



Strengthening BAME inclusion in arts & wellbeing services – summary of 1st roundtable 29.04.20

Flourishing Lives are delighted to be working in partnership with the [Race Equality Foundation](#) and [HEAR Network](#) as we seek to advocate together for best practice in diversity and inclusion across the arts and wellbeing sectors.

Our programme aims to identify ways in which arts and wellbeing organisations can improve their inclusive practice to ensure that people from a Black, Asian, and minority ethnic background are genuinely engaged and directly involved in the development of their cultural programmes.

In April 2020 we convened our first roundtable, bringing together a group of approximately 25 representatives from organisations with a focus on working with BAME communities.

The aim was to start by building an understanding of community-specific barriers to engaging in 'the arts' and identifying what some of the solutions might be.

The conversation started by inviting representatives to share some of the challenges that they and their respective communities have encountered:

- Large institutions that are not really seen as part of their local community and therefore not accessed by them or felt to be 'for them'. This might be coupled with communities that don't generally 'move beyond' their space.
- Financial issues: Getting into central London is a challenge because of cost. Once there, a sense of being priced out (for example entry is free but cafes are expensive).
- 'The welcome' or the anticipated welcome and what that experience of walking into the space might be like.
- Understanding that this is a question that works both ways: arts institutions might be asking how to better engage BAME communities, but should not assume that this is the same as those communities not accessing art at all. In turn why don't you (the staff on these teams) engage with the arts specific to the communities that you are trying to attract?
- A lot of existing building/spaces have a history, perhaps a colonial history. How are you addressing the fact that some people may feel uncomfortable? How do we address the horrible histories?
- An example of this was bringing students on a museum tour and the tour guide expecting the students to understand and connect with the institutionalized way that information was shared. In turn, how can staff be supported to better have these conversations and understand the different contexts in which the space is experienced?

- Content has to be addressed too, if it is going to be accessible to all. Sometimes the conversation comes after the content has been planned and produced, and at that stage only really serves as a tick-box exercise. Involve people from the beginning.
- The current understanding (and valuing) of cultural capital is a very white idea.
- Barrier example: members of the Arab and Bangladeshi communities were invited to engage in an arts project hosted by a major arts institution and were very reluctant at first, but when that became an offer for the whole family it was easier to engage with and they ultimately loved it.
- Language can be a barrier and especially with new migrant communities.
- We need to be clear about what people are already accessing and whether this is a conversation about accessing art that may not relate to their experience.
- Partnership work to help build diverse audiences is useful but there is a fear that might lead to loss of funding - with some funding even disincentivizing partnership-working.

What solutions do we have?

- We need to start by thinking and understanding the audience, what is their existing engagement with the arts, as well as the barriers that they face.
- Diversity of workforce, across all connected sectors. For example, who is identifying the ideas of what should be funded? We need to diversify the boardroom and the decisions that are made there.
- A challenge is accessing funding opportunities and the difficulties in completing applications. Work needs to be done to more thoughtfully share available funding opportunities.
- Help with making applications and their formats accessible to ensure they are genuinely open to all.
- Making the link between engagement in arts and the impact on your wellbeing. We need to raise awareness, and not just about going to museum, but how all arts activities - such as African drumming - directly contributes to a sense of wellbeing.
- Understanding the need to work in every direction. For example: decolonising the arts curriculum may impact children and young people's own confidence which allows for that relationship to grow early on.
- Creating links between boards and developing connections with schools – what if every organisation included a youth advisory board/element (depending on the size of the organisation)? It was questioned to what extent this happens already but in the collective experience it seemed to be minimal.

What are some available actions we can take now?

- Weekly webinars that are run by [Ubele](#) on how to complete applications and other funding support are available online and can be shared across our networks.

- Are there successful organisations (either in terms of securing funding or other ways) that would be able to run workshops on their approach?
- Organisations getting together to showcase talent.
- Identify possible partnerships with organisations already working in the arts and set a precedent for positive partnership working in the future.
- We need to encourage all organisations to advertise their jobs (approximately 70% are never made public, harming potential for diversity).

Future aims:

- Walk through/develop a programme that actually delivers an activity that demonstrates diversity.
- Secure specific commitment from an organisation to develop this programme.
- Some of the challenges of partnership working need to be addressed. For example, the impact of last minute involvement (connected to the point above).
- Establish a steering group to support the future of this work.