

Spiralling Outwardly for Equity in Public Arts



Imagine a big circle to represent the earth and water that surround us all. In this circle's orbit is the sun, a bright warm ball.

Within the large circle is a spiral with no beginning and no end. This is the framework's core. Three dynamic entities floating on open terrain.

Welcome!

My name is Shanice Bernicky (she/her, elle) and I am a PhD student at Carleton University. This framework was constructed as part of the Mass Culture and Mitacs Research in Residence project. The Framework is designed to assist public arts organizations develop equitable practices for employees and community members. If you make use of this project, you must use CC BY-NC. I can be reached at shanicebernicky@cmail.carleton.ca and invite your feedback.

Do you work at organization in a country in the global west without a designated equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)* team/team member? While you are certainly wearing many hats, there are ways of ingraining equity into your daily practice to foster an equitable environment to ensure your employees and community members can engage in the public arts sector to their fullest.

Guide to this Framework

The interactive version of this framework is available on Miro. Please navigate to Mass Culture's website for access.

There are three (3) layers to this board:

- The Earth: We are bound to the earth, and we owe everything we have and are to it. Anything we do must be done with deep respect and consideration for the more-than human beings and the lands and waters.
- The Sun - Anything we do must also take action heeding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action.
- The Spiral - the framework...Remember these?

Guide to this Framework

Step 1: Open your own word processor

Open your own word processor as you follow along with this document, copying elements that you want to use. Do note that the Miroboard will be updated from time to time with tweaks or new interventions to the framework. If you wish to make a note on the original board, please send me an email!

If the requests on this board overwhelm you or you feel you and your organization are not yet ready to undertake the steps recommended, please navigate to [this document](#) which is an anti-colonial toolkit - a great starting point!

Step 2: Pick a pillar that is top of mind for you and your organization (There are 4 pillars total - check the next page).

Pulse Check: The commitment to equity should be considered a beating heart of any organization. This means, constantly scanning the terrain to identify barriers visible and opening the floor to employees and community members for anonymous (or not, this is their choice) to detail more inferential barriers. This is the beginning of a never-ending cycle. Equity does not just mean checking off boxes of tangible things that can be done but working to improve lives as our communities and environment evolves. As such, you will always find yourself checking for a pulse with the hope that it gets stronger each time.

Transparent Socialization: After completing a pulse check, review the barriers signalled from this round. How have they manifested themselves? Are there items that can be immediately addressed without the consultation of community members? If so, start with those. Some barriers will be more systemic, requiring anywhere between leveraging local to federal strategic plans. As such, when building a strategic plan, be realistic about what your organization can do for communities in the very near future. Furthermore, badger—sorry—communicate bureaucratic hurdles with government representatives that are actually hurting the possibility of equitable access. Throughout the process, it is also necessary to consult and compensate community members whose barriers you are always addressing. Try to prioritize building trust and sustaining relationships with community members rather than calling on them for a finite amount of time to develop solutions for your organization. Transparent socialization makes use of the sociological term "socialization" to consider how we are taught the appropriate behaviours and traditions of our culture. In the case of transparent socialization, the art organization is responsible for respecting and following the customs of whichever community they are engaging with.

Step 2: Page 2 of 2

(E/A)ffective Equity: Equity is a complex principle to measure as it includes an affective, personal layer. The “effective” component of this stage is where your organization implements programs and strategies to push equity forward. “Affective” is the level of care, support, and inclusion marginalized community members feel when entering and engaging with the organization in question.

Continu (or living): Evaluating equity is a continual process with no end. Nothing is truly perfect and that is okay. Continu acknowledges the messiness of ensuring equity for as many folks as possible at any given time. As a result, the cycle continues over and over again, building on top of itself with no end. This might not be useful just yet, but is a good reminder.

Step 3: Navigate to the pillar of your choice

Go to page 8 if you selected "Pulse Check"

Go to page 10 if you selected "Transparent Socialization"

Go to page 12 if you selected "(E/A)ffective Equity"

Go to page 14 if you are curious about "Continu (or living)"

Step 4: Go to page 14

Pulse Check

The commitment to equity should be considered a beating heart of any organization. This means, constantly scanning the terrain to identify barriers visible and opening the floor to employees and community members for anonymous (or not, this is their choice) to detail more inferential barriers. This is the beginning of a never-ending cycle. Equity does not just mean checking off boxes of tangible things that can be done but working to improve lives as our communities and environment evolves. As such, you will always find yourself checking for a pulse with the hope that it gets stronger each time.

Indicators (please don't leave these steps behind!):

- Begin by running an internal diagnostic of your organization to see how diverse your workplace currently is. This includes reviewing the intersectionalities of your board members as well.
- Review the trends of artists your organization has collaborated with over the last 10 years.
- Review the trends in subject matters of cultural events your organization has held.
- Create an anonymous method for employees to provide feedback regarding barriers they experience to bring their whole selves to work.
- Create an anonymous method for community members/artists to provide feedback regarding barriers they experience attempting to engage with your organization.

*Note that some community members/artists may be hesitant to collaborate with your organization – provide a safe avenue for them to express why.

Pulse Check (continued)

Below are some quotes from arts organization representatives that helped inspire this pillar.

“As we develop, I know I have come across a lot of barriers that are only still there because they are not my barriers or the company’s barriers, or the strategic plan’s barriers. Barriers that are in place by municipal, federal, and provincial governments that actually prevent any sort of advancement. For instance, my building qualified for a half a million-dollar federal grant to install a wheelchair ramp and it got blocked municipally. It got blocked, they would not allow it because of whatever little small thing that was going on and ultimately it was harmful to the city’s own EDI plan.”

Jackie Latendresse

“Those open dialogues with staff across the board—just giving them that assurance that they have a voice, and they might have some really great ideas to help strategize and figure out how we breakdown those barriers and how we feel inclusive for all as well.”

Crystal Massier

“Also doing some individual work, I think. Therapy, maybe? For a lot of people. Like, mental health for folks because a lot of this is also rooted in fear of like ‘oh my god what are people going to say if I start talking about racism? I don’t want to have this conversation; I am a manager.’”

Valeria Duarte Reyes

As you engage with this pillar, try to hold on to these questions: What does equity mean to you? How does your organization work to ensure it to all employees?

Transparent Socialization

After completing a pulse check, review the barriers signalled from this round. How have they manifested themselves? Are there items that can be immediately addressed without the consultation of community members? If so, start with those. Some barriers will be more systemic, requiring anywhere between leveraging local to federal strategic plans. As such, when building a strategic plan, be realistic about what your organization can do for communities in the very near future. Furthermore, badger—sorry—communicate bureaucratic hurdles with government representatives that are actually hurting the possibility of equitable access. Throughout the process, it is also necessary to consult and compensate community members whose barriers you are always addressing. Try to prioritize building trust and sustaining relationships with community members rather than calling on them for a finite amount of time to develop solutions for your organization. Transparent socialization makes use of the sociological term "socialization" to consider how we are taught the appropriate behaviours and traditions of our culture. In the case of transparent socialization, the art organization is responsible for respecting and following the customs of whichever community they are engaging with.

Indicators (please don't leave these steps behind!):

- Reviewing anonymous feedback, what are the immediate steps your organization can take without consultation?
- Remember to include community members in the loop of your progress by keeping a webpage up-to-date regarding all work to advance equitable access and collaboration.
- Build trust with community members by appointing a permanent liaison from the community and compensating them for their work.
- If holding consultations, allow the liaison to lead them, and pay collaborators for their work. Remember to practice on-going consent!

Transparent Socialization (continued)

Indicators (please don't leave these steps behind!):

- If community members do not wish to participate, keep the momentum going, with steps 1 to 3. You cannot force a relationship, but can continually try to build and strengthen trust.
- Small arts and culture organizations struggle to receive funding for such initiatives. This is a structural issue. Ban together across sectors (such as public health or education) to apply for grants to take the step above on if you can.
- If you are a medium to large organization, develop micro grants for artist spaces and community art centres who are already doing this work so that they can continue and thrive.
- If this begins to feel like a checkbox exercise, stop what you're doing and go to (E/A)ffective Equity.

Note: This pillar wasn't developed without help from community members. Once their quotes are validated, a new version of the PDF will be uploaded to the Mass Culture Website.

Question: Are some of the barriers identified municipal, provincial, or federal?

This is where you signal the help of community members and other organizations. Together in numbers, you can plead your case to various layers of government about the harm, their by-laws and policies, are causing.

(E/A)ffective Equity

Equity is a complex principle to measure as it includes an affective, personal layer. The “effective” component of this stage is where your organization implements programs and strategies to push equity forward. “Affective” is the level of care, support, and inclusion marginalized community members feel when entering and engaging with the organization in question.

Indicators (please don't leave these suggestions behind!):

- Diverse mind-bodies are part of your organization.
- The board of directors makes space for seats reserved for one artist from an EE/EE seeking background AND one community member EE/EE seeking background with no prior experience required – nominated by community members through a virtual vote system.
- Develop artist residencies reserved for diverse-mind bodies.
- Hold space for diverse mind-bodies to congregate without micro-management.
- Remember that self-determination is essential!

*EE Seeking Background refers to Employment Equity and Equity Seeking Background. This includes folks who are members of LGBTQ2+ communities, have hidden and/or visible disabilities, Indigenous peoples, Black and racialized communities, and/or women with the consideration of their intersectional backgrounds.

(E/A)ffective Equity (continued)

Note: This pillar wasn't developed without help from community members. Once their quotes are validated, a new version of the PDF will be uploaded to the Mass Culture Website.

Question: Do you feel your organization is ready for restructuring?

- If yes: what sort of restructuring and what will it take?
- If no: go to pulse-check and explore the reasons for why. Do not engage with community until your organization is serious about moving forward with actionable steps.

Continu (or living)

Evaluating equity is a continual process with no end. Nothing is truly perfect and that is okay. Continu acknowledges the messiness of ensuring equity for as many folks as possible at any given time. As a result, the cycle continues over and over again, building on top of itself with no end.

Indicators (please don't leave these questions behind!):

- What sorts of changes has your organization made thus far?
- How has your organization's relationship with the community evolved?
- Are there still barriers being vocalized by employees and community-members?

The goal here is that your organization IS part of the community. Do not remove any of the programs, positions, or infrastructure your organization built to foster a more equitable environment. Keep it going!

Below are some quotes from arts organization representatives that helped inspire this pillar.

“You can have clouds that are here today and not here in five minutes and [similar to] the idea of a system that is working but changing all the time.”

Valeria Duarte Reyes

Continu (or living) continued

“So you have this plan, let’s say there’s an organization and you have this EDI plan and you have these goals of having this diverse team or something. Sometimes, as we were just talking about, they do this really fast and then they just have this easy fix or this solution right away. Or it could be that they actually take the time and do the process and hire someone or something. But I think that sometimes the work I feel, it stops there. So they have this diverse team or they have this inclusion program and they do all these things and then they say ‘okay! We’re done. So we have this team of people and this plan so we are now on the good side of history and everything is good.’ But then they don’t go and reevaluate like six months from now and see what actually happened. Are people actually feeling comfortable? Is this actually working for the organization and not just for the organization but of course for the people working within the organization? So, I think that it’s also a matter of understanding that this is just something that we have to keep going at and keep doing it. It’s just not something that we are gonna fix and that’s it because we are people—we’re humans and we don’t work like that.”

Valeria Duarte Reyes

“I’d also like to add that it is always so quick. People want to make these changes—like they want that immediate change like ‘okay now we’re diversified.’ But what did you do? How did you build that so that it actually meets the needs of what your end goal? So that’s always where for me, these things take time and I know that’s difficult, and it feels awkward and horrible that it is taking that much time but there really isn’t a quick fix. So that’s also something that I often hear that feedback too where ‘yeah it’s great that this organization is doing this but they’re still doing it so quickly that it’s not actually benefiting anybody. It’s sort of like spinning your wheels or just ticking off boxes. There’s ways to get people maybe just to slow down a little bit and really think? In the end, I feel like that’s a stronger approach.”

Crystal Massier

Step 5: Repeat steps 2 through 4 over and over again.



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