

Ad Hoc Committee on Arts, Culture, and DEI Implementation

Final Report, June 2024

Background

The Ad Hoc Committee on Arts, Culture, and DEI submitted its final [report](#) in April 2022, making several recommendations, some immediate and some longer term. These include:

- Creating and sustaining an arts festival
- Increasing support for student groups in the performing and visual arts
- Diversifying MIT's public art collection
- Developing and enhancing tours of the MIT campus
- Evaluating the legacy of MIT's third president, Francis Amasa Walker, and the building named in his honor (Building 50)

Implementation

To translate these recommendations into action, in December 2022, [Provost Cynthia Barnhart announced](#) the creation of a new committee, the Ad Hoc Committee on Arts, Culture, and DEI Implementation. Co-chaired by the Institute Community and Equity Officer and the Vice Provost for the Arts, this committee was charged with coordinating the implementation efforts of four working groups corresponding to the first four recommendations above. Efforts to advance a study on Francis Amasa Walker are on a separate path, under the direction of the Institute Community and Equity Office (ICEO), the Offices of the President and Provost, and in consultation with faculty from MIT's History section. Two historians have been contracted to produce a study of Walker's involvement in the American Indian reservation system. Their report will be submitted to the President and Provost at the end of calendar year 2024.

Progress report

The Arts, Culture, and DEI Implementation Steering Committee, made up of the committee chairs and the eight co-leads of the working groups met three times during the 2023-24 academic year, including a final meeting on May 15, 2024. In addition, each of the four working groups met periodically beginning in April 2023 with the working group co-leads reporting back to the steering committee during the 2023-24 academic year. Summaries of the progress made by each of the working groups is noted below, with links to full reports and addenda as appropriate.

Arts Festival

The Arts Festival Working Group met during the fall semester to establish guiding principles for the festival and to determine a timeline. The working group also generated an open call for proposals and

criteria for assessing them. During the spring semester, the working group selected projects to include in the program and are now finalizing the roster of events based on feasibility and the progress and feasibility being made to advance each selected project. The arts festival is being organized by Professor Azra Akšamija and Institute Professor Marcus Thompson working in partnership with Executive Director of Arts Initiatives Leila Kinney and Senior Producer Katherine Higgins. Final projects will be announced in the fall 2024 semester.

Criteria for Reviewing Proposals (see slide 2 in the above proposal)

- Assess how the project connects to one of questions below and how the project engages the MIT community:
(questions were posed in the open call for proposals)
 - a. What pulls our community apart?
 - b. What brings us together?
 - c. What needs to be done to create structures for lasting change?
- Artistic quality
- Feasibility and strength of planning (with producer input)
- Participatory, interactive, community components

Planning Principles *(shared with all student, staff, and faculty collaborators)*

- Be distinctively MIT—convey the creative spirit and the culture of MIT and its tradition of participatory creativity.
- Encourage a thoughtful examination of the past and present across a broad range of artistic expressions.
- Engage students as active partners in developing programming.
- Educate and inspire the MIT community about the breadth of arts at MIT.
- Incorporate arts curriculum and communities prominently in the Arts Festival to highlight their importance to MIT.
- Reflect the full spectrum of the MIT Community, as well as the core [MIT Values](#), especially the fun, openness, diversity, and creativity of the Institute.
- Reflect support for free expression in the hope of fostering alliances across the community. See [Mind and Hand Book](#) and [MIT Statement on Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom](#).
- Be as “green” and sustainable as possible.

Timeline: In consultation with the working group planning opening events for the new music building, the committee scheduled the festival for March 2025, with a culminating weekend March 14-16.

Program: The committee received 61 proposals. After ranking them and interviewing potential participants, the working group created a preliminary program that includes 16 faculty contributors, 13 students, eight staff, and two visiting artists. There are five categories of proposals:

1. **Academic and curricular projects** (e.g., Classes led by professors Gediminas Urbonas in ACT and Sarah Brown in Theater will contribute exhibitions, installations, poetry, or performances)

2. **Professionally-led platforms for group programs** (e.g., MIT film festival led by Clayton Ainsworth and *Layers of Place*, an XR workshop and exhibition using co-creation methods, organized by fellows in the OpenDocLab)
3. **Elevating existing programs and campus artists** (e.g., Student Art Showcase in W20 on the culminating weekend highlighting performing arts groups; four “headliner” concerts in the new music building or Kresge, including Grammy-winner jazz musician Miguel Zenón’s concert “Golden City”, and a world music showcase)
4. **Student open call projects** (e.g., *Common Parts*, *Open Seating*, which creates a physical environment for dialogue, and *Interwoven*, an installation and participatory project that raises awareness about climate change)
5. **Newly commissioned work** (e.g., Charles Shadle will write a piece for the Chamber Choir that reflects Indigenous experience, and there is a call for nominations for an Indigenous artist to create a sound or visual art installation on campus)

Campus Tour

The Campus Tours Working Group assessed the current “visitor experience” for MIT, mindful of existing admissions tours and potential combinations of in-person, virtual, or blended encounters that could improve understanding of MIT’s history in the context of the Institute’s commitment to inclusive excellence and welcoming diverse populations to campus. The group also compiled a set of peer-institution models for best practices in approaching complex pasts. Ultimately, the group made five recommendations in its [final report](#):

1. Improved accessibility
2. Consolidated database of MIT history
3. Student and professional “design charrettes”
4. Website and physical signage design
5. Tour design, placard placement

The first recommendation will be fulfilled by the Office of Campus Planning. OCP has, for example, partnered with the ICEO to complete an [Campus Inclusive Restrooms Study](#). Creating a welcoming physical environment and remaining in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act are foundational values for MIT.

The second recommendation will require new and renewed collaborations with appropriate MIT faculty, the Libraries, the MIT Museum, the ICEO, and the new Vice President for Equity and Inclusion. This recommendation requires ongoing commitment to maintenance and continual updating as new research is conducted.

The third, fourth, and fifth Campus Tour Working Group recommendations have emerged as the most actionable of the report’s recommendations. In spring 2024, the STS.050 “History of MIT” subject offering engaged students in telling important MIT DEI stories in their final project. Deborah Douglas, Senior Director of Collections at the MIT Museum and the course instructor, provided students with a list

of prospective topics and helped guide their selections. She used the classroom experience to work with students in the creation of their own “stops” on a campus tour. They assembled collections of related photographs, documents, videos, etc., wrote short papers, and gave a public presentation at the MIT Museum. Working Group members, other contributors to the DEI Arts and Culture effort, as well as MIT senior officers were invited to the final presentations for their input and guidance.

Public Art and Campus Building Projects

The Public Art Working Group built on ongoing work streams to clarify guidelines and best practices for implementing public art on campus and to update the guidelines on the selection of architects for small and large campus projects. For public art, new guidelines ([Addendum to Best Practices for Implementing the Art on Campus Policy](#)) for campus public art selections and the campus plan on diversifying the public art collection ([MIT Percent-for-Art Policy and the Art on Campus Plan Recommendation on Diversifying the Collection](#)) are under review by the Office of the General Counsel.

Campus Building Projects

In its April 2022 report, the Ad Hoc Arts, Culture, and DEI Committee strongly recommended that the selection committee policies that consider diversity in the selection process for public art be extended to architecture commissions. With that directive in mind, the Public Art Working Group collaborated with the MIT Office of Campus Planning (OCP) to document its guidelines and procedures for the selection of architects for small and large campus projects.

OCP manages two primary types of architect selection programs: 1) for modest renovation projects under the capital project threshold, and 2) for capital projects. For modest renovation projects, OCP (in partnership with the MIT Department of Facilities) manages the On-Call Services Program, an initiative of the Vice President for Campus Services and Stewardship.

There are some recent and ongoing successes with OCP’s on-call architect services program, which has focused on increasing diversity in the selection of architects for interior renovation projects. Those efforts have resulted in notable progress on increasing the representation of women and people of color.

For larger scale projects OCP and the Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning (SA+P) curate a long list of internationally renowned candidate firms for capital projects. They informally track criteria related to Women/Minority-Owned Business Enterprise (WMBE) status and other criteria related to diversity.

There are some challenges to the existing selection process, including the possible lack of consistency across the selection committees in the practices necessary to recruit women and minority architects and consultants for capital projects.

Based on its analysis the working group recommends that the on-call processes continue for small projects while implementing inclusive processes for members of the MIT community engaged in the selection of architects for capital projects. In addition, the working group recommends that the Institute implement initiatives to diversify the membership of capital projects review and selection committees. The working group also recommends increasing the representative impacted stakeholders and reviewing the committee's existing policies for selecting architects and consultants for capital projects.

As described on its website, the role of the [Building Committee](#) (a decision-making body) is largely unchanged since its inception in 1949, and the working group suggests the Institute revisit and reconsider ways to affect the organization of the committee to reach more diverse building candidates and encourage a diversity of selections. The working group recommends the Building Committee include an independent expert in its membership, a practice held by other universities including Harvard University and [Washington University](#).

Arts and Culture Student Groups

The Arts and Culture Student Groups Working Group made new resources available to support the activities of MIT's 150+ cultural and performing arts student organizations. This included streamlined and additional funding for student organization activities, enhancements to existing student spaces, and the opening of additional spaces for student organizations' use. During the 2023-2024 academic year, cosmetic updates were made to the Black Student Union and Indigenous Peoples' Center, and two new dance performance spaces opened on the fourth floor of the Stratton Student Center as part of the building's recent renovation. Temporary spaces were also identified for the Muslim Student Association and Asian and Asian American student organizations.

Looking ahead, the Division of Student Life (DSL) will continue to work with campus partners and student leaders, including the Undergraduate Association, Graduate Student Council, and Association of Student Activities, to develop sustainable financial and space allocation practices, including a space study that is underway. This work will continue taking into consideration the recommendations of the DEI Arts and Culture Working Group and the [Student Organization Working Group](#).

DEI Arts and Culture Implementation Committee Membership

Co-chairs

Vice President for Equity and Inclusion Karl Reid (former Interim ICEO Dan Hastings and also former ICEO John Dozier)

Vice Provost Philip S. Khoury

Staff to the committee: Chad Galts (ICEO), Leila W. Kinney (Office of the Vice Provost), and Catherine Williams (Office of the Provost)

Recommendation 1 Arts festival

Co-lead: Azra Aksamija, Associate Professor of Art, Culture, and Technology, Department of Architecture

Co-lead: Marcus Thompson, Institute Professor

Martha Eddison Sieniewicz (President's Office)

Ted Johnson (Institute Events)

Rebecca Tyler (Institute Events)

Daniela Rus (Director CSAIL)

Fred Harris (Music academic staff)

Jeffery Grossman (Head DMSE)

Sara Brown, Class of 1957 Career Development Associate Professor, Music and Theater Arts Section

Cassandra Guan, CAST Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow

Katherine Higgins, Senior Producer, CAST

Recommendation 2 Student performing and visual arts groups

Co-lead Jimmy Doan, Associate Dean, Office of Student Wellbeing

Co-lead Rima Das, Graduate Student, Department of Mechanical Engineering

Recommendation 3 Public art working group

Co-lead Yolande Daniels, Department of Architecture

Co-lead Paul Ha, Director, List Visual Arts Center

Amy Glasmeier (Urban Studies)

John Ochsendorf (Architecture)

Kaitlyn Gee (student)

Nandi Bynoe (DEI Assistant Dean)

Natalie Bell (LIST)

Morgan Pinney (Campus Planning)

Jon Alvarez (Campus Planning)

Recommendation 4 Campus Tour

Co-lead Emma Teng, T.T. and Wei Fong Chao Professor of Asian Civilizations, History Section

Co-lead Caroline Jones (Architecture)

Bryan Thomas (Assistant Dean for DEI, Sloan)

Debbie Douglas (MIT Museum)

Chris Peterson (Admissions)
Aaron Donaghey (DSL)
Charles Shadle (Music academic staff)
Erin Murray (Admissions)
Phoenix Swartz (student)
Amanda Hawk (Libraries)