Creative Equity National Survey
Culture: Race, Myth Art = Justice
A Project of Creative Justice Initiative
“Racism, or any other form of sectionalism, will be used by the dominant social group to prevent any clear, resolute and united action against its dominant position in that society. It will use each and every myth disguised as education, history, philosophy, religion, aesthetics, to bolster its hegemony on the one hand; and to scatter, confuse and even lead astray the entire resistance hegemony of the other sections” --

Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms
Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1992)

INTRO

Creative Justice Initiative Culture: Race, Myth, Art = Justice Conference, developed in collaboration with a cadre of national cultural workers and organizational representatives from diverse racial and cultural communities, was designed in 2018 to address the racist, discriminatory and unjust policies that continue to victimize disenfranchised communities. The work focused on a series of planning and programming sessions that interrogated and examined false narratives and policies designed to silence cultural communities, artists, and community leaders.

We understand that we live in a white supremacist nation, which has persistently overlooked, ignored, disposed of, and erased our people. For centuries, up to and including the present, the collective “we” have experienced an increase in hate-driven actions embedded in discriminatory laws. As a result, the lives of our children, our men, and women have been unjustly threatened and too many lost. We are fighting for survival, for the right to live with dignity under the democratic principles exalted in our nation’s Constitution and laws. Blacks, Latino/a, Asians, Native Americans, economically poor, and myriad communities historically seeking justice are still confronting intolerance and inequity. Domestic terrorists are now being documented due to their invasion of the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021. This blatant act of terrorism is exacerbated by government officials, who are complicit in promoting white supremacy.

One of their many racist objectives is to suppress the actions and voices
of artists and cultural workers who challenge the status quo practices of inequity and injustice. Aided by media that oftentimes colludes with power instead of speaking truth to power, ultimately reinforces governmental policies that fail us rather than protecting and advocating for hard-fought civil rights that are set forth in the Constitution. Presently, the right to vote in our democracy is being challenged by discriminatory laws that are being proposed and instituted across the country.

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, our survival was further threatened by the failure of a comprehensive and coordinated response at the federal level. At the highest echelons, our nation did not prioritize a politics of care. This created a crisis for all and unveiled, for any non-believers, the entrenched systems that support the disenfranchisement of the most vulnerable. As the story unfolds, new information indicates that this level of intentional mismanagement and neglect has placed the lives of economically challenged Native, African Americans, Asian, Latino/a, White, and other communities at higher risk.

The brutal and unjust treatment of members of our communities demands that, again, we unite in the name of those who have historically fought to move this nation to abide by its democratic principles. In this historic period, our call for racial and economic justice is heightened by the public and documented police killing of George Floyd. The esteemed poet activist Audre Lorde illuminated the institutional dehumanization that has plagued Black life in the U.S., the Americas, and globally. In her words, “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.”

Democracy requires social movements that connect the work of past and present generations to move forward the narrative and action of equity and justice. This renewed action is a continuum of justice work that further emboldens a new generation and a renewed global movement for Black Lives -- an urgent and international united call for equity and social and racial justice.

What continues to be incomprehensible is the attempt to influence us to disbelieve what we clearly are seeing and experiencing in plain sight. Witnessing the brutal murder of George Floyd and the white supremacist seditious attack on the government’s Capitol are being framed in a manner that is reflective of the doublespeak illustrated in George Orwell’s novel 1984 that warns us of a totalitarian world view.

Our challenge, and continuing struggle, is to dismantle and destroy the structural elements of the dominant white supremacy policies and practices that promulgate and reinforce oppression. This imposed, dominant eurocentric vision seeks to deny and eradicate the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the nation thus rendering an unhealthy, destructive, and oppressive society. The nation must be disabused of this mythological history. The true history of the purported “greatness of this nation” is the product of imposed enslavement, indentured people, and stolen lands. Diverse racial and cultural groups seek opportunities to not only survive but to thrive and benefit from their work in building the nation. The multiplicity of aesthetic visions, values, and standards have been the result of multiple diverse intelligences that have forged the best qualities of the nation.

From its inception, the experimental Invention that is the United States has been the history of attempted domination of Native people, sanctioning of enslavement of African people, indenturing of Asian and White people, and the exploitation of economically challenged communities through extractive economies. In this era of the pandemic COVID-19, the wealthy have enhanced their wealth immensely, further widening the disparity between the rich and the poor. In the economic heightened crisis due to
COVID-19, the institutional and communal networks that sustain cultural community organizations and promote social cohesion have suffered increased marginalization and victimization.

The “America First” mindset which seeks to uphold and maintain white supremacy, promotes the persistent underfunding of community cultural arts organizations at the level of federal policy and philanthropic neglect. Further, this practice adds to the underemployment of front-line cultural workers, programs and services. We are being decimated by policies and practices which serve to deepen gentrification and implosion of our already economically fragile communities.

The Call for Racial, Social, and Economic Justice survey is the result of a series of planning meetings attended by cultural panelists engaged in the conference, Culture: Race, Myth, Art = Justice. The state of emergency of our community-based cultural organizations mandated evidentiary facts and data to irrefutably show that the economic condition of these organizations and institutions before, during, and coming out of COVID-19 is precarious, at best. The need for an immediate infusion of funding to stabilize the economic condition of front-line cultural community-based organizations is critical to our survival and the services needed within our existing communities. Concurrently, there must be a mandate to develop new funding systems that provide equitable long-range financial stability to our cultural organizations. This support recognizes and honors our cultural communities’ creativity and the life forces that have enhanced the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional wealth of the nation. And for those reasons alone funding support is essential to living up to the equity considerations that are being requested. Thanks to the commitment and work of our network of cultural organizers, workers, advisors, and participants, this survey clearly indicates that our frontline organizations and networks are not only in crisis but facing extinction.

The present administration appears to be addressing the adverse impact of racism, past and present; this is also essential. This study proves that a more detailed understanding of community cultural organizations grounded in their varied traditions, in diverse geographical areas with particular needs,
must be further deepened and expanded, to further undergird our preliminary findings.

Government and foundation funders cannot continue to take a “band-aid” approach. The intentional strengthening of our front-line cultural organizations that work in service to the community must be set up to thrive. Why is it that as a nation we uphold carceral institutions and fund the military-industrial complex yet do not invest in or promote a politics of care for the greater good and for the benefit for all?

The survey underscores that our strength is and always has been that our nation is enriched by the vibrancy of its racial and cultural diversity—past, present, and future. We, as a nation that embraces change, must breathe life into the words of James Baldwin, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

This moment requires that as a nation, we face the naked truths and commit to developing a shared vision that aids communities to build bridges of mutual respect and understanding to work in common cause. Our culturally grounded institutions have a critical role to play in achieving that vision. As Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “The time is always right to do what is right.” Thus, we must embrace the cultural, aesthetic, and ethical values of our specific experiences to serve, educate and inform policy to truly grow and evolve as a nation.

Our call is for investment in our cultural arts communities that are the growth engines of the nation!

This survey reflects the commitments of many who believe in justice and continue the work to form coalitions to assure that we are all better off tomorrow. The Creative Justice Initiative is indebted to the commitment of all that assisted in the planning of the conference series and the creation of the survey and its implementation.

Creative Justice Initiative is most appreciative of the work of Nikesha Hamilton in realizing this initial survey of the state of our institutions nationally based on the information we had gathered during the conference conversations entitled Culture: Race, Myth, Art = Justice. It is clear that a more in depth study has to follow this initiative survey. It is our expectation that added resources will provide the opportunity to deepen the national status of our institutions. What is clear from this initial study is that the economic crisis being faced by our cultural organizations nationally places the community’s culturally grounded institutions at significant risk of survival into the future. The vital services of these institutions to the infrastructure of cultural and economically disenfranchised communities will cease to exist, deepening the crisis that existed before the global COVID-19 pandemic. The survey indicates that action is necessary now by government and private foundations.
The survey findings represent 213 completed responses out of 557 cultural organizations which participated in this survey from regions throughout the United States of America. Understanding the limited time that working under crisis and stress requires administrators, independent artists, and cultural workers, receive assistance in completing a future survey.

The enclosed survey results provide a snapshot in time during the evolving circumstances of COVID-19. While this survey only covers projected impacts from August 4, 2020 through September 10, 2020, significant negative impacts on this sector, and most importantly the communities we serve, is expected to continue through the remainder of 2021 and beyond. Most of the respondents are arts and cultural organizations that serve communities experiencing marginalization. There are few religious organizations and independent cultural workers that also participated in the survey. The data was taken from arts and cultural organizations from the following regions:

**NORTHEAST:** Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont

**MIDWEST:** Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin

**WEST:** Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming

**SOUTH:** Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, Washington DC

LOCATION OF DATA CONCENTRATION:
It is important to note that most of the organizations that completed the survey were in the Northeast region of the United States: Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. This is an important note because the results were heavily influenced by respondents from the Northeast region, given the number of organizations from New York. The results strongly reflect Northeast region organizations’ experience, which differs from the other regions: Midwest, South, West, and U.S. Islands, Territories and Colonies.

UNDERLYING OPERATING MODEL AND CONSTITUENCY SERVED:
With 83% of the respondents being 501c3 organizations and 17% for-profit organizations, most identified themselves as organizations that engage their surrounding communities through cultural equity, community engagement, and social justice lenses to educate and empower their communities. It is evident that the audiences they serve come from communities experiencing marginalization.

Most of the respondents operate as interdisciplinary organizations and focus on visual and performing arts; there is a range with organizations’ target audiences. Most of the organizations’ programs mainly focus on youth/children, and the LGBTQA+ community, with a small number that focuses on adults and elders. The respondents expressed that they must be multidisciplinary because the surrounding communities lack access to resources due to being historically marginalized. THE RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THAT THEY MUST BE A MULTIFUNCTIONAL SPACE FOR THEIR COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND
Provide low-cost to free programming, especially since the average median income of the audience members they serve is $43,377. However, it is important to note, again, that the results are heavily influenced by the Northeast region. This average median income could have possibly decreased if we had an even distribution of respondents who completed this survey.

Property ownership and rental:
Regarding property ownership, 74% of the organization’s rent property, and 26% own the property that their organization is on. What is surprising is that 141 organizations that answered that question did not believe that they face displacement due to market forces or gentrification. We found that response surprising since 74% of the organizations rent property. As such, they are more susceptible to gentrification because they do not own the land they are on. Gentrification violently shifts the culture of a community and displaced people, so it was interesting that most organizations did not believe that market forces or gentrification would play a role in displacement—especially since they may not have the funding to sustain their organization due to the lack of funding they receive for programs and operations. With 64% or 135 organizations functioning in physical space and most of them rent, the question becomes how will organizations continue to sustain themselves through COVID-19? Many organizations fear that they will not be able to keep up with rent.

Audience engagement:
The audience engagement for these organizations has dropped considerably in the physical space from an average of 1,050,773 per year to 62,730. That is a significant loss of audience members in the physical space, which means a decrease in income from audience members for organizations. Although 197, or 94%, of the organizations are functioning online during COVID-19, it is unknown if they are engaging the same number of audience members pre-COVID-19. Only 73% (or 153 out of 207) of the organizations have the expertise, technology and web connectivity to sustain the programs.

Structure of annual operating budget & funding model:
Approximately 51% of the respondents have an operating budget under $250,000, with 17.73% operating budget between $251,000-500,000. The results show that only 6% of the respondents have an operating budget of over $3 million, which is low for this size of a cohort. The respondents depend on government and philanthropic funding to operate. What is noteworthy is that organizations rely heavily on government and philanthropic funding, which is an issue because there is a dependency on this funding, especially for philanthropy and government which is the basis of their annual operating budget. Approximately 40 organizations receive 50%-98% of their funding from the government. While 44 organizations receive 0% of their operating budget from the government, most of the organizations...
receive at least 1% of the funding from the government. As for philanthropy, 140 of the organizations’ annual operating budget receive more than 30% of their funding from philanthropy. Most of the organizations’ annual operating budget rely 100% on funding from philanthropy. Finally, over 50% of the organizations receive 10% or less discretionary funding.

The structure of the annual operating budgets correlates with the sustainability and development of the organizations. Interestingly, most of the respondents allocate 0% of their annual operating budget to administrative support, or no more than 10% is appropriated to the annual budget for administrative support. This expresses that many of the respondents do not have the adequate administrative staff necessary to operate their organizations. Administrative staff is vital because they help to streamline the necessary information and documentation to ensure that the organizations continue to gain, operate, and streamline the resources to their staff and the communities they engage. Another surprising result was the appropriation of funding to programs. OVER 50% OF THE ORGANIZATIONS HAVE LESS THAN 10% OF THEIR ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET APPORTIONED FOR PROGRAMS. THIS TELLS US THAT MOST OF THE ORGANIZATIONS ARE RELIANT ON GOVERNMENT AND PHILANTHROPY TO FUND PROGRAMS FOR THEIR COMMUNITY AND DO NOT HAVE A BUDGET TO FULLY STAFF THEIR ORGANIZATIONS.

STAFFING AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FOR OPERATIONS

The respondents experienced a substantial staff loss. Before COVID-19, the respondents’ staffing amounts were the following: 1588 full-time, 1498 part-time, and 1839 contractors. During COVID-19, that number of staff dropped across the board with 1231 full-time staff, 654 part-time staff, and 927 contractors. When we look at the breakdown of staffing roles, the respondents experienced the following staff losses: 754 cultural arts staff, 294 part-time administrative staff, 233 full-time staff, and 172 contractors. The loss of cultural arts staff is significant because cultural organizations require cultural workers. With cultural arts staff losses, this may mean that organizations cannot afford to keep vital staff on due to the impact of COVID-19, which exacerbated the organizational issues they faced pre-COVID-19. The organizations were barely getting funding for programs or administrative support, and with these staff cuts, they will not be able to execute their mission to support their community.

MORE THAN 86% OF THE RESPONDENTS ANTICIPATE A SHORTFALL IN FUNDING DUE TO COVID-19, WHICH MEANS THAT THEY WILL NOT BE ABLE TO REBUILD THEIR TEAM TO DEVELOP AND EXECUTE THEIR IDEAS AND PROGRAMS. HOWEVER, 51% BELIEVE THAT THEIR BOARD, VOLUNTEERS, AND COMMUNITY WILL INCREASE THEIR SUPPORT FOR OPERATIONS.
CONTRIBUTIONS TO ENSURE THAT THEY SURVIVE THROUGH THE COVID-19 CRISIS. 33% OF THE RESPONDENTS WHO DO BELIEVE THAT THEY WILL GET THE CONTRIBUTIONS WILL BE THROUGH PRO-BONO/IN KIND SERVICES, 30% BELIEVE CONNECTIONS/ACCESS TO RESOURCES, AND 29% THROUGH DIRECT CONTRIBUTION. BUT THERE ARE STILL 49% OF THE RESPONDENTS WHO BELIEVE THAT THEY WILL NOT RECEIVE ANY INCREASED SUPPORT FROM THEIR OWN COMMUNITY. Almost all organizations that did not cite a staff reduction cited an inability to grow their staff to fill vital roles to promote growth.

GOVERNMENT AND PHILANTHROPY FUNDING LOSSES:

Currently, organizations are experiencing losses from both the government and philanthropic sectors. For FY21, approximately 63% of the respondents experienced 20%-100% of loss in government funding. For FY22, there was a slight increase where 66% of the respondents experienced 20%-100% of loss in government funding while other respondents got 100% of their government funding cut. These losses are important to highlight since, like previously discussed, most organizations’ operations heavily rely on philanthropic support. With funding losses from government and philanthropy, some of the organizations could be facing closure or a deficit because philanthropy and government funding in total may comprise at least 50% of an organization’s annual operating budget. Given that these organizations are limited by the type of funding they can attain from both sectors, or do not have the staff to help them look for different streams of funding, they will be unable to recover.

AS FOR THE PHILANTHROPIC SECTOR, IN FY21, APPROXIMATELY 19% OF THE RESPONDENTS DID NOT RECEIVE ANY FUNDING FROM PHILANTHROPY, AND 43% EXPERIENCED A 20%-100% LOSS IN PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING. HOWEVER, THERE WAS A SLIGHT INCREASE IN FUNDING IN FY22 FOR THE RESPONDENTS, YET 17% DID NOT RECEIVE ANY FUNDING FROM THE PHILANTHROPIC COMMUNITY. Moreover, most of the organizations have experienced at least 15% loss in philanthropic funding in FY21 and FY22.

ORGANIZATIONS’ PROJECTIONS ON SUSTAINABILITY AND FUNDING:

Unfortunately, moving forward, most organizations offered a grim outlook on their funding projections. 81 indicated a decrease in funding, some even describing their prospects as “hopeless,” and “dim.” 37 indicated that their future is unknown, using language like “skeptical,” and
“Concerned.” Only 12 seemed to be able to confidently claim they expected funding to remain the same, and only 9 thought their funding would increase going forward. Some organizations gave dollar amounts for funding or cited their funding sources, but it was hard to discern if they projected their funding to be negative, positive, unknown, or consistent. Others used language to describe what they are doing in hopes of obtaining funding or listed their goals but did not summarize their anticipated projections with clear language. These organizations were not included in the calculations cited above.

Most of the respondents shared similar sentiments on funding patterns and how they hinder their sustainability and growth. Government funding is not widely available, late to deliver, and cannot be counted on for future planning. Some respondents expressed that local philanthropy is limited, unreliable, and lacks awareness of cultural biases. Another issue respondents face is obtaining governmental and cultural grants, they do not have enough staff for the labor-intensive process, which are often confusing and convoluted. Most of these organizations function with volunteers or have less than 10 staff members. Additionally, the time constraints of grant awards can prevent organizations from planning far into the future since organizations must reapply for funding annually and cannot consistently plan 3-5 years ahead. They are also constantly at risk of losing their funding to other organizations. Covid-19 makes funding even more uncertain, and organizations have lost income related to their projects.

One thought that can be extracted from these survey results is that if organizations do not have major investment of funds from the government, community, Board of Directors and philanthropy, then there is a strong possibility that they will not survive. The organizations that provide services for free will have to lessen the scope of their assistance, and most organizations voiced that the programs they are providing, whether or not they generate income, will decrease. Most of the respondents seem to express that their organizations are unstable, and that they are unsure of their future.

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