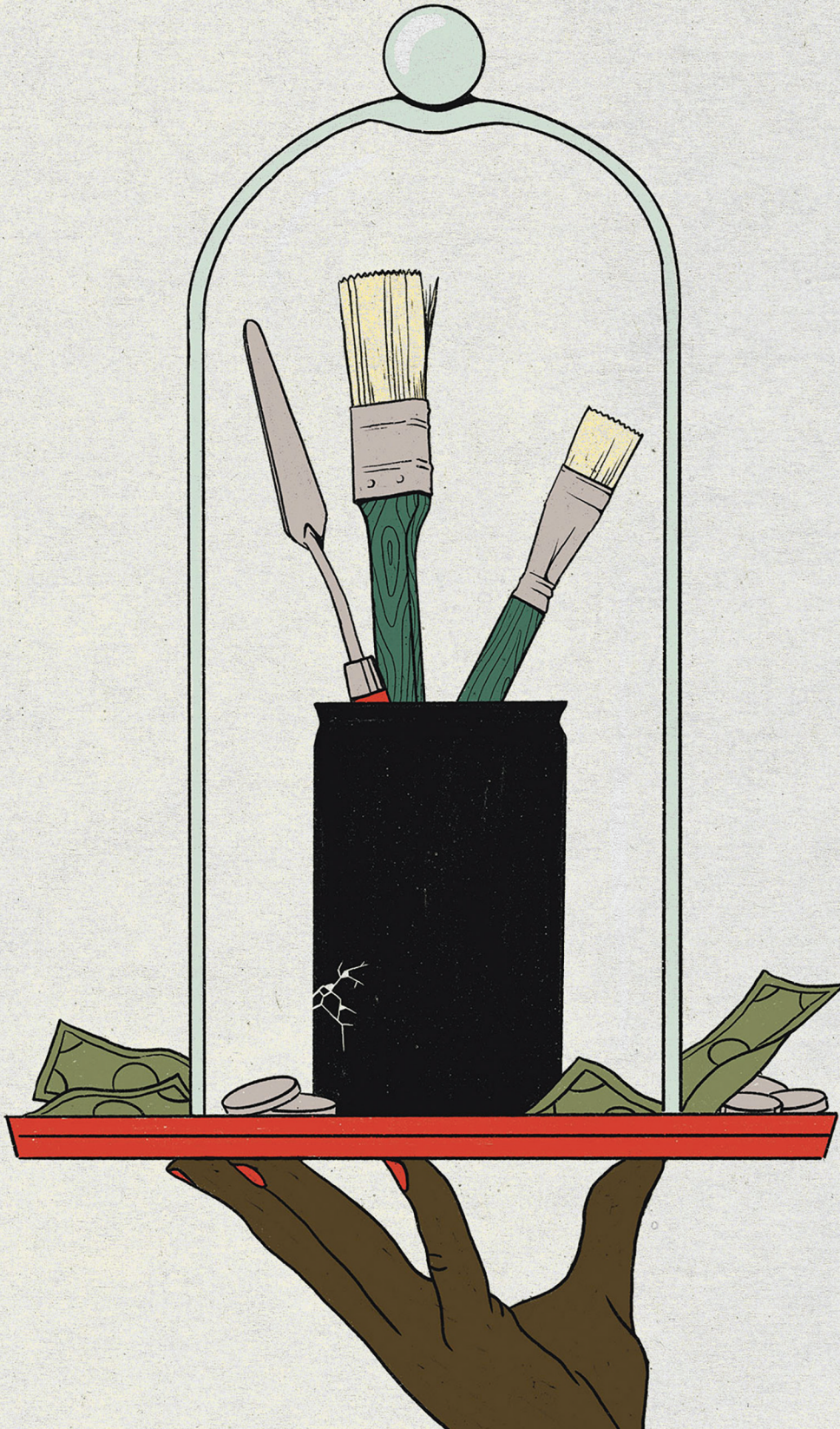
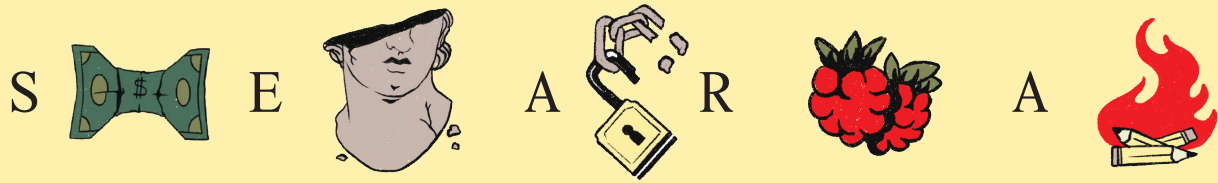


ARTSTATUS

Executive Summary





Research Team

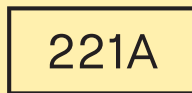


Joseph Ssendikaddiwa



Natasha Mhuriro

Supported by



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Sector Equity for Anti-Racism in the Arts (SEARA) is a movement of Black, Indigenous, and racialized (BIPOC) BC-based artists and cultural workers to redistribute resources through data-driven action. SEARA is a malleable entity, continuously shaping itself in response to the emergent conditions defined by the needs of our communities. Catalyzed by the Black Lives Matter and Land Back movements in 2020, SEARA originally formed as a consortium of arts service organizations to address the rise in public demand for the arts, culture and heritage sector to address systemic racism. Prompting institutions to move beyond performative activism towards investing in actionable change, SEARA launched the POWERSHARE campaign to raise and distribute emergency funds for Black, Indigenous and racialized (BIPOC) artists in BC during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With \$319K in microgrants delivered to 285 applicants, POWERSHARE revealed a persisting gap in research that is instrumental to policy development addressing racial equity. With funding from the Law Foundation of BC, and 221A's fiscal sponsorship, SEARA responded to this gap with its second initiative: ARTSTATUS.

This seminal research presents findings from a mixed-methods study examining equity, access, representation, and systemic barriers within BC's arts, culture, and heritage sector. The study integrates quantitative survey data from funding and programming organizations, independent artists, people working within the sector, and other stakeholders, with qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with BIPOC artists and cultural workers.

While artists are actively participating in funding and programming systems, these data sources demonstrate that existing structures continue to reproduce inequities, particularly for BIPOC artists. The study reveals a sector characterized by high engagement but uneven access, increased visibility without corresponding power, and strong equity commitments that are inconsistently realized in practice.

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Acronyms

ACH

Arts, Culture and Heritage

BC

British Columbia

BIPOC

Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour

CASH

Cultural, Accessibility, Safety, and Humility

EDI

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

JEDI

Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

NDA

Non-Disclosure Agreement

OLMC

Official Language Minority Communities

PAC

Performing Arts Category
(funding classification)

SEARA

Sector Equity for Anti-Racism in the Arts

Background

In British Columbia (BC), the arts, culture, and heritage sector occupies a powerful position in public life. It shapes how histories are told, whose stories are valued, and which communities are recognized as **cultural producers** rather than **cultural subjects**. With significant public investment and economic growth, the sector holds not only symbolic influence but material power. These conditions make questions of race, governance, and resource allocation central rather than peripheral to understanding how the sector functions.

How does power operate?

Despite critical work in anti-racism and equity, BC continues to reflect persistent racial hierarchies in leadership, decision making, and access. This is engineered through policies, funding criteria, professional norms, and organizational cultures that shape inclusion/exclusion. The question facing BC's ACH sector is not whether equity is irrelevant, but rather, how voice and talent are marginalized for the sake of representation without participation in high-level decision making.

Solution-adjacent work is about understanding whose experiences continue to fall outside what policy recognizes as evidence. This change cannot happen if leadership's vision of intersectionality is limited to representation over inclusion. For BIPOC artists and cultural workers, the gap between public commitments to equity and everyday institutional practice remains wide, and extended by the absence of race-based demographic data.

British Columbia's Anti-Racism Data Act enables the collection and use of disaggregated race-based data to identify and address systemic racism, while establishing safeguards related to data governance, privacy, and community trust. Despite this shift, practices related to race-based data collection in the ACH sector remain inconsistent, particularly among organizations that operate at arm's length from the government while relying on public funding.

Without such data, inequities are easily reframed as anecdotal, individual, or incidental. Structural patterns remain difficult to name, and responsibility for change is frequently displaced onto individuals rather than institutions. This absence is not neutral. It reflects a long-standing reluctance to acknowledge how racism operates through institutional systems rather than individual intentions.

What does this research do?

In recent years, EDI has become increasingly visible within the sector. Organizations have issued public statements, adopted equity language, and developed internal frameworks intended to address racial inequities. While these commitments signal recognition of systemic harm, they have not consistently translated into sustained shifts in power and representation. Equity **discourse** has often expanded faster than the structures responsible for implementing change.

Grounded in the knowledge and experiences of those most affected, this research seeks to move beyond symbolic inclusion toward a clearer understanding of how racial power operates across the sector. Through a mixed methods approach, this study analyses demographic representation, equity policies, funding practices, and lived experiences of BIPOC individuals working within and alongside ACH and grant-making organizations. By centering both institutional data and participant narratives equally, the study treats racial inequity as a structural condition shaped by history, policy, and governance. Its purpose is to document broader institutional patterns, identify barriers, and support collective efforts toward accountability, transformation, and justice in BC's cultural landscape.

The report concludes with evidence-informed policy implications and recommendations aimed at strengthening race-based data governance, embedding equity within decision-making structures, and supporting more accountable funding and governance practices. As we present

these findings, please note that this report foregrounds affect, process, and uncertainty as legitimate forms of inquiry.

Objectives and Outcomes

How do race-based equity policies, funding practices, and institutional outcomes within grant-making ACHS organizations in British Columbia evolve?

To address this question, the study advances several interrelated objectives:

- 1. Identify** patterns of representation across organizational roles, with particular attention to leadership and decision-making positions.
- 2. Analyze** how equity is articulated in formal policies as well as how these commitments are understood, operationalized, and sustained over time.
- 3. Capture** how participants experience organizational culture, inclusion, career advancement, and interactions with equity initiatives. This objective recognizes lived experience as a critical form of knowledge
- 4. Generate** evidence-informed recommendations to support policy development and organizational change.

Study Design

The degree to which you're actually able to operate authentically through your lived experience always has to be convenient for organizations rather than a real process of incorporating truly critical voices into office culture.

— Anonymous Participant

Research Goals

Towards the study's objectives, the research seeks to develop quantitative and qualitative findings and analysis on:

- The racial composition of staff and boards in organizations of interest;
- Organizational policies and public statements related to racial equity;
- Patterns in funding distribution and presentation statistics;
- Individual experiences of BIPOC artists, staff, and board members working in the sector.

Participants

1. Organizations serving BC with annual budgets of over \$2 million CAD.

This budgetary criteria identified a group of organizations with long-term influence in BC's ACH sector through sustained public funding

- **Arts, culture, and heritage organizations** engaged in public services, exhibition, presentation, education, and programming;
 - **Grantmaking organizations** including public funders, foundations, and community-based organizations.
2. Individuals working in the sector, including:
 - **Staff, board, and jury** members working in ACH and grantmaking organizations;
 - **Independent artists** working with ACH organizations and/or receiving funding.

Process

With ethics approval from the Veritas Independent Review Board, the multi-phased design of this study collected and verified quantitative and qualitative data from organizations and participants of interest. Specific research targets were identified, and the appropriate data collection systems and consent procedures were in place to ensure the safety and confidentiality of all participants.

Phase	Goals
1. Preliminary Research	Independently gather publicly available data from organizations of interest.
2. Secondary Research	Engage organizations for data validation and further resources.
3. Primary Research	Distribute a public survey to participants of interests, and conduct semi-structured interviews specifically with BIPOC participants.

What is happening at an organizational level?

We're beholden to the larger municipal machine. I feel like there's a lot of power concentrated in people that are already there, and maybe just stay there for a long time.

— Anonymous Participant

Engaging Organizations

This phase of study was designed to document and analyze racial representation, governance practices, and equity-related policies within grant-making organizations and publicly engaged ACH organizations in British Columbia. The primary focus was on the representation and experiences of Black, Indigenous, and racialized individuals across staffing, governance, and funding structures.

We developed an engagement process with an outreach lead who invited organizations to participate in the study by providing the scope of work, a confidentiality agreement, and a request for internal data to supplement and validate the study's preliminary research. 9 grantmaking organizations were requested to provide data between 2012-2024/25, three of which participated in the study. 21 ACH organizations were invited to provide data for 2024/25, seven of which participated.

Type	Data Requested	Data Provided by
Arts, Culture, and Heritage organizations	Racial equity assessments	4 organizations
	Exhibition and programming statistics	2 organizations
	Racial composition data for staff and/or boards	4 organizations
	EDI policies or public equity commitments	7 organizations
Grantmaking organizations	Funding statistics	3 organizations
	Racial composition data	2 organizations
	Racial equity assessments	2 organizations
	EDI policies	3 organizations

Foundational to this research is the examination of racial equity assessments conducted by organizations, with an emphasis on how these initiatives shape access for equity-deserving communities. This included a focus on:

- Organizational policies and practices;
- Funding and programming criteria;
- Strategic plans;
- Application and feedback mechanisms;
- Institutional relationships;
- Accountability measures.

Grantmaking Organizations

The study gathered data from three grantmaking organizations: federal, provincial, and municipal funders of the ACH sector. Across the three organizations, equity commitments are articulated through distinct policy architectures shaped by jurisdictional mandates and governance contexts. These differences highlight the **absence of a shared sector-wide model for operationalizing racial equity**, instead being governed differently across levels of public authority.

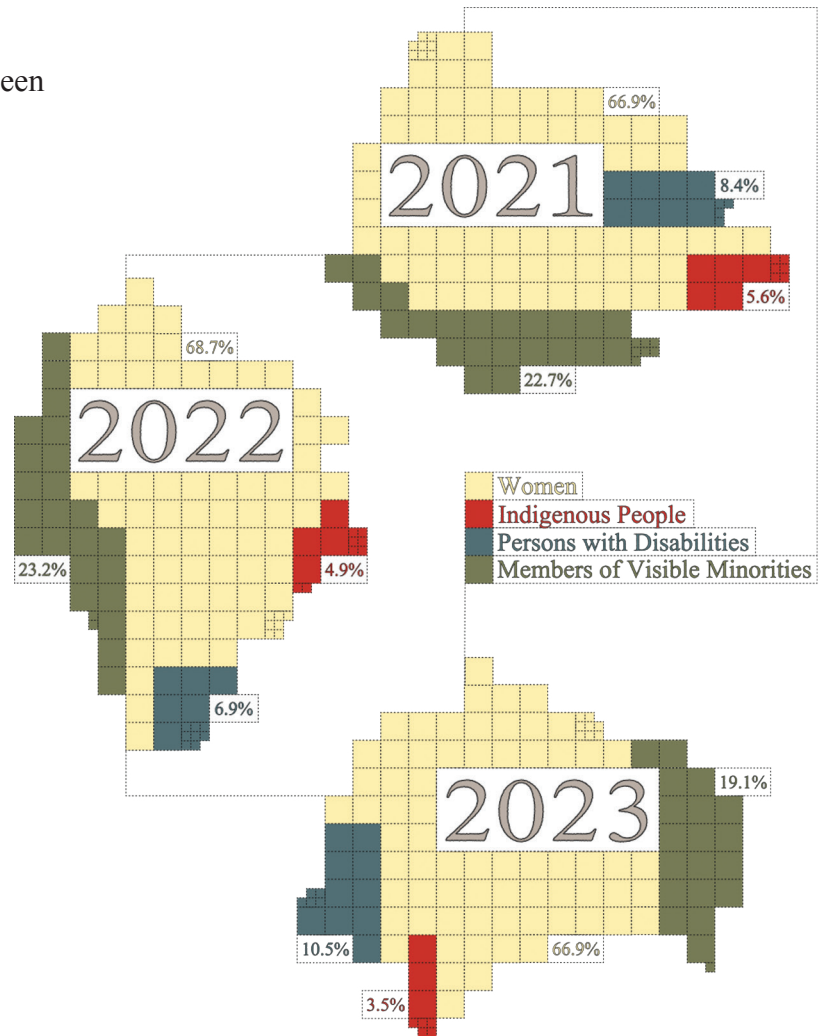
Federal funding: Across the period examined, BC consistently accounted for 15 -16% of total funding awarded through the federal program, generally comparable to, and in some years slightly higher than, the proportion of funding awarded to other provinces. This provides important context for understanding the scale and positioning of BC within national arts funding systems.

Provincial funding: With direct alignment to the geographic scope of the study, year-to-date funding data reveals the scale of demand placed on arts and culture funding programs. During the reporting period, total requests for funding exceeded \$15

million CAD, with approved funding delivered to **11%** (\$1.68 million CAD), with **60%** of the total application count (441) being proposed to the arts and culture stream. This data provides important context for qualitative findings related to precarity, access, and administrative burden.

Municipal funding: Data presented by this category reflects clear institutional constraints shaped by local policy priorities and governance structures. Faced with legislative restrictions towards the sharing of applicant/recipient demographic data, the study finds the absence of disaggregated data a barrier to the assessment of **proportionality, unmet demand, or differential access.** Read alongside findings in provincial and federal funding patterns, municipal data points to a funding environment characterized by **fragmented authority, uneven transparency, and cumulative administrative demands.**

Grantmaking Organization A:
Representation of Designated Groups between
2021 and 2023.



Quantitative findings from Organization A point to varying representation outcomes across groups, suggesting that **progress in equity is not uniform, and may be influenced by both internal practices and broader labour market dynamics.** In the absence of comparable data for 2021-2022 in other organizations, this analysis focuses on internal changes rather than alignment with external benchmarks.

Representation of Indigenous people remains low and declines over time, a trend which stands in tension with the emphasis placed on the inclusion of Indigenous people within Canadian public policy frameworks. The downward shift raises questions about recruitment and retention practices, as well as the extent to which public commitments to reconciliation are reflected in workforce outcomes.

Representation among members of visible minority groups shows greater variability. Fluctuations of this kind are reflected in federal employer reporting, where representation for visible minorities can change from year to year due to turnover, hiring patterns, and labour market conditions. This shift in representation occurs against the backdrop of heightened public attention to systemic racism post-2020, when Canadian institutions articulated (or renewed) their commitments to EDI.

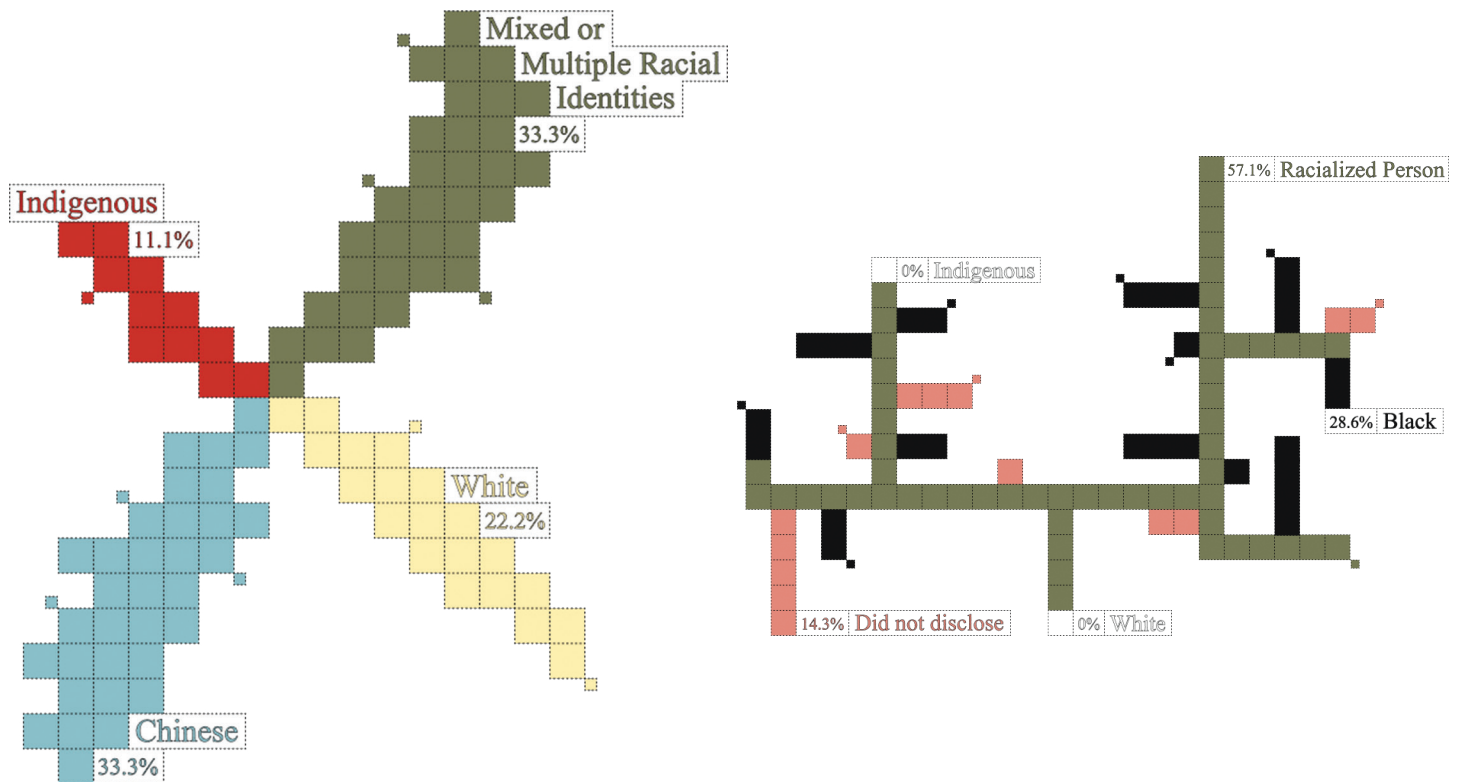
While these findings do not allow for causal conclusions, **the timing highlights the importance of examining representation trends over multiple years.**

Arts, Culture, and Heritage Organizations

There's this expectation that if you're the one Black person in the room, you're automatically responsible for shaping how equity work happens

— Anonymous Participant

ACH Organization A: Representation of leadership staff (left) and board members (right) in 2024.

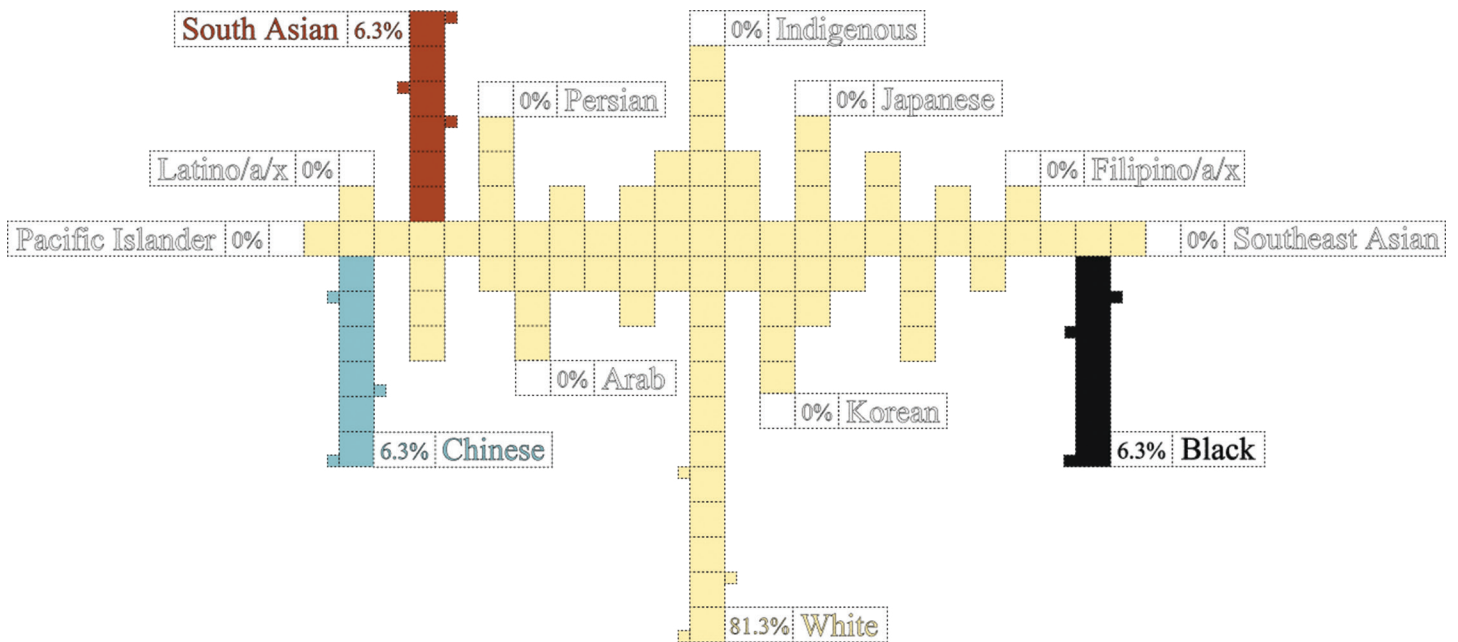
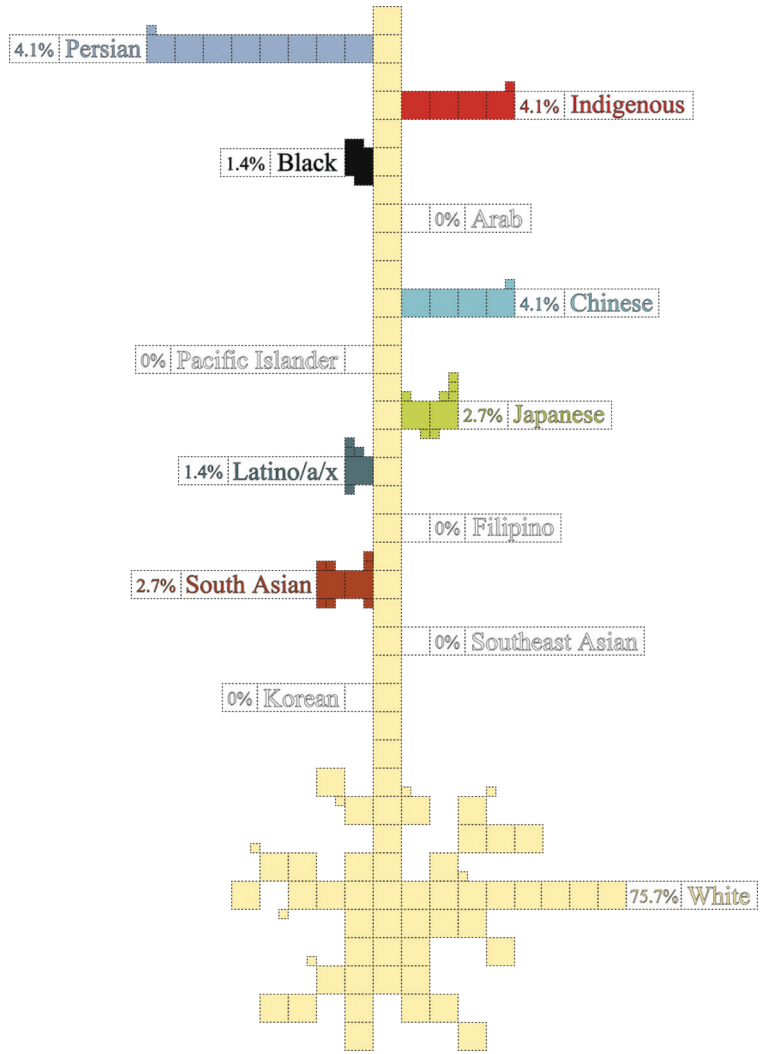


Staff and Board Demographics

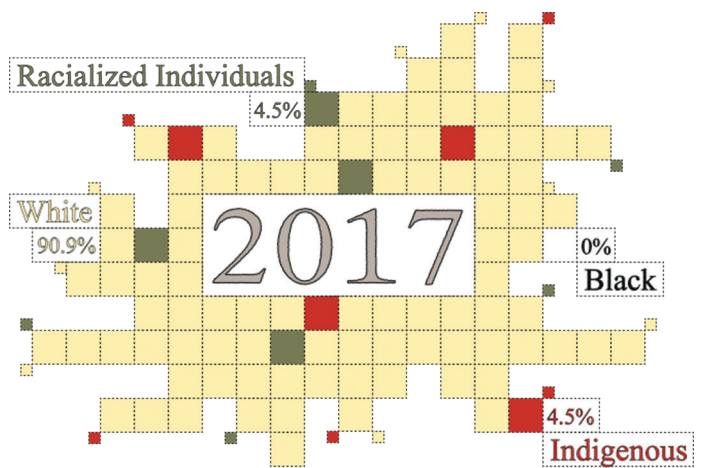
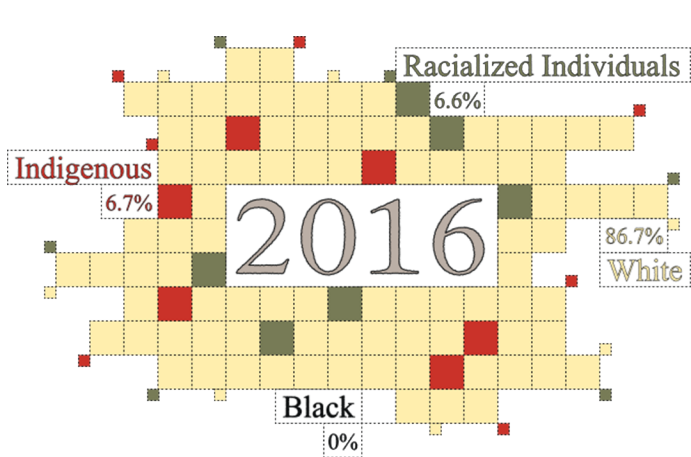
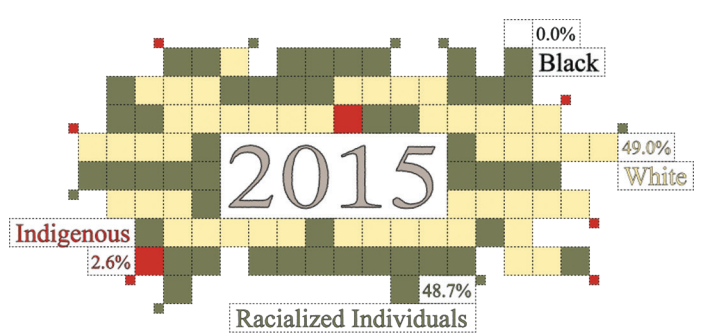
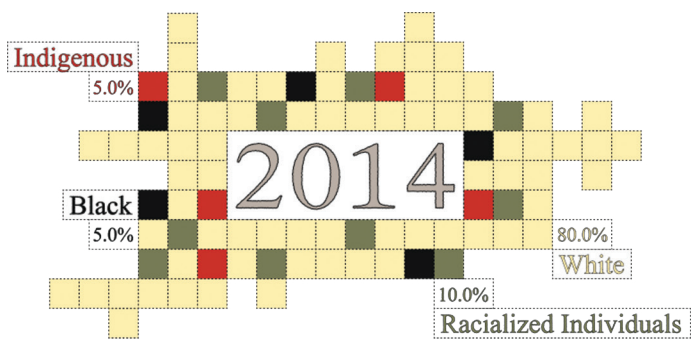
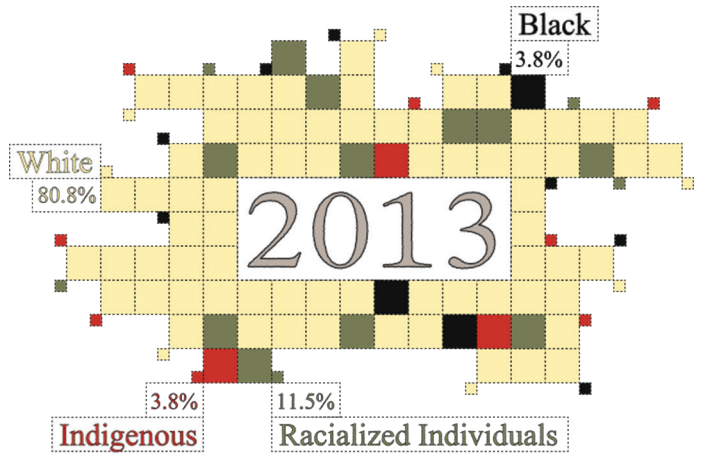
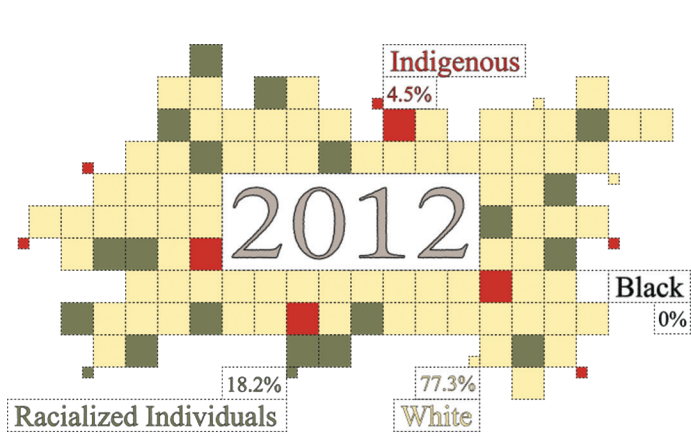
Four ACH organizations provided data that could be included in the analysis. This data is not uniform, reflecting differences in when organizations began collecting demographic information, the purposes for which the data was gathered, and the internal capacity to sustain consistent reporting over time. Certain organizations provided workforce-wide employee data, while others provided information limited to leadership or senior staff. These limitations shape where caution is required in interpretation.

As such, the following data sets are presented on an organization-by-organization basis, as **differences in reporting approaches limit comparability and risk obscuring meaningful context.**

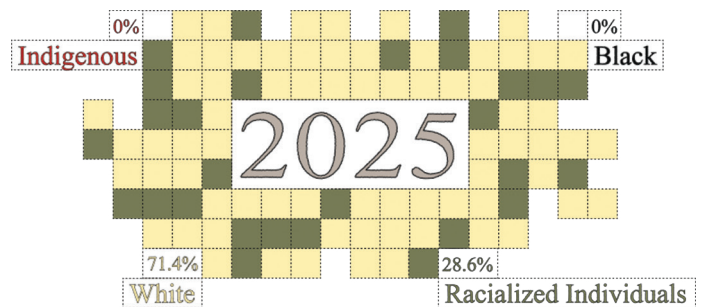
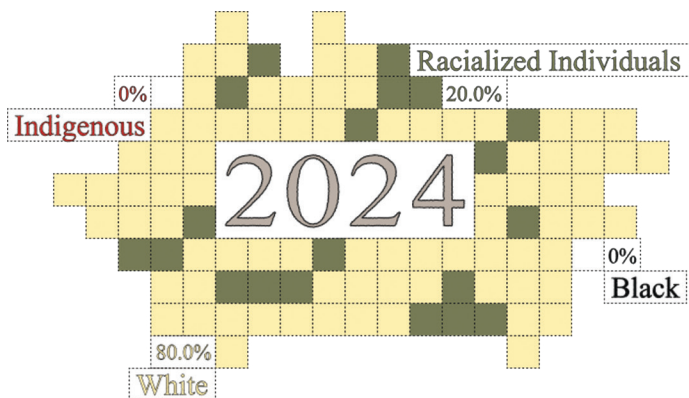
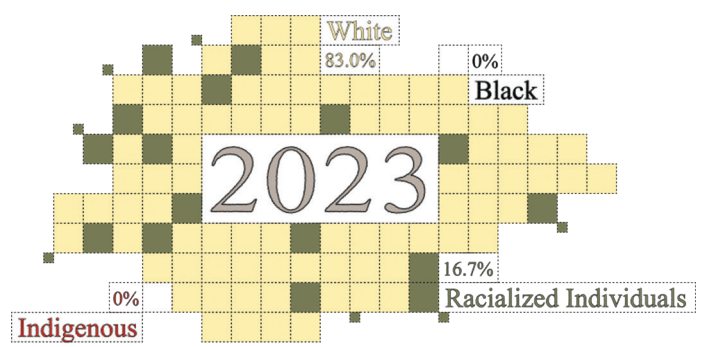
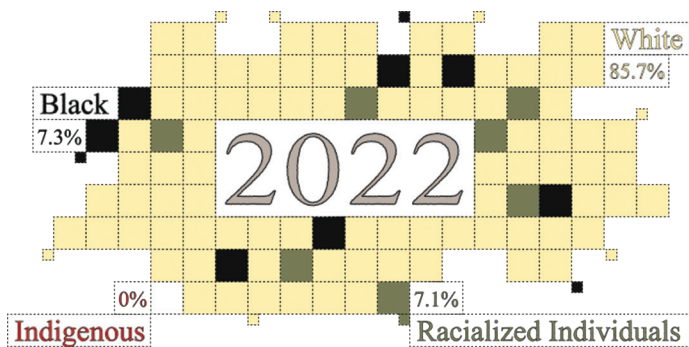
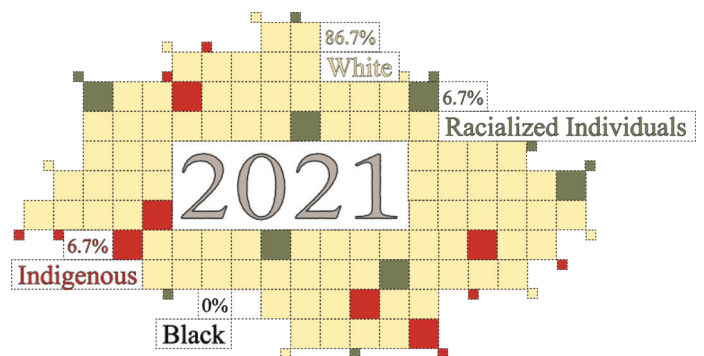
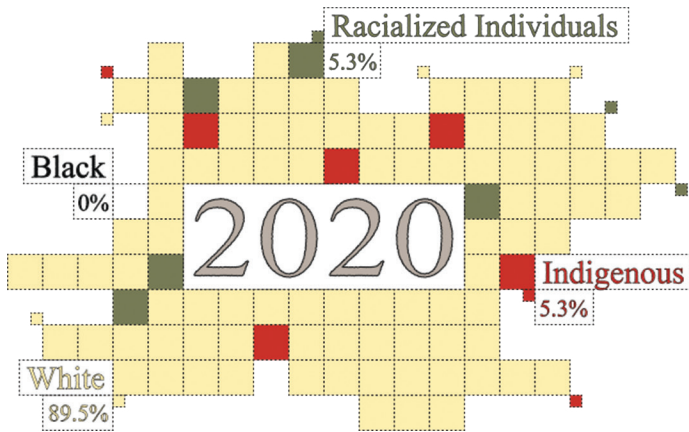
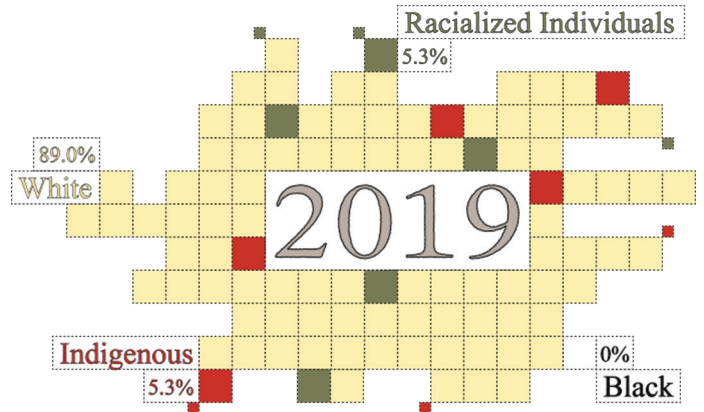
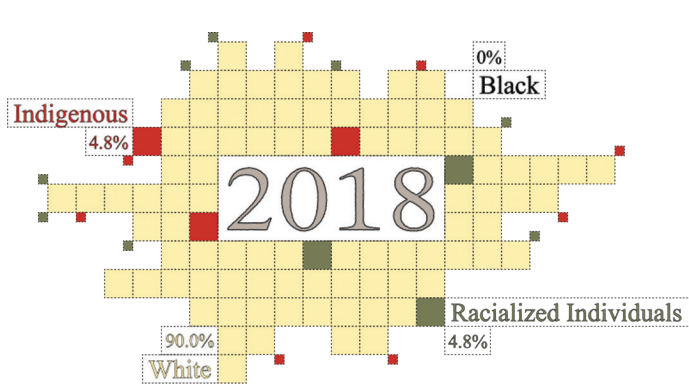
ACH Organization B: Representation of staff (right) and board members (bottom) from 2022 to 2025.



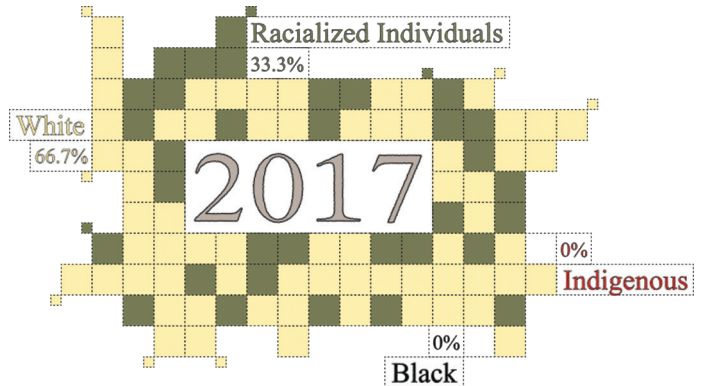
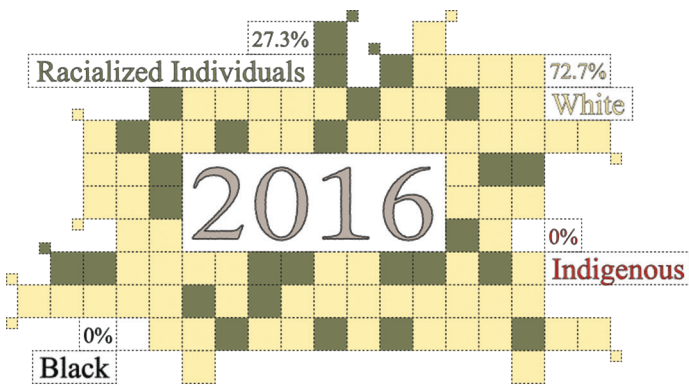
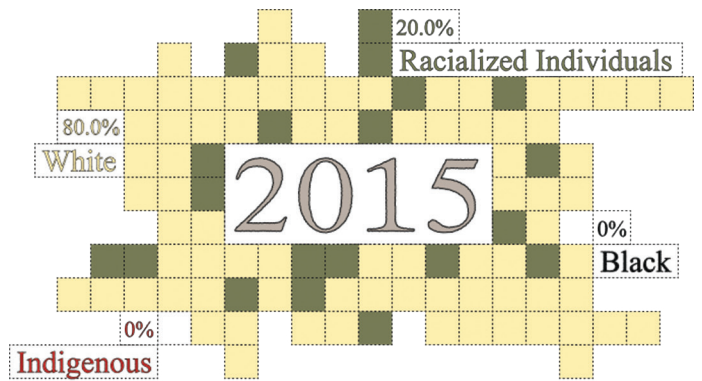
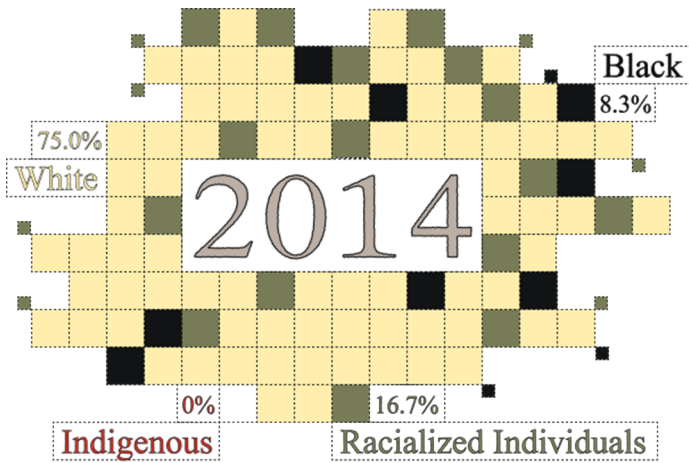
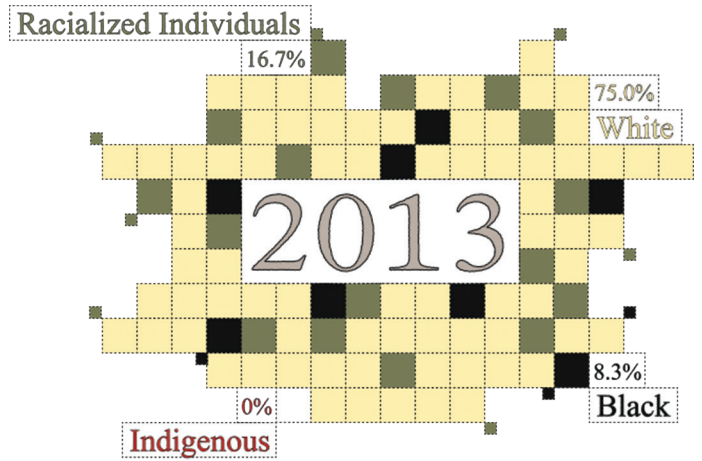
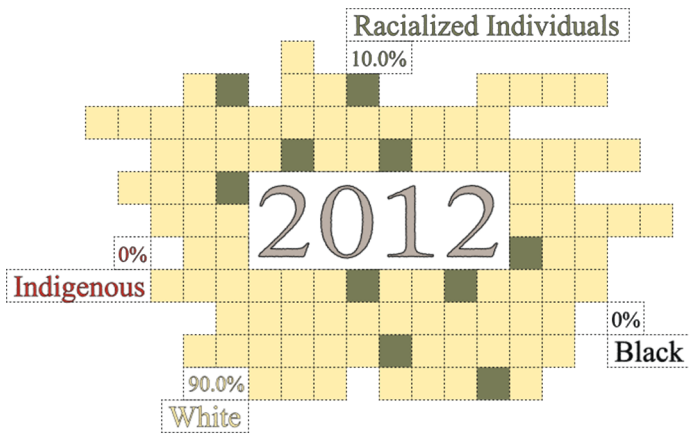
ACH Organization C: Representation of staff from 2012 to 2025



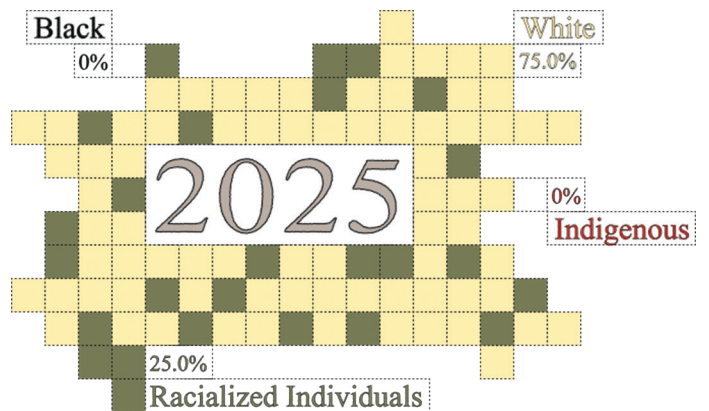
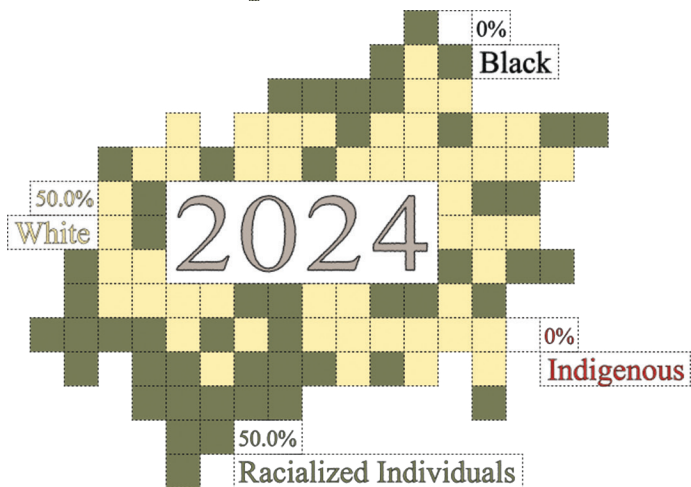
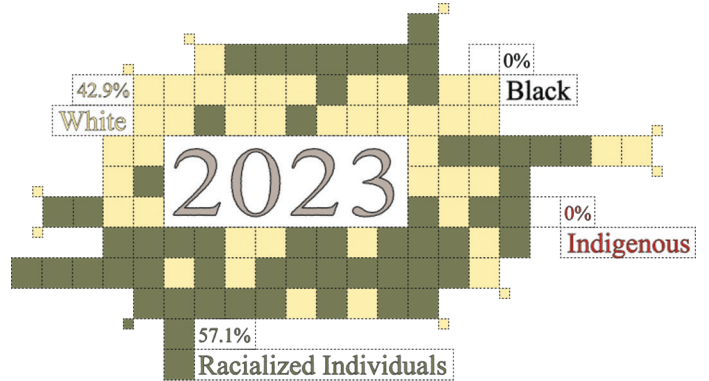
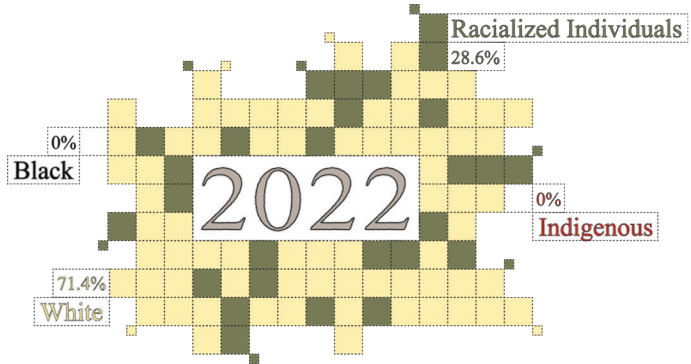
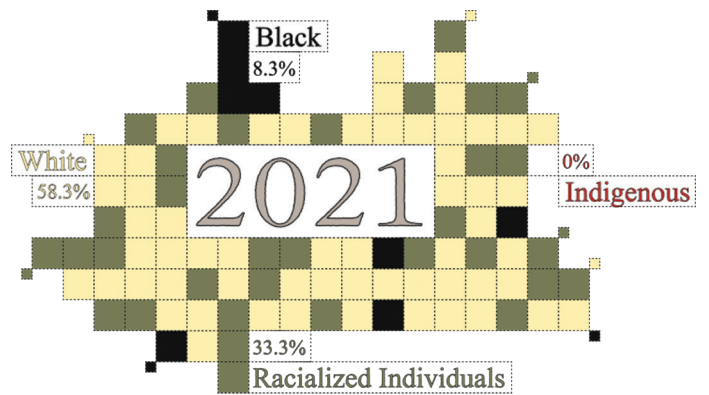
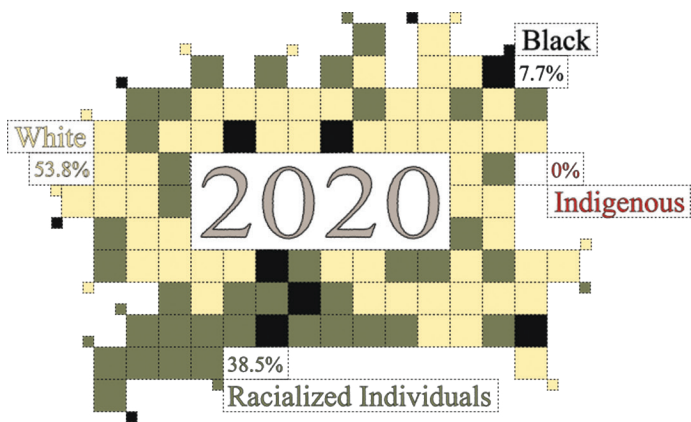
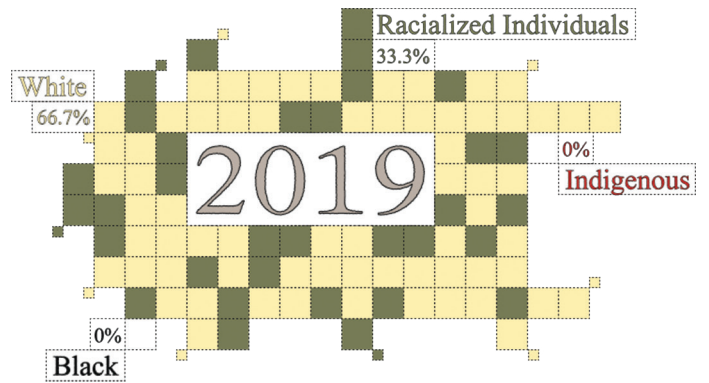
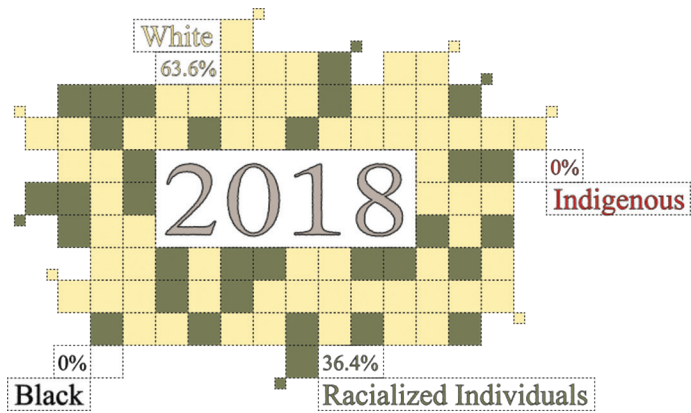
ACH Organization C: Representation of staff from 2012 to 2025.



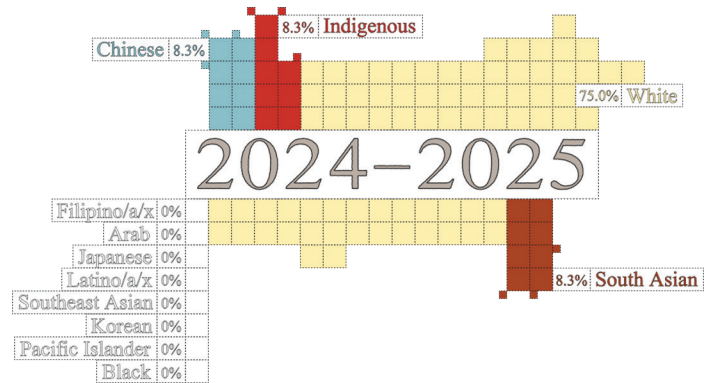
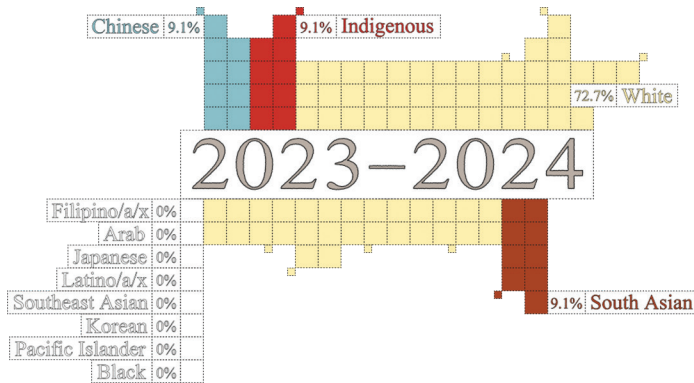
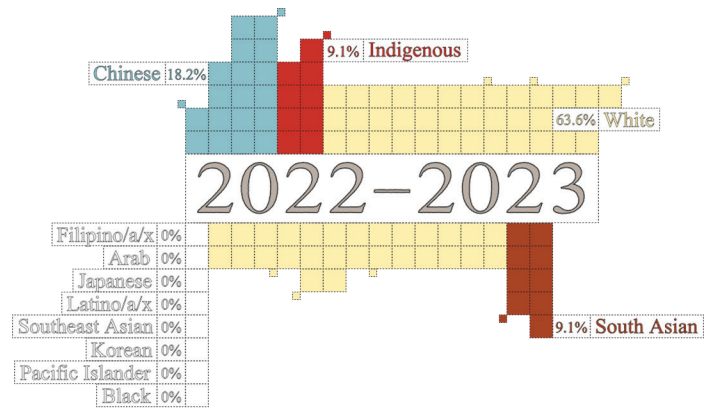
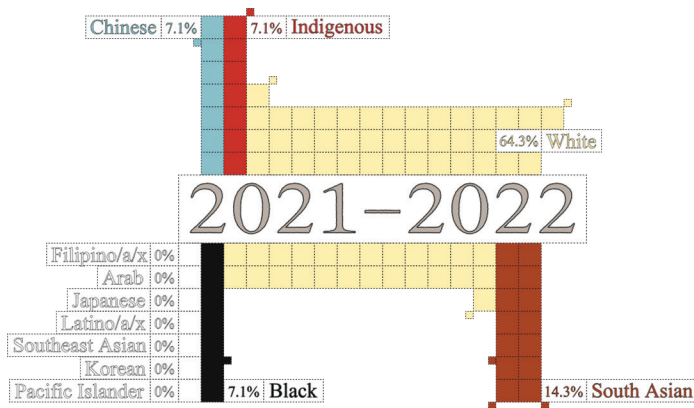
ACH Organization C: Representation of Board Members from 2012 to 2025



ACH Organization C: Representation of Board Members from 2012 to 2025



ACH Organization D: Representation of board members from 2021 to 2025



What do these findings reveal about organizational power?

Staff and board-level findings across grantmaking and ACH organizations reveal patterns of representation that are uneven, context-dependent, and shaped by institutional practice rather than steady progression. While the data provided vary considerably in scope, structure, and level of disaggregation, a consistent feature across organizations is the centrality of White representation within the labour and governance levels. The key findings of our analysis of these representational discrepancies are:

- Even where racialized representation increases, **it does so within the boundaries that leave core decision-making power largely intact;**
- As spaces where authority is produced, knowledge is legitimized, and organizational direction is set, **boards are sites of uneven and incomplete power distribution.**
- Varied approaches to data collection shows that while demographics of racialized staff and board members is visible in some contexts, **disaggregated data reveals that Indigenous and Black staff remain underrepresented, intermittently represented, or absent altogether.**

Programming Demographics

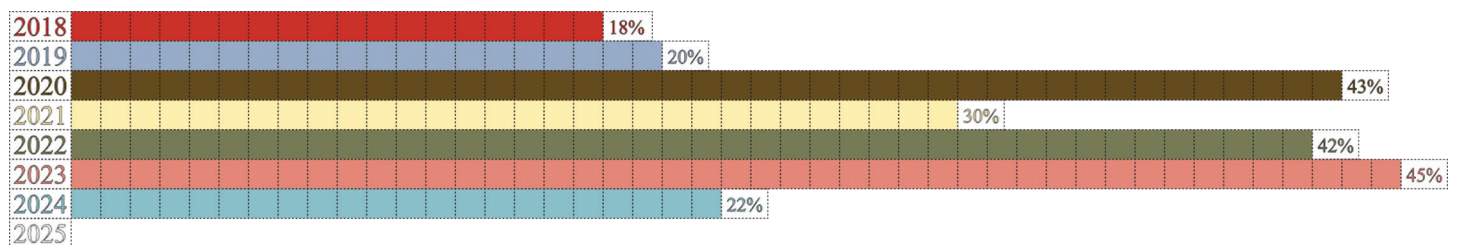
I don't want my work to be about who I know, or what I look like, I just want my work to be, because my work is good

— Anonymous Participant

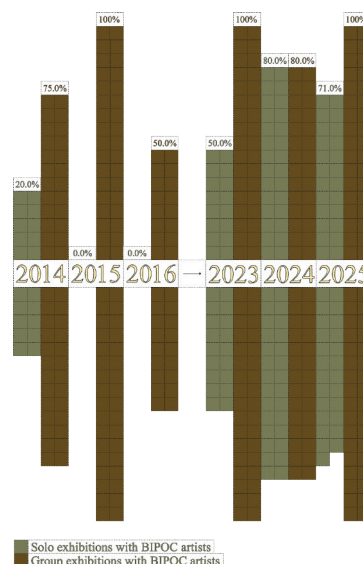
Exhibitions are not neutral sites of display. In the ACH sector, they function as spaces where **cultural value is assigned, visibility is produced, and legitimacy is conferred**. Decisions about who is programmed, whose work is showcased, and which narratives are centred, shape not only public perception but also artists' access to professional opportunities, funding, and longer-term career sustainability. For BIPOC artists, these opportunities are closely tied to questions of equity, recognition, and structural access within the sector.

As part of this quantitative phase of study, only two ACH organizations were able to provide exhibition statistics. These data sets are presented on an organization-by-organization basis, and should be read as descriptive rather than representative of the sector as a whole.

ACH Organization C: Representation of BIPOC-led groups in programming from 2018 to 2025.



ACH Organization D: Representation of BIPOC artists in solo and group exhibitions from 2014 to 2016, and 2023 to 2025.



ACH Organization D: Representation of BIPOC artists in public programs in 2016 and 2024.

Program Type	2016 Events		2024 Events	
	BIPOC-led	Total Hosted	BIPOC-led	Total hosted
Children and Youth Programs	0	1	2	2
Community Arts Events	0	0	4	10
Live Performances/Readings	1	2	5	8
Film Screenings	1	3	4	5
Talks/Tours	1	8	9	12
Workshops	0	0	1	2

The contrast between the reported periods highlights how inclusion can shift from peripheral to central, but also how such shifts depend on sustained institutional commitment. Earlier reliance on group exhibitions as the primary site of inclusion reflects a common sector pattern, where racialized artists are present but not foregrounded. The later expansion into solo exhibitions signals a redistribution of visibility and symbolic capital, **albeit one that remains vulnerable to reversal.**

This analysis of organizational practices reveals both movement and constraint. On

one hand, organizations are collecting increasingly sophisticated data, extending equity considerations into procurement, staffing, and internal culture. On the other, staff reflections point to persistent gaps between measurement and material change. These findings align concerns raised in surveys and interviews with participants, particularly defining concerns around **performativity, uneven accountability, and the reliance on individual labour to sustain equity initiatives.** While these findings demonstrate an emerging infrastructure for equity measurement, they also highlight the limits of data collection in the absence of sustained structural transformation.

What are BIPOC artists and cultural workers expressing?

I do feel hopeful. I have my frustrations, obviously. But I think the fact that these conversations are happening at all means there's at least a possibility

— Anonymous Participant

A key element of this research is the analysis of individual experiences as evidence-based data. This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative research design using four online surveys to examine experience-narratives related to equity, representation, and access. The surveys were openly distributed using survey links disseminated broadly through social media platforms to maximize reach across diverse communities and geographic regions in BC. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and individuals were remunerated for their participation. At the end of each survey, respondents were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews for an additional honorarium, providing narrative-based data.

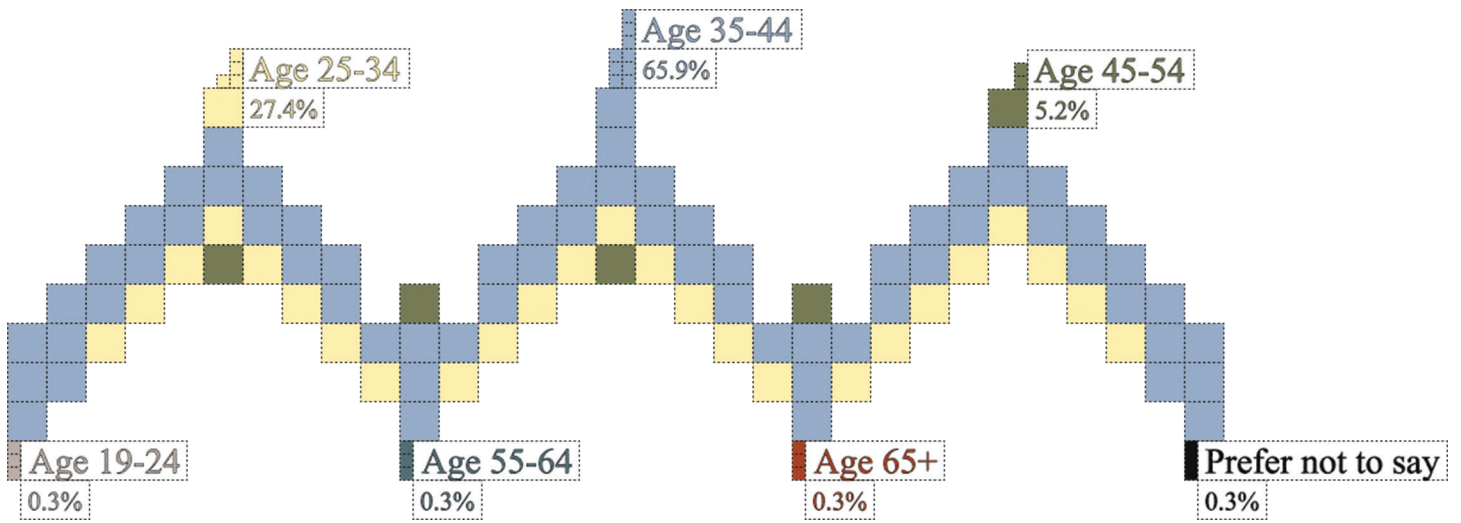
With this approach, we built an intersectional, community-informed analysis of institutional measures in equity, achieved by using qualitative and quantitative evidence as a valid means of assessing how systemic efforts mirror real-life impact. We designed four distinct survey categories to capture perspectives across multiple roles within the sector, including: independent artists; staff/board/jury members of ACH organizations and grantmaking organizations; and artists working within the sector.

We examined the experiences, perceptions, and structural barriers related to equity, representation and access. While each survey was tailored to the specific role of the respondent group, all instruments shared a core set of aligned themes, including:

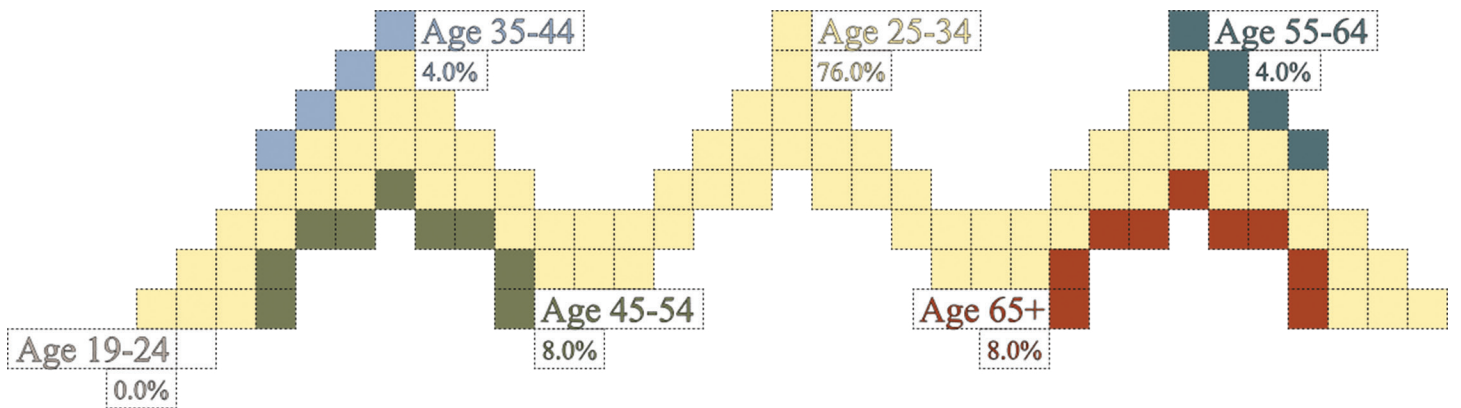
- Age groups, cultural backgrounds, and geographic placements;
- Timelines, disciplines and roles of practice in the sector;
- Perceptions of racial diversity;
- Barriers to public funding, self-funding and alternative financing;
- Effectiveness of policy in addressing racial equity;
- Perspectives on representation in programming, governance, and practice;
- Participant-driven recommendations on advancing equity;

Who did we survey?

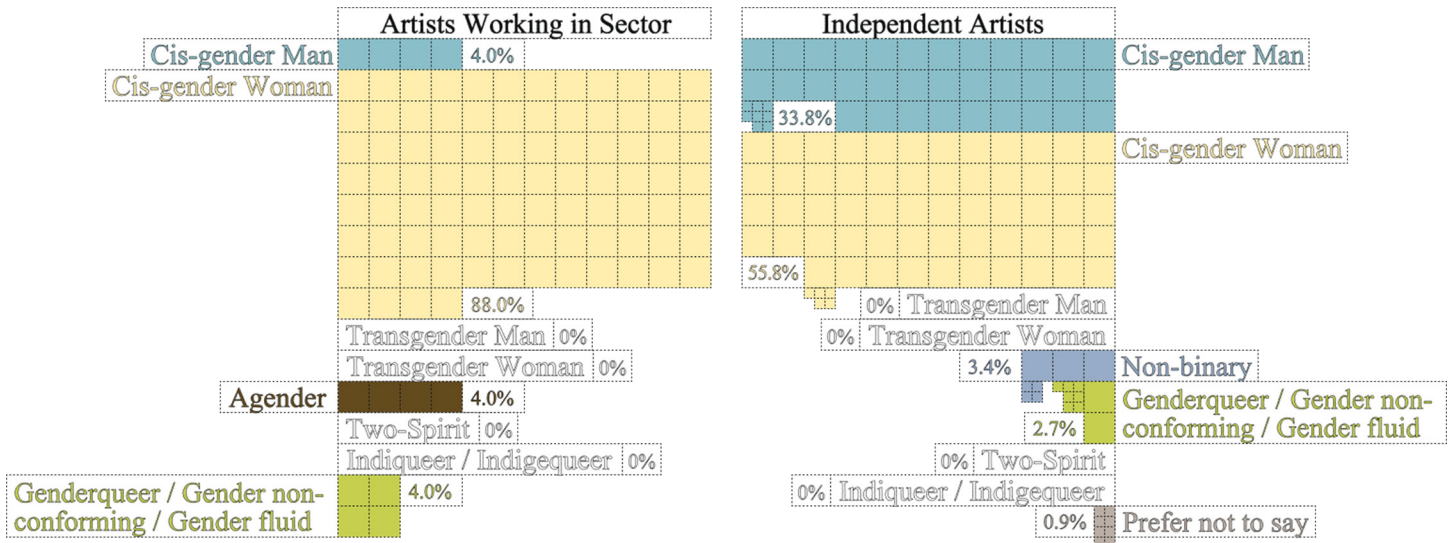
Independent artists



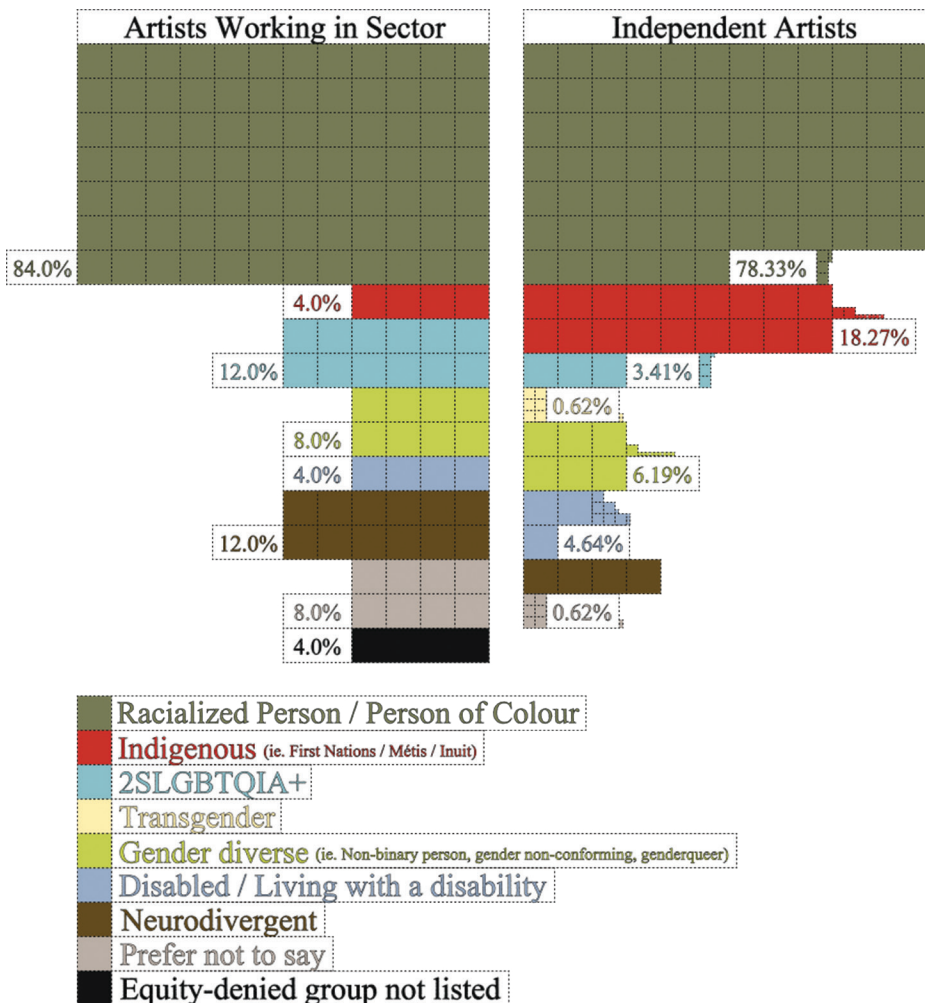
Artists working within the sector



Gender identities

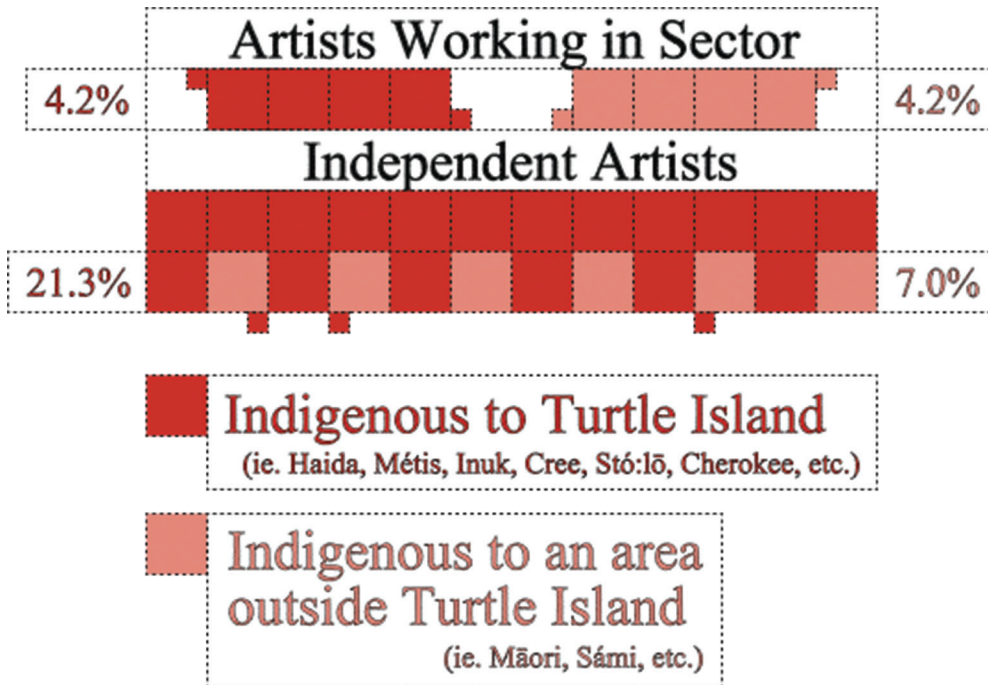


Equity deserving groups

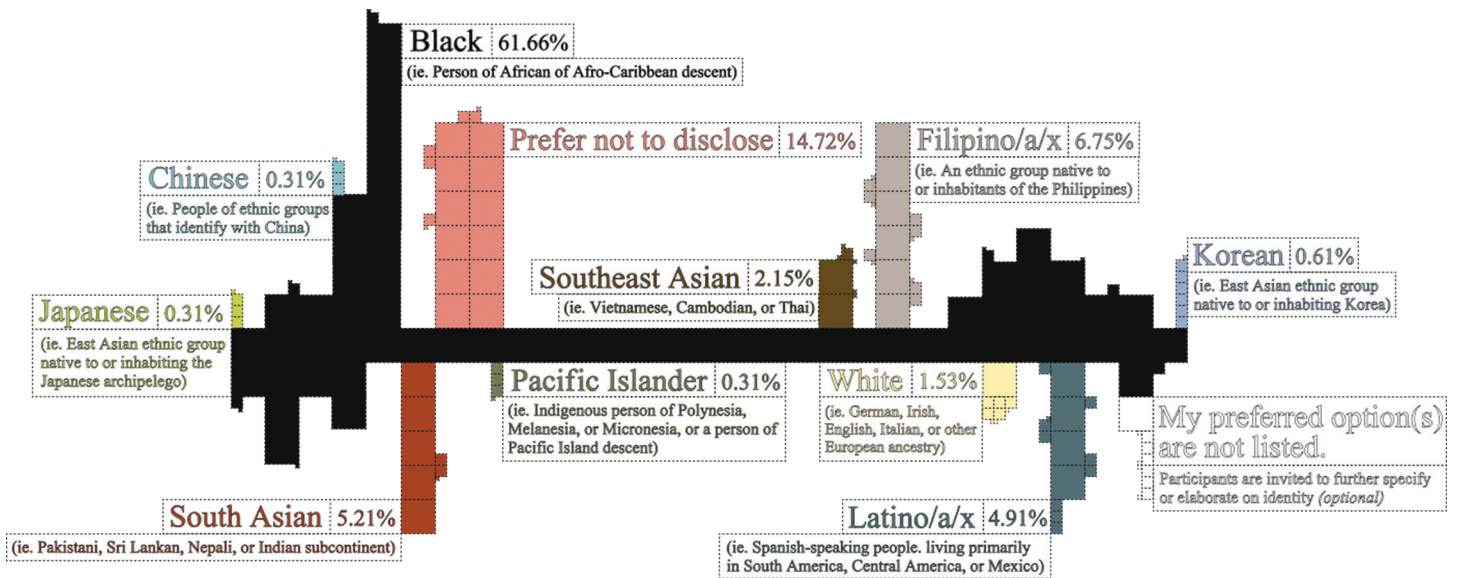


Racial identities

Indigenous respondents



Other respondents



What did the surveys show?

Participants articulated a clear set of priorities for improving equity, representation, and access across the sector.

1. Equitable distribution of funding

There was strong support for redirecting funding toward independent, grassroots, and community-based artists and organizations, rather than concentrating resources within large, established institutions. Artists called for smaller, flexible grants that support experimentation, collaboration, and year-round sustainability, particularly for racialized and immigrant artists.

2. Mentorship, network-building, and support for non-linear pathways

Many respondents highlighted the need for mentorship, especially from BIPOC curators and cultural workers as a critical pathway into funding and programming opportunities. Artists stressed that emerging does not always mean young, and called for support for artists entering the sector later in life, as well as those without access to established networks. Community-based learning and peer networks were widely described as primary sources of professional development.

3. Intersectional approaches to equity

Artists emphasized that equity initiatives must better account for the intersection of identity markers. Current funding models often fail to accommodate these realities through rigid timelines, insufficient compensation, or unrealistic expectations of unpaid labour.

4. Recognition of diverse roles and practices

Several respondents highlighted the marginalization of niche or hybrid artistic roles such as curators, producers, experience designers, and interdisciplinary practitioners, whose work is essential to cultural ecosystems but often poorly understood by funders. Calls were made to broaden definitions of artistic practice beyond “high art” categories and to better recognize culturally grounded, community-embedded, and heritage-based work.

5. Accountability and decision-making power

While respondents acknowledged the advocacy work of BIPOC staff within institutions, many noted that meaningful change is often constrained by hierarchical decision-making structures. There was concern that equity efforts rely too heavily on individual advocates rather than being embedded at senior leadership and governance levels.

Interviews

Some curators embrace my voice, but others focus mainly on the ‘diversity’ aspect rather than the artistic or conceptual depth of my projects.

— Anonymous Participant

Following participants’ completion of the survey, BIPOC participants were invited to in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This phase was designed to complement the quantitative analysis by centering lived experience and providing insight into how equity, access, and power are understood and navigated within the sector. In this phase, we interviewed 22 participants with diverse roles and levels of experience within the sector, including artists, administrators, curators, programmers, producers, and arts managers. Experience ranged from emerging practitioners to individuals with more than two decades of involvement in the sector. Participants also demonstrated a broad range of disciplines, including visual arts, performance, film, music, museums, heritage institutions, community arts, and grassroots cultural initiatives.

A key limitation of the qualitative phase is the relative absence of perspectives from senior leadership and board members. Because power within the sector is often concentrated at these levels, the lack of direct insight from these actors limits the ability to fully examine things.

Following a thematic analysis of the interviews, we identified the following key themes expressed by interviewees:

Personal Identity, Cultural Background & Professional Pathways

“Everything I’ve learned has been through community, not only the Filipino community, but through Black, Indigenous, and Chinese creative communities working in solidarity with us.”

— Anonymous Participant

- **Practice is not an individual or market-oriented endeavor:** Artistic work is frequently framed as an extension of lived experience, cultural lineage, migration histories, or Indigenous knowledge systems.
- **Limited access to formal training and institutional support:** Entry into the sector often does not follow conventional or institutionally sanctioned pathways. Instead, professional development occurred through community engagement, self-directed learning, or informal mentorship.
- **Delayed access to the sector:** Limited exposure, lack of representation, or late discovery of cultural identity impacts access to opportunities.

Representation, Visibility & Belonging

“I often feel like I’m supposed to list my trauma to improve my chances at getting funding. It feels deeply invasive.”

— Anonymous Participant

- **Visibility is conditional, episodic, or symbolic rather than structural:** The satisfaction of representational or reporting requirements rarely considers meaningful influence over programming, governance, or long-term strategy.
- **Uneven distribution of visibility and recognition across the sector:** Representation is not simply symbolic but materially connected to belonging, confidence, and career sustainability.
- **Comparisons with other provinces reveals a lack of visible cultural diversity in BC:** There is a low representation of BIPOC artists across training programs, institutions, and professional spaces, particularly in dance and contemporary performance.
- **Inclusion efforts are reactive rather than transformative:** Temporary increase in visibility following the Black Lives Matter movement reveals that these gains are uneven and fragile, with opportunities being conditional and time-limited. When dealing with these initiatives, there is an expectation to perform identity in ways which align with institutional narratives.

Organizational Culture & Internal EDI Practice

“A lot of equity work feels like representation-for-reporting, not representation-for-diversity-of-thought.”

— Anonymous Participant

- **EDI efforts are superficial, performative, or inconsistently applied:** There is a great deal of skepticism towards institutional commitments to EDI. While diversity language is increasingly common, it is not always accompanied by meaningful changes in hiring, governance, or resource allocation.
- **Tokenization and creative limitation:** Artists are valued for representational purposes, while artistic range and experimentation is implicitly discouraged by host institutions.
- **EDI labour is disproportionate:** These activities are often carried out by racialized staff and artists without corresponding authority.

Access to Programming, Participation & Barriers

“The eligibility criteria are too complicated. The deadlines are too short. Some of us don’t have mentors, or an arts degree, or networks to exploit.”

— Anonymous Participant

- **Cultural exclusion:** Programs are frequently designed without consideration of artistic traditions, community contexts, or lived realities, with artists expected to adapt to systems that were not built for them.
- **Access favours the privileged:** Training, auditions, and professional development emerge as a central barrier. Those with economic means, and cultural familiarity, are the most successful in achieving studio training, competition histories, and affiliation with recognized institutions.
- **Perceived inadequacy:** Exclusion not only operates through formal criteria, but through unspoken norms that signal who belongs. This narrowing of participation disproportionately excludes BIPOC immigrants and working-class artists.
- **Application processes:** Opacity, time-sensitivity, and the reliance on informal networks limits participation from artists who are balancing multiple jobs, or community obligations.
- **Community-based practice:** Interdisciplinary and culturally-specific work is disproportionately excluded from mainstream platforms, venues, and institutional programming.

Funding Systems, Eligibility & Structural Barriers

“The ‘high art’ world continues to be heavily funded over art forms created by BIPOC racialized folks.”

— Anonymous Participant

- **Navigating opaque systems:** Eligibility criteria is often misaligned with community-based and culturally specific practice. This inequity is evident in the pressure to gain institutional affiliations, a lack of feedback mechanisms, and unclear evaluation criteria. Granting systems are overly bureaucratic, competitive, and aligned with colonial standards of artistic value.
- **Reinforcing existing power dynamics:** Funding circulates among the same institutions and individuals, and those models inadvertently exclude the very communities they aim to support.
- **Saturation of administrative roles:** Perceptions of survival in the sector increasingly depend on proximity to power rather than artistic merit. Pivoting from artistic practice to cultural work is emblematic of a broader trend in which systemic conditions force talented practitioners out of creative work.
- **Single-category grouping:** BIPOC artists have distinct historical and structural realities. Their flattening obscures collective understanding of cultural intricacies, and contributes to inequitable outcomes.

Equity Initiatives, Networks & Community Collaboration

“Having BIPOC mentors is a mutually rewarding experience—these relationships build the basis for new programming, funding, and intergenerational opportunities.”

— Anonymous Participant

- **Network dependency:** Opportunities often circulate through informal relationships, limiting essential access to jobs, commissions, and visibility. This practice undermines equity-focused initiatives.
- **Collaborative models:** In the absence of equitable institutional investment, individuals rely on informal networks, peer support, and community-led initiatives that are rooted in transparency, reciprocity, and long-term inclusion. These initiatives are often under-resourced and rely on precarious or unpaid labor.

Power, Gatekeeping & Sector Structures

“Those who ultimately establish the structure still operate from colonial perspectives.”

— Anonymous Participant

- **Dominant norms:** Measures of legitimacy are controlled by a small number of institutions, funders, and decision-makers. These structures are reported to privilege particular aesthetics, training backgrounds, and social networks. While culturally rooted practices are undervalued or misunderstood, conforming to dominant norms comes at the expense of cultural integrity.

Emotional Labour, Safety & Well-being

“It’s exhausting having to explain your existence over and over just to be considered.”

— Anonymous Participant

- **Institutional isolation:** Organizational conditions of tokenization or dismissal, undermine well-being and contribute to burnout, disengagement, and exit from the sector.
- **Cultural safety:** Emotional labour is often extended to manage others’ discomfort, education, and advocacy, raising concerns about psychological and professional repercussions on BIPOC artists.

Access to Capacity-Building Opportunities

“It took me ten years to learn the language and landscape of grants.”

— Anonymous Participant

- **Structural disadvantage:** Those with a lack of institutional backing receive uneven access to capacity-building opportunities, such as grant-writing support, mentorship, leadership training, and systems literacy education.
- **Recognizing diversity:** There is a collective need for sustained relationship-based capacity-building that recognizes diverse entry points into the sector.

Structural Racism Within the Sector

“The system wasn’t built for us, and it shows in who gets funded and who doesn’t.”

— Anonymous Participant

- **Isolated equity initiatives:** Patterns of exclusion cannot be explained by individual bias, but are manifested through policies and expectations that disproportionately disadvantage BIPOC artists.
- **Systemic change:** Meaningful equity cannot be achieved through representational strategies, but requires a redistribution of power, resources, and decision-making authority.

Indigenous Relations

“Indigenous relations can’t be folded into diversity work—it requires Indigenous-led decision-making.”

— Anonymous Participant

- **Distinguishing Indigenous sovereignty from broader equity frameworks:** The sector must caution against pan-Indigenous or pan-BIPOC approaches, with required investment in Indigenous-led funding streams, governance structures, and decision-making processes.
- **Inclusion versus sustained impact:** Indigenous inclusion is often symbolic rather than grounded in sustained relationship-building, accountability and respect for sovereignty. Meaningful relations to Indigenous communities require moving beyond project-based engagement towards long-term partnerships, Indigenous-led decision-making, and recognition of ongoing colonial impacts within the sector.

Solutions and Recommendations

Looking forward, participants called for **systemic** rather than **symbolic** change. They emphasized the need for funding reforms that recognize diverse practices, transparent decision-making processes, and meaningful inclusion of marginalized voices in leadership. Early access to arts education, mentorship, and visible pathways into the sector were identified as critical for future generations.

Participants also highlighted the importance of sustained relationships between institutions and communities, built on trust and accountability. Rather than short-term consultations, they called for long-term collaboration that redistributes power and resources. Taken together, these findings suggest that advancing equity in British Columbia’s arts, culture, and heritage sector will require structural transformation grounded in **lived experience**, not solely **policy commitments**.

Policy Implications

1. Treat “neutral” survey responses as a warning sign, not a success metric.

Policy actions:

- Require public reporting on equity implementation beyond demographics (e.g., changes to criteria, jury training, feedback standards, accessibility testing).
- Add standardized sector indicators (timelines, feedback provided, applicant support utilization, accommodation use).

2. Make funding transparency a baseline requirement.

Policy actions:

- Publish success rates by stream, award ranges, and number of applications per pool each round.
- Require funders to provide minimum feedback standards (at least short, specific rationale aligned to criteria).
- Disclose jury composition (role, region, relevant expertise; with privacy safeguards).

3. Redesign application systems to reduce unpaid labour and accessibility burdens.

Policy actions:

- Extend timelines and introduce rolling/intake windows where feasible.
- Allow multiple submission formats (written, video, oral/storytelling), and provide translation and accessibility support. Introduce tiered application complexity (micro-grants with lightweight reporting; larger grants with scaled requirements).

4. Shift from project-only models to stability mechanisms.

Policy action:

- Expand multi-year funding and operating/core supports, including for community-rooted organizations.
- Create support for space/studio access and non-project expenses that directly affect sustainability.
- Implement minimum compensation guidelines and adjust grant caps to reflect venue and production inflation.

5. Redistribute decision-making power, not only representation in programming.

Policy actions:

- Require meaningful BIPOC representation in juror pools, program staff, and governance, with decision authority (not advisory-only roles).
- Introduce community accountability mechanisms, such as community review panels or governance seats for equity-deserving communities.
- Rotate juries and avoid repeatedly rehiring the same adjudicators.

6. Separate and tailored equity approaches, especially for Indigenous relations.

Policy actions

- Establish Indigenous-led funding streams with Indigenous governance and evaluation frameworks.

- Support long-term relationship models (not one-off consultations), including resourced partnership-building.

- Distinguish race-based equity programming from Indigenous sovereignty obligations in policy design.

7. Invest in capacity-building as infrastructure, not remediation.

Policy actions

- Fund sustained mentorship and clinics (including cohort models for repeat applicants).
- Support paid grant-writing assistance for artists without institutional access.
- Fund BIPOC-led intermediary organizations to deliver capacity supports with cultural safety.

8. Address emotional labour and cultural safety as sector outcomes.

Policy actions

- Adopt cultural safety and anti-ableism standards, including field-testing “accessible” processes with disabled artists.
- Build protections for artists raising concerns (clear complaint pathways; non-retaliation commitments).
- Value cultural labour explicitly (compensate community knowledge, relational work, and consultation time).

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The ARTSTATUS report compiles two years of sectoral research on racial equity in BC's arts, culture, and heritage landscape. Using quantitative and qualitative data gathered on sector policies, demographics, and experiences, this report develops community-informed recommendations on labour, governance, and economic policy.

Read the full report on www.seara.ca



Sector Equity^{for} Anti-Racism^{in the} Arts

SEARA is headquartered at 825 Pacific, which is situated between the burial grounds of Smeḿchús and the shores of Í7iyel'shn—on the unceded Indigenous territories belonging to the x^mməθk^wəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓xwú7mesh (Squamish) and sə1ilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

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