BIPOC Arts Network & Fund

2023 ARTIST AWARDS

Summary of Process and Initial Learnings

**The BIPOC Arts Network and Fund Artist** invests $1,000,000 in 50 artists who have demonstrated transformational service to their communities and who reflect the diversity and potential of Greater Houston's BIPOC arts ecosystem. In June of 2023, we announced the first 25 Awardees.

What follows is a summarized documentation of the process and learnings to this June announcement. We continue to process with our partners, synthesize data, and build opportunities for shared reflection.

The BIPOC Arts Network and Fund made a commitment to support individual artists since its inception in August of 2022. We initiated the work with a grant opportunity focused on organizations and fiscally-sponsored collectives to build our network and capacities to manifest a process that centered equity. From that grounding, we could develop the infrastructure to create a meaningful program to invest in individuals. As with all BANF resource initiatives, we aim to build a community-participatory process that reduces barriers to entry, recognizes the humanity and value of each applicant, and avoids granting practices that perpetuate harm, particularly to those historically marginalized and under-recognized. We focus our knowledge, expertise, and energy on the process more than controlling for an outcome.

2023 ARTIST AWARDS TIMELINE
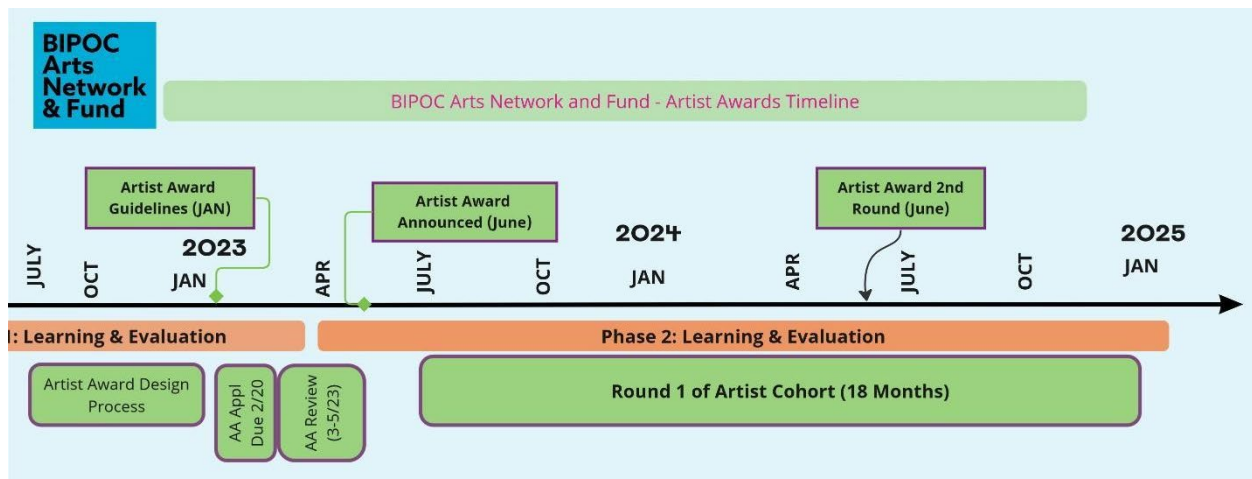
COMMUNITY DESIGN

In July 2023, we began planning an individual artist award by inviting Tony Diaz of *Nuestra Palabra: Latino Writers Having Their Say* and Michelle Barnes of the *Community Artist Collective* to help vision with us. Both organizations had just expanded their services to fiscally sponsor and support a combined 25 artist collectives and artist projects through the 2022 BANF Grants. We also invited **MECA (Alice Valdez and Armando Silva)**, *Urban Souls* **(Walter Hull)**, *LAWAH* **(Arielle Masson and Gabriela Magana)**, and ***The Ensemble Theatre* (Eileen Morris)** as Community Partners, who brought perspectives from different networks, disciplines, and lived experience. With this group of artists and community leaders, BANF co-created the purpose, guidelines, and criteria for the 2023 Artist Awards.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Engaging in Better Practice

The design team enacted policies, procedures, and structures to increase access and address some sources of known applicant barriers and points of harm. We utilized an expansive definition of "artist" to address different cultural understandings and broaden the possibilities from many non-profit or commercially driven definitions of "artist." In response, with our design team and consultants, and informed by learning sessions with our prior grantees, BANF recognized that while some of our creatives have been utilizing creative practice for organizing, community health, advocacy, and in non-arts related sectors, did not identify as "artists." We intended to flatten hierarchies and allow for self-definitions of "artist and creatives" that encouraged many who have been rebuffed in other application processes to apply.

Further, the application encouraged applicants to bring an "authentic voice" to their application. To better enable that, particularly to address hierarchies of written language, including biases surrounding the demonstration of educational attainment and "Standard Written English," the application allowed artists to answer questions in various ways, including with audio or video recordings. We also accepted Advocates' statements - letters of support for applicants - with audio or video recordings and written responses.

BANF published Spanish-language editions of the Award Guidelines and the Application Worksheet to lower barriers specifically for Spanish speakers. Community partners hosted two information sessions in Spanish for Spanish-speaking attendees. Applicants could respond to the application questions entirely in Spanish. BANF took phone calls in Spanish and returned calls if a Spanish speaker was unavailable.

Other practices that informed the application design included careful attention to the length and time required to complete the application to avoid overburdening applicants by providing responses and information not immediately relevant to the criteria. We kept the number of narrative and learning community questions to a minimum. Also, applicants were encouraged, when possible, to submit already-drafted materials, especially for artist biographies or CVs.

Information sessions and application questions reinforced the opportunity for authentic responses from artists, avoiding pat answers to the typical questions asked in other awards and grant applications. We asked the artists to draw from their experiences and perspectives and consider and describe their relationships with their communities. Similarly, the advocate statements avoided reliance on established systems of authority or recognition only by non-profit or commercial arts professionals. In response to community feedback, we updated the review criteria: "Artists whose creative work has been recognized by local, regional, or national cultural organizations, leaders, artistic professionals, [insert:] or other community advocates and leaders*."*

Applicant Support

BANF recognized the importance of availability and transparency to this new process. BANF Staff worked with Community Partners and Community Consultants to utilize their experience as individual artists and grant applicants and their grassroots organizing experience to frame language and support opportunities that created multiple pathways for success targeted to our communities.

On Tuesday, January 10, we opened the application with an online information session and a deadline nearly six weeks later on Monday, February 20. Social media promotion and invitations to the virtual info session began before the winter holidays.

Community Partners and Community Consultants hosted six more information sessions and "town halls" – several of which were also available for in-person attendees – answering questions on specific topics and engaging different communities. These sessions became a primary source for support.houstonbanf.org, an online Help Desk consistently updated with the commonly asked questions. Artists and their advocates were encouraged to submit inquiries, in Spanish or English, by phone, email, support desk tickets, or within the application platform. These were typically answered within a day.

BANF staff and Community Consultants provided opportunities for twenty-minute virtual one-on-one sessions for applicants to ask questions and talk to individuals during the two weeks before the application deadline.

Finally, BANF communicated with artists nearly weekly by email or through the application platform to provide reminders about upcoming opportunities for support, rounding up their advocates' statements, and deadlines.

REVIEW PROCESS

Multi-Phase Community Review

Community Reviewers are an essential part of the review process. BANF reached out through our networks and promoted a self-nomination process to build a group of community reviewers. We also solicited nominations from our Community Partners, Steering Committee, and Accountability and Advisory Committee. From that group, BANF contracted with seven local artists from diverse disciplines to act as Community Consultants. The role of the Community Consultant echoed the Community Partners but from an individual artist/independent arts professional perspective. The Community Consultants were instrumental in providing applicant feedback and guidance to applicants for their application preparation.

BANF Director designed a multi-phase review process focused on equity and process integrity, incorporating accountability and adaptability throughout the process. We developed a method that:

- centered conversation and review on learning and abundance rather than competition;
- recognized the humanity of each applicant; and
- challenged all readers to step outside of their own aesthetics to center the artist's vision in their review approach.

The multi-phase process developed rubrics to move readers from personal perspectives toward more objectively consistent and criteria-focused learning. The criteria and review process created space for generative and responsive dialogue among the reviewers, recalibrating language and expectations informed by the realities expressed by our artists and community members. By consistently bringing the reviewers into conversation with each other, we encouraged community accountability through shared learning and challenging perspectives.

Readers also employed an "Advocacy Vote" that named the applications they were most excited about and who most exemplified the values/objectives of the program. Sometimes the Advocacy Vote correlated with those who scored highest; sometimes, it allowed the reader to go beyond the data to uplift artists who were, among other

qualities, under-recognized, under-resourced, or exemplars of reciprocal practices.

Community Partners and Community Stewards acted as another level of community accountability, as they reached beyond the scores and advocacy votes to uplift artists whose work may not be as familiar or whose application may have undertold their impact.

BANF's infrastructure and focus on community participation is a much more significant investment of time and resources typical of most philanthropic practices. BANF prioritized the connections with community and the resourcing of those who have trust in the community to support the long-term transformation of our community-based networks.

Community Panels

BIPOC Arts Network & Fund leadership designed Community Panels as the primary determinant of the 25 Artist Awardees who demonstrate, among other core characteristics, unimpeachable integrity, a history of community service, and attention to reciprocity, and that their participation in an 18-month learning cohort with other artists would be transformational for those individuals and the Greater Houston BIPOC arts ecosystem more broadly.

More specifically, BANF leadership elected to empower Community-Specific Panels – one Latinx, one Black – to help ensure that applicant artists in those core demographics, the two largest of Greater Houston's BIPOC population, were viewed in a culturally responsive light, and with the true stakeholder power of being able to name awardees and, collectively, appropriate funds directly to at least ten (10) of the twenty-five (25) artists of this first-round, 18-month, $500,000 initiative. We see this as a component of distributing power to those most affected by the work and helping revolutionize philanthropy through weaving and centering community voice in the decision-making process.

Cultural responsiveness looked different for each Community-Specific Panel, which utilized different processes to ultimately select Artist Awardees. This process overview is an oversimplification of the complex and nuanced conversations in each of the panels but gives a sense of the themes and ideas that arose in each.

The Latinx Panel was guided by attention to diversity within the Latinx artist awardees – in gender, immigration status, race, sexuality, national origin,

and artistic discipline. Both community impact and community leadership arose as essential criteria for artist selection, with real value placed on those artists whose efforts were legible as long-term labors of love and commitment that authentically invested in and served Greater Houston's Latinx communities. The Latinx panel members also sought to name artist awardees whose artwork itself ultimately distinguished in its function as community cultural capital.

The Black Panel engaged in similar criteria conversations with particular discussions around discipline, generation, gender diversities, and community impact. They determined it essential to go beyond what was presented in the application and engage a small group of applicants through in-person conversations. These conversations allowed the panel to celebrate the artists' humanity and history of work but also created an opportunity to witness how the individual engaged in a relational process with others - an essential component of the cohort. What surfaced from these engagements was the importance of an applicant's responsiveness, generosity, and the potential for this opportunity to reinforce care/healing for themselves and others in the cohort.

As the Community-Specific Panels ensured artist applicants were awarded from culturally responsive perspectives, the third Community Panel represented a cross-section of Greater Houston's diverse BIPOC arts ecosystem. Diversity was also on the mind of these panelists, who worked explicitly to ensure artist awardees' diversity across geography, ethnicity, gender, and artistic discipline. The criteria that consistently arose during deliberations were generosity, advocacy, artistic excellence, connection, uplift, and mentorship. Artist applicants were esteemed for evidencing selflessness: building support systems for others, serving as a resource and champion of others – in other words, acting in the collective self-interest of Greater Houston's BIPOC arts ecosystem. These qualities felt particularly relevant as the Panels' task was to select artist awardees not just for the $20,000 unrestricted cash grants but for meaningful participation in a cohort community, for which values such as servant leadership and healing justice (rest, radical care) felt particularly important for panelists to mark as transformational elements for our BIPOC arts future.

PROCESSING THE PROCESS AND ITS OUTCOMES

Application Response

We did not know how many artists would apply when we started this process. Canvassing the other funding opportunities for artists in our community, we learned that total applications (not just BIPOC-specific) averaged around 100-150 for the project-based resources with geographic and funding restrictions. We could not have predicted the response of 390 applications. The overwhelming response expresses the strength, need, and unrealized potential of our BIPOC artist community.

Though the significant number of applications could be attributed to the BANF Artist Awards being non-project specific and the size of the award, we firmly believe the more substantial number of applicants correlated to the involvement and work of our community partners and network of prior grantees. The outreach and care to Spanish-speaking communities elicited nearly 10% of applicants who identified Spanish as their primary language. Of all applicants, 6% of applicants completed their application in Spanish and 14% chose to use video responses, thus successfully increasing accessibility and ease with the application process.

After the submission deadline, BANF asked artists for feedback on their experience with the application and received 106 responses, nearly all from artists who submitted an application. 68% of the respondents found the Help Desk "very useful," the highest-scoring support system provided for the award.

Asked about the various sections of the application and about the overall application experience, respondents found them to have been "very easy" in consistent majorities. Nearly all of the rest of the respondents reported that parts had been "hard but doable" (versus "challenging" or "very challenging," which together scored no more than about 5%.) One survey respondent stated: "This was the most straightforward and clear-cut application that I have ever filled up, and I only wish all others could follow this example."

Data and Diversities

We believe the processes were successful with the multiple community touches, accountabilities, and grounding in equity and vision. The initial 390 applicants reflect the broad diversity of Houston's BIPOC populations across the collected demographics of County of Residence, Cultural History, Creative Discipline, Gender/Sexual Identity, and Career Stage. We have named a strong cohort of artists that reflects the diversity and potential of Greater Houston's BIPOC arts ecosystem. As demonstrated in *Appendix A: Awardees v Applicant Charts*, the cohort of awardees closely mirrors the diversities discovered in the applicant pool.

The selected award recipients reflect the applicant pool in almost all demographic categories, with a few notable exceptions. Concerning Cultural History identification, the percentage representation of each category is greater than the respective percentage of applicants except for those who self-identified as White (4% applicant, 0% Awardee) or Mid-Eastern (5% applicant, 4% awardee). Two categories of most significant underrepresentation – emerging artists and artists aged 25-34 – may be related to the criteria regarding evidence of a history of service to the community. Also, the artistic discipline of Film/Photography/Digital is the only creative discipline underrepresented among the awardees cohort by comparison to the application pool: six out of nine artistic discipline categories are considerably more represented.

Learnings

We have much work to do to synthesize hours of conversations that began in Fall 2022. We have insights from the Community Partners, readers, BANF leadership, and the information sessions. Throughout the process, we learned through questions submitted by community members and artists, responses to which were shared in a public FAQ. Finally, and most importantly, we are still learning from the 390 artists who submitted applications for the award and the hundreds of advocates who submitted statements of support.

We have so much data to synthesize, and we are being deliberate in the framing, reporting, and prioritization of these reflections. We are taking time to ensure that the synthesis fairly represents our communities' participation and co-creation of the award and the new Learning Community.
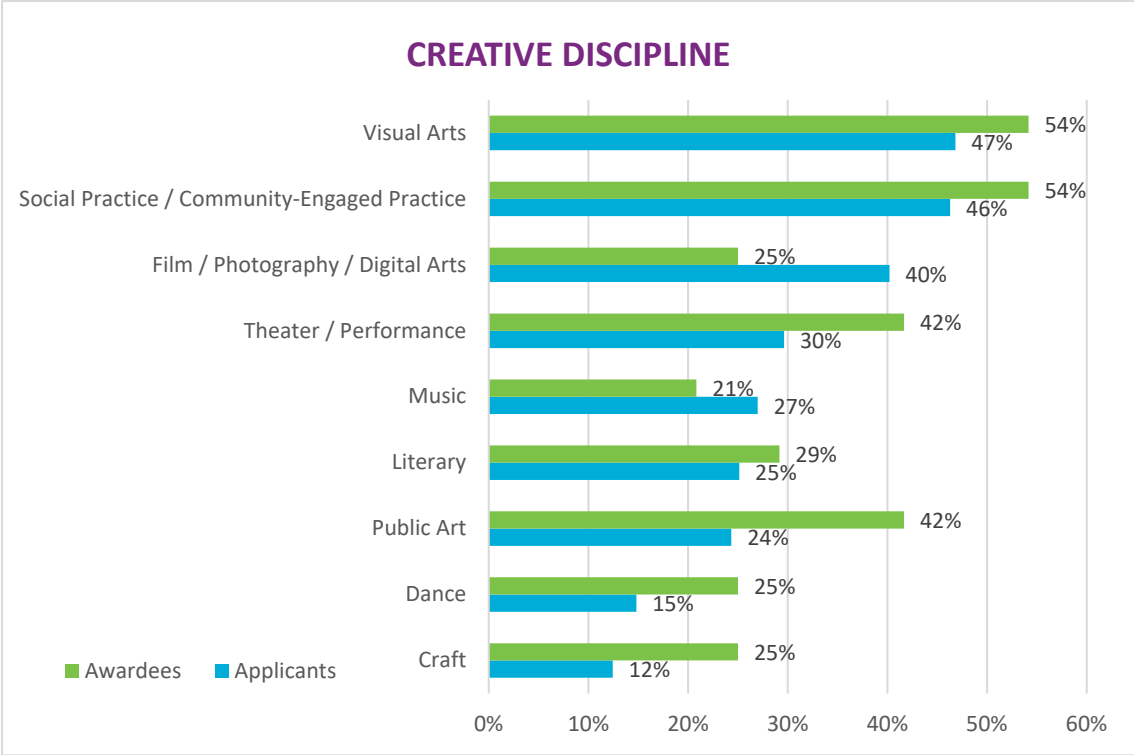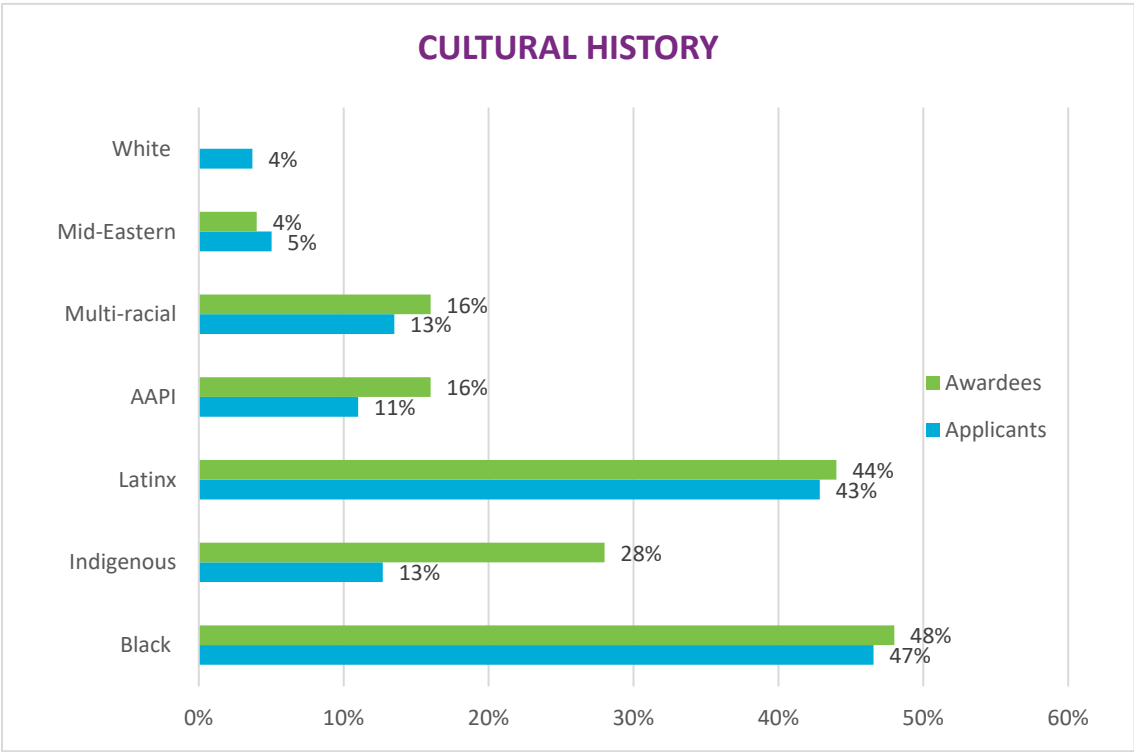
For now, we can at least identify in broad strokes some consistent themes, thoughts, and questions that emerged in these many conversations as significant future investments:

- Importance of challenging conditioned behaviors and historic practice
- Amplifying narratives and resources that reinforce validation and recognition of BIPOC communities
- Need to support network relationships and related infrastructures
- Increased space to dream and create

We plan to host virtual information sessions, informed by these learnings, to support the second round of Artist Award applicants.

SHARING AND ACTIVATION

This is not a summative report but a Learnings Document, a sharing of our ideas, processes, and outcomes as we now understand them. By sharing this learning in "real-time," we hope that our communities and the publics we engage are able to utilize and activate the knowledge. As we continue to work with our communities, process data, and fully understand direct and indirect impacts, we can better activate the learning and adjust processes.

Additionally, we will soon publish our Learnings website that shares the process, observations, and outcomes from year one and this awards process. Further, we have plans to work with our community partners and the broader network to host discussions and public gatherings based on the data and learnings from our process.

APPENDIX A: AWARDEE v. APPLICANT CHARTS

Note that all the data points are from the Artist's self-identification and that artists could select multiple identifiers for Cultural History and Creative Discipline.

CULTURAL HISTORY

Cultural History	Awardees	Applicants
White		4%
Mid-Eastern	4%	5%
Multi-racial	16%	13%
AAPI	16%	11%
Latinx	44%	43%
Indigenous	28%	13%
Black	48%	47%

CREATIVE DISCIPLINE

Creative Discipline	Awardees	Applicants
Visual Arts	54%	47%
Social Practice / Community-Engaged Practice	54%	46%
Film / Photography / Digital Arts	25%	40%
Theater / Performance	42%	30%
Music	21%	27%
Literary	29%	25%
Public Art	42%	24%
Dance	25%	15%
Craft	25%	12%

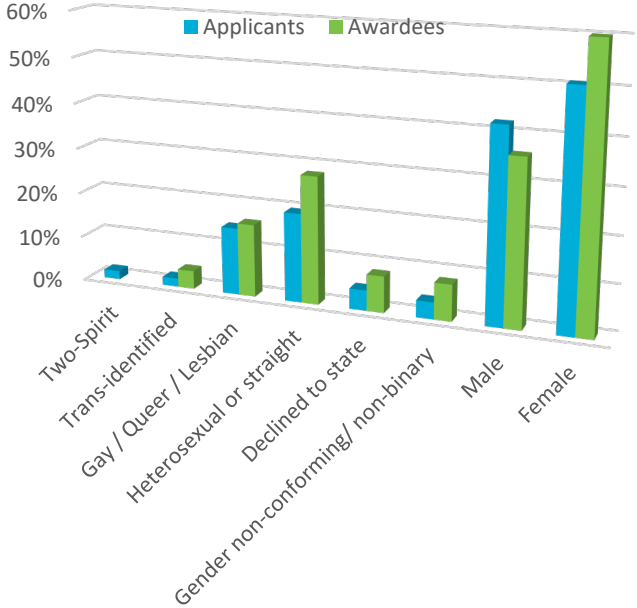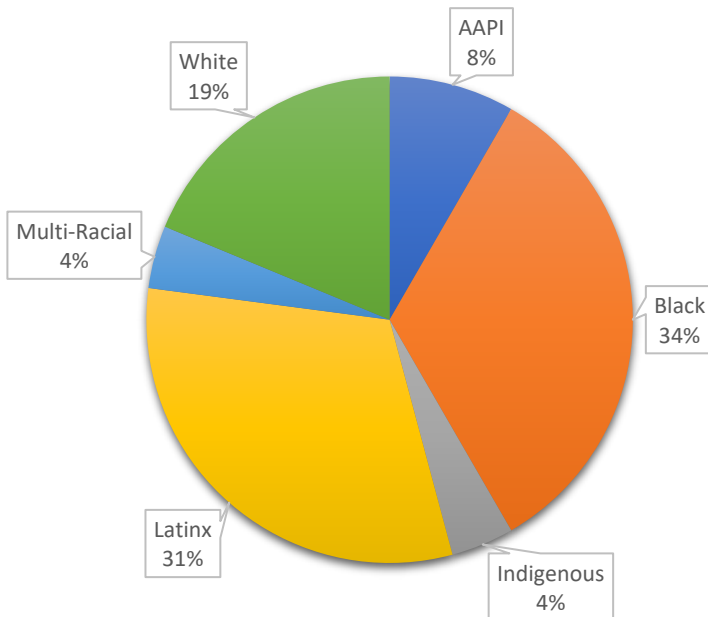|	Applicant	Awardee
Austin County	0%	0%
Brazoria County	**3%**	**4%**
Chambers County	0%	0%
Fort Bend County	**6%**	**8%**
Galveston County	2%	0%
Harris County	**87%**	**88%**
Liberty County	1%	0%
Montgomery County	1%	0%
Waller County	1%	0%

CAREER STAGE
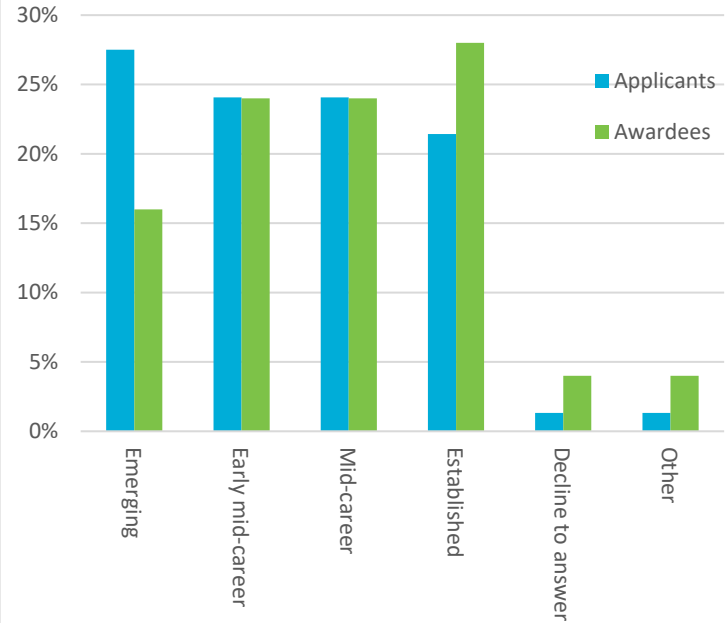
AGE
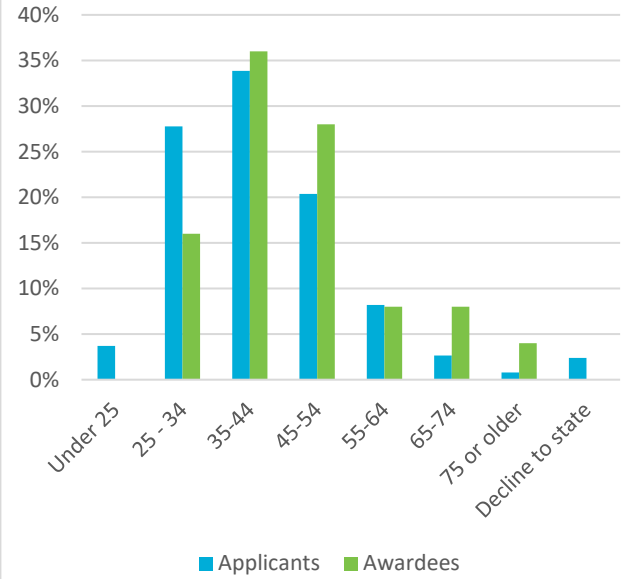
Gender/Sexual Identity

APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY READERS AND PANELISTS

The readers and panelists include artists, creatives, curators, and community leaders who reflect a diversity of our Houston arts ecosystem.
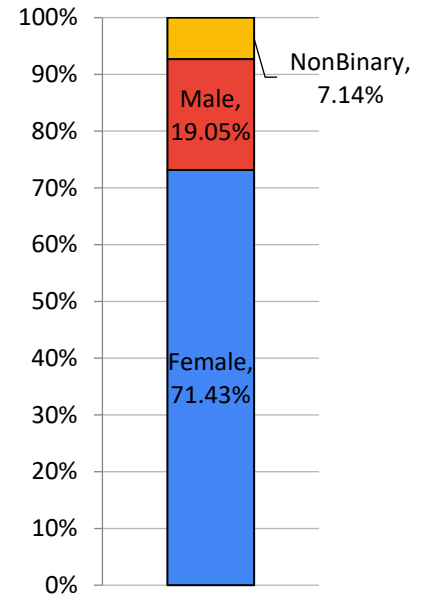

- W. KaNeesha Allen
- **ANTHONY ALMENDAREZ**
- Anthony Barilla
- Layla Bispo
- **SEBASTIEN BONCY**
- **MICHELLE BARNES**
- Michelle Bonton
- Bridget Bray
- **Danielle Burns Wilson**
- Sherry Cheng
- **Ashley Dehoyos Sauder**
- **TONY DIAZ**
- Kenzel Fallen
- Karen Fang

- Joyce Gabiola
- **TORRINA HARRIS**
- Silvina Hecker
- Brandi Holmes
- **ERIKA MEI CHUA HOLUM**
- **WALTER HULL**
- Veronica Ibarguengoitia
- **GABRIELA MAGANA**
- **ARIEL MASSON**
- Melinda Mejia
- **EILEEN MORRIS**
- Dennis Nance
- Ceci Norman
- **ROSA ANA ORLANDO**

- Johnathan Payne
- JD Pluecker
- Matthew Ramirez
- Kristi Rangel
- **LANECIA ROUSE TINSLEY**
- Merian Sherrod
- **ARMANDO SILVA**
- SOPHIA TORRES
- Michelle Tovar
- Liz Unaeze
- Stalina Villarreal
- Gayle Waden
- dianne webb
- Bailey Weiss

Names in blue identify as artists;
Names in **boldface** served on the **community panels**;
Names in ALL CAPS indicate COMMUNITY CONSULTANT and/or COMMUNITY PARTNER

REVIEWERS' CULTURAL HISTORY

AAPI 8%
Black 34%
Indigenous 4%
Latinx 31%
Multi-Racial 4%
White 19%

GENDER IDENTITY

NonBinary, 7.14%
Male, 19.05%
Female, 71.43%

History With Greater Houston BIPOC Arts Community