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# Arts Leadership in the Bay Area: A Qualitative Study

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## FOREWORD

*by Adam Fong*

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For well over a decade, the Hewlett Foundation's Performing Arts Program has sought to bolster leadership development in the San Francisco Bay Area arts ecosystem. Our efforts have included supporting professional development, nurturing leadership networks, providing funds for changemakers in the field, and commissioning thought-provoking research. This study, which falls into that last category, adds a new dimension to our understanding of the evolving landscape of arts leadership. It asks how leadership in the field is changing amidst multiple crises, and whether our current notion of arts leadership is in alignment with our program's values.

We asked Dr. Antonio C. Cuyler to pursue these questions because of his vision of "creative justice," which he defines as "the manifestation of all historically and continuously discriminated against, marginalized, oppressed, and subjugated peoples living creative and expressive lives on their own terms." Taken together, the Performing Arts Program's experience supporting arts leadership and Cuyler's conceptual thinking provide a grounding from which this inquiry can help us actively redefine arts leadership, and rediscover how best to support it.

Together with Dr. Cuyler, we invited 27 arts workers into three focus group conversations. Instead of gathering established local leaders, we asked those "usual suspects" to recommend participants. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the location and timing (Spring 2022) of this study, the referral process yielded a highly diverse cohort. In his report, Cuyler uses the term "global majority" to mean people who are Black, indigenous, Latinx, Asian, dual-heritage, or are otherwise ethnic minorities in the USA. While race and ethnicity were not criteria for inclusion in this study, the racial and gender diversity of each group undoubtedly influenced responses to Cuyler's prompts and revealed important affirmations and lessons for our field.

There are many perspectives expressed here: some inspiring, some concerning, and some hinting at deeper meanings. One idea that both interests and troubles me is that several of the participants were reluctant to self-identity as arts leaders, believing the role to be in conflict with their own beliefs and worldviews. In his book, *The Art of Moral Protest*, sociologist James Jasper writes, "Being asked to do something which, according to their moral principles, is wrong operates as an important moral shock. For some, it is an opportunity to articulate and reaffirm those principles" [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, 135]. If our current era is characterized by such shocks, I suspect that the pathway to creative justice begins with articulations like those here, from arts leaders on their own terms.

## INTRODUCTION

Arts leadership, a practice critical to the success of cultural organizations, received scant attention in the literature before 2016 (Hewison 2004; Johanson and Rentschler 2002; Radbourne 2003; Sutherland and Gosling, 2010). Since 2016, practitioners and scholars have increasingly tried to describe, define, and understand arts leadership and its implications for cultural organizations (Caust 2018; Foster 2018; Goodwin 2020; Nisbett and Walmsley 2016; Ono 2016; Price 2017; Stein 2016). This includes advocating for more culturally relevant and culturally responsive arts leadership frameworks (Caust 2015; Cuyler 2022; Duffy 2022; Heidelberg 2020; Henze and Escribal 2021; Poisson-de Haro and Normandin 2010), and identifying cultural, emotional, and systems intelligences as global leadership competencies (Keeney and Jung 2018 and 2022). Nevertheless, arts leadership is different from leadership in general because it explicitly centers culture as a critical point of practice, requiring visionary attention and intention.

In defining arts leadership, the literature agrees that one must first distinguish leadership from management (Caust 2018; Foster 2018; Stein 2016). For example, as Tobie Stein (2016) quotes, Kathy Brown, the executive director of the New York City Ballet, said, “essentially the difference between leadership and management lies between the executive who is heading the organization, looking at the big picture, versus the team executing the tasks.” However, this definition of arts leadership is highly contextualized organizationally and excludes the ways that artists — who often wear multiple professional identities — experience, practice, and understand arts leadership. Kenneth Foster (2018) proposed a more inclusive definition of arts leadership by suggesting that to accomplish their work, arts leaders practice a three-part process that includes: (1) engaging in serious reflection, (2) taking on the identity of learner, and (3) building and working in partnership with a dynamic team.

Josephine Caust (2018) offered an even more capacious definition of arts leadership, arguing that arts leaders must critically engage with the process of leadership, as well as the process of arts making. In the U.K., the literature defined cultural leadership as the act of leading the cultural sector. It concerns senior managers and directors in subsidized cultural institutions; public officials developing and implementing policy for the cultural sector; and a huge range of producers, innovators, and entrepreneurs in small companies, production houses, and teams (British Council n.d.; Culture & Creativity 2022; Hewison 2004 and 2019). Although it could apply to many cultural contexts, central to understanding cultural leadership in this context is the idea that nobody has a monopoly on leadership in the cultural world. Furthermore, cultural leaders practice cultural leadership in two ways: (1) competently managing the organizations of the cultural sector, ensuring that they are financially viable, legal, and with a well-organized staff; and (2) leading culture itself — making work, productions, and projects that show different ways of thinking, feeling, and experiencing the world — bringing dynamism to the economy and wider society.

In my view, these perspectives on arts leadership contribute to a dynamic and emerging understanding of what it means to lead in the creative sector. However, Caust (2018, 165) correctly identified diversity and difference as challenges facing arts leadership. Arts leadership’s extant literature has rarely explicitly centered the expertise, lived experiences, and perspectives of those of the global majority (Stein 2020), nonbinary, women, and other people historically and continuously oppressed because of their social identities. Indeed, this gap in knowledge has led to an incomplete understanding of arts leadership with significant consequences for practice and the development of theory on arts leadership’s role in envisioning and manifesting an arts ecosystem that more accurately reflects the diversity of the U.S. Furthermore, an implicit bias for more Eurocentric and patriarchal understandings of arts leadership, even when they present as practices and theories, has exacerbated these consequences.

In support of Caust’s argument, a participant in this study stated, “Being an arts leader is an investment in making an impact in the field beyond wherever you are locally or specifically, it’s being active and interactive, collaborative, and trying to have a positive impact on the ecosystem that is the arts and culture sector.” Another participant posited, “a dancer standing up for themselves about how they are paid fairly or not is arts leadership, too.” This case holds a different kind of meaning if the dancer standing up for themselves has been historically and continuously oppressed because of their social identities. Another participant remarked, “There’s the old-school style of what leadership and management means, and there’s the new school style of what that means. Where old school being, ‘I’m the boss, you do things my way.’ It’s me-centric, as opposed to people-centric, and cultivating and uplifting others. Arts leadership should be about shining the light on the skills of others, and building the scaffolding to help support others in being the best they can be, and developing our community, through the cultivation of the skills of the collective.”

As an alternative and solution to the more pervasive Eurocentric and patriarchal arts leadership frameworks, Brea Heidelberg (2020) argued that arts management educators should teach culturally responsive performing arts management in higher education. Culturally responsive performing arts management is the practice of proactively centering the voices not typically represented in the room, or in this study’s case, in very little of the literature. Though Caust (2015), Antonio Cuyler (2022), Ali Duffy (2022), Raphaela Henze and Federico Escribal (2021), and Serge Poisson-de Haro and François Normandin (2010) provide some culturally relevant and responsive models of scholarship that center arts leaders of the global majority and women, more research must intentionally and proactively continue this practice of diversifying research study participants to counter the epistemic violence that perpetuates ideas about who can and should serve as an arts leader. This idea — of who can and should serve as an arts leader — has real material implications for how the creative sector builds, develops, and sustains its artistic, community, cultural, emotional, financial, human, intellectual, political, social, spiritual, and symbolic capital.

Further localizing the question of arts leadership, Ono (2016) addressed three questions pertinent to the changing landscape in California, with national implications including: (1) What were we preparing up-and-coming leaders to do? (2) To what degree did we aim to sustain the field as it exists or spur its transformation? (3) Were we adequately preparing leaders for the challenges to come? The study revealed economic pressures, professionalization of the field, cross-generational workplaces, demographic shifts, generational perspectives on distributed leadership, diversity, and innovation as key aspects of California’s arts leadership landscape.

Building upon these literatures (Caust 2015 and 2018; Cuyler 2022; Duffy 2022; Foster 2018; Henze and Escribal 2021; Keeney and Jung 2018 and 2022; Ono 2016; Poisson-de Haro and Normandin 2010; Stein 2016), this study of arts leadership in the San Francisco Bay Area addressed the following research questions: (1) What are the most predominant leadership frameworks and narratives in the local arts ecosystem? (2) What resources and opportunities are currently shaping leadership in the field? (3) To what extent do they align with the Performing Arts Program’s values of equity, justice, and self-determination? (4) How are responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, calls across the creative sector for racial justice, global warming, and ethics informing and transforming arts leadership in the Bay Area? Lastly, (5) what are some compelling visions for how the role of arts leaders might evolve over the next three to 10 years?

## METHODOLOGY

To address the research questions, this study used an exploratory qualitative research methodological approach. According to John Creswell and Cheryl Poth (2013, 47-49), researchers use qualitative methods because a problem or issue needs exploring; one needs a complex and detailed understanding of an issue; one wants to empower individuals to share their stories; and/or when one wants to develop a theory or theories that adequately capture the complexity of a problem under examination. I used qualitative focus groups as the sole method of data collection in this study. Focus groups are interviews conducted with a group in which respondents hear the views of each other (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun 2012), and the discussion inspires richer insights and observations. I conducted four focus groups with a total of 27 diverse arts leaders from the Bay Area. The participants represented the age, art forms, class, educational, disability, gender, immigration status, racial, and sexual orientation diversity of the Bay Area.

The Hewlett Foundation sought recommendations for participants from established arts leaders within the Bay Area arts ecosystem. Subjectivities and bias in this snowball approach to identifying participants had implications for who received an invitation and who did not. Notably, none of the participants in this study identified as a white male, a perspective that extant literature more than well represents. This decision allowed for the inclusion of more diverse voices, specifically by gender and race, to receive attention in and thereby enrich the literature. Researchers who might replicate this study and ask a different demographic of arts leaders for suggestions of focus group participants would yield a different population for their study and thus different findings. Acceptance and anticipation of this outcome is a hallmark of purposive sampling in qualitative research studies and should inform how readers reflect on and gain insight from the findings of this study.

Focus group interviewees received a \$200 honorarium for participating in an hour-and-a-half interview. I recorded three of the focus groups and had them transcribed by Rev.com as the initial stage of data analysis. After completing the focus group that I did not record, I took copious notes to recall points of convergence and divergence among the recorded focus groups. As the second stage of data analysis, I looked for themes across each focus group discussion, participant, and the literature. Data from the focus groups and the literature affirm and inform the findings of this study. Because believability, credibility, and triangulation remain of critical importance to qualitative researchers, as the final stage of analysis, I used member checking by the focus group participants to ensure that their responses to the inquires and the findings resonated with them.

## FINDINGS

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### Arts Leadership in the Bay Area

#### *How does arts leadership in the Bay Area differ from arts leadership in other parts of the country?*

Although not one of the key research questions, I began focus groups with this question to solicit an assessment of the participants' feelings and thoughts about the Bay Area, given that it is their place of residence. I also wanted to invite participants to articulate if they had considered the ways in which arts leadership might exist indigenous to the Bay Area, versus some other region in the U.S. By posing this question, four interrelated themes emerged across the four focus groups, describing the complex contextualization of arts leadership in the Bay Area. These themes include: (1) culture, diversity, embeddedness, immigration, and history; (2) the value of art and an intersectoral lens; (3) big versus small and BIPOC versus white organizations; and (4) what is missing?

In my view, the Bay Area's history — which is informed by a culture that embraces immigrants — creates an environment for radical thought to impact the ways that residents practice arts leadership. I have intentionally sequenced the quotations below to represent a cross-focus group conversation and reflect the breadth of the participants' responses to my question about how arts leadership in the Bay Area differs from arts leadership in other parts of the country.

#### **Culture, Diversity, Embeddedness, Immigration, and History**

*“The Bay Area was the home of the free speech movement at UC Berkeley in the '60s, the third world strike at San Francisco State, UC Berkeley started ethnic studies programs. The Black Panther Party was organizing in Oakland, in the neighborhood I lived in. Just so much was going on, that comes from this whole area.”*

*“The East Coast arts crew will tell you quick about the need for institutional reparations, as a method of redress. I find it a more subtle conversation here in the Bay when you begin to talk about redress, like in formerly redlined areas, et cetera.”*

*“Immigrant voices are very much centered in California, and that is not necessarily the case everywhere in the country.”*

*“I think we're ahead of the curve. In 2018, the arts community, along with the Human Rights Commission and the San Francisco Arts Commission, formed the first racial equity in the arts working group conference symposium. It was an ongoing working group that was before the pandemic, before the racial unrest.”*

*“Here in the Bay, most of the theater leaders came together to form the Accountability Workgroup, which was a learning work group in which we could talk about challenges our industry was facing, bring in consultants and experts to come talk about pay equity, talk about the treatment of Black and Brown actors and labeling them as difficult, all these different things. It created real policy shifts at a lot of organizations or real culture shifts that happened as a result of being in this community space centered around anti-racist learning. I don't know if that's happening in other places, but I feel like that's special and unique to the Bay, for sure.”*

*“I’ve heard many of our arts leaders talk about this feeling in the South Bay that there’s less of a culture of support. There’s often a ‘Look at what’s happening in San Francisco,’ or ‘Look at the leadership in Oakland and in other places,’ and a desire to be building more of the culture of support around that.”*

*“We have the Bay Area Living Document (The Living Document 2022). There is more of a blueprint of how to move forward, or at least having that as a moment to kind of see, “These are the inequitable things that’s happening in our fields.”*

*“I started to learn more about [the city of] Richmond, and knowing about Indigenous folx and how Black and Brown folx have existed here throughout time and the generations of each community here and how they’ve impacted each other. It made me realize that art and culture was a really big contributor to how everyone coexisted with each other. I think that’s what can bridge our solidarity, our allyship, and sense of belonging.”*

### **The Value of Art and an Intersectoral Lens**

*“Growing up, art wasn’t valued. If I was seen drawing, they’re like, ‘why are you drawing?’ Art wasn’t seen as a part of our development, a part of our growth and healing — or just something that we needed to exist. For Richmond, even though there’s a big population of folx who are artists and cultural workers, there’s a lot of trauma and harm in our lives. Sometimes that trauma and harm makes it impossible for us to create and to exist within art.”*

*“I’m talking from Oakland and San Francisco, but I’ve been in Oakland since the ’80s. The thing that’s unique here is that we have that trans and intersectoral lens. We need cultural strategists in transportation, the mayor’s office, and human services. Not that that’s the only place policy change can happen. The city of Oakland’s cultural plan (City of Oakland 2022) is one resource that I think is incredibly important and has shaped my understanding of all the myriad places that culture already lives.”*

### **Big versus Small and BIPOC versus White Organizations**

*“The smaller groups have done the bulk of the amazing work that goes on, which the bigger arts groups, through the money and perhaps ability, will steal those ideas and move on to them.”*

*“You’re absolutely right about large arts organizations — we’re doing the work. It may not be as transparent as it is in other places because it’s like turning around the Queen Mary, these ships are huge. The operas that are about Black stories and centered on the diaspora, you’re going to see my operas in like four years. That’s how long it takes for those to hit the stage, from conception to implementation. You’re going to see the fruits of my labor in three or four years.”*

*“Either you’re too Black or you’re too white, you’re too big or you’re too small, you’ve got too much money or you don’t have enough. That is what’s keeping us all separate. Once you begin to enter spaces and you can see similarities, you see opportunities for collaboration, you learn from other people’s mistakes of like, ‘Oh my God, thank you so much for telling me that story because I’m never going to do that.”*

*“This is not an indemnification of the Bay Area, but we do have a current paradigm where larger white organizations somehow never have enough money for racial equity. What I mean by that is 100% of my budget goes to BIPOC issues and racial equity. I don’t present BIPOC artists just once a*



*year, twice a year in a small program. I pay them. I don't make them pay me. I feel as though now that 2020 has happened, there's this sense to add more funding to racial equity. What I see it going to is the larger groups wanting to diversify now versus folk like all of us that are on the front lines of this issue. I just want to call that out and hold space to deconstruct the narrative that we're ahead, because I don't feel like the dollar signs are reflective of that."*

Participants also discussed arts leadership in terms of what they believe the Bay Area needs in comparison to other cities and parts of the U.S. This makes sense, given their embeddedness in their communities. The Bay Area arts leaders that participated in these focus groups have clearly done the analysis to identify the resources that would improve their cultural organizations, enhance their ability to fulfill their missions, and strengthen the region's creative sector.

### **What Is Missing?**

*"In general, the Bay Area does have an experimental entrepreneurial vision still, but it's not as possible to execute that in this very expensive environment."*

*"The Bay doesn't seem to have a commercial industry for artists to participate in. I'm thinking of a handful of actors that I've met from New York. They'll do really cutting-edge theater, but they could still support themselves because they have access to commercial work for both screen and stage. That's also something really different about the Bay."*

*"One of the things that's so difficult in San Francisco, at least for theater artists, is that we have a small theater scene and we don't have national visibility. Our impact is limited because our visibility is limited."*

*"The Bay Area for me — I'm going to be pessimistic here — feels very fractured. The door is already starting to close and it's really disheartening. In response to George Floyd's murder on loop, 13 of us who were primarily BIPOC-led collectively just voluntarily started to gather twice a month to talk about accountability. We did it for a year plus, and what's really challenging that I'm seeing is that all of the language, once again has been co-opted and the actual action to change is not happening."*

*"Despite having eBay, Facebook, and Google right here, it seems like we got to still be scrappy. I wish that there was more investment. That's one of the things that I think is different about the Bay Area is that we are here swimming amongst some of the richest people in the world. A lot of arts administrators, a lot of organizations, a lot of cultural producers are still under resourced."*

*"We don't have the legacy foundations like in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, or even Minneapolis. California in general is like that, too."*

*"San Francisco is kind of the center point for how most people view the Bay Area when you're from outside the area. I know San Jose struggles with that image of being what it is. People don't realize that San Jose is the 10th largest city in the U.S."*



## *What are the most predominant leadership frameworks and narratives in the local arts ecosystem?*

The focus group participants articulated a variety of responses to this question. While the following quotes demonstrate the participants' consensus around common leadership frameworks, they also demonstrate the complexity of feelings and opinions that can arise from those frameworks.

*“When I start thinking about arts leadership, how that position is steeped in white hegemonic dominating culture, I go into those spaces being the only person of color sometimes with a little bit of code-switching or imposter syndrome.”*

*“In my experience, arts leadership has either been a maintainer and reinforcer of systemic oppression and white supremacy or the opposite, the transformative space where we are actually leading conversations about racial justice, economic equity, and climate. It’s polarized in some ways, but reinforcing or actively dismantling — and then everything in between.”*

*“I’m working with an arts organization that has a different point of view on how artists can survive. They’re pushing an interesting narrative right now that I have heard of, but have not been able to articulate the way they have — which is that culture moves faster than policy. That’s why artists are important. Every time they’re in front of artists and arts groups and communities, they reinforce this narrative. The other narrative they’re pushing, which I think is really interesting, is the artist as disruptor of systems of oppression. There’s something to be said about a message getting formalized that really informs what arts leadership is from generation to generation.”*

*“I think there’s a common association in arts leadership with being overworked and underpaid and doing it because you love the art form. There’s a lot of emotional labor and labor put on leaders. Those are the folk that are working really hard for not a lot of money to support a lot of people because it’s what we love to do and what we feel is right, and we’re willing to make that sacrifice. It’s especially common with leaders of color. I think that’s a common narrative around arts leadership that is pervasive and not helpful.”*

*“Being the leader is about becoming the resource, no matter how taxed for funding you may be. You have to be the core, the foundation, the thing that things can be built around. Becoming the resource, being able to dream forward, going past where you are, being able to be a channeler, a conduit. Often being an arts leader in small, underfunded communities means taking whatever accolade or benefit that comes to me and holding it with an open hand so that it doesn’t just feed me, it feeds many — because at the end of the day, the loyalty from those people that get opportunity are what gives a small, underfunded company longevity.”*

The focus group participants described leadership frameworks using language of positive affect and action (“transformative space,” “love the art,” “dream forward,” “feeds many”) as well as power-related antagonism (“polarized,” “disruptor,” “dominating”). Observing this ambivalence, I asked if they saw themselves as arts leaders. Many participants reluctantly adorned the identity of arts leader, describing the tension between how they saw arts leadership practiced versus what possibilities they saw for how one could practice arts leadership. For those who identified as arts leaders, they shared the following perspectives:

*“I absolutely identify as an arts leader. I have to. There are young Asian American girls who are looking at what the possibilities could be for them in this world. In the national landscape, where the women of color EDs make up less than 20% with this role, and Asian American women less than 3% of all nonprofit ED roles, the number’s even smaller in arts. I have to embrace that. That’s coming*

*from a cultural framework that says individualism, isn't it? Shared distributed power is really the way to go, but I have to because we are in this system."*

*"I also definitely feel like I'm an arts leader. I also have young Indigenous women, little girls who look up to me. I think about that every day, my own son looking up to me. In my community, in our bigger community, wherever we go, we are representing who we are and where we come from. I have had to lead whether I wanted to or not."*

*"I'm real clear that I'm a good servant. If you are not willing to be a servant, often the last one to eat, or the person that cleans up, if everybody else goes home, then you don't get to call yourself a leader. It's not so much about what you call yourself or how you look at yourself, but how does your community need you to be? I find that an interesting question to be asked in a room full of women and a particularly interesting question for me — I struggled for a long time with imposter syndrome, being minimalized in every room, where it didn't matter about the alphabet on the end of my name or how many organizations I had founded or how long I had successfully run them. I was there somehow on a carpet being looked down on and evaluated, as opposed to having a voice being a privilege extended to me from somebody else. I know a group of sisters and community and their little thing is they call themselves the Big Mouth Women. I admire their approach to that. I'm a big mouth servant and there are some young Black people, male and female, who need to know that you can use your voice. You can use your power, you can have power."*

*"I identify as an arts leader, personally, but I realize a lot of my leadership is grounded in not wanting to be the leader that I have seen modeled for me, or to undo some of the traditions and harmful practices that come along with leadership or being within a position of power. I want people to see me, in my position of leadership, as someone who is trying to subvert that and actually empower other people to be leaders as well. A lot of leadership for me is around advocacy and empowerment. If I'm a leader trying to just hold on to my power, and not give that power or spread it to others, then in my mind, I'm not being a true leader or a good leader. It can't be a hierarchical system anymore because that just hasn't been working."*

### *What opportunities and resources are currently shaping leadership in the field?*

Table 1 provides a list of 21 opportunities and resources that participants reported shape leadership in the field and informed their understanding of arts leadership in the Bay Area. A checkmark indicates the opportunities and resources affirmed by the participants and supported by the literature. It also allows readers to clearly see how inviting a diverse population of participants to this study revealed opportunities and resources not currently discussed in the literature. Notably, at the time of this study, no university-based arts leadership or management program exists in the Bay Area from which one could earn a certificate or degree.

In terms of discussing the resources that they needed, participants identified operating support and self-care for artists and arts leaders of the global majority. Funding these resources would especially help arts leaders working multiple jobs to make ends meet, simply because the field has not professionalized enough to provide full-time salaries for some artists and arts leaders who work for racial identity-based cultural organizations. Participants also expressed a desire for more authentic educational and leadership opportunities. I believe that the participants meant that they desire educational and leadership opportunities that resonate with Heidelberg's (2020) call for teaching culturally relevant and culturally responsive arts management. Those opportunities would empower them to draw upon their lived experiences as historically and continuously oppressed people, rather than requiring them to adopt a Eurocentric and patriarchal arts leadership framework that is counterintuitive to their lived experience.

**TABLE 1.**

<b>RESOURCE</b>	<b>FOCUS GROUP</b>	<b>LITERATURE</b>
<b>1. AMERICAN LEADERSHIP FORUM</b>	✓	✓
<b>2. ARTS PROGRAMS WITHIN SCHOOLS</b>	✓	✓
<b>3. BAY AREA ARTS ALLIANCE</b>	✓	✓
<b>4. BOARD SERVICE</b>	✓	
<b>5. CALIFORNIA ARTS COUNCIL ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM</b>	✓	✓
<b>6. CONVERSATIONS WITH COLLEAGUES</b>	✓	✓
<b>7. HEARING OTHER ARTS LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES ON TRYING TO MAKE CHANGE</b>	✓	
<b>8. INTERNSHIPS</b>	✓	✓
<b>9. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES</b>	✓	✓
<b>10. LEARNING FROM LEADERSHIP EXAMPLES IN AFRICAN AMERICAN, ASIAN AMERICAN, AND LATINX THEATER</b>	✓	
<b>11. LIVED EXPERIENCE AS A REFUGEE</b>	✓	
<b>12. LOCAL COMMUNITY SPACES THAT WORK WITH GRASSROOTS ORGANIZERS AND YOUTH CENTERS IN THE COMMUNITY</b>	✓	
<b>13. MULTICULTURAL ARTS LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE</b>	✓	✓
<b>14. MENTORSHIP, EXPLICITLY GUIDANCE TOWARD UNDERSTANDING AND IMPLEMENTING BEST PRACTICES</b>	✓	✓
<b>15. NATIONAL ARTS STRATEGIES</b>	✓	✓
<b>16. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONFERENCES, SUCH AS APAP, CALIFORNIA PRESENTERS, AND WESTERN ARTS ALLIANCE</b>	✓	✓
<b>17. NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM</b>	✓	✓
<b>18. THEATRE BAY AREA'S ARTS LEADERSHIP RESIDENCY</b>	✓	✓
<b>19. SHANNON LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE</b>	✓	✓
<b>20. WORKING WITH A UNIVERSITY TO SEE THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF ARTS AND CULTURE</b>	✓	✓
<b>21. WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE</b>	✓	

Lastly, two quotes warrant attention in response to this question, given their implications for building a multigenerational sector that values the preparedness of future generations of arts leaders.

*“I am anti anything that divides. I only practice multiplication and addition, so I get upset in rooms that are only for young people, Black men, or young girls. We don’t make society in isolation. Don’t we all know that there’s strength in unity? I am so super stoked about multi-generational spaces where say, elementary school children have responsibility for preschool children. Then those elementary school children are looking up to a group of high school students who are then looking up to the young graduate students I have in the room. There’s a scaffolding because that’s how our families work. We might live in a Western society, but I come from a group of people in which collectivism is our strength and individualism is a thing that’s been imposed upon us.”*

*“Seeing broken internship models where we, as an arts community, continue to find it acceptable to have unpaid full-time internships and expect folx to juggle part-time and full-time work and support the needs of an organization, almost as a staff member, while supporting themselves and seeing that firsthand. Or even if we’re paying folx, we’re paying them poverty wages to develop their careers, and that’s just not acceptable — that’s something that needs to change and has influenced what arts leadership should be for me.*

### *To what extent do they [the resources and opportunities] align with the Performing Arts Program’s values of equity, justice, and self-determination?*

When considering the above question, participants mostly addressed a different question than the one I posed. The first quote I selected most explicitly responds to the question. However, subsequent quotes indicate critiques of Hewlett’s values, and of philanthropy writ large, as opposed to how those values align with the opportunities and resources participants shared. Some responses follow:

*“Those three words [equity, justice, self-determination] are very common for people of color and for anyone belonging to a historically marginalized community, right?”*

*“Equity feels like a huge part of my arts leadership, and we’re moving toward justice. In the arts, it feels a step away from what justice really is, like the art we create inspire people to think or move through the world differently, and then those people go ahead and fight for justice or ensure justice can exist.”*

*“We have been discussing, for the last two or three years, what it means to be equitable. While that conversation is happening, changes and effect from it seem very blurry for me. There has been a lot of conversation, but very little to no action. To be truly equitable, everyone needs to be part of the table, but a lot of the conversations are very closed and only within people who have the agency and the power and the voice to do so.”*

*“Historically the Bay Area has been an activist community and in many ways has led the charge on these words, certainly equity, especially when it comes to the LGBTQ community — representation, having a voice — and immigrant communities, to have equitable access and increasing visibility. Justice, more recently, has at least in my mind become important in the sense of the most basic living wage for artists, because it’s unjust for artists to suffer and be slaves and for their work to just be given away for free.”*

*“When I see these three words, it’s just words until there’s something that changes. I’m already seeing these primarily white, large institutions, once again, getting funded because they’ve learned this language and not actually making change.”*

*“We don’t want equity and justice to stifle creativity. We want it to help creativity flourish. I think that requires subtlety in how we approach our activism.”*

*“I would hate for equity and justice to be a trendy idea for today. There’s a lot of money behind it. There’s a lot of push, there’s a lot of lexicon adoption. In a few years, something else will become the next big thing. Then it doesn’t become a priority or a thing that people talk about except for again, people of color artists, who will always be talking about it. Hopefully, we’re going through a moment where these ideas become part of the foundation and we can continue to build upon them as time moves on.”*

While participants clearly had much to say about equity and justice, self-determination elicited a more complex and nuanced response from participants. As the researcher, I expected participants to express a negative reaction to the word self-determination, because one could read it at the individual level as perpetuating the “bootstrap” rhetoric of individualism, which Tema Okun (2021) has identified as a characteristic of white supremacy culture. However, at a community or societal level, self-determination in a post-colonial context can point more toward collectivism, which, as one participant argued, remains a hallmark and strength that many people of the global majority appreciate and value. Nevertheless, participants expressed the following regarding self-determination:

*“Self-determination is less central in my mind, except for immigrant communities wanting their own stories in their own words. That’s certainly a central tenant of the work that I’ve done in the Middle Eastern community.”*

*“Self-determination is also a huge part of my experience in my work as being a leader. I recently had a mentor, a white woman who sent the unsolicited advice, ‘You should stop letting them use that picture of you because they have a better picture of your white boss. You want to be respectable.’ I was like, ‘I have no interest in being my boss and modeling my leadership after him. I like this picture of me. It’s goofy, it’s fun, it’s who I am inside, and that’s how I want to present myself to the world as a leader.’ That idea that I create the leader. I am the leader I want to be. I create the leadership I want to model. Being able to determine that on my own, and not against the way it’s always been done or the people that have been in my role before me. That self-determination practice feels very much a part of what I’m doing now, how I have to view myself, how I have to work in order to be a good and effective leader.”*

*“The self-determination part sometimes peters out, depending upon who’s facilitating the equity and justice. For instance, there was a journalist who wanted to do a whole series on justice, equity, injustice. After two very comprehensive conversations with myself and several other artists of color, he half-jokingly said, ‘I’m out. This is too much to handle.’ This is a white journalist. But this is our life, we don’t get to step in and out of it. I think that’s where the self-determination of those who were subjugated comes in, because we live it and we do it and we breathe it.”*

*How are responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, ethical crises, and calls across the creative sector for racial justice informing and transforming arts leadership in the Bay Area?*

I was curious to understand how four intersecting phenomena have impacted the participants' views of arts leadership. One response captured it beautifully. The subsequent responses affirmed and supported the participant's observation.

*“It felt apocalyptic. What could possibly be more at stake than what’s at stake right now? We have this chaos of fake news, orange skies, tear gas, plus the sound of helicopters 24/7 downtown, and then we’re all supposed to be away from each other. It felt like the stakes were just so high. It was an opportunity that we all got to learn so much more about each other. It was one of the ways that we were able to stand in our power as an organization and allow artists to do their thing and push our partners to make what they felt were uncomfortable choices, because people wanted to put up Black Lives Matter signs. We had to fight to have that be on the approved list of slogans that a property owner could pick from, four or five of them and then an artist would embody that in some way. We leveraged a lot of our social capital and a lot of trust that we had built within the community.”*

*“I have noticed that the pandemic has caused a shift for some leaders to actually care about the people more than the work. We realize so many people are struggling right now over the pandemic, and, as a response, some folx have tried to become more human-centric and put people first over what we do, having audiences and selling tickets, which I think is exciting.”*

*“But we also realized or are starting to realize the facets of pre-pandemic life that we don’t want to return to. The zero-paying gigs or you’re getting paid in food and drinks or whatever — or lineups not including enough women or BIPOC.”*

*“There’s a lot more culturally specific companies that put on the work now outside of the lens of whiteness, which I think is very powerful and admirable.”*

*“The artists that I’m connected to, a lot of them ended up creating their own market, really: something new that they wanted to work on, and being able to almost self-produce because being at home allowed you to do that.”*

*“For theaters, we lost a lot of money because of COVID and the two-year closure. A lot of artists moved away from the Bay Area because they couldn’t survive here. Some theaters actually closed as a result. Climate change has impacted theater on a practical level with fires, for example, and poor air quality forcing cancellation. I think that’s probably going to become a regular thing. It’s something now that people plan for in their season.”*

*“I agree that COVID and climate change has really halted a lot of different things in different ways. But at the same time, especially the COVID situation, closing things down also created a larger dialogue, and due to Zoom, we were able to start creating those dialogues, not just locally, but nationally and also internationally.”*

Of the four phenomena, COVID-19 received the most attention. Still, consensus emerged among the focus groups around hope that the lessons and momentum gained from the intersecting phenomena of the pandemic, racial reckoning, climate change, and ethical crises would continue.



## *What are some compelling visions for how the role of arts leaders might evolve over the next three to 10 years?*

My final question for participants asked them to contemplate how arts leadership in the Bay Area would evolve. I strategically positioned this question to follow our discussion about the intersecting phenomena of COVID-19, the racial reckoning, climate change, and ethics because of their presumed impact on arts leadership's evolution in the Bay Area. Though the perspectives shared in the subsequent quotes affirm the themes from the first question (culture, diversity, embeddedness, immigration, and history; the value of art and an intersectoral lens; and big versus small and BIPOC versus white organizations), I chose these quotes because together they collectively represent participants' vision for the future of arts leadership in the Bay Area. These quotes also demonstrate the complexity participants face while ethically leading COVID-19 recovery and access, diversity, equity, inclusion (ADEI) and antiracism initiatives within the context of an increasingly precarious climate. Lastly, I think these quotes will resonate with readers in other regions of the country. Participants shared the following insights and observations:

*“Two things have happened that we can't go back on. One is artists demand a living wage. I don't think we can go back to the expectation that we can build organizations on the backs of artists. The other thing that's happened is that once you empower communities of color and change, like in theater, for example, theater leadership has shifted dramatically. A lot of the new artistic and executive directors are women and women of color. Of course, everyone has their own way of leadership and their own values and styles. But I think in general, we [women of color] do have a different way of running an organization and we do define success differently. I think that is going to change the way theater is made and practiced.”*

*“I think there'll be more of a multimedia approach to things from what we've learned over the past few years. Being in person is the best, human connection is the best, in that traditional sense. But I think it would be cool to see what that multimedia approach looks like.”*

*“We offered all our online products for free because access was more important. But then what does that mean, in terms of diverse sources of revenue? What happens if a theater company has no, or very minimal earned revenue? What does that look like? What does that mean for the sustainability of that company? A lot of foundations are funding diversity and social justice and organizations founded by immigrants or people of color, but will that continue five years from now? Or is this another sort of funding trend that will disappear in a few years?”*

*“Succession is the thing to keep an eye on. The idea also that people or groups work more on an entrepreneurial point of view versus a nonprofit platform will be looked at more, too.”*

*“Co-leadership, or more flat models of leadership or collective process of thinking and working is probably going to be a direction you'll see many more organizations moving into for their leadership structure. Funders are one of the entities that will question a co-leadership process, unfortunately. This is something funders, and even board members, to look at, because that'll be something a lot of folks don't understand — they just like a top-down, one-person-in-charge, one-person-to-blame system.”*

*“There will be a focus on more holistic wellness and work-life balance across the sector, especially the importance of that halt and reflect. I'm really hoping that's something that we bring into the future, because I want to lead a healthy team. I want healthy artists. I want happy people who are not overworked and over stressed. I hope that the future of the sector or of Bay Area arts also includes the person who makes the art. When we ask artists for things for free, or we ask them to work overtime, or we ask people in organizations to work overtime, we're separating the person from the work and you can't do that because it's a whole thing.”*



*“We are moving toward funding arts organizations less, and individual artists more. This is happening because, during COVID, a lot of individual artists suffered. This is the most frustrating narrative. My question will be back to funders. How are you not closing the pie on organizations who still also need to exist? It’s like, we got to take money out of our pocket to get that, it is exactly the divisive mode of capitalism that always existed. More organizations will continue to close if that doesn’t shift. I can see that already.”*

*“We get some funding right now, what about when my kid is older? Is he going to be able to do the things that he wants to do within these fields and have that support? All these youth I’m working with right now, in a few years, are they going to get that acknowledgement? Are they going to still be seen? That’s something I think about a lot.”*

*“One of the interesting things about the Bay Area, too, is that it’s a metropolitan area. Government policy and funding is inequitable and it’s distributed in these different ways just because it’s different cities and different counties. Then you have these inequitable funding practices from philanthropy and all the problems with that system. Even as those things are not set up for our larger success, we still have to band together to be able to make changes.”*

*“One of the reasons I like working in the Black Arts continuum is the clear metaphor that arts will always leave a light in the window. There’ll always be storytellers that remind us of what came before and who are capable of imagining what needs to be next. It’s almost like we’re a virus ourselves of a type, as long as humanity exists, artists and dreamers will exist. If institutions want to be on the right side of history, then fund magic, because that’s what’ll save us: imagining what doesn’t exist in this moment.”*

*“We have a choice, and I hope that we are determined to make sure this progress continues. Because we know what happened with the civil rights movement. We know what happened with all these movements. When the other side rises up and contests their loss of power and positionality, the pushback becomes suppression and renewed oppression. We have to stand fast in a way that we haven’t been able to before, whether you’re fighting it from the inside of the game or from the outside. It doesn’t matter, we are all in this together. I think that it’s going to take a new level of an ongoing commitment from all of us.”*

*“I think a lot about how do we connect with young people coming into the field and hoping that they can see that there’s a different way of being, existing, and being subversive, or whatever tools they need to continue to break it down, because clearly, it’s going to be a generational issue for lives past us.”*

*“The one concern I have in five to 10 years is what I’m feeling right now, that as we go back into producing or returning to life post-pandemic, we revert back to our old ways, or we don’t spend as much time and energy thinking about equity, inclusion, and justice, and how we can shift culture for the better because we’re so busy trying to just maintain normal operations. I’m hoping that this work continues to be a concerted effort, even when we don’t have this giant forced pause upon us.”*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, I offer the following practical and theoretical recommendations for consideration by arts leaders, educators, funders, and scholars. Participants identified numerous noteworthy expenditures deserving of funding: affordable space, arts leadership research, conference attendance, holistic arts education that exposes youth to all aspects of the creative sector, informal convenings of arts leaders to have the kinds of conversations discussed in the focus groups, leadership programs, living wages for artists, intergenerational mentorship, sabbaticals for historically and continuously oppressed artists and arts leaders, succession planning, and more experimentation in the creative sector, especially given the sector's focus on creativity and innovation.

Such innovation might include funding for cultural organizations to experiment with and learn from distributed leadership and/or flat leadership models that are less hierarchical. These organizational models more accurately reflect the ways in which the creative making process relies on collaboration, and might prove useful in revealing new ways that cultural organizations can exist.

Another possible approach could support experimental hiring to compel change. Change management in cultural organizations has received too little scholarly attention. But what if funders could incentivize cultural organizations creating the environment to embrace and maximize change? This could include funding a cultural worker solely to agitate, disrupt for, and instigate organizational change. Ideally, the cultural organization would need to commit to the experiment for at least three years and researchers would need to observe and document the process for critical insights and learning gained from what A. P. J. Abdul Kalam described as a “first attempt in learning” (FAIL). My point here is, what if? Still, one participant remarked, “I just want to say that there are foundations that say that in their program description, but they don't actually practice it — because once you fail, they don't fund you the next time.” Another participant stated, “The Hewlett website [talks about the] idea of long-term funding: It should also come with a co-conspirator spirit, a hands-off thing. Quit writing prescriptions. If any of them worked, we wouldn't be in the world we're in.”

Funders and service organizations should also provide more formal and informal educational opportunities with curricula co-constructed with the people the education intends to liberate and serve. This is important because too many educators base their teaching practices on a colonial model that seeks to acculturate, assimilate, and condition students, as opposed to giving them multiple opportunities to engage with their own cognitive processes. The two quotes below highlight the implications of, and the potential opportunity within the Bay Area, from lacking more formal and informal education opportunities.

*“Early training in the field and an education in the business of the arts is necessary. When I was training as an artist, I didn't have that. I don't have any awareness that is available at UC Berkeley, Stanford, St. Mary's, or USF. The business of the arts is lacking for a lot of artists, and that is a necessary component to be able to step into the role of a leader, or even having an awareness of what goes on in the field.”*

*“Folx are looking for how to write a grant, how to budget, they're looking for a production timeline. What is a board? They don't necessarily know how to form a nonprofit from the ground up, as well as self-produce their work. As an arts leader, it's created another level of labor for me to teach and to put these courses together, and to then go out and implement a program that helps people with their art and also how to market it.”*

Because many participants expressed a reluctance to identify as an arts leader — even though others viewed them as such — and some of those who identified as historically and continuously oppressed voiced a disinclination to consistently activate their personal power in pursuit of justice, education on power, including the ethics of how and when to use it and the sources of it (Liu 2014), could also benefit the Bay Area's creative sector. Arts leadership and management educators should also teach ethics, as well as culturally relevant and

responsive arts leadership models (Heidelberg 2020). The quote below offers a final observation that can inform arts funders' thinking about their practices.

*“These funders have created more chaos in the field than the artists. They’ve created these little pockets of, ‘This is what we will fund. We’re going to do it for large. We’re going to do it for middle. We’re going to do it for small.’ Who created that? We’re playing on their field. We’re playing in their game. There’s a different way to construct this. There’s a different way to share resources and power that they’re not facilitating. Part of this division has been a construct in philanthropic giving that has created silos, pockets, either/or, and others. The whole word should simply be collaboration and everybody should be doing it in every which way.”*

This study affirms and builds upon Ono’s (2016) findings of economic pressures, professionalization of the field, cross-generational workplaces, demographic shifts, generational perspectives on distributed leadership, diversity, and innovation as key issues challenging the arts leadership landscape in the Bay Area. These findings warrant further investigation at the national level and with a nuanced focus on geographic context. Researchers might frame such a study by asking the question: In what ways does arts leadership differ across the U.S., and how do arts leaders grapple with economic pressures, professionalization of the field, cross-generational workplaces, demographic shifts, generational perspectives on distributed leadership, diversity, and innovation?

The study also advances insights and observations articulated in extant literature (Caust 2015 and 2018; Cuyler 2022; Duffy 2022; Foster 2018; Henze and Escribal 2021; Keeney and Jung 2018 and 2022; Poisson-de Haro and Normandin 2010; Stein 2016). However, additional questions remain. One participant stated that women of color as a group have distinct leadership methods. Little extant research (Caust 2015; Cuyler 2022; Duffy 2022; Heidelberg 2020; Henze and Escribal 2021; Poisson-de Haro and Normandin 2010) addresses the ways in which social identities, such as disability, gender, race, and sexual orientation, among others, impact how arts leaders lead.

Therefore, future arts leadership research should investigate the following research questions: (1) What is culturally relevant and culturally responsive arts leadership? (2) In what ways can arts leadership become more culturally relevant and culturally responsive in practice? (3) To what extent does the current or the post-COVID-19 arts ecosystem honor and value culturally relevant and culturally responsive arts leadership? (4) In what ways are historically and continuously oppressed arts leaders incentivized and rewarded for practicing leadership models that perpetuate white supremacy and patriarchal culture? (5) How might the creative sector incentivize change management toward a culturally relevant and culturally responsive arts leadership model? (6) What benefits accrue to cultural organizations that affirm, empower, and enable culturally relevant and culturally responsive arts leadership models? (7) Why do some arts leaders, such as several participants in this study, resist self-identifying as arts leaders, and what factors — such as professional development in ethics and power — might change their perspective and enhance their confidence in adorning the professional identity of arts leader?

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