

BASELINE DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF THE LOCAL ARTS FIELD

2017



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To support a full creative life for all, we at Americans for the Arts are committed to championing policies and practices of cultural equity that empower a just, inclusive, and equitable nation.

In May of 2017, Americans for the Arts deployed a 17-question anonymous demographic survey to 9,026 affiliated individuals representing the local arts field as part of our ongoing commitment to pursuing cultural equity. The survey was distributed with an understanding that basic demographics are neither the beginning nor the end of any conversation about equity, but that such anonymous demographic information about our organization and those we serve was crucial to our ability to continue providing the strongest services and ensuring our field is fully supported and sees themselves in our work.

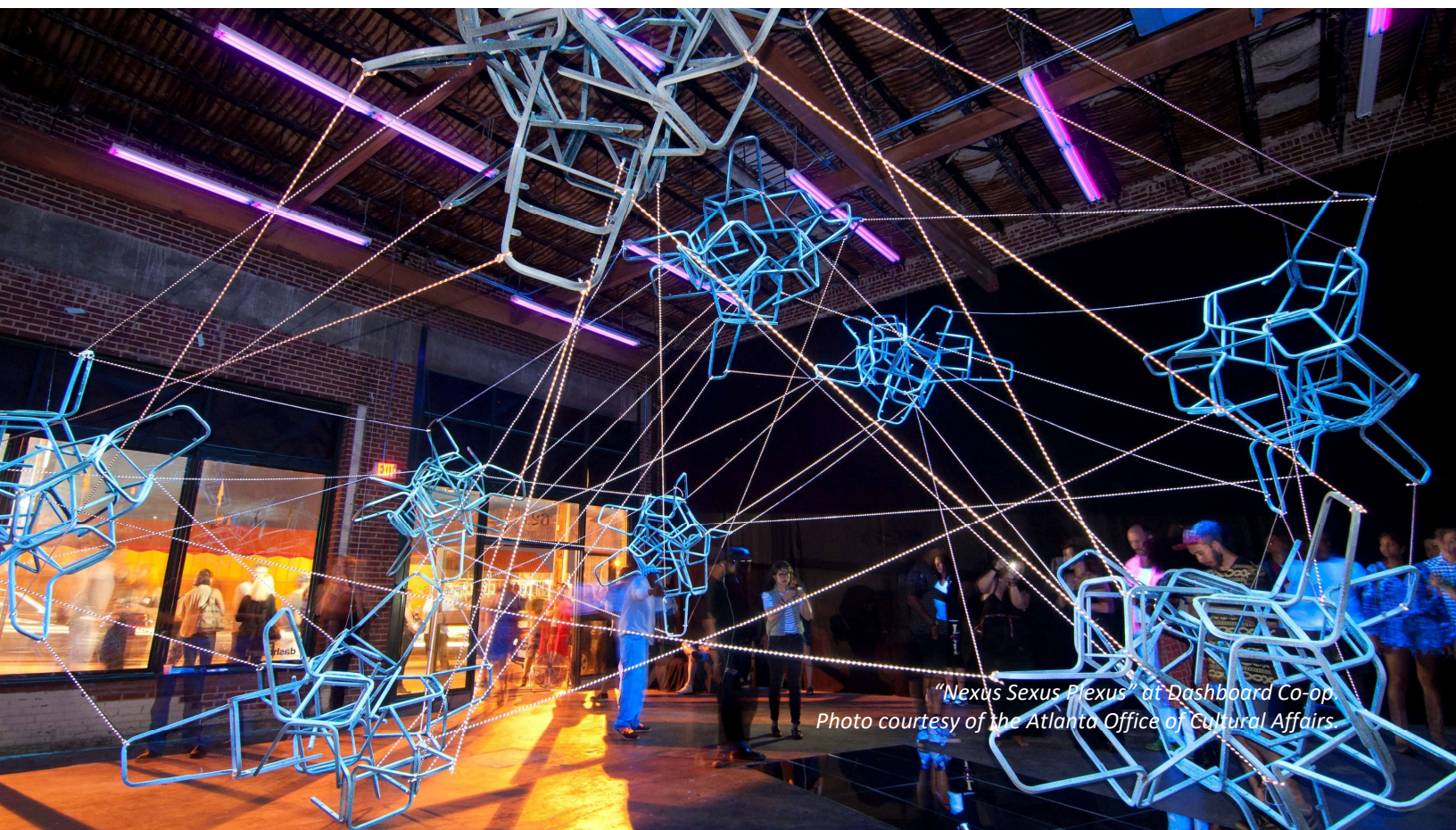
The goal of this survey was to provide Americans for the Arts with a baseline understanding of the demographics of those we directly serve, while also providing the respondents and the local arts field

with a broad portrait of field demographics, which we believe both Americans for the Arts and the local arts field have historically lacked.

The overarching results in this report may (or may not be) surprising to individuals who have spent any amount of time inside the local arts field. But it is important to have specific and actionable information about where local arts agencies and others who sit at the intersection of the arts and the broader community do and do not reflect the broad face of America.

Americans for the Arts will use this information to inform and continue to strengthen the field through our strategic planning process, as well as to craft and deploy more effective services, set and pursue goals and objectives around diversity, equity, and inclusion, and provide transparency about our organization, those we serve, and the field at large.

Thank you to all who helped create this survey, and to the 3,074 individuals who completed it.



*"Nexus Sexus Plexus" at Dashboard Co-op.
Photo courtesy of the Atlanta Office of Cultural Affairs.*

TOP FIVE FINDINGS

1) All the local arts segments in this survey were strongly demographically different from the general U.S. population, particularly in the findings on less visible demographics such as educational attainment, household income, political affiliation, political activation, and sexual orientation. We must work to represent those we serve by broadening the diversity of those in the field through targeted recruitment of under-represented groups and by more deeply training those in the field on what biases they might be bringing to their work.

2) The median age of local arts respondents was 12 years older than the median age of the U.S. population (49 vs. 37), and local arts careers ranged in length from over 60 years to not-yet-begun. Given the pace of change and the differences in viewpoints and cultural consumption between generations, we must examine the leadership pipeline—both for impactful training and preparation of those entering the field and to adjust systems and structures inside organizations. Bridging of generational gaps, which can extend to attitudes, ways of working and engaging, beliefs, and knowledge, must occur. All parts of the age spectrum have important expertise to bring.

3) People with disabilities were represented in the local arts segments at one third of the frequency of the general U.S. population (6 percent vs. 18 percent). Disability is arguably one of the most neglected aspects of cultural equity, in part because of the challenge of visibility. Even among the small proportion of respondents who indicated they had a disability, the majority of disabilities reported in this survey would be invisible to others unless self-reported. How can we make our organizations and ways of working more universally accessible and ensure strong allies in the effort?

4) Local arts respondents were significantly more educated than the general U.S. population. Over half of all local arts respondents had earned an advanced degree (54 percent) compared to just 10 percent of the U.S. population. The difference here is stark. As we consider this metric, we must seek to understand what, beyond a degree, supplemental education might afford us in terms of knowledge, views, biases, and privileges. We must reconsider and set aside the weighing of educational privilege above community accomplishment in our hiring practices.

5) Women made up three-quarters of the local arts segment respondents, and outnumbered men in all segments. That said, men were more likely to hold a doctorate than female respondents (15 percent vs. 7 percent), had a slightly longer tenure in the arts field (4 years), and were more likely to earn \$100,000 or more in annual income (56 percent vs. 44 percent). While the majority of the local arts field remains female, senior leadership positions in the local arts field have historically disproportionately gone to men. In this report, the segments in which men feature most prominently roughly align with what are often the most senior positions: boards and executive leadership. Given the prevalence of women in other areas, preparing boards to hire women into senior positions is key. This is particularly true because of the other gender disparities evident in the findings, which echo findings from previous research.

AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS

REACTIONS AND ACTIONS

Americans for the Arts took up this demographic exploration to understand how our staff, board, membership, networks, and field elected council leadership relate to the make-up of the communities we serve. The results will help us better consider our current work relating to these demographic realities and what new efforts we could undertake as we endeavor to look more like the communities we serve, and work to develop stronger and more equitable systems and practices for ourselves and the field.

Creating Americans for the Arts’ Statement on Cultural Equity, working on internal cultural assessment, and partnering with those in the field who are pursuing cultural equity, all lead to a need for

us to better understand the relationship between our own demographics and those stakeholders we serve. This valuable information is critical to our ability to move forward with policy change, broad training, and an ongoing commitment to field transformation, and it uncovers specific demographic differences in the nonprofit arts field in areas that aren’t fully explored including political affiliation, educational attainment, and household income.

While our organization is just beginning to understand how best to use this information, the ability to place benchmarks and goals for change is important to us as a service organization, and important to the local arts field as well.

IMPACTS OF DEMOGRAPHIC RESULTS ON OUR WORK

RACE/ETHNICITY

Taking Racial Equity Seriously. Americans for the Arts is committed to reflecting the growing and changing racial and ethnic diversity of the United States in our board, staff, advisory bodies, and to helping our membership in our shared pursuit of equitable support for the arts in communities across the United States. Deepening our demographic representation will enable us to create more inclusive policies, widen the leadership pipeline and encourage new management styles, consider new leadership models, and identify systems and structures that can change over time. In the more immediate term, however, we are committed to training ourselves and our field to recognize and combat biases and be the best allies possible in pursuing racial equity.

Supporting Emerging Leaders of Color. The emerging leaders respondents in this study are markedly more diverse than the rest of the study population. Findings from a 2016 report from the Hewlett Foundation, however, as well as our own research and anecdotal evidence from the field indicate that emerging leaders programming and regional networks, while generally successful, has, in some cases, inadvertently reinforced displacement of the voices of people of color. In cities including Washington, DC, New York City, and Los Angeles, arts leaders of color are stepping away from the existing Emerging Leaders networks and creating their own. We will work to connect with and support these new networks and to think differently about the purpose and intended impact of these regional networks to keep racially diverse leadership in the field over time.

AGE AND ARTS CAREER LENGTH

Supporting Those in Mid-Career. The information on age in these demographic results confirms that there is a large gap between the senior-most echelon of arts leaders and our emerging leaders in the field. And within that gap are mid-career leaders, who seem to be at the highest risk of leaving the field because of a lack of professional development opportunities and being caught in the push and pull of two strongly opinionated generations with different styles of management, leadership, and work. Americans for the Arts is increasing our investment in those leaders in the middles stages of their career. We started with the creation of a special Thread cohort for mid-career leaders at the 2017 Annual Convention, introduced a nursing room at our events, and are exploring other ways of extending the cohort and capacity development structures that nurture emerging and senior leaders, to keep these mid-career leaders within the field and prepare them for senior leadership.

Getting Flexible on Career Stage and Need. This data confirms that our current age-based conception of career stage is flawed, and that dividing the field up into emerging, mid-career, and executive/senior chunks may run counter to the reality. Americans for the Arts will continue to re-examine our structures and systems for supporting leadership development across the field to ensure that there is a cohort and a set of programming for as many people as possible.

Creating Dialogue on Generational Difference and Succession Issues. As a relatively young field (the oldest local arts agency was founded just under 70 years ago, and most are 30-40 years old), our field leadership has a median career length of 19 years. Survey results support anecdotal data many in the arts field have seen—that senior leaders are working longer. While this career longevity means more time for transferring knowledge, it also translates to longer waits on vertical advancement for emerging and mid-career leaders, and mutual feelings of impatience and lack of understanding. Americans for the Arts is considering follow-up research related to debt load across generations, retirement savings/ability to retire, staff retention strategies, transfer of knowledge, and attitudes about the future leadership of the arts field.

DISABILITY

Reflecting our Commitment in Practice. When Americans for the Arts released our Statement on Cultural Equity, one of the demographic areas where we were called upon to show more leadership was around disability. In fact, some disability advocates advised us that by not intentionally creating opportunities to participate in our programs, we had made it difficult for people with disabilities to see our organization as representative of them. To begin to address these concerns, we formed a loose advisory group of experts on disability equity and began to have conversations about our national in-person events, our collateral materials, our website, and our policies and practices. We also commissioned outside experts to provide internal working sessions with staff to help us understand how to serve disabled constituents across the entire organization.

First-year changes that emerged from conversations about disability included the implementation of live-captioning at all of our national events; the redesign of our general areas at events to ensure accessibility; the creation of a quiet room at our live events; a shift towards best practices in written materials including increased font sizes and awareness of high-contrast backgrounds; and the creation of written guidelines for both accessible PowerPoint creation and being a conscientious conference participant.

DISABILITY (continued)

Highlighting the Marginalization of Disability in Equity Conversations. On a programmatic side, we have taken the concerns about the marginalization of disability in the equity conversation and made them visible in sessions particularly designed to confront that question. We have worked to incorporate conversations about disability into other dialogues, while also preserving opportunities for disability to be discussed in depth, and have seen increased interest in these sessions over time.

Anticipating the Needs of an Aging Field. In an aging field, we can expect the population of people with age-related disabilities related to sight, hearing, and mobility to rise. As we continue to meet with our advisory group, we will specifically be taking these realities into account. One area where Americans for the Arts is working to address this is in our website. We are currently conducting an accessibility audit of both our desktop and mobile websites, and will be working to make changes to make our website more accessible to those who require large font, readers, image descriptions, etc.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Examining the Education of Our Field. The differentiation between the Americans for the Arts membership and the general field in terms of educational attainment is stark. It reflects a trend in the field towards professionalization that seems to be accelerating—particularly visible given that emerging leaders have a comparatively high rate of educational attainment. The implication of this data could affect both salary and retention rates in the field. Americans for the Arts has, and will continue to, provide field education that does not seek to replace higher education, but allows for increased competence on key trends and skills needed for arts leadership today.

Surfacing the Inequities in Education and Hiring. Two years ago, Americans for the Arts shifted from requiring specific higher-level educational attainment because of new research that indicated this education often wasn't necessary to do most jobs well and the requirement was locking out qualified candidates, including some who did meet the educational requirements but were put off by the primacy placed on formal education over experience. Americans for the Arts has embarked upon a set of conversations—with the Association of Arts Administration Educators, the Local Arts Network, our Emerging Leaders Advisory Council, and the United States Urban Arts Federation—to explore the nuances of field professionalization, the ability to compensate, and ways of dealing with the inequities that tension can create.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Dispelling Myths, and Dealing with Reality. With the marked exception of those who identify as emerging leaders, professionals in our field have relatively high household incomes compared to the general U.S. population. Americans for the Arts' last local arts agency salary survey was conducted in 2013, and we plan to conduct a follow-up survey soon, which will help us to understand this data point more effectively.

POLITICAL AFFILIATION AND VOTING HABITS

Recognizing and Addressing Challenges in Representation. Survey results show that our membership's personal political ideology swings strongly to the left. For decades now, Americans for the Arts' staff, many of whom are involved in local, state, and federal advocacy and policy work that must be bi-partisan to succeed, have had to learn how to listen and engage with all political ideologies for the sake of the arts. It is through these efforts that we have developed staunch allies at all points in the political spectrum—allies that have proven especially valuable in the 2017 efforts to secure the future of the federal cultural agencies. Regardless of political leaning, Americans for the Arts continues to help arts advocates learn approaches to bipartisan advocacy on the local, state and national levels.

Understanding When Our Bias is Showing. We also recognize that no matter how hard we try, actual or perceived bias can make its way into our programs, services, and language. When that happens, we count on our membership and partners to let us know, and we work hard to hear other perspectives and address them head on. In moments when we discern true bias, we attempt to correct it, and in moments when the perception of bias seems to be based more on a lack of transparency about our full spectrum of work, we attempt to make the bipartisan nature of the work more visible.

Disentangling Being Pro-Arts from Political Ideology. Political affiliation results in this study notwithstanding, the arts are not a partisan issue, and their impacts can be felt across the political spectrum. Regardless of personal political affiliation, many of our members spend their days working hard for all people, regardless of politics. As Americans for the Arts expands our resources around the social and instrumental impacts of the arts, we are doing so with a focus on all political perspectives and are making strategic investments in programs and services in areas such as creative economy and workforce development that will have bipartisan impact and appeal.

Harnessing Our High Rates of Civic Participation. This study confirms other research that indicates that the arts tend to be associated with high civic participation and voting. Our membership is two to four times more likely to vote than the general population. We are working on how this political clout might be amplified, particularly at the local level. This requires a more complete understanding of the civic participation of artists and audiences as well as those in this study. We're investigating how to learn more about those populations, and—should the trend of high civic participation hold true—how to maximize that impact.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND ATTENDANCE

Exploring the Untapped Partnership between Arts and Faith. The study results indicate a lower rate of religious association and participation by our members than by the general population. Like political affiliation, this opens a question about finding common ground since, for many, faith institutions are a primary connection to creative expression and art. According to the Local Arts Agency Census, less than a quarter of all local arts agencies are currently partnering with places of worship—a much lower rate than most other types of partnership. Americans for the Arts will be working to surface and share exemplars of arts and faith partnerships, with a goal of making such work more prevalent in the field.

MILITARY STATUS

Standing by Our Military Community. While the representation of former or current armed service members was low in our survey, the intersection of the arts and the military is an example of being able to promote important work even when direct representation from within that community is low in the field. Americans for the Arts has been a primary partner in this ongoing work through the National Initiative on Arts & Health in the Military and the Creative Forces project—a priority of which is to drive strong local and state participation in the adoption of arts and military efforts and to help the local arts field have better information and resources to partner with military constituencies.

AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS INTERNAL WORK AND CULTURE

Revising Interview and Hiring Practices. Americans for the Arts has long had efforts in place to ensure, insofar as possible, broadly diverse candidate pools for staff positions, board positions, and participation on our various advisory councils. In the 18 months since adopting our Statement on Cultural Equity, we have translated past efforts into formalized policies, and reviewed them to bring them in line with a cultural equity lens that focuses on all demographics.

Continuing a Focus on Equity. With the completion of our New Community Visions Initiative research project, we have identified five areas of specific next-generation skills for field education, which will drive all our field education work for at least the next five years—equity and engagement is one of those five areas. ArtsU, our multi-modal learning platform that allows us to distribute content digitally, regionally, and nationally, has always had as a core objective the leveling of access barriers for our field. We continue to think about our pricing, our language, and our content with this lens.

Expanding Who We Survey. In the next iteration of this research, planned for January 2019, we will seek to field the survey to many of the non-member groups we serve to see what demographic differences exist among them. In addition, we hope to pursue funding to broaden research to the full arts field, including artists, arts organizations, arts board members, and possibly even patrons, with the hope of providing a more nuanced and complete portrait. Simply attempting to equalize our demographics with the general population is neither feasible nor sufficient. Americans for the Arts has over 7,000 members and reaches a total constituency that is hundreds of thousands of people larger than that. Each of the organizations and individuals we serve has its own universe of service as well. This survey did not actually gather the demographic information for the full breadth of individuals that Americans for the Arts serves. Our 350,000 Arts Action Fund members, for example, and our Artists Committee were not solicited for this portrait, nor were most practicing artists, genre-specific professionals in the field, nor audiences. The national demographics listed in this research, while a useful starting point, are an inexact benchmark for any individual community to work from in pursuing better representation and enacting more equitable policies and practices. Art is local, and a true benchmarking exercise for demographics should emerge from the service area of the local arts organization.

AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS INTERNAL WORK AND CULTURE (continued)

Doing More External Benchmarking. Americans for the Arts has begun the process of consulting with each of our advisory councils to identify areas where both the networks and the councils themselves, as well as our annual leadership awards, can be approached with more targeted effort and specific benchmarking and outcomes.

Reflecting the General Population. Thanks to long-term efforts to pursue parity with the general U.S. population on the more well-known demographic categories such as race/ethnicity and gender identity, the Americans for the Arts board of directors and staff are already relatively reflective of the broader community. In other areas, such as educational attainment, household income, and political affiliation, both groups do not strongly align with the population, which requires more work as well as competency building around empathy and cross-community collaboration.

CONCLUSION

Many of the discussions and work related to these specific demographic results are not actually about simple representation. Instead, Americans for the Arts has been pursuing, and will continue to pursue, programs, services, and policies that are informed by, and progress forward from, demographics and representation toward creating systemic change.



ChalkFest 2017, Memphis, TN.
Photo courtesy of the Brooks Museum.