

EQUITY TO TASK

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Equity to Task

By People's Cultural Plan

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By now, we should all know what the word "equity" means. We've seen it printed in every woke cultural organization's mission statement from the North Bronx to East New York as they compete to sell their programs to funders in this growing niche of cultural philanthropy. You can easily count "equity" mentioned 68 times in [NYC's Cultural Plan](#) (about once every two and a half pages). The word is omnipresent. But few seem genuinely interested in doing the actual work required to truly achieve equity in a white-dominated sector. Why, for instance, are we sitting back and assuming that the majority of the 33 white-operated and managed Cultural Institutions (CIGs) of New York, who receive at least 75% (\$145 million dollars) of the city's annual cultural budget, would simply change their ways when it comes to hiring workers of color at all levels of these institutions? Without the exigency to examine and change the deeper structures and systems in place, and without consequences for failing to do so, why would they change?

We knew, coming into this, that moving the needle on issues of equity would be a difficult task. These are the same institutions that have withstood decades of protest from black, brown, native and Asian communities since the end of the Civil Rights era. While they have, to their credit, moved a few inches forward, more often than not, they keep throwing us for a loop by taking several steps back. Digging further, we might go as far as to recall that the basis of New York's cultural segregation has its roots in the cultural boundaries set at this city's inception, when the first boundaries separating the native from the colonizer, the enslaved from the slave owner, mestizo from pure blood, were set in blood and stone. We might remember that museums were created as one of the props of White Supremacy, to celebrate "high" culture, and to put non-European cultures in their "proper" anthropological, place. So it comes as no surprise that in the age of so-called "equity," a museum situated in a POC-majority borough, as the Brooklyn Museum of Art is, would select white candidates for its most recent curator hires, further reducing the percentage of people of color in curatorial positions in New York City. This is but another reminder that equity is easier said than done.

It is also further proof that NYC's Cultural Plan, CreateNYC, lacks teeth even over the institutions who receive the largest share of public dollars (the Brooklyn Museum is the fourth largest recipient of NYC cultural funding, budgeted at [\\$7.8 Million of our tax dollars for 2019](#)[1], and lacks the commitment of resources necessary to initiate real change.

Therefore, we call on New York City Hall to close the loop-holes in their existing equity plan and re-consider [The People's Cultural Plan](#), which provides a more robust framework for creating equitable jobs for cultural workers, protecting our culturally rich communities, and providing equal support for all our cultural organizations, not just the most well-endowed and politically enfranchised.

We call on the city to *increase funding* and include *baseline support* for local community arts organizations including general operating support, in order to allow them to *create more equitable cultural jobs* in the already diverse neighborhoods that they serve.

We call on the city to create workers' centers specifically designed to *help workers of color fight against discrimination*. We need protection and legal advice when filing discrimination-related complaints. We need a process that will allow us to submit, track, and report such incidents and resolutions. We need the City to be transparent about which institutions are receiving the bulk of complaints in order to then restructure the mismanagement and hold those at the top accountable.

We call on ALL cultural workers and supporters of the arts to take equity to task and stand-up for equity in their place of employment. And, if our cultural institutions continue down this path of inequity, elite Eurocentricity and white supremacy, we need people to be prepared to support striking workers, uphold boycotts, and help organize protests. These institutions must be forthcoming and accountable in their plans for equity - and equity must mean real transformation, not empty rhetoric.

New York City's uniqueness lies in the multiplicity of the culture present in all five boroughs. Therefore we should all receive our equitable share of city funding, resources, and paths to success in our city's cultural institutions! We want our museums to reflect our vibrant culture and strong work ethic!

People's Cultural Plan
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[1] NYC Government website. February Financial Plan, Fiscal Years 2018 - 2022, Mayor's Office of Management and Budget, www1.nyc.gov/site/omb/publications/finplan02-18.page

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