

Program Priorities for Arts for Learning WNY

Based on our strategic plan and current needs of our local school districts, Arts for Learning WNY has created the following series of questions for you to ponder while you consider applying to join our staff of Teaching Artists. While we would love to accept all artists as we know they have value for our youth, we will only consider artists presenting programs that meet our criteria as listed below. You do not need to fill this out or return it with your application. Arts for Learning is providing you with this information to be transparent about our decision-making process.



Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Innovation (JEDI)

Programs that have at least one JEDI component will be prioritized. Here are some questions for you to think about in relation to each of your programs in relation to JEDI principles.

1. Does your program celebrate a culture?
 - a. If Yes, are you or is someone in your group from that culture? **If the answer to this question is no, please refer to our Cultural Appropriation Policy to see if your program qualifies under our guidelines.**
2. Does your lesson plan include time for belonging practices? I.e. community building, learning students names, creating a safe space etc.
Priority will be given to programs that incorporate belonging practices into each lesson plan. Arts for Learning understands that these practices may differ between multi session residency programs and single visit workshops.
3. Is your lesson plan able to be modified or adapted to serve a student with an IEP or special need in the classroom you are teaching in?
Priority will be given to programs that incorporate lesson plan modifications for differentiated learners.

Connections to Curriculum

All programs on the Arts for Learning roster must connect to at least 1 NYS Arts Standard. Priority will be given to programs that connected to both arts and one other educational area (i.e. STEM, Social Studies, ELA, Physical Education). Most programs should not connect to more than 2-3 standards in order to meaningfully connect to curriculum.

1. Does your program connect to at least 1 NYS Arts Standard?
 - a. If no, your program is not eligible for our roster.
2. Does your program connect to at least 1 curriculum standard outside of the arts?
 - a. Priority will be given to those programs that are cross curricular, using the arts as a vehicle for learning other subjects. However, this it is not currently a requirement.

Cultural Representation and Appropriation Policy

Arts for Learning WNY

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ARTS FOR LEARNING WNY'S JUSTICE AND EQUITY COMMITMENT

The board, staff, and Teaching Artist community of Arts for Learning believe in the power of the arts to engage and empower individuals and communities. By participating in versatile and rich arts education, we believe students will creatively transform their schools, neighborhoods, and beyond. Art can be an agent of personal and social liberation, and we believe this is essential to our mission to inspire people and expand their learning through the arts.

We have a responsibility to continuously work to dismantle the barriers to the arts and arts education in our community. The impact of arts in education is especially significant for communities that often do not have equitable opportunities for discovery, exploration, and self-empowerment through the arts.

We recognize historical and current injustices and systems of oppression – both in society at large and within the fields of education, especially arts education – that have created opportunity gaps we must eradicate. We are committed to engaging in the hard work necessary to advance Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Innovation (JEDI) within our organization and across the arts and education communities. We seek to foster an atmosphere of inclusivity, empathy, and awareness that allows the community to feel safe and valued in each aspect of our work. We strive to use JEDI principles as a central point in our decision-making and program-building across the spectrum, working to enact change from the classroom to the boardroom and all spaces between!

WHAT IS CULTURAL APPROPRIATION?

“Taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else’s culture without permission. This can include unauthorized use of another culture’s dance, dress, music, language, folklore, cuisine, traditional medicine, religious symbols, etc. It’s most likely to be harmful when the source community is a minority group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways or when the object of appropriation is particularly sensitive, e.g., sacred objects.”

SUSAN SCAFIDI, Author of *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law*

Arts for Learning defines cultural appropriation in accordance with the above definition.

Understanding that whether an artist has “permission” can be difficult to establish, so Arts for Learning also investigates whether a given element of a program has implicit/explicit roots in racism, stereotype, or misinformation, or has been historically white-washed and separated from its roots in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) communities.

We find that cultural appropriation and related issues of inaccurate and harmful cultural representation can be present in, but not limited to, the following elements:

- Communication of inaccurate or white-washed historical facts.
- Use of “general” accents, costuming, and language which necessarily draw upon stereotypes in representing people, traditions, and dress outside of the artist’s direct cultural experience, particularly when a historically marginalized group is portrayed by an artist with a less marginalized identity.
- Inclusion of program elements with roots in racist ideology, even when those roots are not widely known to modern audiences.
- Separating an artform founded in BIPOC communities and culture from its historic roots through omission or revision of context and/or failure to communicate the artist’s background and connection to the original context.

OUR STANCE

Arts for Learning believes that arts education experiences are most effective when delivered from a place of cultural authenticity and transparency.

To this end, Arts for Learning is dedicated to hiring teaching artists with deep connections to their artforms, programs that provide accurate historical and cultural context, and internal processes that continually review and communicate the accuracy and authenticity of language, images, and programming. Arts for Learning acknowledges that cultural appropriation is most likely present where there is historic oppression of a marginalized culture. We will review all services with the understanding that artforms created by people of color are uniquely susceptible to being stripped of their original context and meaning.

Questions to ask:

- How is the artist sharing the history and cultural context of the artform, practice, or artifact being presented?
- Is the artist’s cultural background aligned with the cultural origin of what is being presented?
- What is the artist’s personal relationship, training background, and understanding of the artform, practice, or artifact? How is the artist telling the story of that relationship in the program?
- Is there a historical power imbalance between the artist’s racial and cultural background and that of the people from whom the artform, practice or artifact is sourced?
- Has the permission or consultation of experts from the cultural group on display been sought?
- Were they compensated for their expertise, and is there an ongoing economic relationship?

Best practices and contingencies:

All teaching artists should share their connection with their artform. For culturally specific programs where the indigenous culture of the artform differs from the artists' own background, this is especially important. Does the artist have a deep relationship to the culture in question, and the authority to speak as an expert in it?

- If an artist is an expert in an artform but does not share that connection, or the artform's original cultural context in the program, Arts for Learning staff will guide the artist in how to do so.
- If an artist is NOT an expert in an artform that differs from the artist's cultural background, Arts for Learning staff will point the artist toward a different programmatic choice or consider no longer presenting the program.
- In the event of more egregious racial or cultural presentations of stereotypes and offensive imagery (e.g., blackface) Arts for Learning reserves the right to immediately cancel any upcoming bookings of the program and remove the program from active presentation until the issues are addressed.

Some signs of an artist practicing positive cultural representation:

- Clear communication of personal and cultural connection, permission, and ownership.
- Accurate historical context given; respectful language used.
- Willingness to non-defensively engage in critique and adjustment of content.
- Strong relationships with members of the cultural group being represented and with the artforms, practices, or artifacts on display.
- Past or ongoing payment or sharing of proceeds with the group being represented.
- Artists sharing expertise from their own cultural, racial, and/or national backgrounds are also for the most part considered by Arts for Learning to be in the space of positive cultural representation.

Marketing:

As much as is possible in each given marketing medium, Arts for Learning will present clear language and images that reflect both the artform being presented and the story, expertise, and identity of the individuals presenting it.

- Marketing images will be up to date and feature depictions of the program that mirror what the school will see. (e.g., a program on Latinx musical traditions will not have a photo of three Latinx performers when the actual makeup of a group performing in a school might be two white and one Latinx performer.)
- Language in program and artist descriptions will make clear the relationship of the artist to the artform. If an artist has studied deeply in a culturally specific artform that is not their own, Arts for Learning will communicate that history. Arts for Learning will avoid tacitly implying in its language that a performer is of the same cultural background as the origin of their artform when this is not the case.
- Language will be examined to avoid exoticizing phrasing when describing programs highlighting non-White cultures such as "exotic" and "colorful."

Recruitment:

Arts for Learning will prioritize hiring expert teaching artists who share the same cultural background as the artform they are presenting. If this is not possible, Arts for Learning will diligently investigate the artist's expertise in the artform and their ability to share authentic cultural context during a program. If Arts for Learning is not satisfied in either the artist's expertise or ability to communicate context, they will not pursue hiring that artist.

Professional Learning:

- Arts for Learning will make available professional learning opportunities to artists, whether en masse or in focused one-on-one sessions, to continue to educate about how to avoid cultural appropriation and seek authenticity in programming.
- Arts for Learning staff will continue, with the help of the staff JEDII Task Force, to redefine and hone its understanding of how cultural appropriation can appear in Arts for Learning's programs. Best practices are periodically examined and redefined.

Sources:

Thoughtco.com - A Guide to Understanding and Avoiding Cultural Appropriation

National Art Education Association – Position Statement on Use of Imagery, Cultural Appropriation and Socially Just Practices

A main source for this document was the Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance (AORTA's) worksheet on cultural appropriation. This document has since been removed from public access.

