

Cultural Equity

“Scientific study of cultures, notably of their languages and their musics, shows that all are equally expressive and equally communicative. They are also equally valuable; first, because they enrich the lives of the people who use them, people whose very morale is threatened when they are destroyed or impoverished; second, because each communicative system (whether verbal, visual, musical, or even culinary) holds important discoveries about the natural and human environment; and third, because each is a treasure of unknown potential, a collective creation in which some branch of the human species invested its genius across the centuries.”
—Alan Lomax, 1972, *An Appeal for Cultural Equity*¹

The diversity of cultures in our schools should be a source of unity and common understanding. Students and staff need to be able to share freely their cultural background, heritage and beliefs and have those differences taught and celebrated in our schools.²

Definition of Cultural Equity

Cultural equity embodies the values, policies, and practices that ensure that all people—including but not limited to those who have been historically underrepresented based on race/ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion—are represented in the development of arts policy; the support of artists; the nurturing of accessible, thriving venues for expression; and the fair distribution of programmatic, financial, and informational resources.³

Diversity + Inclusion + Justice = Equity

The Inclusion Hub unpacks the difference between diversity, inclusion, equity, belonging and justice:

Diversity: Acknowledges all the ways people differ: race, sex, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, and more.

Inclusion: Is about diversity in practice. It’s the act of welcoming, supporting, respecting, and valuing *all* individuals and groups.

Equity: Is often used interchangeably with equality, but there’s a core difference: Where equality is a system in which each individual is offered the same opportunities regardless of circumstance, equity distributes resources based on needs. We live in a disproportionate society, and equity tries to correct its imbalance by creating more opportunities for people who have historically had less access.

¹ [Cultural Equity | Association for Cultural Equity](#). Retrieved 26 May 2022.

² [Cultural Equity | Education and Early Childhood Development \(ednet.ns.ca\)](#). Retrieved 26 May 2022.

³ [CULTURAL EQUITY - SAACA](#). Retrieved 26 May 2022.

Belonging: Infers that an equitable structure is in place and functioning to make all people, *no matter their differences*, feel welcome. When you reach for equity, you're striving for a system that benefits *everyone*, no matter their circumstance. Belonging is when this not only works, but no one feels as if their inclusion is questioned.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion all mean different things, but interact with *and* rely on one another. **Equity is the goal of diversity and inclusion.**

Justice: Is the mission of equity, in which an equitable system works so well it eventually *eliminates* the systemic problems driving the need for the latter. In other words, everything is fairly and evenly distributed to people no matter their race, gender, physical ability, or other personal circumstances.

Where diversity and inclusion focusses on making all groups feel welcome, diversity, equity and inclusion also addresses the systemic ways access to things—such as education, food, the web, and more—are unequally distributed.⁴

Create Equity.com shared this perspective of cultural equity:



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A Vision for Culture in Ontario

An Ontario where every person has the opportunity for creative expression and cultural participation, and where the diversity of our stories and communities is reflected, valued and celebrated, now and as part of our legacy to future generations.⁶

⁴ [What Is Diversity, Equity & Inclusion \(DEI\)? \(inclusionhub.com\)](https://inclusionhub.com). Retrieved 26 May 2022.

⁵ [Making Sense of Cultural Equity \(createequity.com\)](https://createequity.com). Retrieved 26 May 2022.

⁶ [The Ontario Culture Strategy: Telling our stories, growing our economy | ontario.ca](https://ontario.ca). Retrieved 26 May 2022.

Sample Cultural Equity Statement

To support a full creative life for all, Americans for the Arts commits to championing policies and practices of cultural equity that empowers a just, inclusive, equity Nation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & AFFIRMATIONS

- In the United States, there are systems of power that grant privileged and access unequally such that inequity and injustice result, and that must be continually addressed and changed.
- Cultural equity is critical to the long-term viability of the arts sector.
- We must all hold ourselves accountable, because acknowledging and challenging our inequities and working in partnership is how we will make change happen.
- Everyone deserves equal access to a full, vibrant creative life, which is essential to a healthy and democratic society.
- The prominent presence of artists challenges inequities and encourages alternatives.

Modeling Through Action:

To provide informed, authentic leadership for cultural equity, we strive to...

- Pursue cultural consciousness throughout our organization through substantive learning and formal, transparent policies, and commit to frequent and on-going agency-wide honest conversations about inequity.
- Acknowledge and dismantle any inequities within our policies, systems, programs, and services, and report organization progress and challenges.
- Commit time and resources to expand more diverse leadership within our board, staff, and advisory bodies.

Fueling Field Progress:

To pursue needed systemic change related to equity, we strive to...

- Encourage substantive learning to build cultural consciousness and to proliferate pro-equity policies and practices by all of our constituencies and audiences.
- Improve the cultural leadership pipeline by creating and supporting programs and policies that foster leadership that reflects the full breadth of American society.
- Generate and aggregate quantitative and qualitative research related to equity to make incremental, measurable progress towards cultural equity more visible.
- Advocate for public and private-sector policy that promotes cultural equity.⁷

⁷[ARTS_CulturalEquity_r05v05_jc.indd \(americansforthearts.org\)](#). Retrieved 26 May 2022.