



# RESTORING THE FUTURE

Building a more abundant media  
arts system through restorative  
values practice

Written by Karim Ahmad  
with contributions by members  
of the ALLIED coalition of artist  
support organizations

**ALLIED** organizations (in alphabetical order) are...

**BLACKHOUSE FOUNDATION**

**THE BLACK LIST**

**CENTER FOR ASIAN AMERICAN MEDIA (CAAM)**

**EASTERSEALS SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

**FILM INDEPENDENT**

**FIRELIGHT MEDIA**

**LATINO PUBLIC BROADCASTING (LPB)**

**MUSLIM PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL - HOLLYWOOD BUREAU (MPAC)**

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LATINO INDEPENDENT PRODUCERS (NALIP)**

**OUTFEST**

**PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN COMMUNICATIONS (PIC)**

**POP CULTURE COLLABORATIVE**

**RESPECTABILITY**

**SUNDANCE INSTITUTE**

**VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS**

**WIF (WOMEN IN FILM)**

**We invite you to join us.**

Well over a year into a global pandemic, we still struggle with all that it has wrought. And despite the new challenges this pandemic has most recently dealt us, the world nevertheless continues to re-open.

However as we enter this next phase of our media arts system's evolution, the potential for deep systemic reforms that the pandemic presented to us in 2020 remains largely unaddressed. In the last year, the longstanding extractive practices of so many of our societal structures have been laid bare, and our media arts system is no exception. If we are truly to meet this confluence of moments, and progress toward a thriving pluralist culture, the time to take action is now.

This report is intended to guide such action across numerous sectors. It arose from the work of ALLIED, a coalition of equity-minded media arts support organizations whose collaborations precede the pandemic, but whose focus crystallized during the pandemic specifically to redesign our systems of the future to combat the inequities laid bare in the present. To begin to do so, we engaged in a collaborative worldbuilding process to explore and design a radically aspirational future for our media arts system, which comprises four critical sectors: the industry, the public sector, the artists, and ourselves, the artist support

organizations. All of these have played a role in perpetuating cycles of harm to artists from historically marginalized communities and are thus the four intended audience groups for this report.

The nature of this systemic harm is vast, and in ALLIED's collective work in support of artists from traditionally marginalized communities over many years, it has taken various forms. These include harmful mass misrepresentation, inequitable artist funding and remuneration, exclusion from the means of distribution, audience development and financial sustainability, perpetually extractive business and production practices, and a general systemic devaluation of the role of the artist as demonstrated by an absence of support structures that build resilience in times such as these. In order to address this harm, for the primary benefit of artists, but which can also bear dividends for all sectors, this report explores the vast potential for radical systemic transformation, resilience, strength and abundance by applying a restorative values practice. Derived from restorative justice frameworks typically applied in instances of crimes where alternatives to punitive justice are sought, these are typically characterized by gathering both sides of a conflict with the intent to repair harm, facilitating amends, and reintegration into community. In our restorative values practice here, our framework seeks to gather individuals and organizations among the four key sectors noted above, interrogate the specific nature of the systemic harm referenced above (i.e., exclusion, misrepresentation, inequitable remuneration), create meaningful connection across sectors (i.e., alignment of deepest human values), to facilitate universal transformation (i.e., a system that works to serve a double bottom line, that it both financially and community minded).

At its core, this report is a collection of provocations, and some may apply more directly than others

depending on the reader, their sector, and proximity to privilege in this industry. Nevertheless, this report intends to integrate restorative values (i.e., the intent to repair systemic harm) into the working practice of all sectors in a variety of ways. This is a foundation, not a roadmap. These are provocations, not prescriptions. Meant to be inspiration for iterative manifestations, prototypes in collaboration across sectors, and for engagement and organizing around its principles to bring them into action. They are as follows:

1. As a media arts system, all sectors must eschew extraction and place restorative values practice at the core of all institutional design.
2. We must build regenerative and universally accessible economic models that allow artists to equitably remunerate themselves for their work, and build long term wealth.
3. We must uphold artists as drivers of cultural power and societal progress, and thus as essential workers, deserving of substantial protections.
4. We must decolonize filmmaking practices and proliferate just practices in production.
5. Industry structures must redesign for cultural abundance - and we must create financial incentives to uphold those values.
6. Artist support institutions must invest resources in systemic change, and design for a future in which philanthropy is no longer needed.

The following report will explore the contextual factors, experiences and analyses that have led us to this set of calls to action. In reading this report, we in ALLIED invite you to consider which of these provocations apply to your place in our media arts system, how you may recenter and codify this values practice, and put those ideas into action, as we are doing for ourselves here.

## PART 1 Background and Methodology

I am a writer, culture strategist, organizer, and member of the Guild of Future Architects. In my prior role as the Director of Outreach & Inclusion at the Sundance Institute, I collaborated meaningfully with many community partners including ALLIED, in order to amplify our collective impact in the field and build more just and beautiful futures for artists from historically marginalized communities. I do not identify as a futurist (calling oneself that always seemed a little self-important somehow), however I have always been drawn to futurism as an artistic genre, and a proactive visioning strategy. That was certainly the impetus for the FUTURESTATES series I created and produced at ITVS (the Independent Television Service) starting in 2008. We were at an inflection point in time, both disastrous and hopeful, and producing that series gave nearly 50 visionary and provocative storytellers a platform to envision something more hopeful (and sometimes dystopian) for our future, based on choices made today. For the filmmakers, it was a way to examine the cultural and societal moment and nudge perspectives away from a seemingly inevitable dystopia and toward empathy and justice.

This idea of an inevitable future—a closed loop—is a trope of science fiction, and a particularly problematic one at that. As a member of the Guild of Future Architects, I belong to a group of interdisciplinary artists and strategists working through intersectional collaborations to imagine and prototype shared futures. We are a self-described home, refuge and resource for people collaboratively shaping a kind, just, inclusive, and prosperous world. In other words, an intentional refutation of the closed loop.

Kamal Sinclair, Executive Director of the Guild of Future Architects writes: “The Guild is about trying to create in people that identify themselves as future architects,

*We adapted the worldbuilding process designed by the Guild’s Futurist Writers Room, to envision a world wherein our current arts ecosystem moves through the current dystopia, and toward a more radically aspirational protopia, centering those artists currently at the margins—Black, Indigenous, people of color, women, people with disabilities, the LGBTQ+ community—for the benefit of all.*

people that are boldly imagining the future at a systems level, through the lens of justice and through the lens of beauty, where they’re looking at how do they collaborate and build value for the commons as they prototype and imagine these new systems.”

So when the pandemic emerged and lockdown ensued, a number of us in the ALLIED coalition of organizations came together to ideate on how to collaboratively support artists and each other. And these discussions quickly shifted to identify the urgent need to advocate for radical reinvention within a variety of sectors within our media arts system. We adapted the worldbuilding process designed by the Guild’s *Futurist Writers Room*, to envision a world wherein our current arts ecosystem moves through the current dystopia, and toward a more radically aspirational protopia, centering those artists currently at the margins—Black, Indigenous, people of color, women, people with disabilities, the LGBTQ+ community—for the benefit of all.

The process was facilitated by artist Tony Patrick and myself, and included the following participants in group sessions and individual conversations:

**TONY PATRICK**, Artist and Facilitator, Guild of Future Architects

**KAMAL SINCLAIR**, Executive Director, Guild of Future Architects

**FRANKLIN LEONARD**, Founder & CEO, The Black List

**BRICKSON DIAMOND**, Co-Founder, Blackhouse Foundation

**KIRSTEN SCHAFFER**, Executive Director, WIF (Women In Film)

**MAIKIKO JAMES**, Director of Programs, WIF (Women In Film)

**MARCIA SMITH**, President, Firelight Media

**MONIKA NAVARRO**, Senior Director, Artist Programs, Firelight Media

**DAMIEN NAVARRO**, Executive Director, Outfest

**SUE OBEIDI**, Executive Director, Muslim Public Affairs Council - Hollywood Bureau

**DON YOUNG**, Director of Programs, Center for Asian American Media

**SAPANA SAKYA**, Talent Development & Special Projects Manager, Center for Asian American Media

**MASASHI NIWANO**, Festival Director, Center for Asian American Media

**FRANCIS CULLADO**, Executive Director, Visual Communications

**NIC NOVICKI**, Artist and Founder, Easterseals Disability Film Challenge

**NANCY WEINTRAUB**, Chief Development Officer, Easterseals Southern California

**BEN LOPEZ**, Executive Director, NALIP

**LILIANA ESPINOZA**, Projects Director, NALIP

**TRACY VAN SLYKE**, Strategy Director, Pop Culture Collaborative

**LEANNE FERRER**, Executive Director, Pacific Islanders in Communications

**CHERYL HIRASA**, Director of Programs, Pacific Islanders in Communications

**JOSH WELSH**, President, Film Independent

**LISA HASKO**, Director of Artist Programs, Film Independent

**FRANCISCO VELASQUEZ**, Associate Director, Project Involve, Film Independent

**TATIANA LEE**, Senior Hollywood Inclusion Associate, RespectAbility

**LAUREN APPELBAUM**, Vice President, Communications, RespectAbility

**LUIS ORTIZ**, Managing Director, Latino Public Broadcasting

**HEATHER RAE**, Artist & Narrative Strategist, IllumiNative

**LAWRENCE CARTER LONG**, Director, Disability & Media Alliance Project

**MOI SANTOS**, Coordinator, Outreach & Inclusion and Indigenous Programs, Sundance Institute

**AMBER ESPINOSA-JONES**, Manager, Outreach & Inclusion Program, Sundance Institute

**BRENDA COUGHLIN**, Producer, Culture Organizer, and former Director, Impact, Engagement & Advocacy, Sundance Institute

Visual design by **JASON LUZ**

Together, we sought to contextualize and explore an aspirational future, and our place in it, for the purpose of system-wide collective visioning, values-clarification, and advocacy.

Thus, we intended to include information and perspectives from a large and diverse group of participants. Immediately following our worldbuilding process, many of us sought to make this vision more tangible, in the form of a report, so I as lead facilitator, engaged many of those above in follow up conversations (which were transcribed), and I synthesized our proposed strategies and frameworks in the writing of this report. Thus, while the strategies put forth here are collaborative in origin, readers should assume that this report is influenced by the experiences and values of the main author, as well as collaborators and co-authors from the ALLIED coalition of US-based artist support (largely non-profit) organizations listed here. As such, we center the suffering of historically marginalized communities (communities of color, underrepresented gender identities, the disability community and LGBTQ+ communities), first and foremost. Our restorative values practice is intended primarily to repair that harm, though we also posit that when we design systems that center those that are most marginalized, all people thrive.

## PART 2 Articulation of Harm

To understand the need for a more restorative values framework in the American media arts industry, it is important to first articulate the nature of the harm done.

Numerous studies of representation in front of and behind the camera in U.S. film and television over the past decade have starkly illustrated the dominance of cis-gendered, nondisabled, white men in numbers that far outstrip their representative percentage of the population of the U.S. These reports have shown that women and BIPOC creators are underrepresented both in front of and behind the camera in film and television, and the problem becomes more acute at higher budget levels across the industry. There has been some progress in the past five years but the playing field is far from level and certain groups—including Latinx artists and artists with disabilities—are still far from reaching parity with US population benchmarks. And since U.S. film and television is the most widely exported media globally, this disparity is even starker when compared to the composition of the global population. It is clear that systemic racism, gender-based discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism are ubiquitous in our industry.

There are many organizations and individuals working to address this challenge as industry change-makers and outside advocates, but the data has not yet shown sustainable progress. ALLIED argues that

incremental change in representation of individuals will not yield the systemic shift required for a more just and equitable media industry. Instead, more radically aspirational and imaginative possibilities must be implemented, especially in light of the exacerbated harm wrought by the pandemic.

Studies have also shown that the impact of COVID-19 on artists from historically marginalized communities who are traditionally excluded from industry opportunities was disproportionately high. In March 2020, as COVID-19 was spiking in the US, and the film and TV industry shut down, many of the ALLIED organizations administered our own formal and informal Covid impact surveys to our constituents, and engaged deeply with them to understand the full scope of the damage, and any strategies for resilience.

As Sapana Sakya from the Center for American Media (CAAM) explains: “the filmmakers that we’ve been working with fell into three buckets: for one, people who have decided to focus on personal life, other types of income, and just put their projects on hold for now. Then you have a second group of filmmakers who have navigated the existing system and figured out opportunities in the virtual world to continue to get their projects out and figure out innovative solutions for this new environment to do that effectively. And the third were really investing in virtual engagement with audiences.”

Film Independent also administered a survey of their supported artists as a function of their artist relief granting program, launched in Spring 2020. Lisa Hasko, Director of Artist Development, explains that from that survey, it was clear that “the people who did have a safety net were more often white, middle class and partnered up. So those younger, single

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filmmakers, and definitely our filmmakers of color were disproportionately negatively impacted. You could see that relationship just based on who was applying and what their situation was.”

And yet, now one year later, we begin to quantify the greater resilience of many companies in relation to the artists whose work they monetize. A recent study has shown that worldwide, the year-over-year decrease in studio revenue from 2020 to 2021 was 18 percent—\$80.8 billion instead of the prior \$98.3 billion. In North America, the decline was lower, at 11 percent, to \$32.2 billion. Some of these mitigated losses may be attributed to the fact that studios spent much less on production, released fewer films, and put staff on furlough or layoffs, all of which also negatively impact the livelihood of the individual filmmaker and many other professionals in the creative economy.

Marcia Smith, President of Firelight Media, elaborates. “The larger context of the industry is that it has some horrible practices toward everyone, but filmmakers of color are usually the miner’s canary because everything hits us the hardest. And the pandemic reveals the fragility of the independent filmmaker. For most, if you don’t have a trust fund and you don’t have a large reputation and you don’t have a good network in the industry of people that are actively seeking what you’re doing next (distributors, funders, festivals), it’s a very fragile existence for anyone. And for filmmakers of color, it’s even more so. One of the things that really struck me about watching the pandemic play out for filmmakers was that the people that felt the most stable were those that had a partner with a job. Or they had a teaching gig that gave them health insurance. Or they had some other connection to a livelihood either directly or through a partner that they can hang on to because many in this community don’t have health insurance. They don’t have a guaranteed income. They couldn’t apply for help and for unemployment. So how are you going to sustain your career, or a livelihood? And we’ve seen this before. We know that we lose people from this field. We’ve already lost people who make great films, and then decide economic reasons, that it was just too hard.”

Sue Obeidi, Director of the Hollywood Bureau at the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) notes a similar trend among her constituents, many of whom are early career artists. “There’s a perception shift in the industry, but no way to act upon that shift because executives are not willing to consider folks that are more emerging or on the cusp. They need to have already emerged. And then you have to double that with the financial sustainability pressure, which is now forcing folks that were on the cusp and were able to sustain themselves to a certain degree, can no longer do that and are now forced out of the industry towards non industry jobs to be able to sustain themselves and maybe to transition back in.”

Thus, we see some of the ways that the pandemic has exacerbated the existing systems of exclusion that have been well documented over the years. Marcia and Sue’s comments shine a light in particular on the damage created by the much-discussed meritocracy myth in the media arts industry. However what also becomes apparent is not just that historically marginalized communities are systematically excluded, thus creating an unlevel playing field. This is not news, and industry leaders such as MACRO and ARRAY have had considerable impact in widening that bottleneck. Rather, the principles of competition and scarcity

undergirding these systems to begin with are a key source of harm. Why does our media arts system adhere to operating principles of scarcity? Why do we accept that only the “best of the best” are allowed to tell their stories to the world? For heavily capitalized studio films, an audience measured by the millions is currently a necessity of business to maximize a financial bottom line. Yet if a truly representative cultural landscape is of maximum benefit to human society, and that is what our restorative values practice is designed to achieve, then we must create new structures that embody abundance and pluralism as core operating values, and create incentives for media companies to do the same.

The following section intends to unlock the potential for radical transformation and wide scale restoration of harm by operationalizing such a perspective shift across numerous sectors.

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— MARCIA SMITH,  
President, Firelight Media

Based on both the systemic disparities in representation across the U.S. media arts system and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on communities of color and others, ALLIED has used the collective future architecting process to propose a set of provocations to guide us to a radically aspirational future, wherein all structures manifest a restorative values practice.

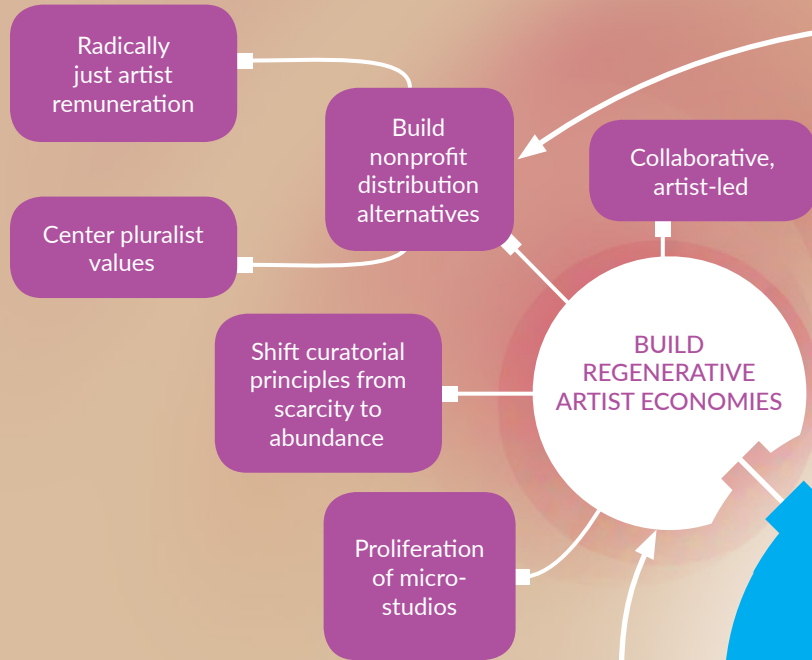
As detailed above, while specific institutions within certain sectors have been more exclusionary or extractive than others, the true harm upon the artist community and thus the cultural landscape at large, are the principles of scarcity that undergird our entire media arts system, which includes all sectors. A new central operating principle borne of a restorative values practice would allow alternative models to rise and proliferate alongside those traditional industry structures, while also incentivizing companies towards a double bottom line. This is a perspective shift, to be sure. It requires all participants in all sectors of this system to operationalize deepest human values, despite the fact that for some, doing so may contradict traditional market wisdom. To those, we remind that studies have shown that when society thrives, economy thrives. Thus, investment in community is investment in economy.

The following systemic redesign centers the guiding principles of dismantling scarcity-based frameworks and imbuing restorative values practice across the critical sectors of the media arts system, again mapped here as artist support organizations / philanthropy, industry, policy makers, and artists / entrepreneurs.

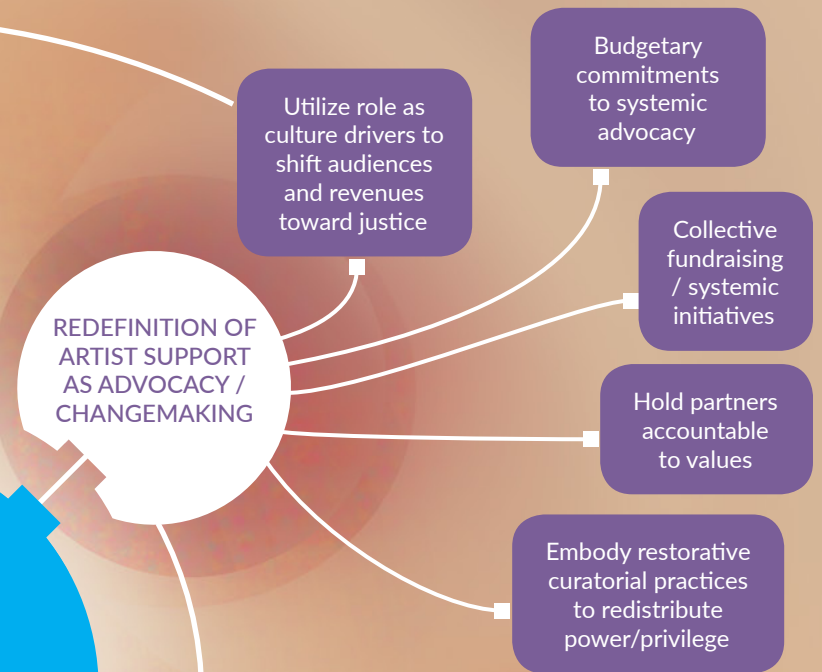
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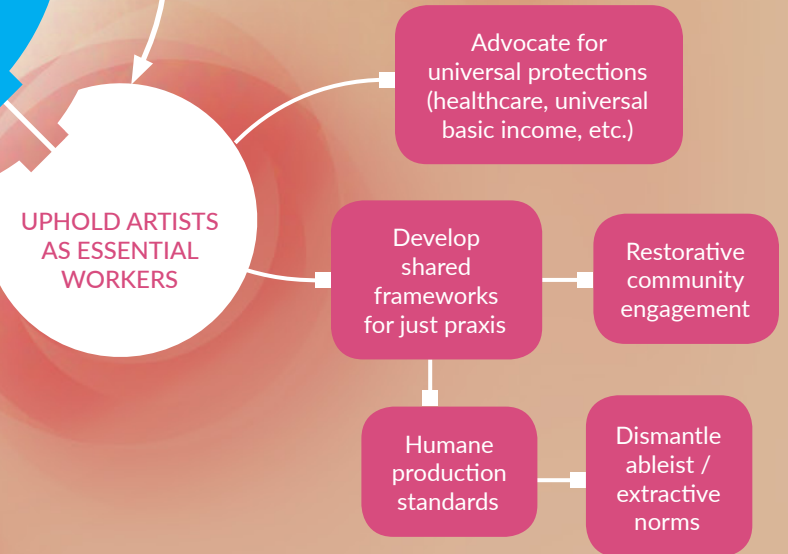
## ARTISTS & ENTREPRENEURS



## ARTIST SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS / PHILANTHROPY



# RESTORATIVE VALUES PRACTICE



## INDUSTRY

## POLICY MAKERS

From this worldbuild, the following key calls to action emerged. Again, these are not a roadmap, but a set of provocations to be prototyped, iterated, and operationalized fieldwide and in and across the four sectors.

These new paradigms will require robust market research and expertise, and deep cooperation, and will require a fundamental reframing of previous success models and metrics—or at least the layering of new bottom lines alongside the ones we've upheld to date. This will be a complex and multi-layered process, but the potential for system-wide abundance is boundless.

1 As a media arts system, all sectors must eschew extraction and place restorative values at the core of all institutional design.

2 We must build regenerative and universally accessible economic models that allow artists to equitably remunerate themselves for their work, and build long term wealth.

3 We must uphold artists as drivers of cultural power and societal progress, and thus as essential workers, deserving of substantial protections.

4 We must decolonize filmmaking practices and proliferate just praxis in all production, i.e., a community-minded bottom line to accompany the financial one.

5 Industry structures must redesign for cultural abundance—and we must create financial incentives to uphold those values.

6 Artist support institutions must invest resources in systemic change, and design for a future in which many of their functions are no longer needed.

1

As a media arts system, all sectors must eschew extraction and place restorative values at the core of all institutional design.

*“Our industry’s guiding principles are not ultimately about an artistic practice, they are about business practice. When I think of some other countries that have public funding for the arts (including film and television), funding decisions are based on what’s good for the art form and/or the health of the society, not just the health of the business.”*

— KIRSTEN SCHAFFER,  
Executive Director,  
WIF (Women In Film)

As expressed in much of this document, this first provocation is central to all that follow. As a field, we must find alternative routes for our artists to restore themselves, their livelihoods and their communities, outside of corporate economic norms. The Hollywood pathway has provided this to many of our supported artists over the years, but remains unattainable to the vast majority of the field. And without prior access to wealth or privilege, this is currently the *only* viable pathway to sustainability in the media arts field.

Kirsten Schaffer, Executive Director of WIF (Women In Film), reinforces this: “Our industry’s guiding principles are not ultimately about an artistic practice, they are about business practice. When I think of some other countries that have public funding for the arts (including film and television), funding decisions are based on what’s good for the art form and/or the health of the society, not just the health of the business.”

Heather Rae, veteran filmmaker and board member at IllumiNative expands upon this notion: “We have the opportunity now to take what is and evolve it into something else. I have been trying to speak, when given the opportunity, about this idea of creating a set of ethics or values for our industry, such that integrity and generosity are as important to the bottom line.”

To yield the immense benefits of a culturally abundant society, we must create alternative means for those that for a variety of reasons cannot or choose not to travel the Hollywood route. This requires a re-envisioning of the career of the artist, a redefinition of what success looks like on an individual and a societal level, and most importantly, what new and regenerative economic models can be created to serve those alternative pathways. As Kamal Sinclair writes in *Making a New Reality*, “we are in an age of abundance, but we are still operating on the subconscious survival mechanisms of scarcity.”

Franklin Leonard, founder and CEO of the Black List, speaks to the potential for such models to create wealth: “Let’s say I make a brilliant film and for whatever reason I never attract the interest of a major festival because for whatever reason the people that run them just don’t get it, like they didn’t get Ava’s first films, or Barry Jenkins’ first film or Blitz Bazawule’s first film. Unfortunately right now, there’s an assumption within the industry that that film is essentially valueless. And if you don’t want to or can’t then build a marketing infrastructure, a social infrastructure, a business infrastructure around selling your film and collecting money for it when people want to watch it, there’s no way for you to amass the capital to make another film. Not everyone can be Ava DuVernay and build ARRAY, and as a consequence, streamers can come through with the equivalent of a trawling net, gather this content for almost no money, and build massive equity for their libraries in the process while never passing that value back to the artist.”

“Why have we defaulted to the commodified structure?” Maikiko James, WIF’s Director of Programs elaborates: “people in this moment are questioning a lot of what’s been given for as long as we’ve been alive—the same way that we are now seeing the limitations of a commodified health care structure. It’s very similar in quantifying an arts industry because you only get to be as imaginative as someone who is there to generate profit. A lot of creative executives and development executives are really lovely, artistic, creative personalities, but they’re confined very strictly to the business model of their company and seeing that tension. They don’t want to lose their jobs. So they’re not going to rock the boat too much. And Hollywood, despite being ‘creative,’ is a highly risk averse industry.”

***Thus, we are calling upon all media system sectors to prototype new operational models to manifest this commitment to deepest human values via measurable process refinements and equity choice points, such as those articulated below.***



## 2

We must build regenerative and universally accessible economic models that allow artists to equitably remunerate themselves for their work, and build long term wealth.

An even cursory exploration of economic justice in the arts and American society more broadly unveils the deep systemic constructs that have made it exponentially more difficult for communities of color, and especially Black and Native American communities, to accumulate wealth. And that very wealth is required to withstand the economic impacts of a depression like the one wrought by the current pandemic, or any other disaster that may come.

Kamal Sinclair describes the current impact of racial inequities and how they manifest as safety nets for white communities that do not exist in BIPOC communities. “We know that Latinx communities are almost 90 years behind in wealth creation in this country than the average white family. Black families are 225 years behind in wealth creation. We know that even a Black executive getting paid the same amount of money as a white executive, the actual wealth generation from those two jobs is significantly different because the Black executive is trying to support their community members in an ecosystem that’s 225 years behind in wealth creation. So the money gets spread out in a way that the white executive gets to keep closer to the chest.”


I am not an economist, and far better minds than I have written about this extensively (Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *The Case for Reparations* comes immediately to mind), but the wealth gap between communities of color and white Americans is vast, and as well documented by various historians and thinkers, is intentional, by design. The creation of America as a slave society, the particularly violent origins of American capitalism, systemic genocide, the theft of Indigenous land, were all intentionally designed to create this wealth gap.

Thus, if we as artist support organizations are to uphold racial justice as a critical component of our restorative values practice (as we should), we must work to repair that wealth gap among BIPOC artist communities, and then support the proliferation of models that invert the values structures that made

that lack happen. These strategies can and must be accomplished together by 1) committing to move dramatically more funding into these communities long term, and more sustainably, 2) creating new regenerative economic models.

One example of such an alternative economic model that embodies restorative values might be a collaborative-based open access distribution alternative to the existing corporate model. One which allows artists to remunerate themselves more equitably and shift curatorial practices from a position of scarcity to one of abundance—founded on the principle that all stories have an audience. The capital-intensive nature of film and television currently dictates that success must be measured on a large scale—but this overlooks the unique impact of targeted audiences of individuals and communities that are a) deeply meaningful in and of themselves to the quality of life of those involved, and b) transformed through social consciousness in ways that are seemingly impossible to measure. And in fact, as history has taught us time and again, the likely reality ahead is that the potential size of the audience for these stories about our communities is significantly larger than traditional market “wisdom” conditions us to expect.

It is well worth noting that this is far from the first time democratized distribution systems have been proposed. There are several examples of such platforms that persist to this day, yet all fail to deliver equitable access, audience development, or remuneration to the artist. Open platforms like YouTube provide universal accessibility, but little functionality to compensate creators, and are also vast oceans of media with no viable means of curation or audience development. They thus function more like social media companies, mining user data for advertising revenue. The public media system on the other hand deliberately eschews the corporate model, yet still upholds exclusionary curatorial practices. It is also not designed to provide opportunity for ongoing



remuneration to its exhibiting artists, instead offering a one time up-front license fee accompanied by heavy contractual and financial reporting obligations. Amazon Video Direct (AVD) seemed for a time to offer the possibility of self-distribution, as independent artists could upload content to Amazon for purchase or rental or earn royalties by including their films as “free with Prime subscriptions.” But as AVD’s sudden purge of all documentary films demonstrates, independent artists cannot depend on corporate structures as a reliable resource to maintain their livelihoods, when these companies singularly serve a financial bottom line.

The creation of more successful restorative economic models will require deeper economic analysis and business planning across various industry sectors, if it is to be sustainable. Yet Kamal Sinclair paints an inspiring picture of the potential benefits of these models, making a strong case for experimentation. “We’re in a phase right now where we are having to shift from what have been expansion and extraction modes of economic models. Those are not sustainable. We know that we’ve already hit the kind of brinkmanship with those models and that we have to start looking at circular economy and regenerative systems in order to rebalance with the earth, so there aren’t these kinds of social inequities. And so that

we are designing not just for the bottom line, return on investment and stake and shareholder value is the highest priority, but really understanding kind of very broad universal stakeholder value as a highest priority. I think over and over again, when we talk about the future of work and kind of the exponential technologies that are in the pipeline, like artificial intelligence. The head of Microsoft at the World Economic Forum basically said, with this technology alone, we could provide everyone on the planet with housing, everyone with health care, everyone with an education and everyone with food, only working four hours a day, four days a week per person. And if that is true, if we have that capacity right now, if we could do it justly and equitably, then that is something that to me would allow us to recenter the values of the arts and creativity, not just in the form of professional artists landscape, but in the lives of every single person. I’m not an anti-capitalist, I just think unbridled capitalism that doesn’t balance the values of the commons can be quite dangerous.”

***Thus, we are calling for meaningful collaboration across all media system sectors to prototype regenerative economic models for the equitable distribution and remuneration of work, designed by utilizing the vision and experience of artists coupled with the resources and business acumen of entrepreneurs and industry.***

*“We have to start looking at circular economy and regenerative systems in order to rebalance with the earth, so there aren’t these kinds of social inequities. And so that we are designing not just for the bottom line, return on investment and stake and shareholder value is the highest priority, but really understanding kind of very broad universal stakeholder value as a highest priority.”*

— KAMAL SINCLAIR, Executive Director, Guild of Future Architects

3

We must uphold artists as drivers of cultural power and societal progress, and thus as essential workers, deserving of substantial protections.

*“What does it actually mean to be human together? We really have to make some intentional decisions about what we have valued up until now.”*

— MAIKIKO JAMES,  
Director of Programs,  
WIF (Women In Film)

In addition to increasing funding toward artists from historically marginalized communities and designing and building ongoing systemic reinventions to our existing economic models, we must also buttress these models with social protections that affirm the essential nature of narrative and storytelling and inspiration to drive societal progress.

Speaking to the specific essential role of the artist in society, artist and worldbuilder Tony Patrick, explains “if there is anyone who can interpret paradigm shifts and complexity and points of convergence in culture and society, it is the artist. So in terms of having guides who can help us into the throes of catharsis, through the throes of crises, they will be artists. And now, confinement has catalyzed calls for more creativity and an articulation of our plight. So as we reimagine the systems we need, artists will also play a role. And that kind of communal design especially by artists who are at the intersection of art and technology, needs support and infrastructure.”

Lisa Hasko, Director of Artist Development at Film Independent, elaborates: “In thinking about what our constituents need, I tend to go right to a macro level; more protections for freelancers, and broad systemic issues like health care, access to education, what we all need on a very basic need level. It really gets at our value systems, and if we are valuing the monetary outcome of art or the monetary outcome of competition within the health care sector or whatever it is, that is not going to amount to equity.

So the values we are placing on these outputs need to change.”

Maikiko James aptly explains further: “the fact that someone’s livelihood is dependent on the creation of their art is currently impossible in this system. Creators are not deemed valuable in this society. But if you work in finance, you are. And so even the mentality of what we value as a society really has to be interrogated much more deeply, I think, because what we know now is that CEOs are valued and nurses are not. Lawyers are valued and teachers are not. And so if we actually want anything to change, we have to engage a complete structural analysis. What does it actually mean to be human together? We really have to make some intentional decisions about what we have valued up until now. And if we’re not asking those questions, then nothing will change.”

These new structural demonstrations of what our society values are critical, because as noted above, narrative drives public policy, and the very real survival of communities. Thus, the creation of just and representative narrative is essential to all our survival, and the artists creating those narratives must be protected by tangible lasting systems.

***We are calling upon policymakers to work with artists to investigate and build broader structural protections for artists, including benefits for freelancers and universal basic income.***

## 4 We must decolonize filmmaking practices and proliferate just practices in production.

*“When all is said and done, who gets to participate and who doesn’t—and who is viewed as able to participate—is still a huge, largely unaddressed issue.”*

— LAWRENCE CARTER LONG,  
Disability Rights & Education  
Defense Fund and the  
Disability in Media Project

Film as an artform is built on colonial norms, whereby those with power have the opportunity to take as much from their collaborators, their communities, as possible, and give as little remuneration as feasible in exchange, with little recourse available. Standard film production procedures must be interrogated deeply in order to dismantle extractive tendencies and replace them with a model that is more generous and creatively conducive both as a manifestation of restorative values practice, and also more practically to create the most positive and conducive conditions for those actively laboring to create the work. A number of our nonfiction organizational colleagues are together developing a set of ethics for documentary filmmakers, which deeply interrogates the relationship between filmmaker and the community they depict, and provides a framework for evaluation. That work is deeply consistent with and complementary to what we call for here across all film and television genres and production sizes, which is a set of ethics for the manner in which a production checks itself against its members and the community it is located within.

Specifically—how do we better value those involved in the creation of the work that do not directly benefit from its success? This includes the community where a story is filmed, and the manner in which a production breathes financial life into local economies or not, the way in which a production is environmentally conscious or not, and the way in which a production values its tradespeople or not. This last category of below-the-line crew has been deeply impacted by the pandemic, has been offered nothing in the way of job protections, and has always been the recipient of perhaps the most extraction in the labor-to-benefit ratio of the production mechanism. Brickson Diamond explains: “it’s not even about the work they have. It’s just the precariousness of their careers. There has to be some safety net that creates more substance, sustenance and stability for those folks who are seen as least among the group.” Our engagement with below-the-line crew over the years has shown that the lack of visibility and voice afforded them

has been a consistent systemic failing. New resources like ARRAY Crew, a personnel database for below-the-line crew members is “designed to amplify women, people of color, and other underrepresented film and television professionals,” in the words of ARRAY founder Ava DuVernay. And yet, the goal of resources like these is to fill a systemic gap that can proliferate better practices universally. Ava DuVernay again: “True success would mean that it’s obsolete in a decade.”

It’s worth noting that these dynamics of precarity also amplify the exclusion of artists with disabilities in unique ways, as detailed by Lawrence Carter Long of the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund and Disability Media Alliance Project. “When all is said and done, who gets to participate and who doesn’t—and who is viewed as able to participate—is still a huge, largely unaddressed issue. If we’re talking about a radical shift the whole process must begin with an honest, sometimes painful assessment which dares to ask: What does everybody bring to the table, who isn’t here, and how do the systems and processes we’ve adopted exclude certain people? What is required, first and foremost, is a genuine appreciation of what different individuals and groups—communities even—bring to the process. But that’s only the beginning. To be meaningful, it also requires an ongoing, never-ending evaluation of our expectations once a project has begun. A commitment to never settle before we even start the work -- a mindset, and accompanying practice, that embraces the ongoing changes that will need to be made going forward. A willingness to center two core questions which, if asked honestly, will offer up different answers in perpetuity: What does each person bring that is of value and how do I choose to honor it?” This latest notion of choosing what to value is, of course, a recurring theme in this work.

***We are calling upon all sectors in our media arts system—from studios to nonprofits to artists with privilege and power—to identify and dismantle extractive work standards embedded in development and production processes, and build new ways of working that tangibly value all contributors to the work.***



5

Industry structures must redesign for cultural abundance—and we must create financial incentives to uphold those values.

It is widely known that most industry institutions are led by cisgender nondisabled white men. And it has been oft-discussed that a community of decision makers this homogeneous is ill-equipped to commission for maximum cultural abundance, which as we have posed here, is a matter of survival.

Heather Rae again: “Our industry generates about 80 percent of the world’s content, the world’s consumable media content. Which is a vast majority of the content that is consumed on a global level, it’s own kind of colonization, having colonized the story of the world. And roughly 80 percent of what you see on screen by what is generated in Hollywood is white. There’s this strange inequity there. The world has about four and a half billion people that are Asian. Around one point five billion people are Indigenous, just over a billion people are of African descent and only six hundred million people are of European descent. So you start to see that the world’s minority has hijacked the world’s story.”

Clearly, the composition of these entities and their decision-makers must become as culturally abundant as the communities we seek to uphold. This call to action is not new, and gains have been slow where they count the most, at the highest levels of power. Thus other strategies must work in concert to create the conditions by which this is possible in the long term. Such strategies include developing frameworks for power sharing with more junior BIPOC executives in critical decision making on talent and project investments. Such power sharing dynamics are common manifestations of restorative values practice, and generally yield thriving workplaces.

Other strategies include creating community agreements and commitments to retention and advancement, such as is outlined by WIF’s Maikiko James: “I think you could enforce a code of conduct with a new generation of workers, with people who

are coming up in the companies who are younger. We’re seeing more executives of color. We’re seeing more assistants of color. And though we hear the critique that they are not rising in the ranks of power, these are the people that are making these companies their wealth. So if there is for lack of a better term, an organizing model and if you work for a company that you want to hold accountable to making the system better, then we should be having conversations with everyone who’s within them that does actually maybe strive to make it better.”

Of course it is structurally challenging for companies that singularly seek to maximize shareholder value to pivot priorities and operations toward justice. Thus we call for financial incentives to them to do so. The ReFrame stamp is a valuable foundation. “The ReFrame Stamp serves as a mark of distinction for projects that have demonstrated success in gender-balanced films based on criteria developed by ReFrame in consultation with ReFrame Ambassadors, producers and other industry experts. Stamps are awarded to narrative features that hire women in four out of eight key areas of their production, including: writer, director, producer, lead, co-lead, speaking parts, department heads and crew. Additional points are awarded to content that has women of color in key positions.” If such a Stamp can be expanded more broadly in reference to all historically marginalized communities, and be accompanied by significant tax credits, perhaps apply to studios’ and networks’ hiring and retention rates, the impact upon our artist constituents could be significant.

Brickson Diamond: “I often think about the options of making capitalism more just. And I think there is a matter of looking at these partners, these large issues, these large studios and saying, look, this is the price of justice and you all need to pay. I mean, the reality is doing it through us as the starting place is so much



cheaper than being forced to do it on their own by virtue of social justice activist organizations coming in and demanding it.”

This model may also include requiring the Corporate sector to invest in some of the new economic models brought forward previously in this report. Outfest’s Damien Navarro: “We have to empower our filmmakers to have more control over the system. And we do that by going to the studios on their behalf and we simply explain that we need to come together as a society, because you’re not effectively doing this on your own. You’ve tried year over year. The underrepresentation continues. So we’re going to make larger asks from you. We don’t want you to just sponsor anymore. We want you to give large sums of money to actually help fund these new systems and

platforms.” In our radically aspirational future, this is the new cost of doing business in the arts, because these are the values that the entire system must uphold. And this system will bear dividends. Brickson Diamond again: “It’s actually a triple bottom line where you’re going to make a movie that is artistically sound and beautiful and brilliant. You’re going to do it in a way that’s just and fair to as many people as are involved. And you’re going to make a garbage load of money, and you’re going to distribute that fairly.”

***Thus, we are calling upon the industry to acknowledge that there is a symbiotic relationship between the good of the commons and the health of our industry economy, and to build company-wide measurable frameworks to evaluate and uphold their “community bottom line.”***

6

Artist support institutions must invest resources in systemic change, and design for a future in which philanthropy is no longer needed.

Most commonly, artist support is defined as support to the individual, for example, through artist grants. These yield impact, to be sure, but an artist can only apply for so many grants before they must sustain themselves through other means. And as Marcia Smith articulates earlier, those means are often outside of the creative economy, and then those critical voices are lost. Also, as noted above, there simply are not sufficient economic models for artists to monetize their own work and reasonably sustain themselves. Thus, in our framework, artist support organizations shall allocate resources (money and time) to the kinds of systemic and structural reform articulated in the preceding provocations.

In doing so, we design for the obsolescence of some of our current functions, such as granting, as Ava DuVernay is noted to have said earlier in this report regarding the goal for ARRAY Crew. Of course, there will always be a need to build community, provide mentorship, and create generative spaces for artists to cultivate their voice and work and grow. This function of artist support will always have meaning and immense value, especially in our radically aspirational protopia.

For the philanthropic community of foundations and individual donors, short term investment in systemic change involves moving much more money into BIPOC-led artist support organizations. These organizations are vital levers to systemic change and must be upheld and more robustly funded. But this provocation simultaneously requires philanthropy to invest directly in new systems and structures that embody the values frameworks laid out here.

Don Young from the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) articulates such a path: “We could all hold interesting positioning via some kind of ‘field investment fund,’ which is about making the field better, so to speak. We could very clearly lay that claim. Investors and corporations and foundations could feel confident that it’s a place in which you have the infrastructure to do that in a political but effective manner.”

This notion is unpacked further through examining the model that led to the creation of the Pop Culture Collaborative, whose Strategy Director, Tracy van Slyke explains as follows. “The collaborative came to be after a small group of foundations, individual artists, social

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Strategy Director,  
Pop Culture Collaborative

justice organizations were starting to experiment with the intersection of pop culture and social change. The collaborative was born out of these initial foundations who went beyond their silos of the issues they worked on, or even the sectors they worked in, because they were all recognizing that no matter what, deep narrative change and long term transformational narrative change was the foundation for the work they wanted to advance. And this was a place that was really experimental. Foundations aren't naturally inclined to go into the world of pop culture and entertainment. And so they wanted to set up almost a laboratory space for experimenting. They asked, what does it mean to come together as foundations? What does it mean to actually invest as philanthropists inside entertainment, which often feels like a billion dollar black hole? And how do you drive collective narrative strategy forward? We then came to the recognition that the big narrative goal is around building a just and pluralist society, for one, a society in which everyone inherently belongs and that people are doing the hard and delicate work to build a pluralist society. And so our strategic goal now is to build around that narrative change. Our grantmaking now works to build a field of culture for social change that is capable of activating the yearning and millions of people to want to create that just and pluralist society. Our Becoming America fund that is actually built with that strategic goal in mind and has very specific narrative change priorities attached to it."

Indeed, perhaps this worldbuilding process is a similar coming together of like minded organizations, seeking to reinterpret our mission parameters and the manifestations thereof toward investment in

the structures that surround and empower artists as much as the artists themselves on an individual basis. This report is a manifestation of that role we artist support organizations seek to embody more boldly in this future, as a result of our own restorative values practice. The artist community has been vocal wherever possible to express the current array of struggles they face. But few single artists will have the bandwidth, the platform and the resources with which to advocate consistently and loudly. More importantly, few possess the leverage for structural change in the way that an organization does, much less a coalition of them.

***We are calling upon artist support nonprofits like ourselves and the philanthropic community to invest resources (and seek to amplify the resources available) toward continual systemic progress in our media arts system. This work is critical to our organizational missions, and must be prioritized. As drivers of culture, we hold power that must be channeled toward just systems redesign if we are to arrive at a beautiful future that truly operationalizes restorative values practice for the benefit of all.***

***To that end, the advocacy contained herein is a first step in a long term commitment to investing in cross-organizational initiatives for systemic justice and beauty in our arts ecosystem, while also maintaining the direct artist support upon which we have been founded. Our engagement with industry and community which follow the release of this report will be a testament to this commitment.***

When discussing a complete redefinition of systemic values, this may seem an exercise of speculative or science fiction—of a utopian futuristic design—as though these exercises also are not valuable tools. After all, as we know, science fiction of the past is known to have unlocked science practice of the present.

We are convinced to believe that these things are fantastic or unattainable, however, as writer, activist and educator Walida Imarisha writes in *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Movements*, “all organizing is science fiction,” because it requires us to radically reimagine our world and then bring it into being. This act of imagining is a choice.

Ultimately, that choice is what this project asks of you. The choice to bring deepest human values into practice. Often, action (or inaction) in contrast to expressed values is a manifestation of fear—operation from a place of scarcity, that there is not enough for all, and so one must accumulate as much as

possible for themselves and their immediate families. This is learned behavior, deeply socialized through generations of training and practice within oppressive and competitive systems. To subvert that behavior requires an equal oppositional force of training and practice in operation from a place of abundance.

Operating from abundance over scarcity is an intentional perspective shift, and as noted earlier, is critical to the restorative values practice that undergirds this work. It is the conscious choice to believe that there is enough for all of us, and we can all receive what we need and want. Beauty and joy are attainable for all. This belief is a choice, and one that must be made over and over again.

Sentimental as it may sound, this choice comes in no small part from a place of love and trust—trust that when we design for the margins that all individuals will benefit, and love for humanity manifest as restorative values practice. Deepak Chopra says it well: “Love without action is meaningless, and action without love

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is irrelevant.” Perhaps this is all that is required for all of us to be futurists—to choose love and action as the primary lens through which we invest in a future for all of us. If that is so, then I suppose we are futurists, after all.

We in ALLIED invite you to join in this collective imagination of a radically aspirational future, your role living in it, and your role in building it by centering restorative values practice in your own work. We are your allies in that undertaking as our engagement with you henceforth will demonstrate, and we move forward together. Again, this report is simply a foundation for iteration. If we can all consider these provocations—what applies to us, and where we all have power to make a commitment to a restorative values practice, as we the authors seek to do ourselves, then a just and beautiful media arts system is truly within our reach.