

MUSEUMS MOVING FORWARD

MMF Convening: Pay Equity

July 27 2021
12–1:30PM EST

ATTENDEES: 20

SPEAKERS: Elsa Hiltner, Russell Davis, Lise Soskolne

- I. INTRODUCTION AND GROUP AGREEMENTS
- II. PRESENTATIONS

Elsa Hiltner is a writer and organizer on pay and labor equity in the theater industry and a consultant for theater companies who are working to establish pay equity. Her essays on labor and pay equity have inspired systemic change, and the Theatrical Designer Pay Resource that she launched in 2018 has been used nationwide by designers to promote pay transparency and to start conversations about pay equity. She is a co-founder of On Our Team, which successfully organized for pay transparency on Playbill, BroadwayWorld, and the League of Chicago Theatres' job sites and will launch the Pay Equity Standards in 2022. In 2021, she was honored to receive the Michael Merritt Arts Advocacy Award.

Elsa: Three-pronged plan to grow pay equity in the theater industry

1. Education
 - You can (and should) be paid for your passion: break “the scarcity mindset” through independent research, interviews, and the use of the media.
 - Show why pay equity is good for the industry.
2. Pay Transparency
 - Get job sites to post salaries
 - Destigmatize the issues about salaries
 - *Process:*
 - Send a letter (to Boards/Executives?) with a time limit to respond
 - Initiate social media campaign to apply pressure if no response within the allotted time
 - Issue a petition to raise awareness
 - Press coverage of the issue
 - This approach was successful in convincing Playbill to require posting pay on their job listings.
3. Gaining Pay Equity
 - Counter the fear and lack of knowledge associated with pay equity.

Next steps: Formalizing an “official” pay scale this fall for theaters. Will establish a certification process and a badge system along the lines of the ALANA Rubric used by foundations and W.A.G.E. and food labels. It can be used by theaters to grow audiences; demonstrate to potential employees and foundations that they are

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on the right path. Process includes three primary “tasks” for institutions:

Russell Davis has been a Human Resources executive since 2002, with experience in for-profit and non-profit industries. He has been a consultant focused on communication effectiveness and racial dialogue since 1992 when he Co-founded The Dialogue Consultants (TDC) after the civil unrest in Los Angeles. He is the author of *The Leadership Papers: Tools for Effective Leadership* and the upcoming book, *A Fire in My Bones: The New Leadership Guide*. Russell is an advocate for organizational and individual accountability and believes that effective leadership is a key factor in meeting organizational and individual goals. He currently serves as the Chief of Human Resources, Equity & Engagement (CHREE) for the Hammer Museum.

Russell: Equity Review 101

An equity review is a process to discuss where people are in your organization -- “to understand and address salary discrepancies.” An equity increase is permanent and thus impacts all aspects of a museum’s budget. He raised 6 points (complete notes available):

1. Intent of Equity Review
 - Who asked for it – Board, Union, Employee?
 - Whose needs are you serving?
 - Are there racial and/or gender issues?Laws regarding pay equity vary by state.
2. Ensure the privacy of the data
 - Work with a law firm to keep information private.
 - Distinguish between privacy and transparency.
3. Internal Comparisons
 - Review internal SSG (Significantly Similar Groups) within your organization.
4. External Comparisons
 - Review similar organizations (type, size, budget, location, cost of living).
5. Be careful what you share publicly
 - The perception of salary collusion between organizations can present legal issues and harm your institution’s integrity and reputation.
6. Implementation
 - Can you actually implement these changes? Set realistic timelines. It can be frustrating to employees if their expectations are not met immediately.

Lise Soskolne is an artist and core organizer of Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.), a New York-based activist organization founded in 2008. W.A.G.E.’s mission is to establish sustainable economic relationships between artists and the institutions that contract their labor, and to introduce mechanisms for self-regulation into the art field that collectively

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bring about a more equitable distribution of its economy. Along with many others, Lise is a co-founder of W.A.G.E. She has been its core organizer since 2012.

Lise: Building sustainable economic relationships between artists and the institutions that contract their labor

WAGE's focus has been on securing fees for artists who were formerly unpaid workers in the museum system: "Payment is not for content, but for its provision". WAGE's approach has three parts: Certification, Wagency, and Contracts (upcoming).

1. Certification
 - Self-regulation by institutions.
 - Sliding scale: fees are calibrated to the institution's operating budget.
 - The information is drawn from 990 tax documents (line 18).
 - They license API data from Guidestar.
2. Wagency
 - Enable artists to send fee requests to institutions.
 - Artists can withhold their labor, thereby pressuring institutions into paying them.
 - Solidarity unionism: in formation. About building power around and through all constituencies.
 - Advocating for portable union membership (between institutions).
3. Contracts
 - Goal is to establish new contract/work agreement standards that address the exploitation inherent in conditions for artists and art supply chain workers.
 - Both non-profit sector and commercial market.
 - Focused on non-unionized freelance labor.

V. DISCUSSION

Transparency as a Tool

- Pay transparency alone is not enough, but it brings attention to inherent issues:
 - Discussion of the The New York Times article on the limits of salary transparency found that pay transparency alone disrupts certain balances of power.
 - Russell: job sites don't post salaries or salary bands because companies want room to negotiate.
- Is there a way to track the salary history of positions within an organization? Would that prove useful?
- Small organizations are getting W.A.G.E. certified but are still slow to sign on.
- W.A.G.E. certification would require significant structural changes in many museums, especially larger ones and especially with regard to large exhibitions, which creates a "firewall."

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- Some museums have started conversations with W.A.G.E. and are genuinely interested, but ultimately back away before signing on.
 - Discussion point: this stickiness is where we need more time, attention, and focus. MMF could offer this in the future.
- W.A.G.E. includes the highest salary and mission statements in their Fee Calculator.
- Orgs should include WAGE certification in their job postings.
 - Discussion point: The curators at ICA in Philadelphia achieved W.A.G.E. certification by creating a pilot project for a year (a pathway).

Coalition Building

- Suggestion that groups build coalitions with other, like-minded organizing groups, to avoid duplicating their efforts.
- Working with city governments is also an option. For example, On Our Team has started to work on pay equity in Chicago through public campaigns and pushing to have pay equity questions on grant forms.
- Get AAM and AAD and NYFA to talk together.

Pay Scale and Value

- Only Boards and Directors have the power to define who has value in a museum.
- Artists' payments are a major issue. Big institutions don't want this information to be made public because of the disparity in how artists fees are allocated/distributed.
- Curators and Development workers are necessary for fundraising and so are considered more "worthy" of higher salaries.
- Change has to start at the top, but the Board/Directors have to buy in. If you make an ask to the Board, you need to be well-informed: present specific salary figures, market analysis, cost of living information and a suggested base salary.
- Name and Shame approach: is it impactful? (What kind of organization do you really want to be?)

Role of Unions

- Unionization doesn't guarantee an automatic pay increase.
- Good for collective bargaining for benefits but salary raises are structured according to an employee's length of tenure at the organization. (An attendee noted that the only cost of living raise they had ever received was when they were a union member.)
- MMF needs to explore this topic more and get union experts involved in the conversation.
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- Art and Museum Transparency switched goals to unionization. Being public about their views has helped others come forward and speak out.

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TAKEAWAYS

What are the long term and short-term goals with regard to pay equity? What is achievable in the short term?

1. Explore values as a way to frame the conversation in your own organization.
2. Push for posting salaries and salary bands on NYFA etc. and also at your own organization.
 - Attendee note: Speak publicly if you can. Not just about salaries, but as a worker who believes these issues are critical for us all. Raise the issues even if it feels problematic for you, personally. You could very well be helping others start conversations themselves.
 - Attendee note: Keep in mind this work can be exhausting: what are the incremental changes we can make to reduce individual fatigue and stress?
3. Need to develop a timeline (steps or stages to W.A.G.E. certification) to avoid the “hard stop” / push back
 - Reference [Maturity Model for The Empathetic Museum](#): looking at museums and equity as maturation process.
 - Focus on the sticky points.