



METRO ARTS

NASHVILLE OFFICE OF ARTS + CULTURE

PUBLIC COMMENT
Metro Art Board of Commissioners
Feb. 17, 2022 12 p.m.

- A. Call to Order & Welcome
- B. Approval of Minutes: January 20, 2022 and February 3, 2022

Public Comment: [D1](#) | [D2](#) | [D3](#)

- C. Action Items:
 - 1. FY23 Grants Eligibility Rule Exemption
No public comment.
 - 2. CARE Roster
No public comment.
 - 3. Amended Donelson Selection Panel Roster
No public comment.
- D. Staff Reports
- E. Adjourn Meeting

February 3, 2022

Metro Arts Commission,

It would be hypocritical for me who's primary focus as a private citizen is racial equity to not speak up about the injustices taking place within Metro Arts. This is my call to action.

I listened to the meeting held on January 20, 2022. Though I agree implementation is everyone's responsibility, precedence is set from the top and roots downward. It is Director Vincent's responsibility to create a work environment that is safe for all employees. To say "These workplace culture items will require the full engagement of all staff and management-level employees and in my opinion, it's not just the responsibility of Director Vincent. It's everybody's job to work together and find a commonplace." minimizes the experiences of the victims and includes them in the *work* to be done.

These testimonies are opportunities to rectify an inequitable environment and policies. Any entity that self-polices will become corrupt. I am writing to request that an outside and neutral third-party DEI firm be hired to investigate the firsthand lived experiences of Janine Christiano and other current and previous BIPOC Metro Arts employees. Additional requests are: ongoing equity training for all employees, the DEI firm create an action plan and guidelines, and any retaliatory or dismissive actions cease.

It is my hope that Metro Arts acts in the manner they teach, and that restoration towards BIPOC employees and community commence.

These words and sentiments are my own and protected under my First Amendment right and are in no way tied to any organization or association I am a part of.

I appreciate your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, circular scribble followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Danielle Myers

February 15, 2022

Metro Arts Commission,

Since September 2021, the current Racial Equity in Arts Leadership Cohort (REAL), organized by Metro Arts, has met weekly to learn about race's role within Nashville's cultural ecosystem. Each meeting begins with sharing agreements and challenges that ground us in advocating for racial equity within our organizations and the larger Nashville community.

Our REAL Agreements and Challenges consist of the following:

We agree to practice active & empathetic listening

We agree to make this a safe place for honest & thoughtful dialogue

We agree to challenge the idea, not the person

We agree to be both teachers & learners

We agree to take space & make space

We agree to leave the stories and carry the lessons we learn forward

We agree to use "I" statements

We agree to respect who has the floor

We agree to be here now

We challenge ourselves to practice kindness & tolerance

We challenge ourselves to have an open mind

We challenge ourselves to embrace discomfort

We challenge ourselves to trust intent & name impact

We challenge ourselves to be honest with ourselves & others

We challenge ourselves to acknowledge that we all have blind spots

We challenge ourselves to recognize judgments & assumptions (including our own)

We challenge ourselves to accept that things may remain unresolved; we might not feel a sense of closure

We challenge ourselves to be present for each other

As a collective, we would like to encourage the Metro Nashville Arts Commission's Board and staff to consider these shared agreements and challenges, the foundation upon which the REAL

cohort, its organizers, and guest presenters engage in ongoing equity work for the betterment of our community.

It is apparent through the testimonies of current and former BIPOC employees that Metro Arts' leadership deafened its ears to their concerns about the injustice and inequity of its internal structures and toxic work environments. This behavior does not match model expectations of providing safe and non-discriminatory workspaces. Instead, it represents norms rooted in white supremacy—silencing, shaming, and disrespecting people of color who already face multiple barriers in their everyday lives. We recognize that we all participate in white supremacist systems; it is rooted in the foundation of this country. Calling out inequities should not be taken as a personal insult; instead, as a moment to educate, edit, and implement new systems that drive equity.

Our concerns go beyond Metro Arts' inability to model the agreements and challenges by its REAL cohort. We know the weight Metro Arts has within the community of Nashville. Because of this, Metro Arts must hold itself to a pinnacle standard and commit equity moves into policies. The real work of equity is in practice and procedures, how reports of discrimination are handled, and ultimately in the experiences of those being discriminated against. It is not enough to say that no law or policy was broken, so no harm has been done. For generations, procedures have been used to exclude population segments intentionally.

Former and current Metro staff members have bravely and publicly issued their complaints, complete with incidents and quotes, and Metro has hidden behind the power of a collective "we." There is a time and place for "we," and indeed, the commission is composed of numerous individuals. But when it comes to real change, apology, and accountability, "I" statements must be made.

We believe that to move forward; there must be acknowledgments that harm was done, an impartial review of what policies or practices need to change, and continued accountability for those in any position of authoritative power. We challenge you to develop and commit to a timeline to implement all actions listed in the February 3rd meeting in the interest of transparency and accountability.

"The only way to move forward is through." –Robert Frost.

The words and sentiments in this letter are from members within the REAL cohort and are not affiliated with any organization we may be a part of.

Sincerely,

Members from the 2021–22 REAL Cohort

February 15, 2022

Metro Arts Commission,

Harm has been done at Metro Arts, and by not holding those accountable for committing the harm, you are being complicit in their actions. At least three people who have been employed at Metro Arts have spoken out about the injustices that has happened in that department, if things continue as if nothing happened, nothing will change and this will continue to be an issue moving forward. Hold those accountable and replace them with someone who can do the work in an equitable manner. I am fortunate enough to have worked closely with Janine Christiano, she is genuine and truthful. If she says harm was done, there is no doubt in my mind that harm was done.

I want to leave you with the equity statement on your website. I urge you to read through this and evaluate whether you have been upholding these values internally as well as externally.

METRO ARTS CULTURAL EQUITY STATEMENT

Metro Arts believes ALL Nashvillians should be able to participate in a creative life; and that the arts drive a vibrant and equitable community.

Cultural Equity embodies the values, beliefs, policies and practices that ensure that all people can fulfill their rights of cultural expression and belonging, participation, learning, and livelihood within the arts ecosystem.

This includes specific commitment to people who have been historically underrepresented in mainstream arts funding, discourse, leadership and resource allocation; including, but not limited to, people of color, people of all ages, differently abled people, LGBTQ people, women, and the socio-economically disadvantaged.

Metro Arts believes:

- The ability to express, celebrate and champion cultural tradition and heritage is elemental to honest civic discourse and the well-being of democratic society.
- Artists and cultural creators have a unique role in challenging inequity and imagining new and more just realities.
- The health of the future cultural ecosystem is contingent on dynamic inclusionary practices that move towards cultural plurality.

Metro Arts acknowledges:

- Inequity is pervasive and historic. Disparities and discrimination are daily occurrences that are rooted in long-standing majority privilege and power inside and outside of the cultural arts.
- Inequity occurs within systems at all levels within the cultural/creative ecosystem.
- Equity moves past inclusion and representation; accepting that power has created uneven starting points for some communities and individuals. Simple diverse representation does not dismantle the unequal nature of voice, resource allocation and visibility that exist in the arts and cultural ecosystem.
- We hold ourselves accountable by acknowledging that equity does not currently exist in the arts.
- We commit to exposing and unraveling it through our own leadership, practices and policies.
- We commit to holding up examples and practices that facilitate equity and those artists and creators who are equity champions.

Specifically Metro Arts will:

- Commit to frequent and on-going, agency-wide honest conversations about race, class, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age and income status.
- Pursue formal and regular cultural competence training and discussions with staff, board, and volunteers.
- Expand leadership and employment positions wherever possible with under-invested and under-represented communities.
- Continually review and edit our grant and public art practices and policies to ensure that more under-invested and under-represented communities can compete equitably for artist commissions, grants and other financial investments. This will be ongoing with a view towards transformation of our programs and larger community systems.
- Encourage the broader development of policies and practices that drive equity in Nashville.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christine Farwell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Christine" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Farwell".

Christine Farwell

District 4