

# Executive Summary

In 2022, the McKnight Foundation commissioned Research in Action to capture the experiences of artists seeking, attaining, and participating in its program to help shape programmatic change, create new supports, and assist in redefining measures of success and impact for McKnight and the broader field of philanthropy. The main source of data for this project was the execution of 25 semi-structured qualitative interviews with artists and culture bearers across the state of Minnesota.



**25 artists**  
interviewed across MN

How do artists define, advance, and practice justice in their work?

## Definitions of JUSTICE



Justice is a **vision**:

A just world is one where communities are thriving, people's needs are met, and each person is treated like a valuable member of society.



Justice is a **process**:

Justice is a set of actions that interrupt oppression and help communities achieve their goals.

“When I imagine a just world, it's really a world where people can make whatever choice they want; where they have freedom and they have agency.”

## ART that advances justice



Art is a **storytelling** tool:

Art can provide visibility and representation to underrepresented communities, change narratives, and inspire creativity or thought.



Art is an **advocacy** tool:

Art can be used to uplift the needs of a particular community or to draw focus on a specific issue.

“Through our artistic projects, we can bring about a more complete story about the world for more people to hear that and then also find ways that they can live that.”

## ARTISTS who advance justice



Artists are creating **spaces**:

Artists gather community for learning, to support togetherness, for healing, and to create a middle ground.



Artists are **collaborating** and engaging **community**:

Engaging community and working together helps to build the capacity and relationships necessary to strengthen the movement for justice.

“I think process is key. I know that we're in the capitalistic world and at the end of day like product is really important. But for me it's like process and the experience that people have that grounds me.”

# Artist interviews

## What supports do artists need to continue their justice-oriented work?

### Supports



#### **Institutional support:**

Artists need institutions that fund them to provide organizational resources and public support.

**Support for BIPOC artists:** Because of historic and ongoing racism within the arts community and broader society, BIPOC artists have to navigate through challenges that their white counterparts do not face.

“What would Minnesota be without the arts funding we have here? I mean, I can't tell you how many people have said to me, “if you're gonna be an artist, you should be an artist in Minnesota.”

“There has been an incredible amount of systemic racism that has pushed Native and artists of color away. There are generations of people who have left the Twin Cities, like my peers who were Black artists, when we were working in the early 2000s.”



#### **Art spaces:**

Artists need physical and collaborative spaces in which to create and share their work.

“I've noticed that in my own work, where there's opportunities to gather, and connect... that those relationships form into new groups that live on in different ways. Spaces where there's opportunities to be resourceful and abundant and kind of counteract some of the competition that... can be really isolating for artists, and the opposite of building community.”

### Barriers



#### **Gatekeeping:**

The process through which traditionally recognized artists are able to hoard a large share of resources while BIPOC artists, often not groomed through normative artistic venues and networks, are underfunded, devalued, and publicly criticized.

#### **Structural problems of philanthropy:**

Top-down relationships between funders and artists and the distribution of massive amounts of wealth create many challenges for artists.

“The biggest hindrance has been...the whiteness of the granting organizations... where there's just this idea that if you're going to be successful, you have to assimilate to what they're doing, and how they do it. Rather than being yourself doing your own work on doing what works for your people and your audiences.”



#### **Rural challenges:**

Artists in rural and tribal communities in Minnesota navigate complex cultural and political contexts, and experience a particular type of isolation that funders and institutions in the Metro Area don't fully understand.

“We get lumped into an attitude of ‘all of Greater Minnesota is the same, so we don't really have to look into the broadness of experiences and diverse experiences that are happening out there.”

# Recommendations for Philanthropy



## Programmatic Offerings

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**Make flexible funding available for artists to use during community emergencies.**

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**Shift away from funding historically white institutions, investing instead in larger, multi-year awards to grassroots organizations in BIPOC and rural communities.**

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**Develop mechanisms to fund collaboratives and partnership endeavors, not only individual artists or organizations.**

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**Resource small organizations with capital grants to allow for the creation of more arts infrastructure in communities, especially collaboration and performance/gallery space.**



## Application Process

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**Invest in strategies to deepen relationships with communities so that more artists and culture bearers are aware of the available opportunities.**

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**Improve accessibility by shortening application processes, allowing multilingual or video submissions, and involving artists in rewriting extractive, tokenizing, or ambiguous questions.**

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**Ensure that review panels and juries are committed to curiosity when considering artists' submissions.**



## Relationships with Grantees

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**Allow artists to develop their own metrics of success.**

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**Provide flexibility to be emergent in expected outcomes during the course of a grant period.**

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**Commit to long-term relationships with grantees so that the resources don't disappear right as a project becomes stable.**

# Recommendations for McKnight Foundation



## From Artists

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**Expand the types of fellowship programs offered to include supports intentionally designed for artists outside of the Twin Cities Metro area, BIPOC artists, emerging artists, and for social justice oriented artists.**

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**Strategically invest and collaborate between programs, so that the impact of the Arts & Culture program is logically connected to the initiatives of other programs.**

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**Leverage the Foundation's power and relationships to support artists and communities.**

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**Embrace the role of being a leader in the philanthropic sector and arts spaces to push the entire ecosystem to invest more in justice-oriented work.**

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**Acknowledge and take direct action to repair the harm at the root of the Foundation's wealth while encouraging and holding other institutions accountable to follow through.**



## From Research in Action

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**Continue the work of engaging artists in the development and implementation of program strategy.**

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**Revisit assumptions about artists' understanding of the types of work that advance justice and artists' impact on advancing justice.**