

States population. In [A Decade of Arts Engagement: Findings from the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, 2002–2012](#), the National Endowment for the Arts stated that “changes in United States demographic composition appear to have contributed to the overall declines in performing arts attendance.” Arts and culture organizations need to take active steps now to attract more diverse audiences, donors, employees, and other key stakeholders if they want to achieve programmatic, financial, and operational success in the very near future.

In the November 2016 issue of *Arts Insights*, ACG examined the three sides of organizational diversity: governance, audience, and workforce.

- At the governance level, it is critical that boards examine their own makeup to determine whose voice is missing from the decision-making table. Thinking about the board composition as data points may serve to remove some of the potential emotion from the discussion and allow the board to consider these questions that speak to the needs of the organization. Once these needs have been identified, the nominating or governance committee is responsible for seeking out new members with the combined passion for the institution and the necessary time and financial resources to make a contribution.
- Since audiences connect to organizations through their programming, it is important that content and engagement strategies seek to develop a relationship with the communities in which they serve. Organizations that invest in more structured engagement reap benefits that affect all areas of the business and have a long-term impact. Diversity work should be driven by the mission of the organization and not the margin of short-term grant funding for specific initiatives.
- Staff who are at the core of programming and interacting with audiences are the third side of the diversity equation. Education and community engagement departments with diverse staffs are becoming more common. However, building diverse curatorial and artistic teams remains a challenge for all areas of the arts and culture sector. The same is also true in areas of administration and executive leadership where inequities are most pronounced. Organizations cannot remove individual bias but they can look at their policies, procedures, and behaviors to minimize institutional biases that may be impacting the organizational goals around diversity.

Since 2016 ACG has further explored two additional sides that arts and culture organizations consider in diversity. The first includes programming by a wide array of differently abled artists, more people of color, and stories that highlight the diversity of people and human experiences. The second focuses on the relationships between cultural organizations and the numerous vendors that supply them products and services, including prioritizing minority and women-owned businesses as well as other enterprises that demonstrate policies and progress towards addressing diversity.

Other Industries Are Leading the Way

Recognizing that a diverse employee pool can positively impact the bottom line, arts and culture organizations should look to companies outside their sector that are leading the way in equity, diversity, inclusion, and access efforts. In the early 2000s, PepsiCo’s Frito Lay division worked with its Latino employees to develop products for the United States that were familiar to Mexican-American and Latino consumers. They also created new flavors by tapping into their employees’ unique cultural knowledge.

With 42 percent of its workforce identifying as persons of color, AT&T is also leading the way in creating a more diverse work environment. To attract this diverse pool of candidates, AT&T partners with universities and uses mentorships and employee resource groups to support and retain underrepresented employees. “It makes good business sense to have an employee base that looks like our customer base,” said AT&T Senior Vice President of Human Resources and Chief Diversity Officer Cynthia Marshall. “To truly serve the populations we want to serve, we need diverse groups of employees, suppliers, and vendors.”

Success in the Arts and Culture Sector

While it may seem that the arts and culture sector is behind the times in cultivating more diverse and inclusive board members, staff, donors, and other key stakeholders, there are numerous organizations that have successfully implemented equity, diversity, inclusion, and access initiatives. Past ACG client and the nation’s premier Asian American theater East West Players created the [51% Preparedness Plan for the American Theatre](#) in 2015 because American theater was not “prepared to welcome new audiences of diverse backgrounds; at the vast majority of theaters, the subscriber base is overwhelmingly white and rapidly aging...We depend on the diverse, next generation of artists and theatre practitioners to continue the advancement of live performance. That is the only way we will have a chance of cultivating new theatre audiences. It is a survival imperative.”

Equity, diversity, and inclusion are also recognized as a critical priority in the Canadian arts and culture sector. The previously mentioned strategic plan of the Canada Council for the Arts foresees that by 2021 “Canada’s major arts organizations will be models of diversity and innovation.” Its vision for the future is also Canada’s response to the country’s changing social environment and an expression of its shared values. Additionally, the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres has launched All In, a major collaborative program focused on increasing equity, diversity, inclusion, and access throughout Canada’s theater sector.

As organizations develop an ongoing commitment to this important issue, ACG suggests the following additional resources for arts and culture governing and managerial leaders:

- **American Alliance of Museums:**
Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, Inclusion
- **Americans for the Arts:**
Statement on Cultural Equity
- **BoardSource:**
Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
- **Canada Council for the Arts:**
Equity
- **League of American Orchestras:**
The Diversity and Inclusion Resource Center
- **Society for Human Resource Management:**
Six Steps for Building an Inclusive Workplace
- **Theatre Communications Group:**
Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Initiative
- **The Wallace Foundation:**
Strategies for Expanding Audiences

Conclusion

According to NUDC, data indicates companies with a diverse workforce are 35 percent more likely to financially outperform the industry median. Scientists have concluded that diverse teams bring new and varying perspectives to problem solving, even helping companies avoid groupthink. The benefits of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access abound. Every organization is unique and defines diversity and inclusion differently—racial, cultural, socioeconomic, physical, gender, geographic, and more.

Through careful discussion with board members, senior management staff, and other key stakeholders, arts and culture leaders can create clarity and focus from the start in program planning, strategic planning, board recruitment, executive search, vendor relations, and overall hiring processes. Organizations with limited resources or experience in these matters should make it a priority to work with an outside facilitator who can navigate these complicated and sometimes challenging organizational changes. Ensuring that inclusion, diversity, equity, and access are central principles in all business practices will have a lasting impact on the success of individual organizations, the broader arts and culture sector, and the communities that they serve for years to come.

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Bruce D. Thibodeau, DBA

President

Dr. Thibodeau founded ACG in 1997 and, as its President, has been embedded in numerous projects in all practice areas to grow institutional sustainability, advance the arts and culture sector, and enhance communities served by this vibrant industry. He has guided hundreds of clients in achieving effective leadership transitions, planning cultural facilities, increasing revenues, developing dynamic institutional brands and messages, crafting strategic plans and business models, and revitalizing board governance practices. Dr. Thibodeau has conducted extensive research in a threefold exploration of stakeholders, nonprofit arts management, and cultural facility project management to highlight how stakeholders influence, and are influenced by, the activities and practices of nonprofit arts and culture organizations. Dr. Thibodeau's recent conference papers and presentations include the Academy of Management; Social Theory, Politics, and the Arts; and *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*. Published papers and those being considered for publication include, "Bonds, Boundaries, and Unexpected Transformations: Exploring the Performativity of Stakeholder Interactions in Nonprofit Organizations," "Nonprofit Organizations, Community, and Shared Urgency: Lessons from the Arts and Culture Sector," and "Overcoming Project Inertia and Gaining Project Momentum: Strategic Adaptation in Cultural Facilities Planning." Dr. Thibodeau holds a doctorate of business administration from the Grenoble Ecole de Management (France), a master of business administration from the F.W. Olin Graduate School of Business at Babson College, and a bachelor of music from The Hartt School at the University of Hartford. He also has multiple certifications in competencies, communications, and motivations analysis from Target Training International.

Wyona Lynch-McWhite

Vice President

Ms. Lynch-McWhite joined ACG in 2016 as Vice President, bringing a long and accomplished career in the museum and cultural sector, including more than 21 years of experience leading art, university, and multidisciplinary museums. Prior to joining ACG, she served as the Executive Director of Fruitlands Museum and Fuller Craft Museum. Under her guidance, the Fuller Craft Museum was successfully reaccredited by the American Alliance of Museums and completed facilities and capital campaign planning. She revitalized the museum's development program and donor relation strategies as well as eliminated a multi-year deficit pattern while increasing the organization's level of collections development, programming, and partnership support. Ms. Lynch-McWhite has served as the chair of the Roanoke City Arts Commission and as a national grant reviewer for the National Endowment for the Arts and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. She was also a 2006 participant in the Getty Center's Museum Leadership Institute. She currently serves as a board member of the New England Museum Association and the Haystack School of Crafts. She is American Alliance of Museums' Leadership and Management Network Chairperson and a member of its Diversity Professional Network. Ms. Lynch-McWhite graduated Magna Cum Laude from Florida A&M University and holds a master of fine arts degree from Columbia College, Chicago.

**Contact ACG for more information on how we can support
your organization's inclusion, diversity, equity, and access efforts.**

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