

# THE — FIELD

## ARTISTS AT THE CENTER

### A Snapshot of The Field's First Artist Council

*"...when artists band together to solve problems they CAN solve problems"*

- Artist Council member reflection

## Centering Artists since 1986

Our name is The Field for a reason - a truly thriving community must include the voices and visions of the full field of artists and makers: from the radical, gorgeous and bizarre to the schmaltzy, swelling and overblown. We are also what's called "an arts service organization" - and we take that designation very seriously. We are in SERVICE to artists. Over our 35 years of work we have always endeavored to serve and center artists: from being founded by and staffed by working and retired artists, to hosting Artists Congresses which center artists' needs, from fellowships for artists from historically under-represented communities, to research and reports which share the hopes of artists across the country, to now: the launch of our inaugural Artist Council - a Black, Indigenous and Artist of Color (BIPOC) majority body that was charged with providing critical advice and perspective to our new Vision services. From October 2020 through July 2021, this group advised us on a critical range of topics from artist services, technology, branding, privacy, accessibility, and more. We intend that the Council becomes an annual body that deepens The Field's commitment to centering artists and their needs in our work. We are extraordinarily grateful to this wise and honest group for pushing us to do better. The following is a snapshot of what we did, what we learned, what worked and what's next.

### WHAT WE DID

VALUES: While we didn't explicitly name it we tried to center *trust* and *abundance* in the operationalizing of the Council: from compensation to scheduling, from attendance to contracts.

WHY: to get feedback, insight and advice from artists who use our services or who could use our services.

WHO: 18 artists. Vast majority NYC-based. BIPOC-majority. Performance, media and visual artists representing a range of creative and artistic practices, generation/gender identity diverse, with varying career trajectories and with diverse experiences and expertise, artists familiar with The Field and not.

HOW were artists selected: Staff of The Field collaboratively crowdsourced a list of artists who met the above criteria. Artists were then invited to submit a very brief application that asked for basic, but necessary, contact and demographic information. The goal for the Council to be majority BIPOC was centered in the review and selection process once questionnaires were received. In the end, 18 individuals with a proven commitment to community-building, equity and making an impact on the arts and culture sector were selected by The Field staff to form the first iteration of the Council.

HOW MUCH: We offered a \$1,500 stipend, paid in 3 installments. The last payment is 30 days after the Council ends. All Members will receive full payment regardless of participation.

HOW WE DETERMINED \$: After much discussion and research, staff of The Field proposed \$125 an hour for approximately 12 hours of work. We decided to pay a flat stipend rather than per hour. We also decided that we would prioritize trust and intention - that we believed the artists would do their best to attend whatever they could - and we would not NOT pay someone if they couldn't attend.

WHEN: October 2020 - June 30, 2021. We intentionally did not set a calendar in advance for meetings. Nor did we make any meetings mandatory. Once meetings were set up we invited 6-8 artists to join.

HOW: Zoom meetings only due to COVID. Usually 60-90 minutes often with a brief survey to follow up.

TIME MANAGEMENT: Artist Council hours were not tracked or micromanaged. Members were free to commit to as many meetings as they had time and capacity for. Members were engaged through online meetings, focus groups, email communication and surveys. Overall, 93% of Council Members surveyed felt that the compensation structure and amount were fair. We believe that there is room in the future for potential increases based on scope of work, Council responsibilities/deliverables, and length of the term of service for Council Members.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

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### WHAT WORKED:

*"I learned a great deal from all the members of the Council. It was enriching and edifying to hear how other artists live their lives and to interact with them. The wisdom passed around on our calls expanded my consciousness."*  
- Artist Council member reflection

- Trust! The artists were very generous with their input, time and ideas.
- The mix of age, artistic discipline, career trajectory and familiarity (or lack of) with The Field was effective in providing useful input and building community.
- When surveyed: 86% of the group indicated that their experience was very positive.
- Artists contributed great feedback related to future service areas where The Field would **connect** artists with experts in the sector to help fill knowledge gaps and high need areas of support. Artist Council Members participated in a series of focus groups to help us think through what these services were and could look like. Council Members focused on the need for advanced services and guidance from lawyers, accountants and technicians to help support digital production work throughout and beyond quarantine. Artists also reflected on the need for strategic planning and capacity building support for their companies and work as well as the need to connect with peers and build more intergenerational mentoring relationships.
- From an organizational equity perspective, 93% of council members surveyed felt that the compensation structure and amount were fair.
- 100% of our Council Members said that they would consider serving another term with us. That is a deeply meaningful response for The Field and also indicates tremendous promise for the potential impact that integration of a permanent Artist Council can make on The Field and our work.

### WHAT DIDN'T WORK SO WELL:

- Zoom fatigue and lack of in-person meetings. The Council only met once as a full body. These factors may have contributed to a lack of community building overall. However, we also know that zoom participation is more accessible and much easier for many

people including people with children or who do elder or other care.

- A staffing shift at The Field resulted in no designated staff member working specifically with the Artist Council. We pivoted to add an external consultant (and former staff member of The Field), Wilfredo Hernandez, for discrete work with the Council. Staff at The Field also added work with the Council to their already full plates. The lack of a dedicated staff member, however, contributed to a lack of structure and diminished impact.
- We had less need for time from the Council than we thought. Most artists did between 3-8 hours of work/meetings, while we originally projected 12 hours of work.
- Specific and discrete projects: In the final survey some members suggested that having a specific project for the Council would be impactful. For example, perhaps a subset of the Council creates an event for The Field or reviews specific services that they have a demonstrated interest in developing. Case in point, Operations Manager Nancy Ahn reported getting more (and more actionable) feedback on our fiscal sponsorship program from individuals enrolled in that program than the Artist Council. This may be attributed to the fact that the Council Members were largely unfamiliar with fiscal sponsorship, and therefore had little buy-in for improving this service.
- Our own scarcity mindset: We raced to do an event with the Artist Council and to write this report by June 30th because we had promised some funders that we would. While the event and the report are, we think, impactful and effective, we are racing - in the midst of the “end” of a pandemic after one of the longest, hardest years in The Field’s and the field’s history.

## NEXT TIME AROUND

- Artist Selection: Current Artist Council members will nominate artists for the next Council. Staff at The Field will supplement names as needed.
- Who? Again we will aim for BIPOC- majority but we will expand to include more non-NYC artists. We might pursue only early career or emerging artists or artists who are very involved with The Field for discrete areas of need.
- We will allocate a dedicated staff member at The Field to lead the Council.
- Fewer members: most likely the Council will be 8-10 members so that we can effectively use their time.

- Schedule and participation: We might set a calendar and encourage commitment in advance. We might schedule live quarterly or bi-annual meetings (with food, childcare and more) to build community more effectively.
- More time together, more time in the work, and more time as a cohort. In addition to time, several members asked for more structure to their experience. Rather than being tapped as a pure advisory board, several of the members offered suggestions as to how they could play a larger role in special projects at The Field, and potentially even governance. Overall, members wanted a deeper experience with each other and the organization.
- Both The Field and the current Artist Council feel like there is so much potential for increased responsibilities, special project oversight and member-led initiatives. 86% of the current Council felt like the Council could accommodate additional responsibilities in the course of their work. Deepening the impact model of the Council will continue to create pathways for learning, responsiveness to artists' needs, and engagement with the sector as a whole. We believe this will increase artists and artists' perspective at the center of The Field, and beyond.
- This report is called "Artists At The Center" but it was written by The Field. It features two quotes and some data. Next time we will ask artists to write directly.

## CONCLUSION

There is a big difference between listening and really centering artists. What would real autonomy or self-determination look like at The Field (or in the field)? Impacted and inspired by the national and international racial justice reckoning of 2020 many artists and cultural workers looked hard (again) at the non-profit industrial complex and the white supremacy that undergirds all of it. These systems center funding and curation, prioritize product over process and are burdened by deep scarcity mindset. Artists are decidedly NOT centered. In response, 2020 and ongoing saw the rise of robust work by powerful groups like [Creating New Futures](#), [We See You, White American Theater](#), [Solidarity Economy](#), PSNY 02020 artists-at-the center project, and so many more. And then, of course, there is backlash and back-steps and the cycle continues. It's hard to feel hopeful but we must. If the past 18 months don't transform what we - as gatekeepers - do and how we do it, then we have no right to say we love the arts. We have no right to say we are working for artists, we have no right to our jobs and our salaries and our benefit packages. We must be transformed and we must transform. And by "we", we mean WE.

## 2020-2021 ARTIST COUNCIL REPS

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Martin Casella\*  
Yanira Castro\*  
Sarah Chien\*  
Andrew Clarke\*  
Maura Nguyen Donohue\*  
Alicia Foxworth\*  
Fana Fraser\*  
Melanie Greene\*  
Sarah K. Khan\*  
Zaq Landsberg\*  
Anabella Lenzu\*  
Katherine Longstreth\*  
Francesca Pazniokas  
Rad Pereira  
manny rivera  
James Scruggs\*  
Qurell-Amani\*  
Maysoon Zayid\*

\*denotes current or former member of The Field or other program participation

## GRATITUDE & CREDITS

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A huge thank you to the artists on our inaugural Council! Also shout out to Chantel Bell, Wilfredo Hernandez, The Field staff, ILABS, Team, the Board of The Field, and our funders and donors.

### CREDITS

Jennifer Wright Cook, Executive Director, The Field - Contributing Writer  
Shawn René Graham, Deputy Director - Editing  
Nancy Ahn, Operations Manager - Contributing Writer  
Wilfredo Hernandez (Communitas Arts + Culture, LLC) - Contributing Writer & Thought Partner  
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### FUNDING CREDITS

