

Framework for the Next Phase of the NASAA Folk & Traditional Arts Peer Group Convenings and Organizing Working Group

*Compiled by Selina Morales, with support from
the 2020-2021 NASAA Folk & Traditional Arts Working Group*

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Part 1: Field-wide Commitments & Foundations for Building Racial Equity in the NASAA Folk & Traditional Arts Peer Group

CONTEXT

The 2020-2021 NASAA Folk & Traditional Arts Working Group included Kaitlyn Berle, Langston Wilkins, Teresa Hollingsworth, Lisa L. Higgins, and Jennifer Joy Jameson. Selina Morales served as a consulting member on the Working Group, and we thank her for her valuable contributions. The working group also engaged racial equity consultants Levon Williams and Sandra Bonnici to lead four online sessions, focused on identifying barriers to BIPOC engagement in statewide traditional arts positions and building a more equitable field of traditional arts administrators. Williams and Bonnici provided visioning, strategies, and recommendations that helped form the basis to our collective work.

OUR GOAL

Transform the field of traditional arts administrators to mirror the culturally diverse communities with whom we collaborate, and to elevate, include and promote professional opportunities for local cultural experts as we collectively strive towards equity in the Traditional Arts Field.

This work includes identifying and strategically addressing barriers to BIPOC engagement in statewide traditional arts administrative positions, as well as establishing methodologies for accountability and continuity.

We acknowledge that members of the Peer Group may be at different places in their journey of unlearning racism and oppressive practices; This work aims to be an accessible tool and resource to those at all levels.

OUR WORK

Through ongoing learning and practice, we'll build a field that is more equitable and committed to anti-racism and anti-oppression (AR/AO). In order to achieve our goal, we will examine and adjust our organizational and personal practices so that working environments are places where Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and other historically and currently excluded/oppressed colleagues can thrive. Quarterly learning and practice labs, workshops at NASAA pre-conference sessions, and collaborative work and/or individual/self-work will help all Folk Arts Partners work towards a more inclusive field.

To support our goal of transforming the field of traditional arts administrators, committing to an actively anti-racist and equitable practice is a seminal step. Below is a framework for commitments we can make as individuals and as organizations.

OUR COMMITMENTS FOR ANTI-RACIST AND EQUITABLE PRACTICE

Source: Yancey Consulting, LLC. <https://www.yanceyconsulting.com/>

Author: Lisa Yancey

- **Understand that defeating systemic oppression is not overnight work.** Commit to an evolving and adaptive process. Embrace this work as a lifestyle change. There is real pain, trauma, and harm unjustly forced upon and endured by millions of people resulting from structural racism and white supremacy.
- **Commit to seeing yourself.** Interrogate your actions and reactions to discussions, demands, and expectations regarding truth, reconciliation, and reparations as America atones for its fabrication and perpetuation of white supremacist systems.
 - If when it comes to conversations about structural racism and white supremacy, you default to traits of helplessness and fragility, acknowledge them, and let them go. They do not serve you on this journey.

- **Actively tune into, observe, and document where you—either with complicity or actively—perpetuate white supremacy** in your spheres of influence—family, friend circle, professional networks, civic participation, financial investments, time investments, exclusive invitations, social capital, and others.
 - If you genuinely hold anti-racist and anti-oppressive values, do not remain silent. Start talking. You speak things into existence. Be all in.

- **Learn about, acknowledge, begin (or continue) to reconcile and reckon** with America’s sustained practice of terrorism, torture, genocide, pillage, thievery, brutality, and supremacy over BIPOC bodies and lineage, intellectual and real properties, economic and inventive assets, and cultural narratives. Stop using sanitized language to make it more palatable. We cannot get to reconciliation, reckoning, or atonement without seeing and becoming moved by these grotesque truths.
 - Acknowledge that America is not, and has never been, the land of the free for all people. That is an intentional and ingeniously constructed lie.
 - If you have been privileged by a system that thrives on oppression and displacement, you have to be willing to lose something. You cannot transform while simultaneously keeping the status quo intact.
 - Acknowledge the unearned privileges you hold that contribute to your current positioning. See where you advance/d within this supremacist system when intersections of your identity and environment—neither of which were produced by your efforts—align with conditions that trigger opportunities to get ahead. For example, having a degree that makes it possible for you to consider jobs that have nothing to do with your major or area of concentrated learning is an unearned privilege. Living in a room with a fast, accessible, and reliable Internet connection is a privilege. Your ability to move about the world without having to account for accessibility accommodations, or your being nurtured to pursue higher learning or travel because you happened to be in proximity to someone who provided a framework to make those pursuits possible for you. Once you can see unearned privilege, you can acknowledge it when you encounter a benefit presented to you as a result of it—even if it means forgoing the offer. This is one way that you can use your power to change the system.

- **Be accountable for the strain, harm, and trauma you cause people** who are or have been oppressed by a white supremacist, racist, sexist, misogynistic, transphobic, xenophobic, economic, able-bodied, or in other ways exploitative hierarchy—whether intentional or not.
 - Do not lean on BIPOC, trans, immigrant, or any historically terrorized, displaced, or disenfranchised communities to help you process your privileges and emotions or as your *primary* source of information gathering.

- Do not infantilize your capabilities to learn, explore new ways of being, adjust, and remain present in uncomfortable situations without applause.
- Surround yourself with people who will unapologetically inform you when you are causing harm or need to widen your lens of perspective for a more holistic, inclusive, and accurate analysis.

SHARED LANGUAGE (a start)

Developing shared language amongst a team or organization creates an opportunity to have deeper and more rich conversations. Shared Language should be seen as an essential starting place for those conversations. The ability to understand specific language when it is used can prevent misunderstandings that often derail conversations about equity and inclusion. This combined with establishing Group Agreements lays the groundwork for meaningful conversation and dialogue about change.

Source: Sandra Bonnici and Levon Williams circulated this list with NASAA Folk & Traditional Arts Peer Group during online convening sessions in 2020-2021

Authors: Sandra Bonnici and Levon Williams

Diversity – All the ways that individuals and groups of individuals differ. A term to describe the presence of these people. Diversity is something that you count.

Inclusion – Creating an environment where any individual or group is welcomed, respected, supported, is asked to participate, and to lead. Inclusion is something you feel.

Equity – The fair and just treatment of people demonstrated through the acknowledgment that systemically individuals have vastly different access to opportunity and thus need different resources to be successful. Equity shows up in the outcomes we see as a result of organizational culture, policies, processes, trainings, systems, and structures.

Accessibility – Giving equitable access to everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience. It refers to how organizations make space for the characteristics that each person brings.

Organizational Culture – The learned and shared values, beliefs, and behaviors of a community of interacting people. It includes tacit behaviors that are not questioned and taken for granted as “normal”. It is often dictated by those in power in organizations such as Leadership Teams and Boards of Trustees.

Racism – A system of advantage and oppression based on race. A way of organizing society based on dominance and subordination based on race. Racism penetrates every aspect of personal, cultural, and institutional life.

Racial Equity – An active process of identifying and eliminating racism and racial bias within an organization by changing and sometimes overhauling systems, organizational structures, policies, practices, and attitudes so that power and resources are redistributed and shared equitably.

Race Equity Culture – A culture focused on proactive counteraction of social and race inequities inside and outside an organization.

BIPOC – Acronym denoting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Affinity Group – A designated “safe space” where everyone in the group shares a particular identity.

Dominant Culture – The established values, language, religion, and social customs on which a society is built. It has the most power, is widespread and influential inside a social entity such as an organization.

Power – The potential of influence, the resource that enables leaders to gain compliance or commitment from others. Power can be expressed personally, institutionally, and structurally and systemically.

Anti-Racism – An active and conscious effort to work against multidimensional aspects of racism.

White Privilege – The power and advantages benefiting perceived white people, derived from the historical oppression and exploitation of other non-white groups.

Microaggression – The everyday, subtle, intentional, and often unintentional interactions or behaviors that communicate bias toward historically marginalized groups.

***Definitions pulled from the following works:**

- [Awake To Woke To Work: Building a Race Equity Culture – Equity In The Center](#)
- [Whiteness At Work: Training Module 1 – Adaway Group](#)
- [MASSAction Toolkit – Museums as a Site for Social Action](#)
- [Facing Change: Insights from AAM’s DEAI Working Group](#)
- [What Is Anti-Racism and How to be an Anti-Racist – Business Insider](#)
- [Microaggressions Are A Big Deal: How To Talk Them Out & When To Walk Away – NPR](#)
- [Affinity Group FAQ’s – Children’s Day School – San Francisco](#)
- [Beyond Good Intentions – Beth Zemsky – Facing Change – AAM](#)

GROUP AGREEMENTS (a start)

Establishing group agreements is an extremely important component of making space for conversations on anti-racism. Because trust and vulnerability are essential to moving equity and inclusion work forward, being intentional about how the conversations are framed is critical. The goal of these agreements is to help the space be as constructive as possible. Below are a few that were brought to this group by Sandra Bonnici and Levon Williams, our 2020-2021 Equity Consultants. The Peer Group may add additional agreements as the Group sees fit.

- **Safe space/Brave Space**

This agreement pertains to the fact that we want the space that we create together to feel safe for all participants. We want participants to be able to trust, assume positive intent, and offer grace to each other as we have ongoing conversations. However because "safe space" sometimes has the connotation of being entitled to be comfortable at all times, explicitly naming the space a "brave space" is meant to empower participants to bring their full authentic selves to the conversation and to help folks understand their thoughts and assumptions may be challenged during the conversation.

- **Be the expert of your own experience – Use "I" Statements**

This agreement is meant to help participants think about themselves and how they relate to the conversation. In these discussions, it can be very easy to slip into talking about experiences that are not our own. Starting with "I" statements guides us to talk about how "we" have experienced something.

- **Embrace Discomfort/Stay Engaged**

This agreement is the most important one for these conversations. One reason discussions of race, politics, and other "hot button" topics do not happen is because they can be uncomfortable. However, to be able to have these very necessary conversations and make progress on these issues, we have to commit to build the emotional stamina to sit with the discomfort that may arise in these discussions. Understanding from the outset that parts of this conversation may be uncomfortable for some can be helpful in managing expectations. The Stay Engaged piece speaks to our tendency to sometimes shut down when we are uncomfortable during a conversation. Committing to stay engaged asks us to be thoughtful, reflective, and present, as opposed to tuning out.

- **Give yourself permission to not have to be a knower but a learner**

This agreement focuses on shifting our orientation. Often during conversations, we may feel pressure to have "all the right answers". We want to push back against the need to have an answer for everything, and instead agree to make this a space for learning and growth.

- **Impact and Intent matter**

For some, these types of conversations can be uncharted territory. It is likely at some point someone will make a mistake. That's okay, that is a natural part of the growth

process. This agreement ensures that when mistakes happen we prioritize the impact of our statement or action, as opposed to leaning into our "good intentions".

- **Take space/Make space – Step up, Step Back**

This agreement is meant to encourage active participation. Those of us who may be very comfortable speaking in groups can use the opportunity of this conversation to practice active listening (this doesn't mean do not share, it means to also practice active listening). Those of us who often tend to be quieter, are encouraged to use this space to practice sharing your thoughts openly. This is also a request for us to be aware of how much airspace we are taking up during a given conversation. We want to hear from everyone.

- **What is said here stays here, what is learned here leaves here**

In order to build trust amongst our group, we ask that all participants agree not to share stories/experiences shared in this space that are not their own. However, we strongly encourage sharing any learnings that come from what is shared in this space.

Part 2: Learning & Practice Lab (suggestions for future Peer Group sessions + convenings)

LEARNING & PRACTICE LAB SESSIONS

Introduction

Folk & Traditional Arts Peer Group Learning and Practice Lab focuses on building racial equity across and within organizational culture and praxis. We recommend that one 2-hour session takes place quarterly. Each session should follow a set agenda. (A framework for setting session agendas is below.) Each session will have follow-up collaborative work and individual/self-work.

PRE-WORK: Self Reflection on Personal and Relational Power and Influence

During the NASAA Folk & Traditional Arts Peer Group convenings of 2020-2021 it was shared that many administrators do not feel they have power or influence to make needed systems or organizational change. Before the start of these sessions, it is recommended that all participants engage in a [Spheres of Influence](#) activity in order to be prepared to make change as a result of the shared learnings.

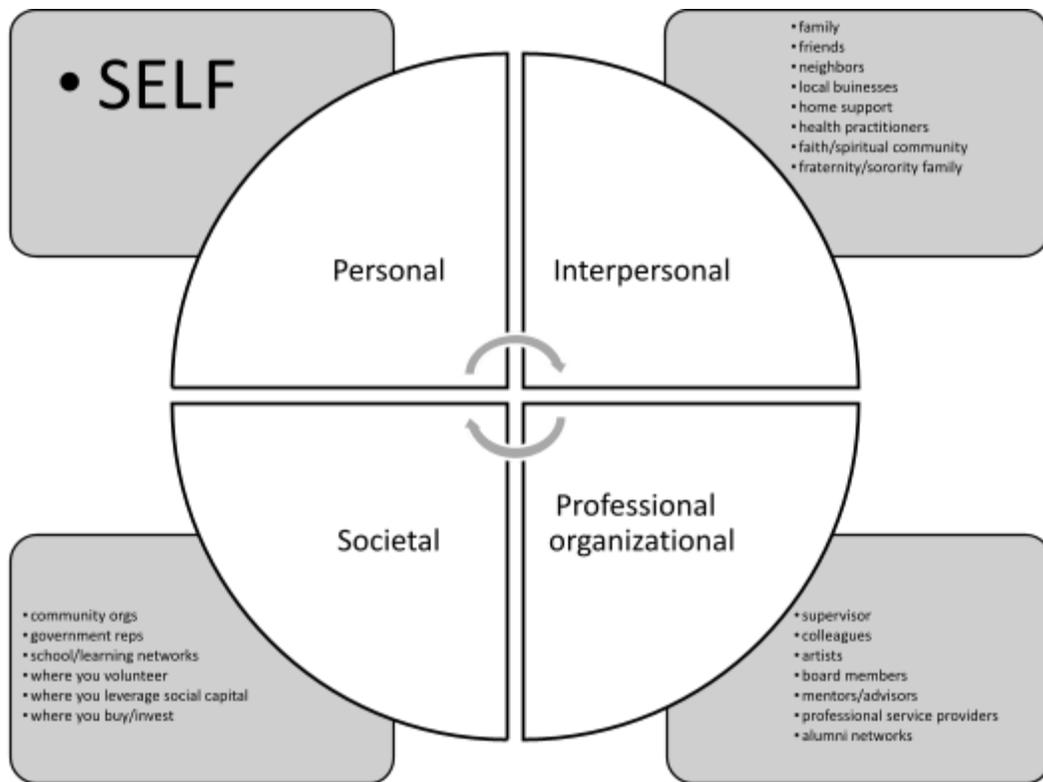
Spheres of Influence Activity

Consider where YOU have influence and write down the names of people, institutions, relationships, venues and others areas where your actions will have impact. If you are able, do this activity with a co-worker or a colleague in your field – remote or in person. Conduct the audit of your own Spheres of Influence, and then share your list with your partner for discussion.

Self-reflection/discussion questions:

- 1. How did you feel making your list?**
- 2. What was illuminated for you?**
- 3. What did you learn from your partner's list?**

Use the next page to complete your list. Keep this list active and available during the NASAA Folk & Traditional Arts Peer Group Learning & Practice Labs.



Where else and with whom do you spend your time and exercise your power and influence?

Add your lists here:



Proposed 2021/2022 Quarterly Learning and Practice Lab Sessions (Online)

- **Introducing [Language Justice](#) into your Organizational Practice**
During this session attendees will learn about Language Justice, consider how they can incorporate principles into their work, and ask questions of presenters and one another.
- **Introducing [Universal Design](#) into your Organizational Practice**
During this session attendees will learn about Universal Design and Accessibility, consider how they can incorporate principles into their work, and ask questions of presenters and one another.
- **Workshop/Critique on Job Descriptions + Outreach Plans**
During the NASAA Folk & Traditional Arts Peer Group convenings in 2020-2021, facilitators heard that our peers want to re-examine job descriptions as a barrier to BIPOC professional engagement in our fields and examine job description outreach strategies. During this workshop, we'll engage in a conversation about how job descriptions reveal the values of our organizations and we'll dig into examples of how to write job descriptions that will attract diverse and qualified candidates.
- **Who are you bringing to the table? Re-examining the Panel Review Process**
During the NASAA Folk & Traditional Arts Peer Group convenings in 2020-2021, facilitators heard that our peers would like to examine grant panel review processes to better align with anti-oppression/anti-racist practices. This session will be a facilitated discussion with individuals who lead grant panel processes centered on equity and integrity.

Proposed sessions for next NASAA preconference - online or in person (alternatively could be combined with above into bi-monthly gatherings for 2021/2022):

- **Revisiting or building on Peer Group Agreements that are anchored in Traditional Knowledge** (Peer-developed)
- **Re-examining "Qualifications" (Honoring & Uplifting Multiple Ways of Knowing / Valuing Lived Experience)**
A session focused on naming the skills, experiences, knowledge, strengths, etc. that we value as a field. Centering arts administrators who are active community culture-bearers as our guides for naming critical folk cultural knowledge that advances our organization and our field.
- **On Being a BIPOC Cultural Worker in/close to the Traditional Arts Field**
(participants who ID as BIPOC only -- extension of the affinity group recommendation)
BIPOC arts administrators consider their role in paving the way for more BIPOC participation in the field through mentorship, affinity groups, and real talk about racial equity work in a white-dominant field.

- **White Anti-Racist Cultural Workers in/close to the Traditional Arts Field**
(participants who ID as white or white-passing).
This session may include examination of White Supremacy Characteristics.