

# Moving Recommendations Forward

Prepared for Region of Waterloo Arts Fund

Written by Jennifer Chan

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# Land Acknowledgement

The Region of Waterloo Arts Fund is situated on the Haldimand Tract, land that was promised to Six Nations, and was traditionally used by the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Neutral Peoples. We are grateful to have the opportunity to live, work, create, and to meet on territory protected by the Dish With One Spoon wampum. The enduring presence, philosophies, and deep traditional knowledge of First Peoples are foundational to the arts and culture of this place. We are committed to supporting local creators by acknowledging the collective past, and respecting the contributions of all peoples. (Source: Region of Waterloo Arts Fund)

During the EDI process, stakeholders shared about how land acknowledgements are a necessary step towards reconciliation as well as a demonstration of an easy first step. This analogy was shared in response to how if RWAF only takes easy steps, that trust will be further broken and there may not be faith for a future where RWAF is seen as an equitable funder.

The actions that follow the easy steps are the ones that demonstrate what kind of kinship is possible.

# Why this report and why now?

In May 2022, the Region of Waterloo Arts Fund received a report titled: *“Region of Waterloo Arts Fund: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Needs Assessment and Recommendations Report”*. The report was shared as an artifact of the beginning of an EDI process and journey for RWAFF with 24 recommendations.

This report is a continuation of this EDI journey, it is an artifact of process and progress. This report is titled: *“Region of Waterloo Arts Fund: Moving Recommendations Forward”* and it is an update to the initial 24 recommendations and where they are in December 2022.

This report is a summary of the EDI process from the perspective of the EDI Consultant based on coaching sessions with members of the RWAFF Board and 7 EDI Advisors.

This report is a key tool in decision making within the existing RWAFF Board. The Board Members who have been participating in nearly weekly coaching sessions for 3 months have requested a written report be shared with their counterparts so that they can move the conversation forward together.

This report is intended to provide a stepping stone to the next steps. This report is a culmination of conversations that opened up biases, tensions, and behaviours that if unresolved, could be holding RWAFF back from being the type of organization that remains viable.

Finally, this report is written and fosters the [white supremacy culture - worship of the written word](#) and therefore cannot fully capture the nuances, context or relationships in which these recommendations were created and so anyone who might have questions or concerns about this report are strongly encouraged to seek out the parties who participated in the creation of these recommendations to have a deeper conversation before casting judgment.

While documentation of what happened and where this journey might be going are important, it should not be the proof that work is happening.

If the expectation is for this report or any written documentation to replace the richness of conversations that took place in order to arrive at this report, that is not possible.

**Disclaimer:** The relationship between RWAF and Jennifer Chan continues to be one built on feedback and growth. In order to continue to push this work forward, there needs to be a shared commitment to acknowledging where individual discomfort may hinder collective action.

With every equity, diversity and inclusion journey like this one, there are bound to be emotional reactions and those reactions are an invitation to investigate what is feeling threatened or violated. These emotional reactions illuminate the boundaries of this work and allow deeper conversations to emerge.

If you are having an emotional reaction to the content of this report, check with yourself is that reaction comes from a place of protecting what you have always known to be true or uncertainty about what lies ahead or is it a call to action where you are centered on what is best for RWAF and the larger Region of Waterloo artist community.

# How to use this report

As previously mentioned, this report is an artifact; there is not just one way to read this report. This report can be a standalone document or read in combination with the previous accompanying report. This report may be a source of inspiration and insights for as long as it serves its purpose.

Depending on who you are as the reader of this report, your perspectives, your living experiences and your own capacity to absorb and engage with this report, here are a few ways that might help with wayfinding:

- If you are a reader who likes to get all the information, you might enjoy reading this report from cover to cover and preparing discussion points as you go.
- If you are a reader who likes to jump directly to the actions, you might prefer to flip to the pages with the **Now What?** Section starting on **page 13**.
- If you are a reader who values process first, you might like to start with the process timeline in the **What?** Section starting on **page 6**.
- If you are a reader who prefers a bit of process and action together, you might like to start with the **So What?** Section that highlights updates to previous recommendations starting on **page 8**.

There are many ways to read and use this report, ultimately the value of this report lies in the implementation and ideally the recommendations won't stop with this report.

# What?

This process began as an internal audit and needs assessment of what was happening behind the scenes within RWAF and what was potentially causing a lack of diversity at the Board level, within the applications and grantees.

Throughout the equity, diversity and inclusion journey the RWAF Board has been focused on adding diverse Board Members to support them in this journey. In order to address this desired outcome, RWAF rehired Jennifer Chan as well as 7 EDI Advisors to continue this work.

This report and work would not have been possible without the unique perspectives shared by the 7 EDI Advisors who honestly shared their personal experiences of RWAF and being Artists-of-colour within the Region of Waterloo.

Based on limited time and investment from the entire RWAF Board in the process, this recommendations report is an artifact of where the work stands now. This work requires intention, action and decisions to move forward.

## **PROCESS TIMELINE**

June 2022 - RWAF rehires Jennifer Chan to lead EDI process

July 2022 - invitations sent to Artists-of-Colour to either join the RWAF Board or accept a short-term contract to be an EDI Advisor

September 2022 - 7 EDI Advisors hired

October 2022 - EDI Advisors Group Session #1 (1.5 hours)

October - December 2022 - EDI Advisor one-on-one Sessions (18 hours)

October - December 2022 - RWAF Board Coaching Sessions (10 hours)

December 2022 - EDI Advisors Group Session #2 (1.5 hours)

December 2022 - Moving Recommendations Forward Report

This process was designed to build on the previous recommendations report and to move towards implementation.

The bulk of this process was called coaching sessions with the RWAF Board and EDI Advisory, on the surface these coaching sessions were a series of conversations and relationship building blocks however at a deeper level, each one was a necessary step towards an evolved vision for RWAF.

The sessions were recorded and could be made available for transparency if approved by the Board Members who participated.

## So What?

This process was made possible by relationships built between Jennifer Chan and the RWAf Board Members EDI committee and the EDI Advisory. These relationships facilitated conversations that would not be possible without a great deal of trust.

Since May 2020, across Canada and within the nonprofit sector, there has been too much performative anti-racism work and there is a lot of skepticism about true action. The EDI work at RWAf is happening under this lens.

While some extremely fruitful conversations have taken place during the last few months with the RWAf Board and the EDI Advisory, the actions taken so far have been incremental and demonstrate a hesitation for big changes.

That is part of an intentional evolving process. The sense of urgency to see big changes could be detrimental to progress so far and it is strongly recommended to take the time needed for this process to naturally transition and create sustainable change.

In the previous recommendations report, the recommendations were broken into 4 categories:

- Diversity of Board
- Capacities of RWAf
- Being an Artist @ Large
- Artists within the Region

These categories represented the 4 areas to pay attention, develop priorities and implementation plans.

Each of these recommendations require a different amount of effort and time, therefore their updates vary accordingly.

In the following table, the recommendation and up-to-date progress are side-by-side:

Recommendation	Update
<b>Diversity of Board</b>	
<p><b>Recruit and onboard a cohort of racialized board members with effective support from external EDI Consultant</b> to build better practices and structures for RWAF moving forward including compensation for specific EDI work, addressing macro- and micro-aggressions behaviour, governance policies and accountability measures for when conflict arises</p>	<p>Initiated.</p> <p>Through hiring 7 EDI Advisors to support the evolution of the RWAF and the potential of joining the Board, this work is still ongoing.</p> <p>EDI Advisors have shared that they would not be comfortable joining the current version of RWAF.</p>
<p><b>Evaluate the effectiveness of the existing governance</b> structures of RWAF</p>	<p>Initiated.</p> <p>Through participation in a Roles and Responsibility activity, the RWAF Board Members who participated revealed the number of unpaid hours currently go into keeping RWAF operational.</p>
<p><b>Assess the logistics and responsibilities</b> required of Board Members, such as time of meetings, where they are held, the requirements of each Board Member to review each application, the time commitment to attend meetings as well as participate in committee meetings, board terms</p>	<p>Same as above.</p>
<p><b>Initiate anti-racism and anti-oppression training</b> for all Board Members and staff</p>	<p>Not initiated.</p> <p>RWAF Board Members have not initiated any anti-racism and anti-oppression training.</p>
<p><b>Centre transparency and reciprocity</b> when building relationships and partnerships with community members</p>	<p>Not initiated.</p> <p>RWAF Board Members requested a meeting with the EDI Advisory, however</p>

<p>and artists so that the Board Members and RWAF are not seen as an opaque and faceless entity</p>	<p>the EDI Advisory did not agree that was the best use of their time or energy.</p>
<p><b>Capacities of RWAF</b></p>	
<p><b>Partner with community-based organizations</b> to broaden outreach, recruitment and connection to groups currently disconnected from the work of RWAF</p>	<p>Not initiated.</p>
<p><b>Diversify funding sources</b> to grow RWAF's funding pool and potential impact within the region for example applying to provincial and federal funding programs, engaging with corporate sponsors</p>	<p>Not initiated.</p>
<p><b>Actively participate and stay updated</b> with anti-racism initiatives happening within the region including municipal council, school board, police, universities</p>	<p>Not initiated.</p>
<p><b>Create specific funding streams</b> dedicated a particular cultural group or anti-racism initiative and hire a curator to oversee that process and decision-making process</p>	<p>Initiated.</p> <p>Through consultation with EDI Advisory, the recommendation is to implement a goal to prioritize Indigenous, Black and People of Colour Artists to be over 50% of successful grantees.</p>
<p><b>Increase efforts on data collection</b> to participate in research, advocacy and evaluation of funding impact including but not limited to race-based data, demonstrated value to intersectional communities, increased employment for Artists and region</p>	<p>Initiated.</p> <p>In the Fall 2022 application, 3 data collection questions were added to the application form.</p> <p>This data creates a baseline for where RWAF is currently creating impact.</p> <p>A discussion on how to use the data has not happened.</p>

<p><b>Improve on application criteria and outcomes</b> based on priorities such as emerging/established arts, fine/community-based arts, size of project organization/budget, impact measures</p>	<p>Initiated.</p> <p>Through consultation with EDI Advisory, the recommendation is to focus on specific funding streams for Individuals (experimenting/exploring, emerging and established) and Organizations (supporting emerging artists, supporting established artists) and to prioritize emerging artists within both streams.</p> <p>This could be implemented for Spring 2023 with approval from the remaining Board Members.</p>
<p><b>Continue working with EDI Consultant</b> to build on the momentum and trust established during the EDI process</p>	<p>Initiated.</p>
<p><b>Being an Artist @ Large</b></p>	
<p><b>Rename</b> the Artist @ Large role</p>	<p>Initiated.</p> <p>Through consultation with the EDI Advisory, the recommendation is to call this role either Peer Reviewers or Paid Adjudicators.</p>
<p><b>Shift majority of decision-making</b> power into the hands of Artist @ Large role</p>	<p>Initiated.</p> <p>Through consultation with the EDI Advisory, the recommendation is to ensure that Paid Adjudicator/Peer Reviewers would always have a majority vote per grant decision-making.</p> <p>For example if 2 Paid Adjudicators review a grant, only 1 Board Member would have a vote or multiple votes would be averaged to 1 vote.</p>
<p><b>Created paid tiers of participation</b> and commitment within Artist @ Large roles</p>	<p>Initiated.</p> <p>Through consultation with the EDI Advisory and the RWAf Board Members, a recommendation to</p>

	implement paid roles for Spring 2023 grants requires approval from the remaining Board Members.
<b>Facilitate value added benefits</b> for Artist @ Large roles such as peer networking and professional development	Not initiated.  In the Fall 2022 granting round, there were no Artist @ Large roles and no engagement to facilitate value added benefits.
<b>Be clear and transparent</b> about the role and responsibilities of Artist @ Large	Not initiated.
<b>Create flexible terms and commitments</b> for Artist @ Large roles to create access to being a part of RWAF	Not initiated.
<b>Evaluate existing recruitment process</b> and network for Artist @ Large role	Not initiated.
<b>Artists within the Region</b>	
<b>Improve application process</b> to offer a variety of ways to submit and an clear feedback process	Not initiated.
<b>Offer capacity building workshops</b> that are reflective and responsive to the needs of different community groups, including different languages, cultural backgrounds, virtual and in-person	Initiated.  Through consultation with EDI Advisory, the recommendation is to pay artists to offer workshops for other artists.  To implement this action, Board approval is required and funds allocated to paying for workshops and coordination.
<b>Collect intersectional data</b> during application process and be responsive to what the data shows	Initiated.  Alongside race-based data, RWAF added 2 additional data collection questions about sexual orientation and accessibility to the Fall 2022 application.

<p><b>Create paid mentoring opportunities for Artists</b> who have been successful with applications for communities how have been historically left out of the RWAF funding pool</p>	Not initiated.
<p><b>Offer support</b> for RWAF fundees who are no longer able to safely do their proposed project</p>	Not initiated.

## Now What?

The conclusions of this report and this year of investing in an equity, diversity and inclusion journey is a story of being on the path and deciding what to do next.

This process continues to require investment of time, energy and resources.

During this process, it emerged that if RWAf were to shift their thinking from “Where Art Happens” to “Where Art Starts” perhaps they could move towards the vision they hold in their hearts.

The RWAf Board Members who participated most fully in this journey have dedicated themselves to asking questions, navigating discomfort, and finding where their biases and perspectives were limited.

The 7 EDI Advisors have given their wisdom and living experiences to add robust perspectives to this process and shared their desires and hesitations of seeing a new RWAf emerge from this work.

While at times, the expectation for divergence between the two groups was palpable, there was also a great deal of alignment as well.

Where the alignment exists is the place to build from.

At this point, without buy-in from the existing RWAf Board, there is not much action that can be taken.

The EDI Advisory strongly recommends that the RWAf Board considers these two scenarios on next steps.

1. Delay Spring 2023 applications and continue working with EDI Advisors and RWAf Board to redesign the application process, assessment rubric, engagement strategy and governance.
2. Proceed with Spring 2023 applications and hire Paid Adjudicators to the grant review process.

In both scenarios, it is recommended to continue working with Jennifer Chan as the EDI Consultant on this journey.

In addition to these strategic direction decisions, the EDI Advisory also recommends voting on the following items:

1. Shift RWAF mission from “Where Art Happens” to “Where Art Starts”
2. Invest in the future of RWAF
  - a. Grow the fund (advocate for levy for funds to be in alignment with 2021 Census population data)
  - b. Develop strategic partnerships with for-profit companies
  - c. Demonstrate alignment and grow relationships with existing anti-racism, inclusion and equity efforts within the region
    - i. Equity Upstream Fund
    - ii. A Better Tent City
    - iii. Waterloo Region Community Foundation
    - iv. Pat the Dog Theatre
3. Stream the Fund
  - a. Launch specific grant streams related to types of social impact initiatives
    - i. Community mental health and wellbeing
    - ii. Indigenous celebration & ceremony
    - iii. Confronting racism
  - b. Split fund between Individual grants and Organizational Grants
    - i. Individual
      - Exploring/Experimenting (microgrants) up to \$2500
      - Emerging Artists (new or growing art practice, under 5 years of experience) up to \$10,000
      - Established Artists (seasoned art practice, over 5 years of experience) up to \$7500
    - ii. Organizations
      - Supporting Emerging Artists
      - Supporting Established Artists
4. Create an accountability and transparency communication culture
  - a. Feedback for Artists to grow from
  - b. Data on where the funds went

It is possible that for RWAF to implement the above recommendations, that they will need to engage additional consultants.

## Next Steps

In January 2023, the RWAF Board and Jennifer Chan will have a Q&A session to address any questions and the outcome of that discussion will direct the next steps.

To truly do this work, the current RWAF Board is going to need to continue to pick a path that is bumpy and unclear, that requires new tools and skills so that they can travel to a place unknown to them but ultimately safer for more people.

The process of imagining equitable futures is one of grief and care. We can let go of what is no longer working and grieve that existence and nurture new ways of caring for ourselves and others that we wish existed for us long ago.

# A note from the EDI Consultant

Hello again, this is Jenn. I am the EDI Consultant who took on this work.

## **Here is a bit about me:**

I am a Mama of 2 absolutely amazing kiddos who challenge me every single day to be a better human. I am also a partner, sister, friend, Aunt and I feel like a mostly disappointing daughter. I am a child of immigrants from Hong Kong. My relationship to this land continues to evolve. I am a Chinese-settler, second-generation to Turtle Island. I was born, raised and still living in Tkaranto (or Toronto as you may colonially know it). I crave justice, order and love - and have found a way through my job to keep working towards that. I do this through my work as the CEO of the Department of Imaginary Affairs.

## **And if you are looking for more academic and work-based info:**

I hold a Bachelors of Architectural Science and a Masters of Design, in Strategic Foresight and Innovation. I have been working within the nonprofit sector for the majority of my professional career. I continue to centre learnings from anti-racism and anti-oppression frameworks into my design, facilitation and research practice. I primarily work to support nonprofits and players in the social innovation sector. I have worked on projects ranging from philanthropy, community development, housing, placemaking, settlement, program and service design, governance, public policy; just to name a few. In all my work, I see my role as using design, facilitation and research to centre, elevate and amplify the voices who are underestimated within the process.

## **Why am I sharing all of this:**

In the last year supporting this work, I have had to reflect a lot on my role in this work and why I choose to do this work. It is not easy. It takes a different part of me to emotionally show up to do EDI work.

I am a human on my own ongoing learning journey. I bring with me my own stories, biases, perspectives and expectations.

This work is deeply personal and each person who I interact and intersect with because of this work adds to my stories, biases, perspectives and expectations - just like I do to them.

Ultimately, my entire existence shifts as I do this work which is not how I was conditioned to show up in my work. I was told not to bring all of my sensitive parts to work, to hide who I am, to be good and to follow the rules.

What I know now, is that I wasn't made to be good at any of that. In order to survive in this work, I have to bring my full heart, mind and soul with me and that practice is foreign to many.

I continue to invest in this work for my own dreams of living in equitable futures. I used to think I was doing this for others, for my children, for future generations, but I have to be honest with myself and recognize that I need this for me. Harm has been caused to me while working within the nonprofit sector and in order for me to heal from that harm, I have to make sense of it and this is why I keep doing this work.