

MRAC Racial Equity Statement Background

In mid 2016 the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council board of directors came together to form an Inclusion and Representation Task Force. At this point, the board was the most racially diverse in its history, yet it was recognized by board and staff that there were inequalities in the systemic practices of MRAC which were most apparent in the racial diversity representation of our panels. This led to the formal declaration by the organizational leadership that this was something to address and change. The spark of action did not solely come from the board members of color, but rather the diverse board make-up made current practices and inequities imperative to address.

To kick start the Task Force, the board drafted a simple purpose statement and created a pre-planning document that was a tangible recognition that MRAC leadership was making space and priority around racial equity work. These guiding documents were created with an internal and external intent and a glossary and language about MRAC's work started to be documented. Recognition that MRAC has work to do around equity in its grantmaking, decision-making, staff and board make-up, panelist make-up and process, and organizational decisions as MRAC has significant community influence in the Twin Cities metro arts community.

The Task Force evolved to become the Racial Equity Task Force (RETF) as the problems of racial inequity at MRAC helped focus the work of the group. There was an acknowledgement that this declaration of work towards racial equity is not a devaluation of other inequalities, but rather a honing in on a problem that is intersectional and can be focused and intentional at this time.

By late 2016, MRAC staff was invited to join the board members who made up the RETF to create an organizational think tank to be a collective effort to hear voices across the organization. This was a new experience to have staff and board working and talking together. All MRAC staff members joined the four board members who were part of the RETF. The exchange of ideas related to all aspects of MRAC's work was and continues to be built upon this empowering, encouraging, and collective foundation that the group modeled and declared as essential to doing this work.

Diversifying panels and facilitating more authentic and racial equity informed panel discussions were an aspect of the MRAC process that had been identified as needing change even before the formalization of task force work, so it was natural that this became a priority of the work of the RETF. The starting point of the panel process has led to

MRAC Racial Equity Statement Background

reflection on all of the MRAC grant guidelines and organizational processes. Through community engagement, surveys of constituents, ongoing conversations, reflections and revisions, field research, readings and networks, attendance at conferences and trainings the RETF has continually been working to educate and better inform the work of MRAC and its influence with current, former, and potential grant applicants. The 2018-19 biennial plan embodies racial equity as being a leading effort in MRAC's work which is a validation that the work of this task force has the commitment of the leadership and staff. The understanding and practice we build and share through this work is continuously evolving.

This Racial Equity Statement is an intentional development over the past two years of deliberate work that included community feedback and is a public declaration of the duty of MRAC to use its power and influence to eradicate racial inequities in arts access in our community.