuring the network's long-term success. This initiative aligns with national priorities for equity and diversity in the arts and stands as a model for future touring networks that prioritize social justice and inclusion.

Limited Access to Networks and Mentorship

Indigenous and racialized artists report having fewer opportunities to connect with established networks, professional development programs, art markets and audiences. This lack of access can hinder career advancement, reduce collaboration opportunities, and limit exposure to broader audiences and potential patrons.

According to the Canada Council, culturally diverse artists continue to experience greater challenges disseminating their work than their non-culturally diverse peers. Contributing factors include a lack of knowledge and sometimes interest among Canadian presenters, curators, programmers and publishers about culturally diverse art forms and practices – and a limited number of culturally diverse arts professionals in decision-making roles within Canadian arts institutions.[39]

Culturally diverse arts organizations are therefore increasingly engaged in a wide spectrum of knowledge-transfer activities, including mentorships, apprenticeships, workshops, labs and specialized courses. In order to do this work, many culturally diverse arts organizations must recruit, cultivate and train their own artists because most training institutions do not offer instruction or support in culturally specific art forms. Some examples include:

[39]Canada Council for the Arts. *Context Brief: Culturally Diverse Arts*. Ottawa: Canada Council for the Arts, 2022

CPAMO: The Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement Ontario (CPAMO) is a collective of Indigenous, Black, and racialized artists dedicated to fostering relationships, building capacities, and enhancing cultural pluralism across the arts sector. CPAMO also provides arts organizations with management and leadership tools, organizational reviews, training, and coaching to support anti-racism and decoloniality.

CultureBrew.Art (CBA): A digital platform created by racialized artists for IBPOC artists based in Vancouver, CultureBrew.Art features a Canada-wide searchable database of Indigenous and racialized artists working across various disciplines, including literary, media, performing, and visual arts.

IBPOC Cultural Professionals Network: Facilitated by the BC Museums Association (BCMA), this network aims to support racialized workers and volunteers in the arts, culture, and heritage sectors. It offers peer-to-peer mentorship, community-building initiatives, and professional development training to strengthen the professional agency of its members.

Creatives Empowered: Based in Western Canada, Creatives Empowered is a non-profit collective of IBPOC artists and creatives in film, television, media, and arts. They provide empowering and educational resources, events, and professional development opportunities to increase representation and eliminate systemic racism within the cultural sector.

Case Study: Artist-Led Initiatives

The OYA Emerging Filmmakers Program, initiated by the OYA Black Arts Coalition (OBAC) in Toronto, is an initiative aimed at empowering Black youth in the film, television, and digital media industries. Established in 2018 by Black filmmakers Alison Duke and Ngardy (Gaddy) Conteh George, the program addresses systemic inequities by providing mentorship, networking opportunities, and on-site training to Black post-secondary graduates, thereby fostering their integration and success within Canada's arts sector.[40]

Targeted to Black-identified individuals, aged 18 to 26, the program offers:

- **Mentorship:** Participants receive guidance from seasoned industry professionals, facilitating knowledge transfer and skill development.

[40] OYA Black Arts Coalition. "OYA Emerging Filmmakers." Accessed March 7, 2025.

- **Networking:** The program organizes industry mixers and training sessions, enabling participants to build valuable connections.
- **On-Site Training:** Collaborations with production companies, broadcasters, and film departments provide hands-on experience, enhancing practical skills.

Additionally, OBAC supports participants by covering memberships to film organizations, unions, and guilds, and by offering logistical assistance such as transportation and sustenance during workshops. The program is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services' Black Youth Action Plan, underscoring its commitment to addressing anti-Black racism and promoting diversity within the arts.

The OYA Emerging Filmmakers Program serves as a model for initiatives aimed at promoting equity in Canada's arts sector. By addressing systemic barriers, enhancing representation, and fostering professional growth among Black youth, the program contributes significantly to a more inclusive and diverse cultural industry. Its success underscores the importance of targeted support mechanisms in achieving equity within the arts.

Colonial Legacies, Tokenism and Cultural Misappropriation

E. Tendayi Achiume, then Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, has stated that some of the most entrenched forms of systemic racism are the result of continuing legacies of slavery and colonialism.[41]

Indigenous and racialized artists in Canada report ongoing experiences of tokenism, and marginalization of their practice when compared to historically Western art forms and aesthetic standards, as well as cultural misappropriation. For example, despite years of professional and sector experience, within Canada or abroad, many Indigenous and racialized artists report being labeled as “folk”, “community” or “ethnic” artists.

Numerous studies demonstrate that Black artists are significantly more likely to experience racial discrimination and Black Arts are frequently

[41]Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. n.d. "Racism and Discrimination Are Legacies of Colonialism." *United Nations Human Rights*. Accessed March 4. https://www.ohchr.org/en/get-involved/stories/racism-discrimination-are-legacies-colonialism.

undervalued or even excluded in public spaces. A recent study of the Canadian arts sector highlights the barriers facing Black artists and Black Arts, relying on artist testimonies to give voice to discrimination. The report states, "artists spoke about discrimination towards Black artforms, *"we look around for places to rent … they really don't want hip hop, soca… They don't want black music in particular."*[42]

Indigenous artists in Canada face not only racial discrimination, but also the direct and the long-term impacts of colonialism. Their cultural expressions are often tokenized or misrepresented by non-Indigenous institutions, and they may face challenges in asserting control over their cultural narratives. This dynamic not only affects the economic viability of their work but also their cultural sovereignty. According to an Indigenous performing arts artist,

"There are not enough Indigenous arts administrators, artistic directors, creative producers, and teams. We are underserved, undersupported and underdeveloped. [43]

Cultural appropriation is another ongoing concern within Canada. Artists and arts organizations have been critiqued for adopting cultural forms, aesthetics, or iconography from Indigenous and racialized communities without proper engagement, acknowledgment or context. This practice can strip artistic traditions of their social, political, and cultural significance while also limiting opportunities for racialized artists to share their own narratives.

Sector Reforms

Alongside promoting diversity, Canadian arts bodies have put measures in place to ensure ethical representation of Indigenous and other cultural art forms, aiming to prevent cultural appropriation and misuse. As Indigenous communities disproportionately experience cultural appropriation, most Arts councils and funding agencies now provide clear protocols and guidelines on working with Indigenous cultural content. For example, the Ontario Arts Council explicitly defines *cultural appropriation* as the use of any aspect of a people's culture or knowledge without proper authority or permission, noting that communities who have faced colonization are

[42] Toronto Arts Council. Concentration of Artists in Canada. Toronto: Toronto Arts Council, 2023. pg.27

[43] Wind in the Leaves Collective. *Feasibility Study to Support the Creation of an IBPOC Touring Network*, 2023

especially vulnerable to having their arts exploited.[44] Furthermore, the OAC urges artists and organizations to ask critical questions about who has the right or permission to share Indigenous stories or imagery, and it requires applicants to demonstrate engagement with Indigenous knowledge-holders when Indigenous content is involved.

The Canada Council for the Arts likewise has taken a strong stance, and uses the term cultural misappropriation. In its public statements, the Council acknowledges that in a society where inequalities persist, *"unilaterally borrowing from a culture that is marginalized or disenfranchised"* – without engagement or consent – can lead to "disempowerment, exploitation, misrepresentation and fetishization" of that community.[45] The Council's assessment guidelines emphasize that art is strengthened when rooted in rigorous research, genuine consultation, and dialogue with the communities whose culture is referenced.

Outside of funding bodies, professional associations have also provided frameworks – for instance, CARFAC (Canadian Artists' Representation) released *Indigenous Protocols for the Visual Arts* (2021), a comprehensive guide on legal and ethical considerations when working with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis art and cultural materials.[46] These protocols cover everything from obtaining permission to use traditional designs, to consulting elders about sacred content, to proper ways of crediting and sharing benefits.

All of these measures aim to move beyond the tokenistic or insensitive treatment of non-European art. Instead of treating Indigenous and diverse cultures as exotic display fodder, Canadian arts institutions are increasingly realizing that partnership, respect, and shared authority is necessary in mitigating misappropriation and fostering ethical representation of artists.

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[44] Ontario Arts Council. *Video Provides Guidance on How to Engage with Indigenous Arts and Communities.* Accessed March 8, 2025. https://www.arts.on.ca/news-resources/news/2016/video-provides-guidance-on-how-to-engage-with-indi.

[45] Canada Council for the Arts. *Supporting Indigenous Art in the Spirit of Cultural Self-Determination and Opposing Appropriation*. Ottawa: Canada Council for the Arts, 2017.

[46] Canadian Artists' Representation (CARFAC). *Indigenous Protocols for the Visual Arts*. Ottawa: CARFAC, 2021.

Case Study: Artist-Led Initiatives

Oddside Arts is a Toronto-based, not-for-profit arts organization that centers the experiences and creativity of Afro-descendants, particularly women, gender-expansive, and 2SLGBTQIAP[47] individuals. Co-founded by artists Queen Kukoyi and Nicole “Nico” Taylor, the mission of Oddside Arts focuses on merging art, technology, and wellness through Black speculative design, fostering spaces for marginalized communities to theorize, create, and influence an equitable future that acknowledges the intersectionality of the racialized experience.[48]

Key Contributions:

- **Advocacy and Representation:** Oddside Arts emphasizes the inclusion of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) creatives, advocating for their representation within the arts sector. They focus on integrating the creative outputs of these communities, especially those who self-identify as 2SLGBTQIAP, into mainstream narratives.

- **Collaborative Frameworks:** Operating under the Ubuntu philosophy, which promotes interconnectedness, Oddside Arts prioritizes collective success over individual achievements. This approach fosters a supportive environment that challenges systemic racism by uplifting community voices.

- **Educational Initiatives:** Through knowledge-sharing efforts, Oddside Arts supports the development of Black and Queer BIPOC artists. They offer mentorship programs, disseminate educational resources, and provide platforms for the creation, production, and presentation of artworks, thereby addressing educational disparities rooted in systemic racism.

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[47] This acronym is an inclusive term representing diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions, as well as intersex individuals. The "2S" (Two-Spirit) is placed at the beginning in recognition of Indigenous peoples’ unique and longstanding identities and traditions related to gender and sexuality.

[48] Innovating Canada. *How Oddside Arts Is Celebrating Black Culture Through Art.* Accessed March 8, 2025. https://www.innovatingcanada.ca/diversity-and-inclusion/black-history-month/how-oddside-arts-is-celebrating-black-culture-through-art/.

- **Public Art and Community Engagement:** The organization engages in public art projects and community exhibitions that reflect the narratives and histories of marginalized communities. For instance, their involvement in the Villiers Island & Keating West Public Art Master Plan demonstrates a commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion in public art, ensuring that decision-making processes are inclusive of a broad range of diverse voices.[49]

- **Cultural Events:** Oddside Arts curates events like Afraspektion, celebrating the contributions and creativity of the Afrodiaspora during Emancipation Month. Such events provide platforms for Black artists and vendors, fostering community engagement and challenging racial biases.

Through these multifaceted efforts, Oddside Arts demonstrates how the arts can address systemic racism by creating inclusive spaces, amplifying the unique and diverse narratives of racialized communities, and modeling equitable practices within the arts sector.

What's Missing - Research Gaps

While this sector wide research scan has revealed many recent policies, initiatives, and institutional changes that address the many ongoing impacts of racism and colonization on artists, significant gaps still exist.

Three areas that are underrepresented in this research scan include:

- Insufficient current and ongoing desegregated data collection on the status of Indigenous, Black and racialized artists.
- Research as to the impacts of intersectional discrimination on artists
- Further acknowledgement of the psychosocial impacts of racism and discrimination

More Data Is Needed: Arts researchers, such as Hill Strategies have pointed out major gaps in data on the status of marginalized artists. In 2022, Hill Strategies noted a "lack of recent and reliable statistics" on Indigenous, Black, other racialized, Deaf and disabled, and LGBTQ+

[49] Waterfront Toronto. *Villiers Island & Keating West Public Art Master Plan.* May 29, 2024.

artists in Canada.[50] Kelly Hill also notes the available information tends to be fragmented (by discipline or region), which makes it difficult to fully "see the sector clearly" and address equity issues. Such calls to action aim to bolster more intersectional research and accountability in the arts which can in turn translate into direct and meaningful actions against systemic bias and racism.

More study on the impacts of intersectional discrimination: Intersectional discrimination refers to the overlapping and compounding forms of bias that individuals face due to multiple aspects of their identity (e.g. race, gender, sexuality, disability). In the arts, this means Indigenous, Black, and other racialized artists who also belong to another marginalized group (such as 2SLGBTQIAP, women, or persons with disabilities) often encounter unique barriers not experienced by artists with a single marginalized identity. These multiple-minority artists face challenges rooted in historic inequities and cultural biases, resulting in unique systemic obstacles to funding, representation, and support.

Acknowledgement of the psychosocial impacts of racism and discrimination: In Canada, surveys have shown that inequities, in particular multiple inequalities can affect artists' well-being: one pandemic-era study noted extremely high stress and burnout among marginalized arts workers – 68% for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) and 78% for 2SLGBTQIAP artists – rates higher than their non-marginalized peers.[51]

This underscores how racial discrimination and bias in the arts is not only about missing out on opportunities, but also about shouldering heavier emotional and economic burdens. Further study and acknowledgement of this area is needed to build awareness and provide solutions.

Conclusion from Environmental Scan

The studies, reports, policies and grassroot activism reviewed in this research summary have been instrumental in moving the conversation from anecdotal claims to evidence-backed urgency. By quantifying the gaps (whether in dollars, percentages, or personal testimonies), they have put pressure on the arts sector to respond. The consensus across all the research reviewed is that inequities in the arts are real, persistent, and yet fixable – if institutions are willing to confront bias and reinvent their

[50] Kelly Hill, "Arts Research: Insights and Absences," *Hill Strategies Research*, March 9, 2022, https://hillstrategies.com/2022/03/09/arts-research-insights-and-absences/.
[51] IBID.

structural systems.

And yet, despite growing recognition of the barriers facing racialized and immigrant artists in Canada, meaningful and lasting structural change remains elusive. Even highly talented and innovative artists continue to encounter significant hurdles tied to their racial, cultural, or social identities, reinforcing long standing inequities in earnings, leadership, and representation. While efforts to reform funding practices and increased diversity in leadership have been introduced, the lack of accountability has prevented these initiatives from translating into substantial, measurable progress.

In addition, the recent backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, as highlighted by scholar Dr. Debra Thompson in a recent article[52], underscores the fragility of these efforts—without strong institutional commitment, policy enforcement, and accountability, progress is easily stalled or reversed. The fact that earnings gaps, leadership representation, and board memberships have seen little to no improvement suggests that equity measures have often been superficial, lacking the necessary structural backbone to drive real transformation.

To build a truly inclusive arts ecosystem, institutions and policymakers must move beyond symbolic gestures and commit to sustainable, systemic change. This means enforcing accountability measures, ensuring equitable access to resources, and fostering leadership pipelines that reflect the full spectrum of Canadian artistic talent. Without these steps, the promise of diversity in the arts will remain an unfulfilled aspiration rather than a lived reality.

[52] Debra Thompson, "The Name Can Change, but the Work Must Not: Why Canada Still Needs DEI," *The Globe and Mail*, February 8, 2025,

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