



**RESEARCH
IN ACTION**

**Artists & Justice
Research Project**

Produced for the McKnight Foundation

October 2022

ABOUT RESEARCH IN ACTION

Research in Action is a Black queer female-led, multi-racial and gender-diverse social benefit corporation created to reclaim the power of research by centering community expertise and driving actionable solutions for racial justice.

Research in Action was created to disrupt traditional, top-down approaches and reclaim the power of research by putting community expertise first at every step – from naming the problem to identifying solutions. Led by impacted community, we leverage and share our technical skills in research, evaluation and analysis; data innovation; strategy support; relationship and capacity building; and narrative shifting to advance concrete and actionable policy and practice solutions that lead to real and lasting change in our communities.



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INTRODUCTION

In the Spring and Summer of 2022, the McKnight Foundation commissioned Research in Action (RIA) – an action research, community engagement, and racial equity social benefit corporation led by Dr. Brittany Lewis – to explore how artists define, advance, and practice justice in their work and what supports artists need to continue that justice-oriented work.

The McKnight Foundation has a legacy of leadership in the arts in Minnesota, and support for working artists and culture bearers has always been a mainstay of their arts grantmaking. The Foundation has been evolving for years in its efforts to make program priorities more explicit and visible in ways that were not possible in the past.

Since 2021, after launching a strategic refresh process that ratified the Arts & Culture program's evolution, McKnight's board of directors and team remain focused on resourcing the people who power Minnesota's creative ecosystem—working artists and culture bearers. McKnight recognizes the myriad forms through which artists and culture bearers illuminate experiences, inspire joy, express the cultural diversity of communities, and advance justice—enriching the vitality and vibrancy of our state. The Arts & Culture program believes that Minnesota thrives when all its artists and culture bearers thrive. The new program goal is to catalyze the creativity, power, and leadership of Minnesota working artists and culture bearers.

How do artists define, advance, and practice justice in their work and what supports do artists need to continue that justice-oriented work?

The intent of this project was to use the experiences shared by artists seeking, attaining, and participating in artists programming to help shape programmatic change, create new supports, and assist the McKnight Foundation and the broader field of philanthropy in redefining measures of success and impact. The information presented in this report is a result of data collection, analysis, and synthesis carried out by Research in Action.

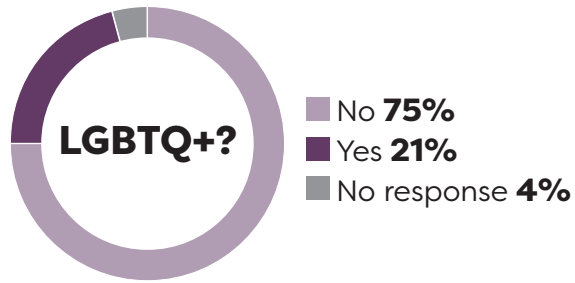
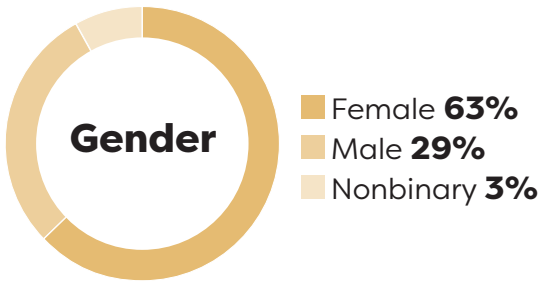
DATA COLLECTION

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. A 15-question interview guide for the project was developed in partnership with the Arts & Culture team at the Foundation and RIA research staff. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded, with each interview lasting approximately one hour. The broad categories of the interview and general question format were used consistently in each interview, though there was flexibility for the interviewer to ask additional probing questions based on the direction of the conversation. Participants were compensated \$150 upon completion of their interview and provided another \$300 for participating in a shared meaning-making session to further refine the key themes, reflect together on all data gathered, and narrow in on key priorities for final report findings and recommendations.

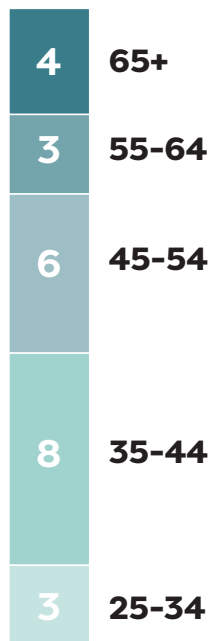
This project utilized a snowball recruitment method. Initially, staff from the Foundation provided an initial list of 15 interviewees selected to participate based on their work on a justice issue aligned with the Foundation's mission, the diverse perspectives they could provide based on their geography, race, or gender, and their reputation and community impact. It was important to the Foundation staff that some of the participants were connected to the Foundation, and others were outside of their current network. To ensure the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and artists from Greater Minnesota were included, a majority of the initial list of 15 artists were BIPOC or lived in Greater Minnesota.

The research team started with this list, and at the completion of each interview asked interview participants: "Who are other artists or culture bearers that I should speak to?" The snowball recruitment method is an engaged action research process that honors that the artists selected are the experts in their communities and influencers in their fields with direct access to and knowledge of other artists whose perspectives would enrich the findings of this study. Upon receiving those suggested names and contacts, the RIA research team ensured that a wide variety of racial and ethnic identities and artistic mediums within and across the arts community in Minnesota were then added to the interviewee list. Lastly, there were additional recruitment efforts and follow-ups made to ensure that there was significant representation of Native artists and artists working in Greater Minnesota who often go underrepresented.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

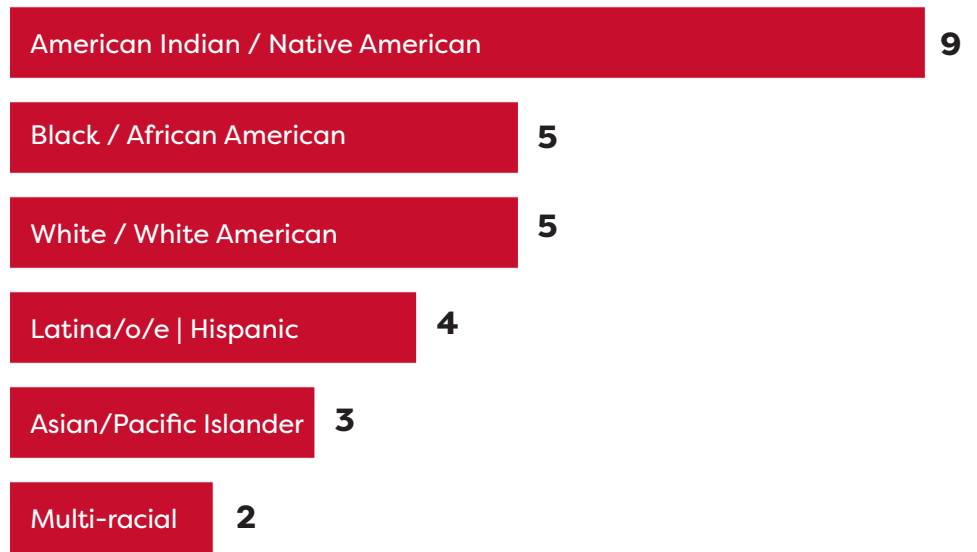


Age



Race / Ethnicity

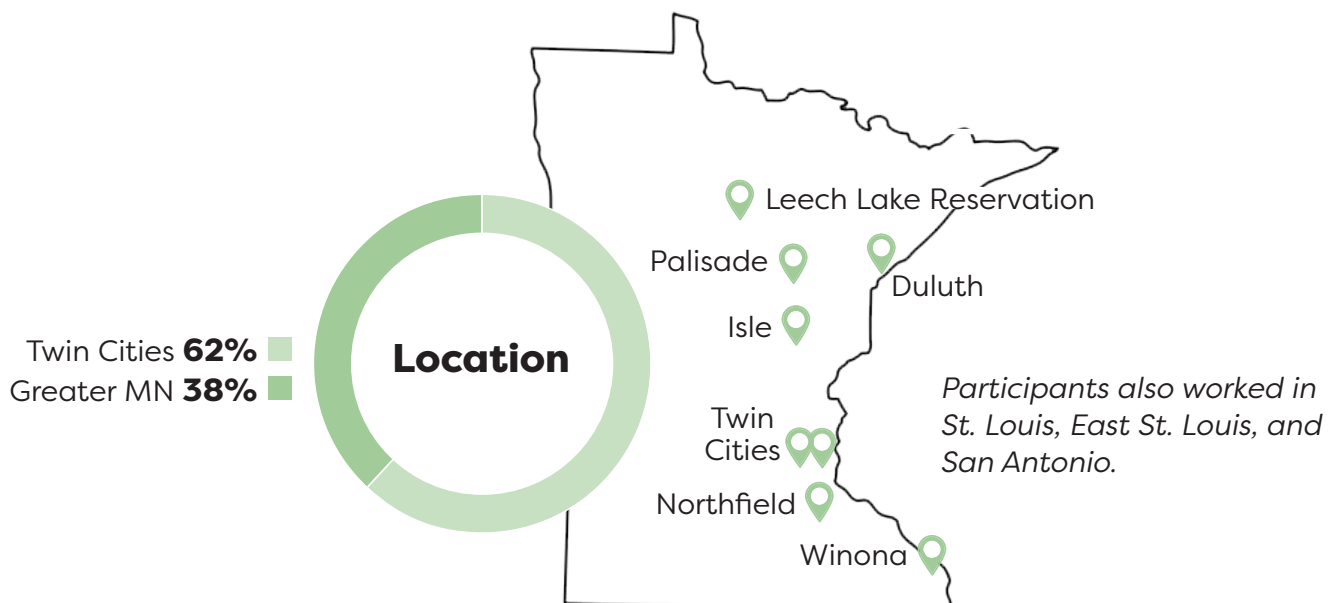
Number of responses



PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Artistic Discipline

Visual arts			Writing		Public art		Community engaged art			
							Performance art			
Multi/mixed media			Film			Printmaking		Painting / murals		Photography
Music			Digital design			Cultural art		Land stewardship		
Audio	Craft	Curation	Poetry	Textiles	Illustration	Graphic storytelling	Social practice	Multi disciplinary	Trans disciplinary	



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research team utilized thematic coding to analyze data gathered from the interviews. Each of the 25 interviews was transcribed and a summary memo was written which included key topics from the conversation. These topics were turned into codes, which were grouped based on theme. Themes were developed in partnership with multiple research team members to help ensure that they were accurate based on the lived experiences shared in the interviews.

The themes and key quotes were presented to the artists during a shared meaning-making session attended by 19 of the 25 artists. During this virtual meeting, the project participants had the opportunity in small and large-groups to provide feedback on the themes, discussing what resonated with them, what was missing, and what additional context needed to be considered. For six of the 13 subthemes identified by the research team, artists responded to the questions "What resonated with you?" "What did you expect to hear but did not?" and "What else do you want McKnight to know about this?" Involving the participants and collaboratively making meaning in the data analysis phase of the research project is a way to ensure that the findings and recommendations are true to the participants' intended meaning.

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Contextual Observations

The 25 artists who participated in this research project offered a diverse set of perspectives on art and justice and the factors that support and hinder their work and desired impact. Each artist approached the interview differently, and provided a unique and nuanced perspective on the relationship between art and justice. It was apparent from the interviews that some artists had previously considered the topics of the interview, such as the relationship between art and justice, the impact that their art has in community spaces, and the factors that help and hinder their goals as creators. They made comments about the interview questions being topics of particular interest or recent conversation in their lives or communities. Others remarked that these were new questions for them to wrestle with, especially questions relating to the factors influencing their work or the direction of the art community. A few of the participants also became emotional during the course of the conversation. One artist cried when discussing high rates of incarceration in their community

and another artist cried telling a story about their grandfather's work as an activist and laborer, which was an inspiration for their work. In diverse and complex ways, the artists explained that working to advance justice is personal to them, meaning that even discussing their work can bring about big feelings.

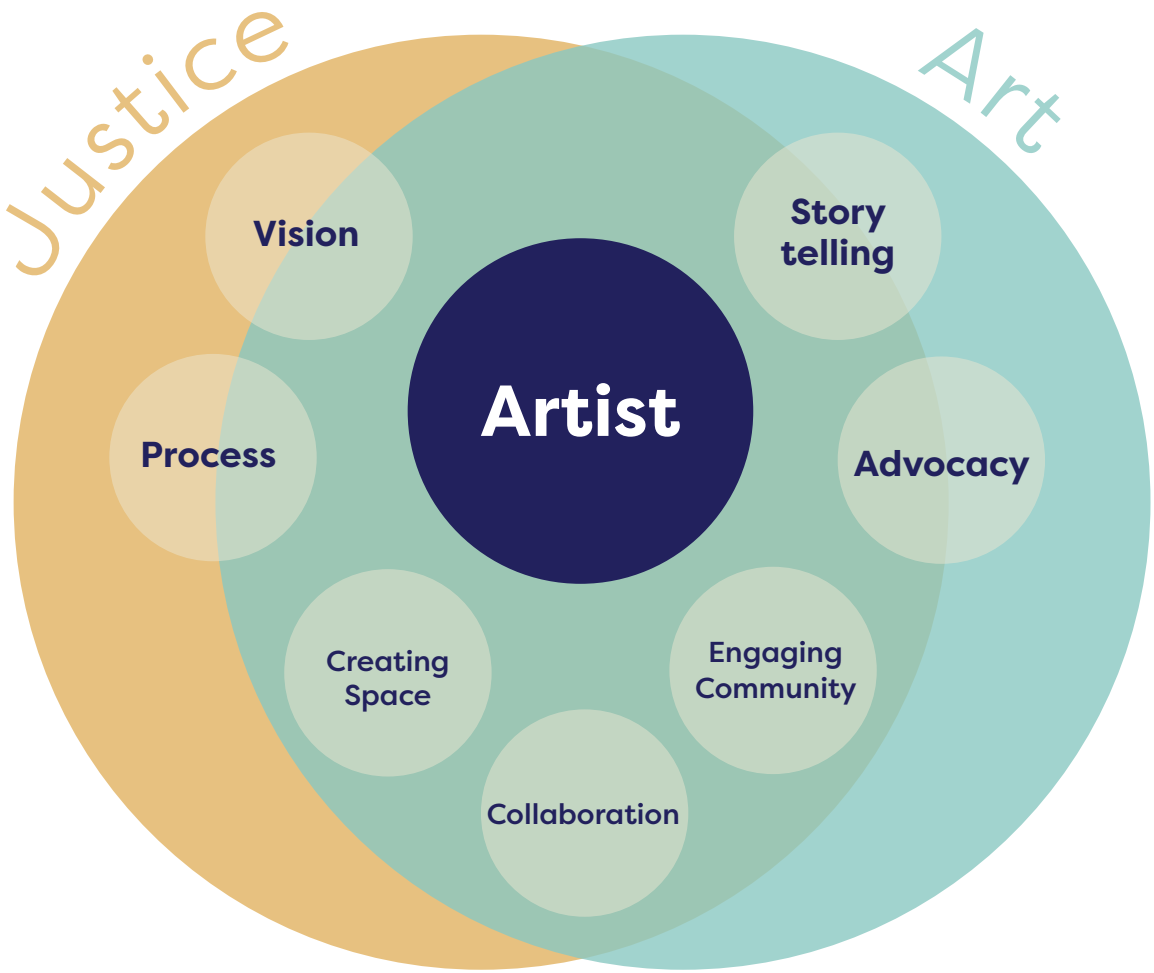
It was also clear that the artists had different understandings of key terms such as impact, justice, or community, which were used in the interview questions. For example, several interview questions sought to understand artists' understandings of their own impact, be it in the arts community or to advance justice. When responding to these questions, artists described impact at multiple levels. Some talked about the interpersonal impact on individuals in the community, others discussed impact on a systems level or into the future. At times artists were quick to identify that impact is something they don't even consider in their work. They shared that to them, impact is something to be determined by the audience, not the creator. Similarly, with the term justice, artists defined the concept using examples and

counterexamples that spanned a wide spectrum of beliefs. To capture this diversity of thoughts, the findings and themes compiled by the research team use broad categories and specific subthemes, creating space for diverse perspectives to be considered simultaneously.

Finally, having the McKnight Foundation commission the research surely impacted the responses of artists. Those who had a previous relationship with the McKnight Foundation had a unique perspective based on their experiences - artists explicitly stated that their lived experiences participating in McKnight programming was contributing to their responses to the questions. Artists less familiar with McKnight were unable to discuss specifics related to the Foundation at times, but instead geared their comments to the broader field of philanthropy. It is certainly possible that the potential for receiving and risk of losing future McKnight Foundation resources impacted participants' responses to the questions and participation in the meaning-making session. However, all artists and culture bearers were eager to participate and appeared to be providing direct and intentional thoughts and feedback.

FINDINGS: Learnings, Lessons, Innovations from Artist Interviews

Based on the lived experiences shared by the artists during interviews, we categorized responses into four major categories: those focused on art that advances justice, those focused on artists who advance justice, those defining the term justice, and those relating to factors that help and hinder artists' work. Within those four categories, 13 sub themes were identified, which explore the nuances of artists' answers. All of the direct quotes used in this report were approved by the artists.



Supports

- Art space
- Institutional support
- Support for BIPOC artists

Hinders

- Gatekeeping
- Rural challenges
- Structures of philanthropy

Questions and themes

What does **art** that advances justice do?



Art is a **storytelling** tool



Art is an **advocacy** tool

What do **artists** who advance justice do?



Artists are creating **spaces**



Artists are engaging **community**

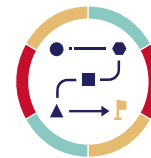


Artists are creating **collaboration**

What does **justice** mean to you?



Justice is a **Vision**



Justice is a **Process**

What helps? What hinders?



Gatekeeping
Structural problems
of philanthropy



Art spaces
Rural
challenges



Institutional support
Support for BIPOC
artists

Art that advances justice

When asked “In what ways do you see your work advancing justice?” and “How do you describe the impact your work has on advancing justice?”, the artists responded in two general ways: describing how art advances justice and exploring how artists advance justice. The distinction being made here is how the medium itself can create new ways of being, understanding, or seeing the world versus how the actions, words, and influence of the artist themselves can be a major part of advancing justice.

In the responses focused on art advancing justice, two themes emerged: art as an advocacy tool and art as a storytelling tool.



Art as an advocacy tool

Artists who described art as an advocacy tool described their medium as a mechanism used to uplift the needs of a particular community or to draw focus on a specific issue.

“When I think about ... social movements and arts, I think they’re very much in conversation, whether people want it to be or not. I think of ... art as a catalyst for expressing all the things that are happening in our social context.” (Visual & Community Engaged Artist, Asian American, St. Paul)

These artists shared that since many art forms, such as murals, music, paintings, and performances, are outward-facing in nature, they have the power to deliver specific messages to the audiences that interact with the art pieces. In particular, art can draw attention to social issues. One artist recounted a story of using digital art for advocacy, sharing that they,

“...photoshopped all the signs (replacing the word “Lake Calhoun” with “Bde Maka Ska”) and then put them up on social media like it had actually happened and it started a whole conversation. People have been advocating it for years, but then...one of the park board members...posted my photo and it [was] like ‘Okay, what an easy change this would be to make....’ So it’s ... using art to push people into thinking about what’s possible” (Design & Installation Artist, Native American/American Indian, Minneapolis & San Antonio)

Bde Maka Ska is the Dakota name for one of the largest lakes located within the city of Minneapolis. For years until the decision was made in 2017, community members had been advocating for the name to be restored. In this example, the art was used to illustrate what was possible and was then used by an influencer at the park board as a tool for political change. The ability to use art to envision a new world is a concrete example of art being used to effectively impact policymakers’ decision making processes. This artist and many others reflected on the capability of art to achieve at times what words alone cannot.

Art is used as an advocacy tool when it is determined that a change to the current system is needed. It can shed light on the issues that need the most attention and provide ideas for what can be possible.



Art as a storytelling tool

Artists who described art as a storytelling tool stated that stories are used to provide visibility and representation to underrepresented communities, change narratives, and inspire creativity or thought.

Those artists that identified art as a tool for representation for underrepresented communities stated that it is a tactic used to tell the stories of those that have been ignored:

“Creating within the framework of community and community stories, even if that’s something really abstract, it has a power of first amplifying those voices that are often unheard, but also providing a point of view on something that is really strong and expert but is not usually honored as that... That’s the best way to create a just system. Is to hear from some of the people who’ve been victimized by a system.” (Artist, Black/African American, Minneapolis)

For communities whose realities and stories have been ignored by mainstream culture, storytelling is a way to amplify hidden or unaddressed problems, validate experiences that are pushed to the margins, and shine a light on the resilience of those too often named unimportant. Simultaneously, these stories illustrate what solutions are now possible once we face the problem narratives that mainstream culture has denied.

Other artists identify storytelling as a powerful tool for changing narratives for the purpose of developing a new way of seeing the world:

"I think that's an impact too...a narrative justice. A way that...through our artistic projects, we can bring about a more complete story about the world for more people to hear and then also find ways that they can live that." (Multidisciplinary Artist, White, Palisade)

Telling stories opens up a door for audiences to resonate with ideas they believe in themselves, learn about cultures they might not have been exposed to before, or disrupt their narrow understandings of lived experiences outside of their own. These artists went further to discuss the impacts on their subjects and participants, who see themselves differently and more positively after engaging in artistic projects. One artist described the work of creating a documentary about youth in their rural community who were advocating for the development of a skatepark. These youth were viewed by many as troublemakers, and had in many ways internalized that label for themselves. Through the process of creating a documentary together, participating as subjects but also crew on the film, the youth were viewed differently by their community. They began to be seen as agents of positive change. The artist discussed how powerful it was to have parents call and share the positive impact the film had on their children.

Lastly, these artists see storytelling through art as something that inspires creative thoughts. Storytelling can help people create or participate in positive visions of an unknown or uncertain future. For example, art that depicts a world without oppression or climate catastrophe can spark imagination and illuminate a path forward. These artists hope their work can inspire audiences to regain power and fight for a just reality. One artist described working on an installation piece that focused on visions for the future in which humanity has taken action to address climate change, implement more sustainable practices, and disassemble capitalism. The artist expressed that they see helping people imagining a different future through art as one of the most important ways to advance justice.

Artists who advance justice

When asked, "How would you describe your role or impact as an artist?"; "What is most important for us to learn about your work and the methods that you utilize?"; and "How do you collaborate with other artists to advance justice?", the artists responded in three general ways: stating that artists who advance justice do so by creating spaces, engaging community, and through collaboration.



Creating spaces

Artists that described creating opportunities for communities to come together to share space do so for multiple purposes. Among the reasons that these artists identified were to learn, support togetherness, heal, and create middle ground.

For artists who described creating spaces in which learning can happen, one artist who also works as an university instructor reflected:

"I'm giving them tools to keep doing that work when they [writing students] leave. That's what I'm hoping. I'm not sure what metric to judge that by, or how to know if it's been successful or not other than my students know things and ways of living that they did not know before, and they are exposed to things they haven't been before. So that feels meaningful." (Writer, White, St. Paul)

In this example, the artist created spaces for their writing students to not only receive knowledge and learn art-making techniques, but also to gain new perspectives on the world around them in hopes that they would then create those same spaces for others.

Other artists create spaces for togetherness. When shared spaces are made available for art-making, the community is able to gather around a common goal, which provides opportunities for conversation. Many spoke about the importance of community art tables to recreate the togetherness that many have missed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In these art spaces, community members get to find peace and connectedness that their busy lives often make feel impossible. One artist described the importance of this sort of space:

“There were all kinds of mamas at this table. All kinds of babies at this table. And between the interpreters and myself, we started talking about creativity. The women started making art. They started...painting and pasting and cutting and weaving. And they started talking about how they loved it, and they never get a chance to do it. And they don’t get a chance to be with women and be relaxed...So that was the seed that planted [the organization]. If we had a space that we can come and be together and just do art and sit down and chill. Our kids are okay. Would you come? And they said Yes.” (Writing/Performance Artist, Black/African American, Minneapolis)

Artists also see themselves creating spaces for healing. Art can be used to reclaim our lost and collective identities, build the confidence and strength in voices that have been shunned or shut out, and provide the therapeutic pause, reflection, and breath needed to be in one’s body and mind. An artist described:

“In a lot of kids’ daily lives, no one’s telling them that. Not that you’re one of those people, but also that you’re a special kid. You’re a part of our tribe... Furthering justice is actually getting our children to feel proud of who they are. Not ashamed. Don’t look at the ground. You are one of the people.” (Visual Artist & Musician, Native American/American Indian, Leech Lake Reservation)

Artists who described the use of art as healing paid particular attention to the lives of people in underrepresented communities of color and rural areas whose experiences with racial injustice, systemic disinvestment, and erasure have impacted their minds, bodies, and spirits. Creating healing spaces works to both name harms and find peace and reprieve, a radical endeavor for those who do not often have the privilege of time and space.

Lastly, artists described utilizing their art to bring together those with divergent or competing worldviews or ways of being in the world to create middle ground:

“In the absence of a lot of avenues for expression, just for the kind of interconnectivity that artists and arts organizations bring together, it’s just no wonder that you’d sort of go from like zero to a frenzied reaction to CRT [critical race theory]. There’s just nothing.

There’s nothing between them...The opportunity for relationship is greatly diminished” (Writer, White, Winona).

In this example, the artist expresses the importance of art spaces to create relationships between people and an opportunity for an expression of beliefs. As evidenced from recent debate about topics such as the teaching of critical race theory in schools, the artist argues that art spaces are a crucial middle ground for interpersonal dialogue amongst people with different perspectives. Without these spaces, cultural or political polarization can become rampant.

The spaces that artists create can provide opportunities for people of different lived experiences to share their worldviews, and for shared values to be uncovered even among divergent beliefs. Local newspapers are an example of an arts infrastructure that have been diminishing over time, and yet serve a critical function in a community for artists and culture bearers to use writing to invite conversations on important topics. Artists actively work to create a middle ground for conversation across multiple mediums - be it in the pieces they prepare for a gallery show, the central themes of a theater or dance performance, or in the stories told via documentary film or public art.



Engaging Community

Other artists described actively engaging with the communities that they belong to as a process of creating art that matters as much to them, if not more, than the final product:

“Process is key. That’s the world I live in. I know that we’re in the capitalistic world at the end of day, product is really important. But process and the experience that people have is what grounds me.” (Visual & Community Engaged Artist, Asian American, St. Paul)

Artists see their work beyond the final deliverables - they see the process of making art as meaningful since it invites collaborators and community members to be a part of the art experience. One example of community engagement described the collaborative way in which artists work together with community members to create murals. An interview participant who works in the Twin Cities

described the process of connecting with community leaders, elders, and other stakeholders when the idea for a mural is formed. Research and ideating on a design is done collectively, by hosting community sessions or interviewing people on the street about broad topics like the history of the community and artistic details like the color of a flower. The mural is then painted collaboratively and celebrated as a community once it is finished. To this artist, the final product of the mural is important, but what is more important is the participation of the community and opportunities for skillbuilding. This is how art can be a tool for community empowerment.

One filmmaker shared: "When people say empowerment, I don't think it's enough to empower people by interviewing them...there has to be something tangible that they can take away with them, and that they can continue to use" (Film Artist, Latina, Northfield). In this example, the artist involves their community members by offering skillbuilding opportunities through technical training, teaching them new crafts, and sharing new perspectives.

Similarly, many artists point out that they don't always see art's value in the production of a product, but in its resulting opportunities for discussion. "Anything about art is never really about art...it is about the surrounding entry point...and a set of other engagement tools to have a bigger conversation" (Audio & Visual Artist, Black/African American, Minneapolis). One artist described a stipulation that they put in place when installing their work at different galleries, that there must be some sort of artist dialogue, field trip, or other opportunity for youth to come see the pieces and participate in conversations about the themes. This artist believes that the show they have created is important for advancing justice, and has worked to display their artwork around the state of Minnesota. However, they prioritize creating opportunities for youth to be engaged in discussions that emerge from the final product.



Collaboration

Artists that described the process of advancing justice through collaboration resist the normative idea that artwork is created in isolation, instead believing that advancing justice happens in communal settings where process and ideas create the product.

These artists pointed out that collaboration brings unmeasurable value. One artist provided an example in which they worked with two other artists in a collaborative mural project. The artist described themselves generally as a solitary creator, but in this particular instance they reflected:

"That was a really great opportunity to work with these two artists and it builds relationships. That's so needed...in our art community...The relationships and the network we build is what creates the future opportunities." (Public Artist, Native American/American Indian, Minneapolis)

This artist and many others find that collaboration strengthens existing relationships and creates new connections which can result in future opportunities for new work. The collaborations they have participated in have introduced them to mentors who have helped them develop technically and peers who have recommended them for other contracts and opportunities.

Other artists pointed out that the value of collaboration is evidenced when there are conflicts and differences, which can spark new ideas and opportunities for finding solutions :

"The deep relationships, trusting relationships, the ability to weather and handle conflict between us are the foundations of what helps our movements and formations to continue. Because right now it feels like there's a lot of splintering that happens when we can't work stuff out between us." (Culture Worker, Black/African American, Minneapolis)

In short, collaboration can produce productive conflict and tension that can help artists deepen their perspectives and understandings of justice, and strengthen relationships among people fighting for justice. One artist described the process of working with numerous artists and activists to protest the construction of Enbridge's Line

3 oil pipeline. Collaboration was difficult at times, as there were differing ideas for the best strategies to take and most compelling pieces to create. However, through the process of navigating hard discussions together, disagreeing but still returning to common values, hearing different ideas, and collectively trying to heal, the relationships among the water protectors grew more resilient, allowing them to better fight for justice.

Justice Defined

When asked “What does justice mean to you?”, the artists responded in two general ways: describing justice as a vision and justice as a process.



Justice is a vision

Justice as a vision was described by artists as a reality where their communities were thriving, their needs were met, and they were treated like valuable members of society with self determination. Art is used as a medium by these artists to illustrate what a just world could and perhaps should look and feel like where access, equality, and accountability become a part of the norm.

One artist whose work involves using digital art and narrative to fight for climate change shared:

“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... The baseline of that is everyone’s needs have to be met.. All of the base things have to be there in order for people to even have the options to live how they want to live” (Design & Installation Artist, Native American/ American Indian, Minneapolis & San Antonio)

When articulating their vision of justice, artists described a world where the communities that they love are able to lead full self determined lives where they are not ignored, tokenized, or physically harmed because of their differences. With a just world in place, people can have their needs for food, safety, and companionship met. One artist provided the example of helping their daughter in a wheelchair navigate through the world, and how challenging everyday tasks like walking through a doorway can be.

A just world instead would mean for this artist that their child in a wheelchair, themselves as the person pushing the wheelchair, and any other person coming behind them can access a building without issue.

Artists went further to describe justice saying, “It’s the natural state of things. Justice and freedom are inherent rights, not a fiction in the future, but something we can return to. It’s in us” (Design & Installation Artist, Native American/American Indian, Minneapolis & San Antonio). Justice is and should be the natural state of the world, the way that nature and human behavior intend for us to be in relationship with one another. According to the artists we interviewed, it is capitalism and white supremacy that have disrupted this natural balance. These oppressive systems create the competition for resources, unjust economic systems, and inequitable distribution of power that stand in the way of communities accessing the materials they need to thrive.

Artists that advance justice work to show us what the world would be like if we returned to this natural state of being - often rooted in Indigenous wisdom and practices. To them, justice is about removing the barriers that get in the way of who we really are as people and what we are pursuing in life.

Artists believe that their vision of justice is a goal to work towards, but also happens presently in small ways in communities, and has happened in ancestral and Indigenous spaces. It is not something to invent, but something to rediscover.



Justice is a process

Justice can also be thought of as a process. Not only an endpoint or an image of the world, justice is a set of actions that interrupt oppression and help communities achieve their goals. In advancing justice, artists’ work and art contributes to addressing or repairing past harm and also inspires change through multiple mediums.

Many of the artists who participated in this project advance justice by helping their communities to heal from previous and ongoing harms of capitalism, colonization, and white supremacy. As a process, justice can look like work that draws attention to injustice, supports the community in healing from harm, and/or shifts

systems towards a more just future. One artist discussed the process of justice as a means of uncovering the struggles of community and holding those responsible to account saying:

“Justice for me is about our ability to take our social conditions and discern where harm is being done and really having an intent and understanding about how you make amends for that harm and then how you change the conditions that are causing that harm. That to me is justice.” (Artist, Black/African American, Minneapolis)

Justice is a healing, reparative process. Artists participating in this project are creating safe gathering spaces for mothers, working with companies that have previously appropriated Native culture to uplift authentic Native art, and developing materials for protests to support the community in combating the harmful impacts of oil pipelines.

Artists went further to describe a self-sustaining process of working to advance justice, in which actions taken can inspire more action. One muralist described a project in which they painted the story of a community of tenants organizing against their predatory landlord to advocate for better housing conditions. The mural displaying their efforts to advance justice has since become a source of inspiration and roadmap for other renters in the community to follow. The artist described their role in advancing justice as fulfilling a critical need for storytelling that disrupts dominant narratives about the power imbalance between renters and landlords, inspiring hope, providing a sense of possibility, and outlining the steps that people can take in our collective journey towards justice.

A definition of justice?

When collectively processing the frameworks that artists provided when describing justice as a vision and justice as a process, there were certain values uplifted numerous times that are connected to a definition of justice. When we have justice:

- Individuals and communities are heard, valued, and supported
- Individuals and communities are provided the space and resources to pursue their goals
- Past and ongoing harms are addressed and repaired, at their roots

Artists, however, believe that the vision or process of justice must

be informed and guided by local communities and context. Much of their work is, in fact, about disrupting dominant narratives or singular perspectives. To that end, any definition of justice must be informed by the salient values and cultures of impacted communities and individuals. For this reason, it is difficult to create a singular definition. As one artist described, “It’s a big old topic (justice) that’s constantly getting better and better definitions...as we talk about it more, and even those definitions are expanding” (Public Artist, Multiracial - Native American & White, Duluth).

Artists also emphasized the importance of understanding the function and impacts of injustice in order to seek and attain justice. One artist provided the parallel to the healing of the body - without a full understanding of the ailment and its causes, healing attempts can be unsuccessful. Artists want allies in the fight for justice (ex: institutions like the McKnight Foundation), to develop a clear analysis of injustice and their roles in its perpetuation. In this way, efforts towards justice can be more intentional.

Factors that Help and Hinder

When asked a series of questions about the factors that enable or hinder their goals, and about the specific supports they would like to see from the McKnight Foundation and other philanthropic partners, the artists responded in six general ways: stating that factors that impact their artmaking include institutional support, gatekeeping, the structural problems of philanthropy, art spaces, rural challenges, and support for BIPOC artists.



Institutional support

Artists described Minnesota as a great place to create art with a stellar reputation for investing in artists. One university professor described the advice they give their students, saying:

“What would Minnesota be without the arts funding that we have here? 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 just because it’s possible.” I tell my students, “if you want to move away for a little bit, do it. But if you’re serious about your art, you need to come back to be here because it’s impossible to be an artist anywhere else” (Writer, White, St. Paul)

However, experiences for many artists working to advance justice in Minnesota, BIPOC artists, or artists working outside of the Twin Cities do not always match with this description, primarily because institutional support is not equitably distributed. For instance, rural artists of color described feeling like urban artists receive more recognition and financial support than lesser known BIPOC artists who are geographically isolated. Other artists described working in the Twin Cities Metro area but not receiving critical public recognition from mainstream arts organizations, often as a result of their work not fitting within the narrowly defined priorities or artistic categories of historically white arts institutions.

The institutional supports that artists need are organizational resources and public support. Artists need organizations to help them navigate the bureaucracy of art markets (ex: helping individuals through contracting processes with municipal agencies) and the current political environment (ex: taking a stand on the issues of justice that artists are advocating for). The sense that an institution that supports them financially will also stand firmly behind them is crucial.

One artist who is facing potential criminal charges for their activism discussed how meaningful and powerful it would be to have an institution like McKnight write a statement of support for them and others fighting to protect the environment. Others described what it would mean for funders to pressure historically white institutions (HWIs) to repair the harm they've created in BIPOC communities and diversify their practices. This could look like HWIs receiving less funding from philanthropy or HWIs being required to develop intentional programs for BIPOC artists. In practical and symbolic ways, these are the types of institutional support that artists are looking for.

Foundations like McKnight can also demonstrate their support for artists advancing justice by funding them through multi-year grants. One artist described a need for institutional support that is:

"Funding over time, because sometimes by the time that you are able to start to incorporate and grow with whatever that infusion of funding was, then it taps out and you're back to like "so now we know how we wanna do the work but we can't keep doing it." (Muralist, Multiracial - Latinx & White, Minneapolis)

Artists specifically named the need for higher amounts of funding over a long span of time to support the implementation of and iteration on ideas developed with seed funding. Long term funding

for artists was described as an important form of institutional support, not just for the individual artists or projects, but also a signal from institutions that investing in justice isn't simply a momentary fad. Artists described a concern that the current movement across philanthropy to invest in BIPOC artists and work that advances justice is a short-term wave that will crash as we move further in time from George Floyd's murder and the uprisings of 2020. Many of the elder artists experienced a similar phenomenon in the 1990s, when multiculturalism was a trend that resulted in time-limited investments in BIPOC artists. Artists suggested that codifying institutional support for artists advancing justice into organizational by-laws could outlast the short-term passions of any staff members or whims of a political moment. If an institution were to say that a certain percentage of their funding had to be allocated to BIPOC artists, rural artists, or artists advancing justice, it would both be a signal of sincerity but also a way to ensure stable funding for these sorts of work.



Gatekeeping

Artists described gatekeeping as an active component of white supremacy culture that goes unregulated in the larger philanthropic community. Through a variety of processes, traditionally recognized artists are able to hoard a large share of resources while BIPOC artists, often not supported through normative artistic venues and networks, are underfunded, devalued, and publicly criticized.

Gatekeeping manifests itself in the technical processes and cultures of institutions. Artists described the systems they have to navigate to access resources as being particularly burdensome:

"Having processes that have really intense requirements just sucks... Maybe there's no application fee but they're going to require professional photography of your work that you might not have. And there's a lot of rewarding of folks who've already had experiences which just goes to further... give white artists advantages...because they've had those privileges more frequently." (Design & Installation Artist, Native American/American Indian, Minneapolis & San Antonio)

The process of having to write the perfect application in English, regardless of your native language, using proper terminology to effectively describe one's art was a quintessential example of

gatekeeping repeated in numerous interviews. Besides applications, the other mechanism by which many artists access funding is through nominations for awards. Nomination-only processes can be a form of gatekeeping if the pool of recommenders is limited. One artist described the Twin Cities as having two distinct and siloed arts communities - one populated by people connected to large, historically white institutions, another of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ community members doing justice-focused work. Artists raised concerns about the equity impacts of relying on nominations to determine who should be afforded resources, recognizing that people can only recommend the folks that they know.

Application and nomination processes are examples of technical processes in which gatekeeping happens. Many artists also shared their experiences of navigating the white culture of art institutions. One described the challenge of cultural fit, saying:

“The biggest hindrance has been... the whiteness of the granting organizations. The whiteness of the arts 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, or doing what works for your people and your audiences.” (Writer, Native American/American Indian, Minneapolis)

The culture of mostly white-led art spaces can be evidenced by the types of works displayed in galleries and performance spaces, the demographics of the audiences and staff, and the behavioral expectations for community members. Often small and unspoken, the practices in these spaces result in a culture of exclusion upheld by organizations and individual gatekeepers, who include people in curatorial positions and people that run and manage programs.

A particular aspect of gatekeeping culture mentioned by numerous artists was exceptionalism, described as a sort of threshold mentality where institutions are not willing to provide opportunities for new artists or artists seeking to experiment. An artist or culture bearer must be viewed as exceptional to receive resources, validated by elites. This validation often comes from curators, critics, or juries, groups that many artists feel don’t have the context to fully understand their work and yet have significant power over how resources are allocated. A more just system of support would be structured to allow for more opportunities for those looking to explore, experiment, and grow in their craft. One artist who runs a

fellowship program and is a self-described gatekeeper pondered:

“How do we create systems that are as low barrier as possible that get as much resource into them [artists], into their hands? To do the work that they want to do in our community. And to try not to have our own sort of imprint or external expectation over them. To trust that artists and our community already know what excellence is in their mind and their practice and their hearts and their cultures” (Community Engaged Artist, Asian/Pacific Islander, Minneapolis)

Thus, gatekeeping is a result of a lack of trust. To counter this, artists stated that grantmaking institutions must ease burdens for artists by relinquishing control and expanding their outlooks on quality, recognition, and excellence.



Structural Problems of Philanthropy

Many of the artists who participated in this project wrestled with the broader system of philanthropy as a context that has hindered their goals. The structural issues in the relationships between funders and artists and the distribution of massive amounts of wealth create many challenges for artists.

The relationship between funders and the community was a major theme across multiple interviews. One artist reflected, “We’re all bound and enmeshed in this really strange system of relationships and power and resources, and I know that all of us believe that it’s not really what we need” (Community Engaged Artist, Asian/Pacific Islander, Minneapolis). Artists described frustration with the top-down directional power relationship between foundations and artists. In their experiences, funders are the main influencers on the direction the art community takes. When institutions make decisions, such as to no longer offer a fellowship for a certain type of artistic discipline or to intensify investments in a particular neighborhood, artists feel like they have to either adapt to the new grantmaking frameworks or seek out different sources of investments. Artists said it was rare for communities to be able to dictate to funders where resources should be allocated.

Through the gatekeeping of a limited number of resources and the focus on exceptionalism mentioned in the previous themes,

funders also create conditions that are challenging for artists to have collaborative relationships with one another:

“Arts funding and arts presentation often really wants to prioritize an individual artist... almost everything is kind of structured around you as an individual artist. And when you’re applying for grants or when you’re presenting your work, you’re supposed to think about how to present yourself... I’ve seen the way over the years that that has sometimes led to a competitiveness among artists that... especially for socially engaged artists or people who are working closely with their communities, is a distraction from the work that we really do. And it doesn’t really capture how we think about our work.” (Multidisciplinary Artist, White, Palisade)

This sense of competition and the funding of individuals over collectives is in contrast to the community-based way in which many artists create their art, which is often collaboratively and with a free flowing sharing of ideas and resources. Artists described a more justice-oriented system, aligned with their values, where relationships and resource cycles operate with a philosophy of mutual aid rather than selective benefit. A shared funding pool that many artists could tap into as needed, rather than a competitive fund administered by those outside of the community, is a funding strategy in alignment with the collaborative approach used by artists during creative processes.

Many of the relational challenges that artists named are rooted in the sources of the wealth of funders. Artists find it problematic that institutions that control mass amounts of wealth accumulated through colonization and white supremacy are able to achieve numerous benefits by returning relatively small amounts of resources to communities. One Native artist suggested that the McKnight Foundation, like many others, needs to “unapologetically” fund Native artists, culture bearers, and organizations because the institution’s wealth comes in part because they operate on Native land.

Artists discussed frustration about the benefits that funders receive from appearing charitable, and the actual financial benefits received in the form of tax benefits, especially when those burdens are passed onto the artists themselves. The fact that funders only give away a small portion of their endowments makes artists question whether institutions investing in justice-oriented work are really committed to justice or are instead seeking to maintain the status quo.



Art Spaces

Over and over, artists discussed what a crucial resource space is for their work. Artists described two primary types of spaces that were critical to them - physical space and collaborative space.

Physical space includes spaces for the creation and presentation of art. Many artists reflected on the threat that the Twin Cities art community is facing as a result of the loss of a few staple arts spaces:

“The loss of Intermedia is by far the biggest hit to the Twin Cities art community... That has really scared me ever since they closed. And I was actually really mad. McKnight or Bush or someone should have just bought the building. The building was the magic of Intermedia. It wasn’t really even about their programs. It was the fact that we had... a permanent art home” (Design & Installation Artist, Native American/American Indian, Minneapolis & San Antonio)

The idea of a permanent art home was important to many BIPOC artists who remarked that an arts space that is community-owned can be a symbol of permanence and invitation for the broader community to participate in arts programming. The types of physical spaces needed were broad, and included critical resources like libraries and archives where research can be done. Artists also discussed models of arts-based community development where the creation of cultural institutions is well-resourced and artist-led, resulting in the revitalization of underinvested communities.

The other type of space described was collaborative space, which at times necessitates physical resources, but often was more about social contexts in which artists can share ideas and be with other artists and community members:

“I’ve noticed that in my own work, where there’s opportunities to gather, and connect, and especially... in a way that offers stipends or something that is really accessible for folks, that those relationships form into new groups that go and live on in different ways. So I think spaces where there’s opportunities to be resourceful and abundant and counteract some of the competition that... can be really isolating for artists, and the opposite of building community... Spaces where folks can share ideas and generate

ideas together... that's where I've seen direction shifts... where the conditions are abundant enough that people can think together. And have a space to do that." (Muralist, Multiracial - Latinx & White, Minneapolis)

This artist describes the resources that make collaboration possible - funding, opportunities for mutual benefit, idea sharing, and time. Another artist remarked on the importance of funders not just paying the wages for an artist partnership, but also investing in the processes in which collaborations can grow. This includes mentorship relationships, adaptive responses to emergent community needs, and fellowship programs.

Rural Challenges

Artists working outside of the Twin Cities face a set of challenges that are different from artists working in the Metro area. Artists in rural and tribal communities in Minnesota navigate complex cultural and political contexts, and experience a particular type of isolation. Artists observed that funders located within the Twin Cities often don't understand the dynamics that artists in these geographic areas are experiencing, so funding and support does not always meet their needs.



The uniqueness of the circumstances in a particular area was an important point of emphasis for artists working outside of the Twin Cities. One artist reflected:

"Greater Minnesota has a lot of different stories and places itself, and I feel like, in Duluth, we get sometimes lumped into, at least from the Metro perspective - and the perspective of funders - 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'" (Public Artist, Multiracial - Native American & White, Duluth)

Each of the communities in Greater Minnesota have a unique set of resources, needs, and cultural contexts in which artists work. Artists describe the labor of having to continually explain their particular contexts when applying for funding or opportunities or sharing their work. Work that advances justice in rural spaces can fall into a

middle void where audiences and markets are looking for quaint, folksy art, while justice-oriented institutions fail to acknowledge that there is justice-focused work being created. Thus, consumers in their communities may not find their work to be appealing and organizations outside of the communities interested in justice don't consider the work to be groundbreaking enough when compared to the projects being developed in Metro areas. As a result, artists in rural communities feel that they are being overlooked for opportunities.

Tribal reservations provide a very particular environment for artists to work in. Native artists working on reservations describe the pride they feel in the wide variety of justice-oriented projects they are able to develop with community members. At the same time, reservations have unique political systems and numerous challenges related to poverty that can be especially challenging for Native artists. One artist cried while describing the needs in their community and said,

"That's why it's heartbreaking, because the kids I worked with [when they were younger] are in jail [now] and I think that's the resource I need. You said what's the hindrance? I think because there's not enough people who have that leftover energy. Or how the meth has risen 3000% on my reservation in the last 3 years. 3000. I didn't know there's such thing as 3000%. But that's one of the things that's a hindrance, meth...I don't know you guys, it just gets bigger and bigger." (Visual Artist and Musician, Native American/American Indian, Leech Lake Reservation)

The scale of problems within the community is daunting, and can become both a source of inspiration for justice-focused projects but also a major impediment in their execution like in this example. The issues of drug abuse are a theme within the artist's work, and also a barrier to their creations because the community members they want to engage and create with are struggling with addiction.

Artists describe an acute need for space, both physical and collaborative, in rural communities. They also tell of the heightened challenge of confronting power structures in places where there are fewer people. There can be more pushback, scrutiny, and gatekeeping in smaller communities. Artists described a shielding effect of being one of many artists calling out injustice in a large city, while making the same art and statements in a small

community paints a larger target on the artist. Creating art that disrupts or challenges the small number of people with access to power can be significantly detrimental to one achieving their goals and can create a sense of isolation.

Isolation can be a positive thing, and an attractive reason for artists to remain in rural communities. Many consider their homes in Greater Minnesota to be more naturally and culturally rich compared to the Twin Cities metro area. However, isolation can also be a negative as it relates to a sense of missing community, opportunities, and funding. One artist described their organization's work to combat this isolation saying:

"We do things like exhibitions or publications or websites or policy things, but really the glue of it is social dances, barbecues, like folks being together. Because I think one of the things that really unites a lot of artists and organizations outside of the metro areas in our region is just kind of like a fundamental lack of ability to be together." (Writer, White, Winona)

Artists find themselves in a sort of conundrum where they know they aren't the only ones, but often struggle for ways to be with others advancing justice. This is a space where additional resources can be dedicated.



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.

Described across artistic disciplines, age groups, and geographies, the racism within the arts community is pervasive. Artists recounted instances of explicit and implicit racism they have experienced historically and in recent months. These include music venues not wanting to book Black performers because they were concerned about the safety risks of their audiences, the appropriation of Native culture by white institutions, and curators not viewing the work of culture bearers as exceptional enough to be displayed. Injustice is a source of inspiration and motivation for the justice-oriented art of many of the artists interviewed, but also a source of pain and challenge. BIPOC artists identified supports and needs related to general investment in their work and communities, healing, and resource networks.

As a result of the lack of institutional support and gatekeeping that BIPOC artists have experienced, their work has historically been underinvested in. BIPOC artists have had to create the resources and networks for themselves, feeling the obligation and importance of lifting up one another and their communities on the way. A younger artist who recently started an artist collective for BIPOC creators said:

"Because of the lack of access that we had, and because of the lack of access that everyone had... we had to figure out a way to create it [support structures] and that became a model of ours... I realized no one's gonna give us anything that we really deserved. And so we had to either find a way to create it and invest our own heart and sweat and blood into it to make it anything. So that also broadened my entrepreneurial spirit and that's sort of where we are today." (Film Artist, Black/African American, Minneapolis & Duluth)

The lack of support for BIPOC artists has resulted in the creation of numerous creative support structures, but not without cost. Many of the artists expressed pride in their resiliency, but also acknowledged the significant amount of emotional labor that goes into creating projects and navigating the mainstream arts community. The projects themselves can be intense, and then artists have to do additional work to translate their work if they want it to be accepted in traditionally white spaces. To navigate these spaces, artists find themselves having to assimilate, code-switch, and operate outside of what might be generally viewed as appropriate for their cultures, for example making choices to market themselves individually as opposed to as a part of a collective.

BIPOC artists shared a need for opportunities to heal. They also want more freedom to create "weird" art, a freedom afforded to white artists. Many artists described the pressure of having to create identity-based art or justice-oriented art, when they feel that their presence or existence is a way to advance justice in and of itself. An older artist described a situation that many BIPOC and LGBTQIA artists have to navigate - deciding whether to conform or work in contrast to people's assumptions of their identities. The opinions of others can be very limiting to one's creativity. For this artist, merely existing and creating is an act of advancing justice because they are focused on making the art they want to create, not what is expected of them as an artist of color.

Among BIPOC artists, some are looking to arts institutions for investments that help meet these needs, but others have reasons

to not want the support of historically white institutions. Some of the artists discussed the reality that their art could not be what it is without the struggles they have navigated and the support they've sought from within their own communities rather than from external sources. Artists also have a lack of trust in institutions to actually invest in their needs. One described the fear they have for emerging artists saying:

"There's so much empty performance and signaling around supporting BIPOC artists today, but it doesn't necessarily equate to deep and real lasting investment... And so I'm always leery of especially younger artists that are like, "hey I'm gonna go work with this... organization because they have this new program for BIPOC artists." And maybe it'll work out, and maybe this generation has an opportunity that didn't exist for past generations and I hope it's true. But I'm also so weary and so concerned that they're just another cycle of tokenism... The burning of another generation of artists and cultural producers so that white institutions can stay alive or relevant continues to be really troubling for me." (Community Engaged Artist, Asian/Pacific Islander, Minneapolis).

Artists both want additional support from institutions and need to trust that it is sustainable and motivated by good intentions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through engaging 25 artists and culture bearers across the State of Minnesota in this qualitative research project, a number of broad and specific recommendations were offered. We separate the recommendations into two sections according to the intended audience of the suggestions: recommendations regarding the general philanthropic community and those specific to the McKnight Foundation. Recommendations for philanthropy broadly are categorized into three high-level areas: programmatic offerings, application processes, and relationships with grantees. Recommendations for the McKnight Foundation include recommendations from the artists and the research team.

For Philanthropy Broadly

Programmatic Offerings

Application Process

Relationships with Grantees

For McKnight Specifically

From Artists

From Research in Action

Programmatic Offerings

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

Artists discussed the importance of having access to money quickly to respond when emergencies (such as George Floyd's murder or Enbridge's Line 3 Construction Project) happen in communities. Currently, there are limited resources available for artists to mobilize and organize in a timely manner. They often have to come up with their own funding to support community gatherings or art projects. Flexible emergency funding where resources can be transferred to artists within hours and without cumbersome application processes allows artists to move quickly when the need arises.

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

Artists question whether philanthropy is genuinely interested in advancing justice if they continue to direct resources into historically white institutions that have received significant funding over time while also creating harm for artists from marginalized communities. Historically white institutions have decades of white-leadership, or preference for the works of white artists, at the expense of BIPOC leaders and creators. To demonstrate an institutional commitment to advancing justice, it is recommended that Foundations not only invest larger amounts of resources for longer periods of time into BIPOC- and rural-centered organizations, but to do so while shifting resources away from historically white institutions.

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

Much of the available funding for the arts community is directed towards either individual artists or arts organizations. However, many artists acknowledge that their ideas are often derived from collaboration. Supporting collaborative residency programs or seed funding for partnership initiatives are ways for Foundations and philanthropy to invest in the critical initial and ongoing spaces necessary for artists seeking to advance justice.

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

Accelerated by the pandemic, communities across Minnesota have been impacted by the loss of many critical arts spaces. Artists of multiple disciplines reflected on the need for small organizations to have the resources necessary to make available spaces for artists to collaborate, create, and display their art. Artists would like to see investments in organizations with BIPOC-leadership and without multi-million dollar budgets, recognizing those organizations' simultaneous historic lack of funding and abilities to create the types of spaces that are welcoming and conducive to the creation of high quality art. To help support the ongoing health and development of the entire arts ecosystem, capital resources should be directed to small organizations and organizations with an interest in advancing justice.

Application Processes

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

Gatekeeping is a major hindrance for artists seeking to advance justice. Many artists reflected on the reality that unless one is connected to networks where they learn of or are recommended for opportunities, there is a whole ecosystem of resources that can be unattainable. To disrupt this form of gatekeeping, institutions must do the work to ensure that artists and culture bearers know of the opportunities that they provide. Artists suggested that Foundation staff should be more present in community and justice-oriented spaces to build relationships (ex: attend gatherings and protests), expand the criteria of who is eligible to recommend people for awards (ex: allow anyone to submit nominations), and resource more grassroots initiatives to subgrant to artists (ex: funding small arts centers or nonprofits to do subgranting rather than major institutions).

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

The length and complicated requirements of applications were key examples of gatekeeping processes that hinder the success of artists working to advance justice. Some artists advocated for the full elimination of applications, instead Foundations could provide artists with funding simply for being in community and creating work. Others provided recommendations to make application processes easier, including reducing the number of questions on applications and allowing for more space for artists to describe their work (both in terms of response length and openness of questions). To ensure that changes to the application process meet the intended goals, it is recommended that artists are involved in the revision process.

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

Artists have complicated relationships with review panels, recognizing the importance of peer validation and feedback, while also experiencing slights as a result of juries' inability to understand the context of the art they create to advance justice. It is important that those making selection decisions about resources approach their task with sincerity and openness, being willing to look past assumptions and traditional views of "good" or "exceptional art" and instead seek to understand the objectives and point of view of the artists. Artists spoke of receiving feedback on their submissions that indicates that this is not every jury's practice. Institutions have an obligation to support juries in this work by ensuring that there is a diversity of identities, perspectives, and disciplines represented on panels - review panels should include BIPOC artists and artists living in Greater Minnesota. Institutions should also provide intercultural development training for reviewers, coaching on what to expect from artists whose work is explicitly focused on advancing justice, and opportunities for site visits to build relationships with artists outside of their artistic discipline.

Relationships with Grantees

Allow artists to develop their own metrics of success.

Artists describe feeling limited when grants are prescriptive with what the desired outcomes of the artwork must look and feel like in the end. Artists that work to advance justice describe the importance of the processes they use to create their work, as much as the final products. Predetermined outcomes that don't take that into consideration limit what artists can do. Instead, philanthropy should undertake a more collaborative approach with artists, allowing artists to name their intended metrics of success during the application and grant agreement processes. Reporting processes should also be adaptive in this way, allowing space for artists to describe what they were able to do and learn during each grant period.

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

As people who are deeply connected to community and often engaging in participatory processes, artists shared that their projects often follow nonlinear paths. Artistic processes can diverge from originally developed plans and sometimes artists embark on projects without a full conceptualization of an end goal. Application and reporting processes must allow space for this reality. To do this, Foundations could utilize relationships and regularly scheduled check-ins with artists to learn about how projects are changing over time, instead of requiring artists to write and then follow detailed project plans submitted in advance. In this way, artists don't have to be limited by proposed outcomes that may become obsolete over time.

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

Many artists reflected on an unfortunate current reality of philanthropy, where time-limited grants aren't long enough to see a project past its initial ideation phase. Artists working to advance justice are often creating projects with goals that span time periods longer than the average 1-3 year grant cycle or one-year fellowship. Through investing in shared artists collaboratives and extending the time periods on funding opportunities, more sustainable investments in justice can be achieved

Artist Recommendations for McKnight

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.

McKnight Foundation offers a number of fellowship programs for artists, organized mainly by discipline (book arts, ceramics, choreographers, composers, dancers, fiber artists, media artists, musicians, playwrights, printmakers, theater artists, visual artists, and writers). The Community-Engaged Practice Artist and Culture Bearer fellowships are examples of the types of fellowship programs that artists would like to see more of. Focusing on other areas of artistic practice or artists' identities would allow for more investment in artists' work to advance justice.

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

With the recognition of their critical role in advancing justice, artists wondered about the strategic vision of the McKnight Foundation and opportunities for collaboration and deep investment across programs. Artists provided examples of opportunities for collaboration across programs (ex: if the Vibrant & Equitable Communities program is interested in a redevelopment corridor on Lake Street or if the Climate Program wants to encourage investment in renewable energies) in which artists should be consulted and included in opportunities. McKnight could offer cross-program grant opportunities, or encourage other programs to collaborate with artists to achieve their strategic goals.

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

Repression is an expected part of life for artists who work to advance justice. The institutional backing of McKnight can make artists' work easier. By using its financial power and relational capital, the McKnight Foundation could draw attention to many of the important issues that artists are fighting for, apply pressure to other institutions and systems to respond in accordance with the advocacy of artists, and come to the aid of artists when they are facing direct consequences for their advocacy.

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.

The work of advancing justice requires a collective effort from artists, communities, and institutions. Artists see the McKnight Foundation as a leader in the philanthropic sector and art spaces. McKnight should continue to lead its peers in reallocating resources away from historically white institutions, and use the resources it has to encourage other arts institutions and funders to develop more specific and responsive programming for BIPOC, rural, and justice-focused artists.

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.

The wealth that the McKnight Foundation redistributes has its roots in many systems of oppression. Artists want the McKnight Foundation to lead by inviting other foundations to join them in a truth and reconciliation process that will explicitly acknowledge philanthropy's role in the deposition of Native lands, environmental destruction, and participation in exploitative capitalism. After acknowledging this, McKnight and other philanthropic partners should then work with artists and community members to explore reparative and transformative processes that move from apology to action.

Research in Action Recommendations for McKnight

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

The artists who participated in this project expressed gratitude for the opportunity and a desire to continue to engage with McKnight as the Foundation grows and adapts. As one artist said, "Let us know and keep us in that journey with you. Not just in one survey, not just this one interview." (Media and Performing artist, Asian/Pacific Islander, Minneapolis). As specific ways to keep engaging the artists, artists recommended community town halls and an advisory board structure as potential options to keep them in the loop as the work evolves, ensuring to compensate each artist for their time and expertise.

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

The ways that artists described justice and the work required to get there varies. Re-examining assumptions and criteria, and ensuring that artists have opportunities to explain their art in their own words, is critical to ensuring that important work is not overlooked. This might mean rewriting criteria for justice-focused grants and providing more open-ended questions in applications where artists can describe how the art or their work advances justice using the framework described within this report (ex: How does the art advocate for change? Tell a story? How is the artist creating space, engaging community, or collaborating with others? In what ways does this project describe a vision of or take action towards justice?) Relatedly, many artists also acknowledged that they do not actively think about their own legacy when they are creating their art. They are compelled by their values and communities to work to advance justice. As such, a reexamination of the concept of impact, especially when it is assessed and by whom, is warranted. If impact is an important consideration for the selection of artists for awards, mentorship and support in helping applicants describe their own impact is important.

CONCLUSION

As a part of their program goal to catalyze the creativity, power, and leadership of Minnesota's working artists and culture bearers, the McKnight Foundation commissioned Research in Action (RIA) to explore how artists define, advance, and practice justice in their work. With the information gathered from the lived experiences of 25 artists and culture bearers across the state of Minnesota, rich information was harvested that the arts and philanthropic communities can and should use to support justice-oriented work.

The 25 interviews were summarized, thematically coded, analyzed, and categorized into four major themes and 13 sub-themes that explored artists and their work, the concept of justice, and the factors that help and hinder artists' creativity.

Art that advances justice functions as an advocacy tool and as a tool for storytelling, helping to uplift issues within communities that have been marginalized or stories that have been ignored. Artists who advance justice accomplish this by creating spaces for learning, using their art-making process as a tool for community engagement, and collaborating with other artists to establish meaningful connections that strengthen the broader arts community and the fight for justice. We also found that artists see justice as both a future vision and an active process. Artists named the need for more institutional support, art spaces, and more sustained financial support for BIPOC artists over time while pointing out the gatekeeping culture, structural problems of philanthropy, and rural challenges hindering their work to advance justice.

Artists provided recommendations for change in broader philanthropy, hoping for a more supportive arts ecosystem in which funders expand their programmatic offerings, adapt their application processes, and improve their relationships with grantees.

Similarly, artists recommend that the McKnight Foundation create more opportunities for strategic collaboration to better advocate for artists who work to advance justice. Artists also see the McKnight Foundation as a leader in the philanthropic sector that should push for more investment in justice-oriented work and take action to repair the harm connected to their organizational wealth.

From interviewing the artists, the research team offered that the McKnight Foundation should continue to engage artists in the organization's strategy development and continuously think about its approach to understanding artists and their impact on justice.

Hopefully, the findings and recommendations gathered from this project support the McKnight Foundation's goal of advancing justice in Minnesota.