



Visual Arts Centre Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy - Final Approved May 27, 2023

The Visual Arts Centre (VAC) is the largest bilingual independent art school in Canada. Founded originally as The Potters' Club in 1946, the Centre has been involved in the teaching of art for over 70 years. As a vibrant contributor to the city's cultural life, the VAC offers accessible, excellent art education through its school of art (with over 300 courses and nearly 4000 student registrations each year). With courses taught by professional artists and art educators, the VAC offers diverse community members high-caliber art education. Importantly, the VAC's McClure Gallery is a highly respected venue for the exhibition of contemporary art, which is open to all and offers dynamic art education programming. A cultural space with a strong commitment to community, the VAC represents a lively meeting place for artists, teachers, and students where exchange, engagement, and inspiration are fostered. With its open door policy and central location in the city, the VAC is an active promoter of the visual arts in the broader society.

Objectives of this policy:

At the Visual Arts Centre, we actively promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Our community is composed of diverse individuals in terms of race, ethnicity, abilities, sexual orientation, gender, religion, age, and more. Importantly, we continuously strive to further increase diversity within our community. We recognize, respect, and honor each individual's unique experiences, perspectives, and cultural background and work to ensure that each person has equal access to opportunities at the VAC and feels included.

At the VAC, we believe that each student, employee, volunteer, visitor, and partner should:

- Feel that their voices are equally heard and valued
- Have equal access to opportunities within the organization
- Feel that their unique backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives are welcomed, honored, and celebrated
- Experience a safe and inclusive environment for learning, making, and collaborating

With this in mind, we are working to acknowledge, analyze, and dismantle inequities in our policies and practices and continuously work to better infuse an anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and inclusive approach into all that we do. Some of the actions we are taking to support these efforts include our:

- DEI Advisory Group (Members include board members, students, teachers and the VAC's Executive Director) - active since Fall 2020
- Equity policies for our employee, gallery exhibition, and Board selection processes (included here)
- Ongoing examination and challenging of assumptions and biases
- Curricular and pedagogical approaches grounded in DEI
- Collaborations with diverse community and arts organizations
- Ongoing DEI analyses of the VAC (most recently completed in 2022)
- Collection and distribution of DEI resources to employees
- Ongoing DEI policy development (annually)
- Researching and offering DEI training for employees (most recent training Fall 2022 and Winter 2023)
- Transparent communication within the organization and the broader community
- Efforts to advocate for DEI within the arts and cultural sectors



Definitions:

The VAC recognizes that language is subjective and mutable. We provide here a series of definitions for words used in this document. Though these definitions are subject to change, they are included in the policy as guidance.

1. **Equality:** the condition of equality, particularly with regard to status, rights, and opportunities.
2. **Equity:** the quality of being fair and impartial.
3. **Diversity:** the practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.
4. **Inclusion:** the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or intellectual disabilities and members of other minority groups
5. **Racism:** micro and macro acts of harm, power, and violence against Black, Indigenous, and other non-white people across the globe. Racism upholds the construct of race, which is a social and specifically colonial construct, aimed at protecting white supremacy.
6. **Microaggression:** Brief and often subtle actions, remarks, or visual cues in our everyday interactions that communicate negative ideas or stereotypes about a group of people, usually a socially marginalized group
7. **Bias:** Conscious (explicit) and unconscious (implicit) assumptions which are supported and learned through the society and culture around us.
8. **Power:** Authority, the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events.
9. **Discrimination:** Judging & treating someone based on superficial perceived factors
10. **Oppression:** unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power
11. **Colonialism:** the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, or territory, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically. Often involves the murder or illegal subjection of Indigenous communities already occupying the land.
12. **White supremacy:** White supremacy is the belief that white people are superior to those of other races and thus should dominate them. The belief favors the maintenance and defense of any power and privilege held by white people. White supremacy was a major defense of European colonialism and has roots in the now-discredited theory of scientific racism.

Responsibilities of Board, Staff, Students, Gallery Participants and the General Public: Anyone engaged with the VAC in any manner (as a board member, staff, teacher, gallery participant, gallery viewer, or the general public) is governed by this policy. We are actively committed to fighting colonialism, all forms of oppression (systemic and otherwise) and discrimination in our community. We have a [non-violence policy](#), which includes a commitment to non-violent communication. We also have an [anti-harassment policy](#).

Further, as a VAC community member, you engage to:

1. Come to the Centre's classes and other activities ready to learn.
2. Allow time and space for everyone to contribute.
3. Use kind language and give thoughtful feedback.
4. Respect VAC community members' privacy and personal boundaries.
5. Nurture creativity in everyone.
6. Respect people's beliefs, ideas, and identities.



Hiring: The Visual Arts Centre is aligned with the principles of Employment Equity. Employment Equity aims to correct systemic barriers to employment and promote the accommodation of designated groups in the workforce. Employment Equity encourages the establishment of working conditions that are free of barriers, corrects the conditions of disadvantage in employment and promotes the principle that Employment Equity requires special measures and the accommodation of differences for the four designated groups in Canada. The four designated groups include: women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities, with the addition of a fifth group, members of the LGBTQ2+ community. For more information on Employment Equity, please consult [Employment and Social Development Canada](#).

On a practical level, this means that the VAC encourages applicants (both teachers and staff) who consider themselves members of an aforementioned designated group to self-identify in their application. This information is shared without descriptors with the hiring committee and is used to determine the final candidate. If two applicants score equally but one is from a group under represented by staff at the VAC, that candidate will be prioritized.

DEI Pedagogy at the VAC

At the VAC, we promote an organizational culture grounded in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Our community is composed of diverse individuals in terms of race, ethnicity, abilities, sexual orientation, gender, religion, and more. We recognize that each individual brings diversity to our community and we strive to ensure that each person has equal access to opportunities at the VAC and feels included, heard, and valued. With equity efforts, organizations work to create the conditions of fairness and justice based on each person's needs and circumstances so that all individuals can thrive.

We believe DEI efforts need to be ongoing and constantly updated. It is not something that we can simply check off as being done – there is always room for improvement and growth.

It is important that each VAC employee contributes to our DEI efforts. As teachers, your curricular and pedagogical choices are an essential component of this. We know that our school is seen as a warm and inclusive community for so many and we thank you for your incredible work. But, we also recognize that there is always room for improvement. At the VAC, each student should:

- Feel that their voices are equally heard and included
- Have equal access to opportunities associated with their courses
- Feel that their differences are welcomed and celebrated
- Experience a safe and inclusive in-person or on-line learning environment

We have a collection of DEI resources available to you on the [VAC Teacher Google Drive](#) (including how to incorporate culturally responsive approaches in your curricula, creating inclusive learning environments, inclusive language, and more).

If you are experiencing challenges related to DEI efforts in one or more of your courses or would like extra support in general, please do not hesitate to reach out to us. We are here to offer you support and to provide you with the tools necessary to maximize DEI in your courses.

Violations of the policy:



The following procedure is used to report violations of the DEI Policy:

- I. Board members, staff, teachers, teacher, gallery participant, gallery viewer, or the general public shall write and send an email to info@visualartscentre.ca concerning any discrimination, harassment, oppression, act of racism or other act that violates this policy, that they have experienced. The email should include (if applicable): What happened, When, Where, Who was involved/present, in whichever language is most comfortable, for internal purposes.
- II. A response from the Executive Director shall be sent to acknowledge receipt of the email and to request information about their immediate needs within one business day from the initial email.
- III. The Executive Director will document and file an incident [report](#).
- IV. Any person reporting racism shall be protected from all forms of retaliation that may put them at risk of professional harm, including harassment or loss of employment or appointment.
- V. If one or more members of staff or board are implicated, the other members shall contact a third party consultant to mediate.
- VI. If all members of staff are implicated, the Board shall contact a third party consultant and restorative justice practitioner.
- VII. If someone witnesses a violation of this policy by a member of the staff or board, whether directed at a specific person or not, the following protocol applies:
 - A. The person who witnessed the violation should consult the person who suffered the harm (if applicable) prior to moving forward with the process outlined.
 - B. If the person experiencing the harm consents to the witness reporting the act, the witness can do so with anonymity of the harmed person, their own anonymity or the anonymity of both the witness and the harmed person.
 - C. If the person who witnessed the violation does not know how to address the issue, contact the Executive Director for support, unless the Executive Director is implicated, in which case contact a member of the board.
 - D. All reporting and engagement is voluntary for all parties involved.
 - E. Any party involved in the incident can ask for a third-party mediator, paid for by the VAC
 - F. All parties involved will produce a written and signed agreement which stipulates the commitments accepted and to be fulfilled by all parties. This includes acknowledging where and how harm has been done, so that the organization can move forward in an equitable way.
 - G. Any decided accountability will include the opinion of the person harmed, if they feel comfortable and safe to do so. Otherwise, accountability shall be determined either by the Executive Director and/or the Board, with consultation of a third party at the request of the person harmed.
 - H. The accountability for any violation may vary depending on the quantity and severity of the harm(s) committed. Including, but not limited to, in no particular order:
 1. Formal written apology
 2. Public apology
 3. Written commitment on how harm will be repaired
 4. Termination of engagement with the VAC