

Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA)

Pluralism Policy

Executive Summary

The AFA is actively addressing issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) through its Pluralism Policy. Pluralism is defined as recognizing, respecting, and valuing difference. The AFA Pluralism Policy governs and supports AFA's work in applying pluralism principles and practice to all its organizational policies, business areas and activities. This can be likened to applying "a pluralism lens" to all AFA decision-making.

The AFA sees pluralism as a productive response to diversity and, in its approach, the AFA ensures anti-oppression considerations are included in its pluralism lens. This means confronting all forms of oppression: racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and more. The AFA's definition of pluralism also recognizes the sovereign rights of Indigenous Peoples as the most essential expression of true pluralism.

The AFA believes in the full and equal participation of all citizens in the economy, polity, and society. The AFA manifests this belief through its policies and programs that promote inclusive citizenship in two distinct ways: in the arts and through the arts.

- **In the arts** means encouraging a diversity of artists, arts organizations, and audiences to participate through inclusive access to opportunities and resources in the arts sector.
- **Through the arts** refers to the use of art as a vehicle to help Albertans learn how to respond to differences in ways that enable dialogue, promote a sense of trust and belonging, and pave the way for innovation, vibrancy, and meaningful structural changes.

The objectives of the AFA's Pluralism Policy are to:

- Advance equity, diversity, inclusion, and access by committing to pluralism in the arts.
- Promote dialogue, understanding and vibrancy by committing to a pluralist Alberta through the arts.
- Guide the implementation of the Pluralism Policy by the AFA.

The AFA is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Pluralism Policy.

- The AFA Board is responsible for integrating pluralism principles into its governance and strategic planning, as well as ensuring diverse voices and perspectives at its tables.
- The AFA Staff is responsible for integrating the driving principles of the pluralism policy into the business areas of the AFA, its programs and service delivery.

Questions about this policy can be emailed to the AFA at afacontact@gov.ab.ca.

Preamble

Pluralism is a positive response to diversity – it is an aspiration that all people of different beliefs, backgrounds, and identities can coexist, co-learn, and co-create in the same society, and participate in the economic, social, and political life of that society. Pluralism requires people to know each other, and the arts have a unique role to play in facilitating discourse amongst different people – towards the goals of belonging, inclusion, and vibrancy.

Alberta's racially and ethnically diverse population¹, as described by Statistics Canada, is about one quarter of its 4.7 million people. By 2046, Alberta's population is expected to reach almost 6.4 million, and arrivals of people from other countries will account for about 54 per cent of the expected growth over the projected period². But diversity is not limited to race, ethnicity, and country of origin, and encompasses other differences as well, including language, geography (urban/rural), ability and gender.

Another key aspect of Alberta's diversity is the rapid growth of increasingly culturally enfranchised and empowered Indigenous peoples and communities. In partnership with non-Indigenous allies, these groups have been taking strides towards righting historical and contemporary wrongs and imagining Indigenous futures free from colonial constraints. The arts sector in Alberta, including the work of the AFA, can accelerate the understanding of Albertans that while Indigenous Peoples' rights are enshrined within the Constitution of Canada as well as protected by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we have additional obligations to one another through our sacred relationship governed by our numbered treaties. Understanding and valuing these truths will yield a future of all Albertans' awareness of Indigenous Peoples as sovereign peoples with diverse values, knowledges, and aspirations that can benefit all treaty people.

Alberta's increasing diversity enriches our province's cultural fabric, but it has differential impacts in an unequal society where differences are rooted in a historical, economic, and political context. Economic marginalization and social exclusion experienced by racialized peoples, people with disabilities, gender-diverse individuals and other underserved groups are, in fact, a manifestation of failed pluralism, which is why we need an intentional approach to create more paths for belonging.

As part of the larger ecosystem, the arts sector can play an active role in engaging people in dialogue and positive change, addressing marginalization and social exclusion in creative ways.

¹ Statistics Canada describes Canada's diversity according to the following: immigration (arrivals outside of Canada who are residing permanently in the country), ethnic ancestry (includes Europeans settlers) and visible minority (The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" and languages.

² Alberta and Census Divisions, 2021–2046. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/90a09f08-c52c-43bd-b48a-fda5187273b9/resource/9b48e997-92b0-4b74-82d2-017443049790/download/2021-2046-alberta-population-projections.pdf>

AFA Understanding of Pluralism

The AFA has adopted the Global Centre for Pluralism's definition of pluralism as recognizing, respecting, and valuing difference. In addition, AFA views this work through an explicitly anti-racist, anti-oppressive lens, and sees a truly pluralistic society as an aspirational goal in which everyone can experience a sense of acceptance and belonging. AFA aspires not to erase our differences but—through the arts and its programs—to help recognize, respect, and value our unique histories, perspectives, and experiences.

The AFA sees pluralism as a productive response to diversity, of which ethnicity, race, and country of origin are but some, among many, dimensions. Pluralism is an active process of understanding, learning, engaging, and connecting across the wide range of differences in our midst, and is linked to concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion, and decolonization.

It is worth noting that pluralism and multiculturalism are two distinct concepts. Whereas pluralism denotes a dynamic process of connection and change, multiculturalism is a sociological description of a certain kind of diversity, beginning with the recognition of the right to be different and coexist in a shared space. See Appendix 2 for definitions of several key interrelated concepts.

Actively embracing a pluralistic society requires the following three steps:

- **Recognizing difference:** Difference is not restricted to what we can see or hear, but the full texture of what shapes our histories, experiences, and perspectives. We may be different in where we live (rural, urban, suburban); how we worship; who we love; where we come from; how we look; how we sound; our ability; our income and wealth; our occupation, our industry, or how we spend our time; the list of potential differences is endless. We wear multiple hats and we each wear different hats in different contexts. At times, one Albertan might come into conflict with another in how they differentially view or experience Alberta, resulting in different fears, hopes, and expectations for Alberta's future. The first step to living peacefully together is to recognize that those differences exist.
- **Respecting difference:** Recognizing difference does not delegitimize our own identity or position. The goal of pluralism is not 'sameness.' We do not need to agree with the other; but we must respect each other's right to exist. We respect the unique histories, experiences, and perspectives that shape each other's being and outlook. Alberta is comprised of a diverse tapestry of uniqueness that can enrich us if we admire the differences among us. To reach that point of admiration, however, we must first nurture a common sense of belonging; doing so requires Albertans to dialogue among and across differences to better know one another, especially when we disagree.
- **Valuing difference:** By recognizing and respecting what makes us different, we set the stage to be able to value difference; innovation arises at the nexus of different ideas. Fostering trust and a sense of belonging not only creates a safe space for dialogue, but through dialogue catalyzes innovation by bringing together Albertans from any walk of life to collaborate and create a prosperous future for all Albertans.

Beyond these identifiable characteristics of difference, AFA's definition of pluralism recognizes the sovereign rights of Indigenous Peoples as the most essential expression of true pluralism. Within a broader and deeper historical context, the legacy of colonization in Canada, as well as the impact of colonization on those who have migrated from their colonized countries, can explain inequities experienced by Indigenous people and people of colour.

Colonial values, or more specifically Euro-Canadian values, are considered the default value system that built and continues to dominate economic, political, and social institutions in Canadian society. This underlying system has left out the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous Peoples and people from diverse and multiple identities in Alberta. These systems have always been harmful and are negatively impacting communities, which are becoming even more diverse over time. The AFA acknowledges the power differentials associated with an unequal colonial society and, through this policy, is working to balance these differentials, address the legacies of these systems without erasing history, and create more opportunities for equity-deserving communities so everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

The goal of pluralism is belonging. Belonging means individuals and groups feel a sense of acceptance and inclusion for their identities. There is an inherent intentionality when an organization adopts pluralism as a guiding value. It means that AFA is committed to work at two levels:

- An institutional response through policies, governance, and operations; and
- Behaviour and attitude change through discourse and learning experiences that foster understanding amongst different people, to build capacity for pluralism to create a more inclusive, equitable, and vibrant society.

The AFA Pluralism Policy

Policy is a tool to guide intentions, decisions, choices, and investments. The power of policy to shape direction and inform action is significant. What is said and acknowledged clearly in policies has an impact on the success of an organization to achieve its mandate. Likewise, what is left unsaid or unacknowledged also has consequences.

The AFA Pluralism Policy is designed to transform the AFA to help artists and Albertans actively, safely, and constructively encounter differences, and in doing so to celebrate some differences as strengths in a diverse society, and at other times reveal inequities and acknowledge their roots. Better understanding and discourse about Alberta's diverse histories, perspectives, and experiences will support Albertans to actively live the values of decolonization, anti-racism, and anti-oppression and, ultimately, energize actions to help achieve pluralism's goals of belonging, equity and inclusion through the arts sector in Alberta.

The Pluralism Policy is a foundational umbrella policy of the AFA and is seen as holistic and transformative. It offers an approach that positions differences as a strength, and as a starting point for dialogue into deeper issues of equity and inclusion. This Pluralism Policy becomes the vehicle by which the AFA creates opportunities for dialogue, understanding differences, eliminating disparities, and advancing equity, inclusion, and vibrancy. It holds tremendous

power as an approach to address the polarization and sense of exclusion that many Albertans are currently experiencing, and it offers opportunities to build trust, collaboration, and innovation across diverse communities.

Purpose

The Pluralism Policy governs and supports AFA's work in applying pluralism principles and practice in all its organizational policies, business areas and activities.

Objectives

- Advance equity, diversity, inclusion, and access by committing to pluralism in the arts.
- Promote dialogue, understanding and vibrancy by committing to a pluralist Alberta through the arts.
- Guide the implementation of the Pluralism Policy by the AFA.

Authority and Responsibility

The AFA is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Pluralism Policy.

The AFA Board is responsible for integrating pluralism principles into its governance and strategic planning, as well as ensuring diverse voices and perspectives at its tables. This includes ensuring this work is clearly communicated in AFA reports, digital platforms, and plans.

The AFA Staff is responsible for integrating the driving principles of the pluralism policy into the business areas of the AFA, its programs and service delivery. This includes building pluralism, anti-racism, anti-oppression, and equity outcomes into AFA impact and performance measurement.

Legislative Context

- Final Report and Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), an international instrument adopted by the UN in September 2007 to enshrine rights that “constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world.”
- Alberta Human Rights Act: The Alberta Human Rights Act is a provincial law that exists to protect against discrimination. Essentially, its purpose is to ensure all persons in Alberta have equal opportunities and are free from discrimination.
- Government of Alberta - Diversity and Inclusion Policy: The Government of Alberta is committed to a diverse public service workforce that reflects the qualities and differences of the broader population it serves and provides services to meet the diverse needs of Albertans.
- Annual Ministry Business Plans as appropriate.

Value Statements

The AFA, Pluralism, and the Arts

The AFA legislative mandate identifies its critical role in encouraging and supporting the arts as a key contributor to the quality of life of all Albertans. The AFA vision is a “vibrant Alberta arts community that sparks innovation, bursts with creativity, fosters understanding, and promotes belonging.” The mandate and vision, strengthened by this Pluralism Policy, capture the intended impact of the AFA on Alberta’s cultural fabric – both in and through the arts.

The AFA’s Pluralism Policy promotes equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility through pluralism in the arts and through the arts:

- **In the arts** means encouraging a diversity of artists, arts organizations, and audiences to participate through inclusive access to opportunities and resources in the arts sector.
- **Through the arts** refers to the use of art as a vehicle to help Albertans learn how to respond to differences in ways that enable dialogue, promote a sense of trust and belonging, and pave the way for innovation, vibrancy, and meaningful structural changes.

Beliefs

This Pluralism Policy is grounded in three key beliefs about the arts and social inclusion that underpin the AFA commitment to pluralism:

- The arts enable inclusive citizenship and the full and equal participation of all citizens and as such are essential to the social and cultural fabric of Alberta.
- Access to the arts fosters creativity and is a catalyst for excellence, innovation, health, and wellbeing in our communities.
- The resilience of a vibrant, diverse arts sector is crucial to the success of the local and global arts ecology and to the diversification of Alberta’s economy.

Assumptions

The practice and implementation of the AFA Pluralism Policy will be guided by several core assumptions. The AFA:

- Believes in the equal participation of all citizens in the political, economic, and socio-cultural life of the nation, and the commitment to enable individuals and groups to express their cultural, linguistic, and religious identities within a shared framework.
- Believes dialogue and understanding are critical underpinnings to peaceful and constructive social progress.
- Acknowledges that the multiplicity of groups means that there are many competing interest groups with unequal power. Thus, there is the need to build capacity and willingness to acknowledge and address power differentials through anti-racist and anti-oppressive means.

- Understands that achieving equitable outcomes often requires asymmetrical treatment in relation to those experiencing inequities or those with less power.

Policy review schedule

Approved: May 2021

Reviewed: March 2024

Appendix 1

Guiding Implementation Principles

Seven guiding principles will advance the integration of pluralism throughout the AFA:

- **Prioritize Diversity:** recognize, respect and value difference through a whole-of-organization commitment. Acknowledge that differences can bring strength if we build capacity for mutual understanding, cooperation, and innovation across and within communities.
- **Put People at the Centre:** centre people and processes instead of institutions, fostering inclusion through dialogue and deeper understanding and appreciation of differences on many levels.
- **Ground in Place:** root the learning journey to pluralism in place, including Indigenous ways of knowing and being, Reconciliation and sovereignty.
- **Root in History and Memory:** document through arts programs and collections the richly diverse stories and histories of Alberta communities that continue to shape and inform today's cultural discourse and collective memory.
- **Focus on Hardware and Software:** work on the institutional response ("hardware" including policies, governance, and operations) as well as on behaviour change ("software" including focusing on people, learning, and skills).
- **Acknowledge Systemic Barriers:** recognize and address underlying mechanisms that underpin existing inequalities for Albertans that prevent belonging and inclusion.
- **Name Those Impacted:** acknowledge and name the groups experiencing inequities, as well as the need to address these inequities.

Existing Tools to Support Policy Implementation

AFA can draw upon a number of existing tools and frameworks to support the effective, timely implementation of the Pluralism Policy. These include:

- Government of Alberta Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Equity and Anti-Racism Frameworks
- Government of Alberta GBA+ program and lens
- Truth and Reconciliation Final Report and Calls to Action
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Leadership: Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is fundamental to advance any kind of paradigm shift or change. No change will take root without the informed leadership of the organization being committed to new approaches.

The AFA demonstrated its intent to take a whole-of-organization approach to advancing pluralism in all aspects of its work beginning with an internal policy review and situational

assessment in 2021. This work has begun the journey of identifying the importance of a pluralism lens and built momentum and commitment in the AFA. It is at this leadership level that the AFA will truly build a strong foundation for transformation that supports pluralism as a prime driver in its organizational DNA – both in the arts and through the arts, manifesting in not only a pluralistic arts sector, but in Alberta as a whole. The arts ecosystem is a space and medium to promote dialogue, understanding, and trust among Albertans towards the goals of trust, cohesion, and vibrancy.

The AFA will approach implementation of the Pluralism Policy on a leadership and organizational level through these key starting points:

- Continue to develop an AFA culture that welcomes differences, seeks equity, and intentionally creates opportunities to address barriers to participation and engagement, access, and AFA recruitment at the Board, Committee, Staff, and community levels.
- Explore new models of governance and intercultural learning that reflect pluralism values and outcomes, including Indigenous ways of knowing, cultural wisdom, and ways of working.
- Bring the pluralism lens to policy updates, new policy development, and to the work on the AFA Strategic Plan to catalyze and embed pluralism across all business areas.
- Use an anti-racism and anti-oppression lens to ensure all AFA's work acknowledges power differentials and seeks to address systemic harms to marginalized and racialized communities.
- Orient the arts practices of the AFA (grants, collections, research, and engagement) towards fostering understanding and dialogue among Albertans from all walks of life.

As AFA Board and Staff leadership implement the Pluralism Policy, their learnings and enhanced awareness of the pluralism lens will help sustain and develop this work to advance inclusive citizenship and, ultimately, systems change.

Operation: The intent of this policy is to facilitate sustained and positive social impact through the arts and ensure the integrity of the AFA itself. As such, it functions as an umbrella policy for all AFA work. The AFA Board will receive and share reports on progress of the implementation of the Pluralism Policy as they become available.

Appendix 2

Definitions of Relevant Concepts

Multiculturalism and Pluralism

Pluralism and multiculturalism are two distinct concepts. Multiculturalism starts with recognition of the right to be different and coexist in a shared space. Pluralism is an active process that helps us to value difference by getting to know ourselves and each other, and in doing so, constructively shape the economic, political, and social systems in which we live. Pluralism is based on a value system that people, in all their diversity, have decided to share through conscious and complex processes of navigating, understanding and bridging differences. It is more closely related to the concept of interculturality, which builds on the strengths of a diverse society, and that encourages relationship-building and co-creation across and within many cultures.

Diversity³

Diversity is about the variety of unique dimensions, qualities, and characteristics we all possess.

Equity⁴

Equity refers to achieving parity in policy, process, and outcomes for historically and/or currently underrepresented and/or marginalized people and groups while accounting for diversity. It considers power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes, in three fundamental areas:

- Representational equity: the proportional participation at all levels of an institution,
- Resource equity: the distribution of resources to close equity gaps, and
- Equity-mindedness: the demonstration of an awareness of, and willingness to, address equity issues.

Inclusion⁵

Inclusion refers to how diversity is leveraged to create a fair, equitable, healthy, and high-performing organization or community where all individuals are respected, feel engaged and motivated, and their contributions toward meeting organizational and societal goals are valued.

Decolonization⁶

Decolonization begins with the belief that Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development. The process of decolonization can involve the following: autonomy and self-government, protection of historical sites and cultural rights, education in their own language and legal recognition of traditional lands, territories, and resources, among others.

³ Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion

⁴ Adapted from New England Resource Center for Higher Education

⁵ This definition comes from *Global Diversity and Inclusion Benchmarks*

⁶ Racial Equity Tools

Anti-Racism⁷

Anti-racism is the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably.

Anti-Oppression⁸

Oppression is the use of power to disempower, marginalize, silence or otherwise subordinate one social group or category, often to further empower and/or privilege the oppressor. Social oppression may not require formally established organizational support to achieve its desired effect; it may be applied on a more informal, yet more focused, individual basis.⁹

Anti-Oppression seeks to recognize the oppressions that exist in our society and attempts to mitigate its effects and eventually equalize the power imbalance in our communities.

Anti-oppressive practice is the act of challenging inequalities. (Clifford, 2002)¹⁰

⁷ Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre

⁸ The Anti-Oppression Network

⁹ Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre

¹⁰ Burke, B. & Harrison, P. 2002. Anti-Oppressive Practice in Adams, R., Dominelli, L. and Payne, M. (2002) In *Anti-Oppressive Practice*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan Ltd: 227–236