

# INDIANA ARTS COMMISSION (IAC)

## STATEWIDE LISTENING SESSION(S)

Presented by The Lead Change Project

### A PUSH FOR EQUITY

#### *We believe in Equitable Access to the Arts*

To create equitable access to the arts for all Indiana residents, the Indiana Arts Commission is committed to intentional and ongoing engagement with all communities in our state. We will listen, engage, and incorporate diverse people and perspectives into all policies, programs, and services. Being consistently mindful and inclusive of the needs, ideas, and cultural history of the people who call Indiana home, we value and embrace their artistic expression and support them as they advance the arts that reflect their values and traditions. We believe in embracing diversity, championing inclusion, practicing equity, and embodying both the geographic and cultural variety that form the fabric of Indiana.

### BACKDROP

The Indiana Arts Commission is looking to implement its newly adopted Cultural Equity Statement. As a precursor to the Commission's strategic planning initiative, the IAC is working to ensure input from a diverse group of stakeholders. The Statewide Listening Sessions are designed to capture the voice of communities traditionally disconnected from the social network and resources of the IAC. Correspondingly, the Listening Sessions connect IAC leadership to a diverse network of strong community leaders from various parts of the state.

The state was broken into 3-parts: Northern Indiana, Central Indiana, and Southern Indiana. Participants were recruited from a diverse cross-section of the community; they included: corporate professionals, community leaders, healthcare providers, social workers, students, veterans, educators, musicians, faith leaders and more.

Participants were surveyed in advance of the Session(s). Responses to the survey were incorporated into the facilitation of the Session(s) to increase efficiency and capture common themes. Sessions were recorded – with 100% participant consent – to ensure accuracy.

## COMMON THEMES

*“When the arts engage their communities, they create authentic and relevant work”*

***Access is a reoccurring theme*** in most discussions concerning equity and inclusion. Typically referring to [access to] capital, many Session participants referred to the increasing lack of opportunities for communities of color.

***The need for Capital & Resource*** is typically discussed within the context of ‘access.’ However, multiple participants cited the lack of awareness as a consistent barrier to seizing the resources and opportunities available.



More than 70%  
of people land  
jobs through  
networking.

***Social and Professional Network*** is often overlooked when discussing inequities. However, Social Capital ***is critically important and is typically linked to the lack of ‘access’*** plaguing underrepresented communities. As such, Session participants continuously highlighted the need for meaningful engagement with corporate and state leadership.

***Cultural Connection*** was referenced during the Listening Sessions ***thru multiple examples of cultural experiences and events*** unique to each respective community. The participants expressed the importance of supporting such events as they serve as the accumulative voice of that community. Often amplified thru art (music, visual art, etc.) cultural events become an entry point “for others to experience the current story the community is trying to tell.”

***The need for Communications Support*** was a repeated concern. Many Session participants noted their desire to engage more but cited how gaps in communication created a barrier for support. Often, the need for engagement exists outside of the traditional art lanes. Many of the Session participants were healthcare providers, social workers, veterans, and clergy. All of whom expressed an interest in how art supported their professional interests.

Listening Session participants expressed extreme *concern over the continued 'defunding' of school-based art programs*. Most artistic movements are created by the youth; expressly in black & brown communities – where art is considered an important piece of the cultural fabric. Session participants agreed that defunding school-based art programs not only mutes the voice of young people of color, but contributes to the bane of systemic racism.

Participants highlighted *the Arts contribution to population retention*. Multiple participants emphasized the drain of professionals from Indiana cities and the importance of art and culture to city leadership. Conversely, Session Participants pointed out the need for diversity in art and culture when courting Indiana professionals.

*Intentional Engagement* was often referenced *as an opportunity to address equity and inclusion*. Session participants noted the importance of moving beyond strategy and design into a space that specifically engages communities based of off respective needs.



## RESULTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Create Independent Art Education programs to offset the lack of resources in public school settings.**

The lack of funding for public schools was one of the stronger themes developed during the Listening Sessions. Partnering with local, state and national organizations to create alternative resourcing for Art Programming in schools would resonate amongst community leaders. The programming should also include curriculum involving the business of art.

### **Continue to expand and diversify the Commission's social network.**

The ability to identify key stakeholders in respective communities is vital to productive community engagement. Indiana presents a plethora of diverse communities and neighborhoods. Key stakeholders will allow the Commission to identify critical cultural elements and design an adequate plan for engagement.



### **Remain intentional and targeted with engagement.**

Cultivating meaningful relationships with community stakeholders can mitigate the inherent distrust present in most communities of color. Additionally, key stakeholders present a strong entry point for IAC programming. Note: Key stakeholders may have little 'direct connection' to art professionally. Furthermore, strong stakeholder relationships improve the opportunities to direct resources to communities in most need.

**Facilitate forums to encourage collaboration amongst community leaders and organizations.**

An unintended benefit of the Listening Sessions was the network created among stakeholders. Participants were able to connect on events, programming and initiatives with fellow leaders from their respective communities. Facilitating a platform for similar social networking would help further community initiatives while expanding the value of an IAC partnership.

**Engage prior to implementation**

A common misstep when engaging communities – particularly underrepresented communities – is determining the needs of the community without input from that respective community. Often times the perceived needs of the community do not align with the articulated needs of the people in the community.

**Continue the Listening Sessions; preferably in-person (COVID-19 notwithstanding).**

Indiana communities are extremely diverse. Continuing the Listening Sessions would ensure (1) that a comprehensive voice of the statewide community is captured in IAC policy and programming. Continuing to visit (and revisit) Indiana communities would (2) ensure the IAC is aware of the changing landscape of the communities it serves.

**Create a database and platform to disseminate information and provide opportunities for engagement.**

Listening Session participants repeatedly emphasized a desire to be more engaged in their communities. Unfortunately, communication barriers present challenges for consistent engagement. Supporting the creation of local repositories, supported by strong communication strategy, would help bridge capacity gaps.

