



CREATIVE ECONOMY REPORT 2019

As one of the fastest growing cities and metropolitan areas in the country, Seattle is facing new but ever-changing opportunities and challenges. Part of the city's growth includes a robust creative economy, but with growth has also come severe disparities. To gauge these disparities, the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture engaged a team from the Evans Student Consulting Lab to conduct mixed-method research on Seattle's creative economy through a race and equity lens. **In order to fulfill this request we proposed the following research questions to guide our project:**

1. What does the creative economy currently look like in Seattle?
2. What can quantitative and qualitative data illuminate about how and why disparities manifest racially, regionally, and occupationally?
3. How can ARTS recommend and/or implement organizational and city-wide policies that help mitigate disparities and create a more equitable creative economy?

Based on a review of existing knowledge through case studies, we found that while most of these studies incorporate a race and equity focus to some extent, they focus primarily on quantitative data, not contextualizing it by incorporating the lived experiences of creatives.

Recognizing that personal narrative and a rigorous race and equity framework were missing from the existing research, we developed a research process where race and equity was centered throughout our methodology. Therefore, with the data from the Creative Vitality Index (CVI)—a dataset about creative occupations—stakeholder and key informants interviews, and a citywide survey, **we found the following themes to be most relevant to creatives of color:**

- **Structural barriers:** Creatives of color bear the same burden of structural inequities that many people of color in Seattle face. Racism, displacement, and access to housing, among others, are larger barriers to entry in the creative economy.
- **Underrepresentation:** Artists and creatives of color are underrepresented across the creative economy. Underrepresentation in most creative occupations, predominantly White leadership at major arts institutions, and lack of visibility in art itself can all inhibit participation in the creative economy for people of color.
- **Affordability and Wages:** Many creatives, and especially creatives of color, cannot afford to live in Seattle and participate in the local creative economy. Without a living wage, creatives do not have the financial resources, capacity, or time to devote to their discipline.
- **Employment and Gig Economy:** Creatives tend to have more unconventional forms of employment in order to sustain their creative practice—often holding multiple jobs to make ends meet and often function within the gig economy. Therefore, they often lack the infrastructure and support they need, such as benefits and income stability.
- **Lack of Opportunity:** Creatives of color have less access to opportunity to participate fully and sustainably in the creative economy. Lack of funding and financial resources, lack of professional networks, development and



mentorship, and lack of arts education are major barriers to thriving in an artistic practice.

- **Undervaluing Art Created by People of Color:** Creatives of color have to operate within the White dominant culture of Seattle where an emphasis on “fine art” has served as a barrier to people of color centered and created art. This often looks like lower wages for creatives of color, less physical spaces and platforms for creatives of color to showcase their work, and disparities in funding and grants.
- **Career Pathways:** Creative occupations do not always have traditional pathways, and thus participation in the creative economy is often not considered a viable career option. Without arts education, paid internships, and a cultural value on arts careers, it can be challenging for individuals to participate in the creative economy.

This report lays out policy options to mitigate racial disparities in the creative economy:

Recommendations for ARTS:

1. **Gig-Focused Job Bank:** Create, curate, and administer a job-finding platform geared towards creative gig work.
2. **Creative Support Workshops:** Offer a series of workshops so that ARTS can help facilitate access to opportunities, competitive skills, and revenue streams that creatives of color need.
3. **ARTS-Funded Internships:** Implement a program where arts organizations can apply for funding to host a paid intern at their organization.
4. **Dedicated POC Art Grant Program:** Create a grant program specifically for artists of color, where people of color in the community have the decision-making power.
5. **Creative Residencies Program with the City of Seattle:** Develop a creative residency program that matches creatives with city agencies to create a project aligned with the agencies’ goals and utilize the creatives’ skillset.

Recommendations for City-Level Policies:

6. **Supplemental Basic Income for Low-Earning Artists:** Recommend that the city create a subsidy program that provides financial support to artists making less than minimum wage from their creative discipline.
7. **Income-Based Rent Subsidies for Creatives:** Recommend that the city implement tiered rent subsidies for creatives where the lowest earning creatives receive the highest amount of subsidy.
8. **Decreasing Creatives’ Tax Burden:** Recommend that the city create a series of fiscal incentives to increase the production of cultural goods and services from creatives of color.
9. **City Funding for an Artist-Focused Workers’ Center:** Recommend that the Seattle Office of Labor Standards designate funding for artist-focused organizations through their Community Outreach and Education Fund to incentivize the creation of a workers’ center run by and for artists.