



## Gateway Regional Arts Center Cultural Equity Statement

### **Part 1: Land Acknowledgement**

At the Gateway Regional Arts Center, we recognize that we are located on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded territories of Indigenous peoples including the Cherokee, Osage, Yuchi, and Shawnee tribal nations, as well as the Hopewell and Adena cultures. While the full history of their stories may be lost to time, it is important to recognize and celebrate the rich culture and history of Native Americans in Kentucky. There are still thousands of Native Americans living in Kentucky today, as evidenced by the 2020 Census which recorded 91,206 Native Americans living in the state.

As a cultural organization in a region of Kentucky that is steeped in Indigenous history, it is our responsibility to share accurate and balanced accounts of the past that tell the full story of the complex relationships between Native Americans and European settlers. We must challenge the traditional narrative that portrays Native Americans as the aggressors and White colonizers as the heroes. It is essential to acknowledge the injustices and hardships endured by the Native American people, and to use our platform to celebrate their culture and legacy.

The idea that the region GRAC currently serves was only a “hunting ground” to the indigenous people is a myth perpetuated to justify land theft and genocide. This myth was originally created by land speculators and continues to harm us today by absolving settler colonists and their descendants from confronting their history.

### **Part 2: Our Building, Facilities, and Physical Spaces**

We acknowledge that the building our organization is housed in, the former Methodist Episcopal Church South, was possibly built with the labor of enslaved people and/or underpaid labor

wages for Black citizens. In addition to being a segregated congregation prior to the Civil War, its leadership sadly sided with the pro-slavery faction when the Methodist Episcopal Church split in 1844. We recognize the very real and profound geographic and sociocultural effects of limiting entry to Whites, and the prolonged segregation practiced here in Kentucky - effects felt by our Black community to this day. GRAC is proud to reclaim this space for all people from all walks of life by providing a facility that holds a diversity of backgrounds in communal healing for past wrongs.

Our beautiful facility was constructed in 1883 and, as such, contains symbols and stylistic flourishes that predate modern sensibilities. Namely, the “reverse swastika” symbol that is located on our building’s façade predates World War II and was originally used as an ancient religious and cultural symbol with some societies still using it as a representation of divinity and spirituality. We understand that this is now a global symbol of hatred and has been unfortunately adopted by hate groups. While we recognize the architectural and historical use of this symbol on what was originally a house of worship, we do not condone its use in any way in modern contexts and hope our building’s façade will spark important conversations about one of humanity’s darkest moments - and how art can stand as the antithesis to dangerous propaganda.

### **Part 3: Historic Barriers to the Arts & Gatekeeping - in Our Community and Nationwide**

At the Gateway Regional Arts Center, we believe that access to the arts is essential to the well-being of our community. We recognize the historic barriers to accessibility in the arts in our community and nationwide, and the damaging effects of these barriers. We also acknowledge that the act and/or effects of gatekeeping and creating unnecessary barriers to participation are not always explicit, intentional, or malicious. We are committed to understanding and dismantling these systems in order to create a more equitable and accessible community, and we hope GRAC will serve as a field leader in breaking down barriers and removing “gatekeeping” in the arts.

Here are a few ways we are working to expand Kentuckians' access to the arts:

- Offering a wide range of classes and workshops in various disciplines.
- Hosting exhibitions and performances that showcase the work of talented artists from our region and beyond.
- Collaborating with local schools and community organizations to bring arts education and programming to underserved communities.

- Providing resources and support to artists, including studio space, funding opportunities, and networking events.

We are committed to creating a vibrant arts community in Montgomery County, the Gateway Region, and beyond, and we believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to experience the transformative power of the arts.

In order to truly make the arts accessible to everyone, it's important to understand the specific challenges that certain individuals may face:

- For individuals with physical disabilities, accessibility means more than just having a wheelchair ramp. It also means having accessible seating options, clear sightlines, and interpreters for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- For individuals with visual impairments, accessibility means having audio descriptions of performances and exhibitions, as well as accessible formats for printed materials.
- For individuals with cognitive disabilities, accessibility means having clear and easy-to-understand language, as well as sensory-friendly performances that take into account their specific needs.
- Language barriers can also hinder accessibility. It is important to ensure that translations or interpretations are available for individuals who speak different languages.
- Financial barriers can also prevent individuals from engaging with the arts. Ticket prices can be a burden for some, especially for those with low-income or limited access to resources. Offering discounted or free tickets can help overcome this barrier.
- Social stigma can also play a role in limiting access to the arts. Individuals with disabilities or mental health conditions may feel unwelcome or uncomfortable in certain environments. Creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere can help overcome this barrier.

By taking these accommodations into consideration, we can work towards creating a truly accessible arts community that is open to everyone regardless of their background or circumstances.

#### **Part 4: Our commitment to cultural equity**

Our slogan is "All the Arts for All the People." We strive to create an environment of inclusion, respect, and understanding, and to make sure everyone in our community has the opportunity to engage with the arts. We are continuously looking for ways to make our organization more accessible and equitable for all.

At our organization, we believe that everyone deserves equal access to the arts. To further our commitment to cultural equity, we have implemented several initiatives and continue to explore new ways to promote inclusion and diversity. Some of our efforts include:

- Providing ASL interpretation and other accessibility accommodations as requested by attendees at our events
- Offering free or discounted tickets to low-income individuals and families
- Hosting community events and workshops that celebrate diverse cultures
- Partnering with local schools and community organizations to provide arts education and outreach programs
- Ensuring that our staff and board members reflect the diversity of our community, and actively seeking out underrepresented voices in arts & culture
- Providing audio description services for people who are blind or visually impaired
- Hosting events and exhibitions that highlight the work of artists from marginalized communities
- Working with local businesses and organizations to create partnerships and collaborations that promote diversity and inclusivity
- Conducting surveys and focus groups to gather feedback from community members and use that feedback to inform programming and initiatives

It's important to remember that promoting cultural equity is an ongoing process, and there will always be more work to be done. However, by continuing to listen to feedback, actively seek out underrepresented voices, and make meaningful changes, GRAC can create a more welcoming and inclusive space for everyone to enjoy.