A toolkit for visual arts organisations to explore and support approaches to intersectionality

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Image Credit:
Top right - Rosa-Johan Uddoh, _Practice Makes Perfect_ 2021, Focal Point Gallery
Bottom left - Joey Holder Semelparous Vienna

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Background

This toolkit has been developed as part of CVAN The Contemporary Visual Arts Network Fair and Equitable programme, a five-year commitment to instituting equity within the visual arts in England.

The programme aims to cultivate a visual arts sector and ecology that supports its leadership and enables artists and arts workers from marginalised and underrepresented communities to thrive. You can read more about the programme here.
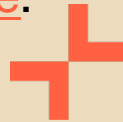
About this toolkit

This toolkit is designed as a prompt, to help you consider how you can explore and address **intersectionality** in order to be able to support artists and arts workers from marginalised and underrepresented communities

We recommend using this toolkit in conjunction with the Fair and Equitable programme research report, *Fostering Equity in the Visual Arts Sector*. The report includes 20 recommendations for organisations to take action around creating an equitable and inclusive visual arts sector, focusing on marginalised and underrepresented communities.
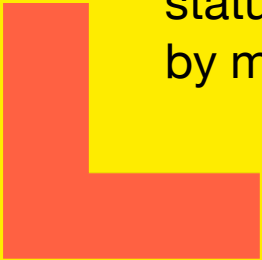
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How to use this toolkit

› This toolkit has been created to be used by senior staff, such as managers, directors, trustees and chairs.

› You can work through this toolkit individually or as a team, however, it's important to collaborate with your boards and those individuals who make up your governance structure to ensure buy-in from all levels.

› Take your time answering the prompts; revisit them, and repeat them on a regular basis.

› There's no single method to creating a successful intersectional approach for your organisation. As always, the best source of information and recommendations are from artists and arts workers from marginalised and underrepresented communities, however, this toolkit may help you to reflect on gaps and strengths.

› When working (including consultation) with people from intersectional groups ensure they are clear about the ask, renumerated and fairly paid. Naturally, it is problematic to request that people from marginalised and underrepresented communities take on extra unremunerated labour to address issues that are not of their making. This needs navigating with respect and nuance.

› There are other organisations that already deliver positive and impactful approaches to intersectionality who may have further tips beyond this toolkit.

› It's important to ensure that this work is taking place without waiting for direction from others.

› It's also important to have a good or outstanding approach to equality and inclusion internally, as this will naturally impact your organisation's ability to deliver this work externally.

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Context

The term 'intersectional' was officially coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how aspects of identity such as race, gender, age, class, and disability overlap or 'intersect' to produce multi-layered advantage and disadvantage[1]. Intersectionality requires thinking beyond a single-issue narrative; instead, it refers to people's experiences, status, access, and more, and can be affected by multiple factors.

Responses to CVAN's Fair and Equitable 'Survey of Individuals' 2022, demonstrated the complexity of the barriers facing marginalised and underrepresented communities in the visual arts sector. As Dr. Cecilia Wee author of the above-mentioned Fostering Equity in the Visual Arts Sector explains 'Whilst the 2010 Equality Act has brought the nine protected characteristics together under one legal definition, this can mean that the struggle for equity shows up as conflicting equality priorities. Rather than viewing aspects of identity as in conflict with one another, an intersectional approach to fostering equity acknowledges the multifaceted construction of identity; for instance, that a Black, disabled older woman, will experience the world in a different way to someone who identifies with only one of those identity markers[2].'

[1] Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color. In, Martha Albertson Fineman, Rixanne Mykitiuk, Eds, The Public Nature of Private Violence, Routledge, 1994, pp. 93-118.

[2] Dr. Cecilia Wee, Fostering Equity in the Visual Arts Sector, 2022, p22

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What this toolkit covers

01   **Your organisation's culture towards intersectionality**

02   **The importance of data**

03   **Ways of working**

04   **Platforming intersectional voices**

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Your organisation's culture towards intersectionality

Artists and arts workers from marginalised and underrepresented communities can experience a complexity of barriers and identify with more than one of the nine protected characteristics outlined in the 2010 Equality Act. According to the Act, the protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation[3]. However, some programmes, approaches, and policies view identity in a silo, as a single narrative or, with identities being placed in competition with each other. This can leave people with multiple, triple, or more protected characteristics poorly served and experiencing increased barriers.

Spend some time thinking about your organisation's culture toward intersectionality, using the following questions to prompt you:

What does intersectionality mean to you and what does it mean to your organisation?	
As with all equity and inclusion work, it's important for your leaders, chairs, chief executives, directors, etc to be leading and role-modelling behaviours. How do your organisation's leaders currently discuss and support intersectional approaches? If they don't do this at all, or only to a certain extent, how could this be addressed?	
Are there one or two protected characteristics that your organisation is most comfortable or least comfortable discussing? If so, why do you think this is?	
Are there one or two of the protected characteristics that your organization supports and serves the most? Are there one or two protected characteristics that your organization serves the least? Why do you think this is?	
Does your organisation consider one protected characteristic (or identity) at a time or do they enable a consideration of multiple protected characteristics (identities) i.e. does your organisation's approach to feminism neglect, minimise or include racialized experiences? Does your organisation's approach to disability neglect, minimise or include queer communities?	

[3]   See Equality Act 2010, part 2, c.1.
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/2/chapter/1

Your organisation's culture towards intersectionality
Continued

Without due care, intersectional discussions can reinforce the view that protected characteristics (or identities) are in competition or conflict with each other when in reality intersectionality aims to do the opposite. It aims to better understand a person's experience to accommodate better inclusion. Have you found yourself in discussion/s with colleagues where viewing protected characteristics in competition and conflict has caused further barriers and limitations? If so, how do you navigate this?	
Sometimes intersectionality is perceived or described as difficult to consider whereas, in reality, targeted approaches that require looking at more than one singular equality issue can have a huge impact that outweighs the work involved. How do you feel intersectional approaches are perceived and described in your organisation?	
Do you feel there is a good understanding and commitment to intersectionality within your organisation? If not, what might be a good starting point to rectify this?	

[3]   See Equality Act 2010, part 2, c.1.
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/2/chapter/1

The importance of data

CVAN's *Fostering Equity in the Visual Arts* report suggests that rather than approaching barriers in isolation or in competition with one another, intersectional practice needs to involve working towards an understanding of how barriers are layered, or how they overlap.

It's important when undertaking any equality and inclusion work to be in possession of data around the impact of barriers on people with multiple and overlapping identities, and also when preparing intersectional strategies. Consider the following:

Do you have up-to-date data that demonstrates the intersectionality of your workforce (including freelancers)?	
Have you explored intersectionality data in terms of seniority and security of contracts in your workforce?	
Where is intersectionality most represented within your organisation and why do you think this is?	
Have you explored intersectionality data to understand patterns of promotion; access to opportunity that has been impacted by a convergence of identity factors; intersectional wage inequality; turnover rates for intersectional staff, and the level of intersectional employee engagement within your organisation?	
Do you understand the multiplicity of layered barriers encountered by people with whom you work? i.e. what has been your consultation process, and how do you ensure your data is up to date and relevant?	
Do you have up-to-date data to demonstrate the intersectionality of your audiences?	

Note

As mentioned in our previous CVAN Fair and Equitable toolkits, only referring to statistics and satisfying representational and statistical targets (e.g. reaching a targeted number of people from marginalised and underrepresented communities) won't in themselves guarantee fairer conditions in your organisation. It will also be necessary to consider inclusion, opportunity, and ways of working as outlined in CVAN's other Fair and Equitable toolkits.

Platforming intersectional voices

To improve your organisation's approach to intersectionality, people with intersectional identities need to be at the core of discussion and decisions. As outlined above this should be done in a respectful, inclusive and fair way and should not rely on one or two representatives alone.

Approaches should include enabling people to engage in meaningful and effective leadership; undertaking authentic and deep consultation with individuals, and platforming of intersectional voices.

Platforming intersectional voices requires motivation, nuance and authentic listening.
To help with this, consider and reflect on the following points:

How does your organisation encourage, support and listen to people with intersectional voices?	
How does your organisation ensure people with intersectional voices are renumerated when consulted?	
How does your organisation encourage and support people with intersectional voices to lead?	
People with multiple protected identities may require a person-centred, individual and bespoke approach. How are you continually and consistently listening to intersectional groups and individuals (especially those with whom you don't often communicate)?	
How does your organisation encourage and support people with intersectional voices to speak up? And when people with intersectional voices do speak up, how can you ensure people don't have to repeat themselves as a result of not being heard or of being ignored?	

Ways of working

Your organisation may have set ways of working that may be difficult to change. If this is the case, your organisation may need to understand, identify and change approaches and policies that do not support and enable successful intersectional approaches.

This work may require you to change ways of working that are no longer fit for purpose and may as a consequence be detrimental to individuals and your organisation. Aim for best practice and efficiency, delivering over and above the norms of traditional or sector-wide approaches.

Consider the following when thinking about your organisations ways of working:

Does your organisation have a clear approach to identifying and understanding the needs of people from marginalised and underrepresented intersectional communities (this should include staff and workforce)? If not, where is a good starting point to rectify this?	
Does your organisation have awareness of the impact of multiple barriers? If not, where is a good starting point to gain this awareness?	
Sometimes, when people face ongoing inequalities in an environment, vigilance and self-protection may be the norm. Does your workforce have relevant and authentic approaches to identifying and understanding systems of care and support for people from marginalised and underrepresented intersectional communities? If not, where is a good place to start this process?	
When you complete equality impact assessments for new projects or work strands do they include a section on intersectionality? If not, how can this change?	
Do you have organisational frameworks, structures and processes that take intersectionality into account? If not, where is a good place to begin to address this?	
When you begin a new project, how do you decide which voices are included?	

Ways of working
Continued

How do you monitor the demographics of each of your teams or work strands?	
Are your organisation's HR policies and processes flexible and adaptive to multiple and interconnected layers of identities and characteristics?	
When needed, are senior HR colleagues who understand multiple barriers and discrimination faced by people from marginalised and underrepresented intersectional communities able to support?	
Working on new intersectional approaches may include having to deconstruct existing hierarchies of single narratives around singular identities, i.e. where single identities are given more importance, power, or status than multiple barriers or characteristics. It may also require the deconstructing of hierarchies given to specific identities, i.e. a single identity which is given more importance, power or status than other single identities. With this in mind, can you identify areas within your organisation that need changing?	
If people from marginalised and underrepresented intersectional communities are leading or have led either formal or non-formal, self-directed or directed equality change work, are they being recognised and remunerated fairly? If not, how can this change?	

In conclusion

It's important to note that addressing intersectionality doesn't mean less bespoke support for one particular group. It's also necessary to ensure that discussions around intersectionality don't reinforce the view that protected characteristics (or identities) are in competition or in conflict with each other. Instead, intersectional approaches encourage and involve working towards opening spaces to allow for an understanding of how barriers can overlap, how they relate to one another, and how they're interconnected.

There's no 'one size fits all' approach to this work. Many people's identities consist of multiple, intersecting, interconnected factors (or characteristics). Individuals do not experience their multiple identities in isolation; they are, in reality, entangled, and intertwined. To work towards justice and equity we need to ensure that we're seeing and supporting artists and arts workers hybrid or multi-layered identities. If we don't support people's multifaceted and interconnected identities and associated factors, the sector may be in danger of upholding a system where only some can survive and thrive. Therefore, to effect authentic equitable change, it's essential to embed an organisational intersectional approach which should be built on an understanding of factors or multiple systematic oppressions faced in order to develop relevant and realistic intersectional strategies.

There are many resources that you'll need to help you on your journey.
We hope that this toolkit can be a useful starting point.

Footnote

This toolkit was created and developed by Monique Jivram. Monique's career spans more than ten years in arts organisations as a funder and practitioner in inclusive community, public engagement and visual arts programming. Operating at the intersection of curation and inclusive public programming, Monique's work focuses on improved inclusion, more efficient distribution of resources, and supporting underrepresented people to thrive in the arts sector.

This toolkit builds on sections of CVAN's 2022 research report *Fostering Equity in the Visual Arts Sector*, written by Dr Cecilia Wee and Veionella Spaine with further programme support from Rukhsana Jahangir.

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