REIMAGINE POWER:
An Audit of Common Field's Power Dynamics

Conducted and Written by
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Knowing there are many people we may miss, we start by acknowledging the genius and brilliance of our ancestors who made our existence possible. We know our histories are complex, so we don’t romanticize the people we come from but we do know their errors, journeys, and lessons influence and inspire us. Thank you to our many elders and teachers for grace and wisdom so generously shared.

I, Mandisa, want to especially thank my forever love and comrade Wendi Moore-O’Neal for being a soft place and a fierce supporter throughout this process. And so much gratitude to my co-facilitator and co-conspirator Shana Turner for being bold enough to take this journey alongside me. Deep thanks to the Black feminists who politically raise, nurture and challenge me—shana griffin, kai lumumba barrow, Andrea Ritchie and the New Orleans chapter of BYP100.

I, Shana, want to express deep love to my downhome peers who never let me become pretentious or believe in exceptionalism. I especially want to thank the queer and straight, multiracial, street-smart, radical feminists/womanists who were the chosen family of my working-class, queer, Irish-American mama from Dorchester and from whom I learned to laugh loudly, buck against respectability, challenge authority when it harmed people, have my people’s backs, and remember that we are nature itself and of the Earth. Mandisa, I am blessed and honored that we have chosen to co-imagine our liberated futures into being, together.
Thank you to our bad-ass documentarians—María Luisa Rosal and Laura Ekua, for your vision, clarity and thoroughness. This would not be possible without your dedicated presence and skill. And to Sage Crump, our strategic advisor, your invaluable and brilliant guidance has grown us in ways we have only begun to experience the fruits of. Many thanks to the people in each of your lives that made it possible for you to contribute so meaningfully to this process.

Much gratitude to the Common Field staff and board who respected and trusted our boundaries, autonomy, and leadership to enact this audit. A special thanks to staff members, Sheetal Prajapati, Chris Tyler, E. Maude Haak-Frendscho, and Cat Yang for your active participation and responses, even when it meant moving outside of your comfort zones again and again. We give tremendous thanks to Margaret Andersen for creating the illustrations and graphic layout for the documents we’ve developed through this process, including this report.

Lastly, we are grateful for everyone who gave so generously of your time and energy to respond to our survey, participate in our interviews and fishbowl conversations, and share additional thoughts and documents—we see you. Your insights have grounded the audit process and especially this report. We want to honor former staff, consultants, contractors, temporary employees, and Network members who bravely shared sometimes painful and traumatizing experiences of misused power, all with the hope that speaking honestly about your experiences could help uncover the full extent of the transformative work Common Field must undergo. We hope you see the ways your experiences are compassionately and honestly reflected. We hope you see that it was you who made this possible.

We dedicate this report to the global workers’ struggle for dignity, equity, and an end to exploitation. We ground our report in this reality and seek to locate our findings and recommendations in this struggle for more accountable and just leaders and institutions.
Introduction & Methodology
STATEMENT FROM COMMON FIELD

“It would not do our purpose justice to not speak up now.”

To our Common Field members and larger community,

Common Field board and leadership appreciate your ongoing interest in the organization and taking time to review this 360° Internal Audit Report conducted in 2021. We hope this introduction provides a framework for how we came to the work of this report and how we are moving forward from these learnings.

In early 2020, a former staff member of Common Field wrote a letter to the Board Chair communicating the harm they and their colleagues had experienced while being part of Common Field staff, as well as deep concern for the organization’s open job postings “strongly encouraging” Black and Brown candidates to apply. This staff member connected their experiences to both cultural and organizational oppressions that operationalized the constructions of white supremacy, and particularly emphasized actions on the part of staff leadership that led to power imbalances. This letter was direct and powerful communication that held up a mirror to each of us for harms experienced and perpetuated at Common Field. This mirror brought to the surface the ways that leadership were simultaneously functioning and contributing to systems of harm that maintained racist, capitalist, ableist structures. These systems compromised our being held accountable and holding others accountable.

Following the receipt of this letter,
over months, the board and staff met regularly to document and gather more information, including additional named and known grievances, assess immediate actions needed, and discern needed next steps towards repair. This work led the board to recognize that a comprehensive internal assessment of the organization was essential and urgent - with the hope that a process like this could critically assess how power has been and is shared and enacted throughout the organization.

In September 2020 then members of the board (dana bishop-root, Jackie Clay, Matthew Fluharty, Anne Focke, Eunsong Kim, sharon maidenberg, Nat May, James McAnally, Aurora Tang, Sarah Williams and Martha Wilson) and staff (E. Maude Haak-Frendscho, Chris Tyler) drafted a call for outside facilitators and practitioners to provide a 360 degree audit and suggestions for restructuring. This RFP requested a racial, economic, gender justice centered audit of programs, policies, structures, practices, and culture resulting in qualitative and quantitative data regarding the current work and workplace of Common Field.

The audit process was one of Common Field’s main programmatic initiatives with the support of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the organization's primary funder. It was our hope that the resulting report would serve our field, a sector in deep need of reckoning with systemic institutional harm and white supremacy culture.

This internal reflection led to three primary actions in 2020: the paid leave and subsequent termination of Executive Director Courtney Fink, a commitment to an organizational audit and reimagining with consultants, and the hiring of Sheetal Prajapati as Interim Managing Director to move the organization through this process in 2021.

When we began this work as a leadership team, we had the full intention of setting the stage for the next phase of Common Field’s trajectory. Since we received the complete report in late summer of 2021, we began working to better understand the larger implications of its outcomes and shaping next steps related to strategic planning for the years ahead as recommended in this report. At the same time, the existing leadership in fall 2021 (board members Sarah Williams, Jackie Clay, James McAnally, and Eunsong Kim, and executive director Sheetal Prajapati) became aware of additional immediate financial challenges that forced us to look at a set of concurrent and compounding organizational issues.

Since the completion of this report, and in light of our commitments to the outcomes of this report, our staff,
resources, and community, Common Field leadership made the decision to begin an intentional sunsetting process and will close Common Field as an organization in December 2022. A public statement about sunsetting with a timeline can be found on our website and an announcement of our final programs will be shared in May 2022.

We hope to frame our process, experience, and vision for this audit report in the spirit of being accountable, responsible, and reasonably transparent — tenets that have guided our work over the last 24 months that led to our sunsetting decision.

This resulting report offers us a call to map, name and expand the narrative out of our various experiences of power-holding, shame, apathy, responsibility, commitment, and pain. Since its inception, Common Field has been working from a place of misalignment, or gap, between thoughtfully stated values and our internal and external work with each other and the Network. In many ways, this report previews the need for profound changes to our organizational business model.

Audit provided a framework to better understand our founding mission and commitments to our field and each other. We believe that in sunsetting, we are owning and acting on the critique, insights, and responsibilities outlined in this narrative as a way to move forward with humility and hope.

Since initiating this process in the fall of 2020 (and before the decision to sunset) we have actively engaged in steps toward repair in 2021 with the aim of bringing the organization to a place where it could begin imagining a new future. This work included:

- Offering formal apologies and acknowledgement to the individuals, organizations, and any other entities named to have been previously harmed by Common Field
- Hiring Sheetal Prajapati as Interim Managing Director and, as of September 2021, the first Executive Director of color to lead the organization
- Aligning staff capacity with the organizational scope of work, from three to six people, and permanent staff from 100% white to 50% POC
- Provided compensation for returned fees, uncompleted projects, and unexpected labor— particularly relating to the 2020 Houston Convening
1.1 Statement from Common Field

• Building staff infrastructure to support repair work identified in Audit Report

We recognize that in the time we have until December, we may not be able to complete all of the recommended work intended to take place over years but as we move forward, we do commit to enacting the principles of repair, restoration, and liberation in this process. We hope sharing this report and our path forward will demonstrate that this carefully considered change-work is rooted in intentionality, accountability, and responsibility to our community through actionable steps. Our hope is that the life and dissolution of Common Field will provide learnings, healing, resources, and inspirations to begin mapping new paths forward for our field.

Common Field would like to express our gratitude and respect for our consulting Audit Team, led by Shana Turner and S. Mandisa Moore-O’Neal with advisor Sage Crump, and documentarians María Luisa Rosal and Laura Ekua. This report is a result of their insightful, open, and collaborative approach to this process.

We also want to thank you, our community, for participating in this process—for being part of our Network and an active part of our field. Your reflections and dreams for Common Field expressed in this report will be a guide for the future of our collective work. Common Field is also deeply thankful to the current staff who have kept our work moving forward during this transitional period and to our former board and staff members who participated in this process.

Finally, we want to share gratitude for those whose brave voices and experiences were a call to embark on this work.

With hope,
2022 Common Field Leadership Team

Sarah Williams, Board Chair
Jackie Clay, Board Secretary
Eunsong Kim, Board Member
James McAnally, Board Member Emeritus
Kristel Baldoz, Administrative Manager & Broad Treasurer
Sheetal Prajapati, Executive Director
1.1 Statement from Common Field

Common Field Staff
Mars Avila, Producer, Programs & Special Projects
Kristel Baldoz, Administrative Manager
E. Maude Haak-Frendscho, Convening Program Director
Sheetal Prajapati, Executive Director
Chris Tyler, Communications & Operations Manager
Cat Yang, Network Associate

Board of Directors during Audit Period (2020-2021)
Jackie Clay, Secretary
James McAnally, Chair
Sarah Williams, Treasurer
dana bishop-root
Eunsong Kim
Martha Wilson
Matthew Fluharty
AUDIT TEAM STATEMENT

It is an intentional decision for us to use the first person and also the third person throughout this report. Naming the ways power is arranged in institutions, as well as reimagining the ways it must transform for our collective liberation, is deeply personal and thoroughly political. It would be inauthentic to speak outside of ourselves, when we have given so much of what matters to us to this audit process. We also know it is important for us to forthrightly name Common Field as both an institution and also comprised of people with varying degrees of power. We will be specific when it is necessary to name the ways particular people have embodied a dynamic, and broad when it is important to name the way the institution has perpetuated a dynamic.

Our work is rooted in Abolitionist, Black, Indigenous, Working-Class, Queer Feminist values and a political praxis in which we commit to doing something we believe in more times than we’ve failed trying. While we have never worked with Common Field before, we build from our own experiences as paid and unpaid workers, board members, and/or managers in many types of organizations: from nonprofits to community coalitions to collectives. In addition, we have guided many organizations through turbulent moments of growth with our expertise in planning, visioning, training, and equity work. We are proud of the work we have done with Common Field. From these experiences, we believe that those in leadership can share power
with integrity by listening to and incorporating insights from people at all levels of the organization.

Building on the work of cultural organizer Nana Fofie Bashir, we understand our roles as Process Doulas. We have supported and fortified Common Field in this early stage of reimagining a more just and equitable organization. Like other doulas, we are not doing the hard change work, but instead preparing Common Field board and staff for what this work entails. This report is a guide and lens for what we know is necessary for the actual changes to occur.

We approached this audit with the belief that healthy power-holding is necessary within Common Field and also that it is possible. Healthy power-holding questions how the needs and priorities of Black and Brown people, queer people, working-class people, disabled people, immigrants, women, trans, and gender non-conforming people are impacted by decisions, policies, and ways of operating. It leans into imagination, including what we can learn from experimental models of organizational leadership that have worked to subvert oppressive hierarchies.

Last, we did not approach this work with a goal of “maintaining neutrality” or a desire to remain “objective”, because we know objectivity and neutrality are tools of white supremacy meant to obscure the realities of power imbalances. It is essential not to pretend to be objective, as that does not grow equity or accountability.

We value that each of us brings our particular experiences and locations within the power arrangement to how and why we make decisions. These are some of the guiding principles and truths that we bring into this process:

1. As abolitionists, when we uncover conflict, we look beyond dichotomies of “good/bad” and “right/wrong” to make room for nuances (including opposing truths).

2. Building and holding trust must include a willingness to experiment, and room to make mistakes—as well as a grounded belief that there is a commitment to repair. Trust-building is not only relevant when resisting injustices, but a necessity when imagining and actualizing freedom.

3. Transparency means there is a commitment to uncovering both internal organizational information and the process of decision-making, especially for people who are impacted by the outcome. It does not mean everyone must know everything. There are ways
1.2 Audit Team Statement

of being principled and clear when determining what is meant to be shared, with whom, and in which space.

4. The only way to actualize accountable power-holding and power-sharing is to study and consistently practice holding and sharing power equitably, including room to learn from mistakes made. No matter how radical and liberatory the agreements are on paper, without a deep commitment to these practices, dominant-white supremacist-heteropatriarchal-capitalist-power paradigms will continue to dominate.

We look forward to your engagement with our findings and recommendations.
METHODOLOGY

In December of 2020, we were invited to a conversation with representatives of Common Field’s leadership, to discuss our proposal to lead a 360° race, class, and gender dynamics-centered audit of power within Common Field’s internal and external relationships and ways of operating. All deciding parties agreed that we would indeed lead this transformative process as co-facilitators and Process Doulas, along with our audit team: documentarians María Luisa Rosal & Laura Ekua, and strategic advisor Sage Crump.

Our team’s core commitments to Common Field have been:

1. To engage a transparent and collective process that critically assesses how power is arranged and enacted throughout Common Field’s internal and external ways of being and operating.

2. To compassionately and boldly approach conflicts and mistakes as opportunities to generate possibilities that expand collective knowledge of how power can be equitably shared.

3. To utilize qualitative and quantitative methodologies that result in a comprehensive analysis of where alignment and misalignment exist (and recommendations for increased alignment) between the organization’s mission, structures, programming, patterns, and impact.

4. To support Common Field in strengthening organizational identity by exploring questions of who the organization serves, and how programming pivots during COVID-19.
Our asks of Common Field have been:

1. To respect our autonomy as an independent body with decision-making power over our process while working collaboratively with Common Field.

2. To be vulnerable enough to acknowledge uncomfortable truths about harmful actions, and commit to making amends, restorations, and repairs to individuals and organizations who’ve been negatively impacted by Common Field.

3. To take responsibility to restructure the ways that Common Field has perpetuated disparities, and instead grow alignment with just and equitable power and resource sharing.

Throughout the six months of this process, we have gathered and reviewed feedback from over 300 people across Common Field’s broad ecology about their positive and negative experiences, and their ideas for how the organization can deepen alignment between its stated values of justice and its practices. The methods we used are as follows:

Review of Existing Organizational Documents:
- This included key grants and reports; relevant internal planning documents; 2019 and 2020 convening evaluations from a collective 200+ participants and partner organizations; former staff grievance letters and exit interviews ranging from 2018—2020; and email correspondences that relay information about conflicts between staff/board members, and also between staff/board and Network members, dating back to 2015.

Reflection Survey
- The invitation to complete the Reflection Survey was shared with all current and former staff and board (including founding members), the entire 680-member Network, as well as on social media and through Common Field’s website.

- 65 Network members completed the survey, with the average time of engagement being an hour. The survey responses were often in-depth reflections about experiences people had firsthand and also as witnesses. Responses included ideas of what Common Field can do to better serve those in the field who have never received adequate resources but have been sustaining arts and culture in communities that have been marginalized, oppressed, and extracted from.* (This language is adapted from a framework written in Freedom Maps.)
1.3 Methodology

Interviews
• We created a rubric to support staff in cultivating diverse representation of Network members in interviews and fishbowl conversations. The rubric included identity markers, and also dug deeper to seek diversity of experience and levels of access to resources and power.

• We invited 65 people to be interviewed, including current and former staff, board, and founding members, and 5% of Network membership (32 individuals).

• 48 people accepted our invitation to one-on-one interviews, including 22 Network members; 24 current and former board members and staff (including original founders); and the Program Director and Senior Program Officer of the organization’s primary funder; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

• The majority of interviews ran about an hour, with about a quarter running more than an hour. People shared generously and we witnessed many candid expressions of pain, regret, and hope for the opportunities that this process presents.

Mid-Process Update
• Halfway through our timeline, we shared a mid-process update with the entire 680-member Network via email and also on Common Field’s website. We invited people to reply to our update with questions, reflections, concerns, and curiosities.

• We received emails from three people who generously shared thoughts and ideas.

Fishbowl Conversations
• We conducted 3 “fishbowl” conversations with a total of 24 artists, culture bearers, curators, and arts administrators who have experience and knowledge about disparities in access to resources, support, and decision-making power within the field. Participants of the fishbowls were a mix of people directly connected to Common Field and also those who are a part of the larger arts-and-culture ecology.
In addition, we have steeped ourselves in learning from the work of people who have been inquiring, examining, analyzing, strategizing, leading and sacrificing for the fight to create racial, class, gender, and disability justice in the art and culture field. These reports, toolkits, and creative works include:

**A Cultural Strategy Toolkit** by Sage Crump

**Art Stuff Matters** by La Tanya S. Autry

**Black Artist Research Space [bars]: Racism in the Arts**, led by Rhea Beckett and Alexis Dixon

**Creating New Futures: Phase 1 Working Guidelines for Ethics & Equity in Presenting Dance & Performance** by Yanira Castro and Team of Compilers

**Decolonial Operations Manual** by Decolonize This Place

**Freedom Maps** by Cherry Galette and Ron Ragin

**Gallery of the Streets** led by kai lumumba barrow

**Helicon: Not Just Money** led by Holly Sidford and Alexis Frasz

**Jaliyah Consulting** led by Wendi Moore-O’Neal

**Leveraging a Network for Equity** led by Sage Crump

**Non Profit AF** by Vu Le

**Solidarity Not Charity: Arts & Culture Grantmaking in the Solidarity Economy** by Nati Linares and Caroline Woolard

**Three Walls** led by Jeffreen Hayes
Much of what is written in this report are the insights, perspectives, questions, and curiosities that people shared with us. Voices of the many people we engaged are also reflected throughout the recommendations section. These insights and ideas are relayed through our lens, and include our analyses of the patterns we’ve observed.

There are times when these multiple voices echo each other neatly, which may make the ideas feel a bit easier to digest. At other times, there are contradictions of truths that exist simultaneously, which may feel overwhelming and confusing as to how to determine ways forward. Sitting within uncontained, unclear, and often uncomfortable tensions of multiple truths may even solicit anger and defensiveness.

In the version of this report shared internally with Common Field’s staff and board, there were a number of detailed incidents that occurred over the course of several years, involving external parties. Out of respect for the sensitivity of those people’s experiences, we have omitted the details of what took place from this public report.

We have reached out to those parties to share that we’ve included reflections about their experiences in the internal report. Common Field is in the process of initiating communication with those parties, with the intention of learning what can be done now to make amends.

To those who hold responsibility for implementing the outcomes of this audit, we encourage you to make space for all of the feelings that arise, and to practice deciding which of your reactions stem from the personal work you are responsible for, and which are helpful for collective processing. This distinction may be clear sometimes and at other times, completely messy.

One of our key observations has been that every staff and board member has experienced levels of emotional and mental turmoil or at minimum, frustration and exhaustion. Please honor your bodies, minds, spirits, and labor. Ask for support when you need it. It’s okay to make mistakes and not know the answers. Take risks. The work is in the practicing.
Observations of Patterns & Our Analyses
WHAT DOES COMMON FIELD DO?

The one thing that was consistent across the spectrum of perspectives offered to us was people’s understanding that the primary work of Common Field is to gather people from the arts-and-culture field—particularly visual artists and arts administrators—for national convenings each year.

Common Field was described as a facilitator of connections, which excels at creating space for artists to increase their visibility while exploring ways of doing their work on practical and philosophical levels; a site of engagement on a national level with colleagues who may not otherwise find each other, bringing together “rad community artists looking to meet other rad community artists” from similar disciplines and with shared interests. Many vital, true peer relationships began and have flourished at Common Field’s annual convenings.
COMMON FIELD’S ORIGINAL ASPIRATIONS

In 2013 when Common Field was beginning to take shape, the founding members aspired to respond to ways that gatekeepers of the “high Art field” maintained exclusionary practices, hoarded resources, and abused power. Their vision to do this was by connecting an alternative arts field that centered independent artists, collectives, smaller-scale projects, and groups who functioned outside of museums and the high Art market, as well as organizations who perhaps did not desire to become larger or more formalized along the trajectories of nonprofits and corporations.

Founding members aspired to create a welcoming space where people excluded from other spaces felt valued, could ask questions, share insights, and learn from each other. Founding members aspired for the membership to self-determine what their shared identity would be and to craft the ways in which the Network would represent and serve them. The original aspiring ethos of Common Field was about relationship-building and peer exchange.

This is how it began.

In a statement shared with the Common Field Council on Sunday, September 20, 2015, during the final day of the Hand-in-Glove gathering held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, founding members Colin Kloecker and Shanai Matteson shared their love and concerns for what was at that time still an emergent and loosely defined Network, as it stood on the brink of becoming a well-funded nonprofit organization.

“It needs to be named . . . the vast majority of people in the room writing the mission of Common Field were in many ways, homogeneous: majority white, urban, college-educated, cisgender, centered in a rather narrow spectrum of cultural production, and deeply embedded in the assumptions of the nonprofit industrial complex.

This was named in that room, but for the last two years, this group has made few significant moves to truly address this. This is a problem. We all need to look inward and ask: What is at stake in these decisions? And we need to be clear: This was a decision.
It was not an accident waiting to correct itself.

We need to look closely, and quickly, at how we are colluding, or perpetuating, institutionalized white supremacy as this nascent organization—Common Field—takes shape. How are we recreating the very structures and systems we know in our hearts are failing?”

Six years later, Common Field is no longer a nascent organization and the questions that Shanai and Colin implored those in leadership to wrestle with persist.

While Common Field’s mission is to support and advocate for the artist-centered field by providing a network for independent arts organizations and organizers, there remains a lack of shared definition about who Common Field serves and in what ways. The title, ‘organizer’ has specific associations most notably tied to the work of community organizing, and it is unclear who one needs to be to qualify as an arts organizer. The tie between being an artist and organizing for social justice work is inconsistently defined and in some cases is arbitrarily applied to Network members.

As the organization has worked to forge connections across localities around a set of values and best practices, they’ve struggled to formulate a notion of what best practices are needed in the field, and what values to root them in. In essence, the organization has an identity crisis and that lack of clear definition continues to center whiteness and other forms of oppression, by default.

“Artist-run space can be isolating. The best aspect of Common Field is the gathering of folks to learn about how people are organizing and creating.”

-Bob Snead, Network Member
IN PRACTICE, WHO DOES COMMON FIELD PRIMARILY SERVE? WHO BENEFITS THE MOST?

It is important to note that this report, and this section in particular, reflects the imprints that people’s experiences with Common Field left on their minds and nervous systems, despite the ways those imprints may contradict the data that the organization has collected about itself.

Elissa Sloane Perry and Aja Couchois Duncan of Change Elemental said:

“Too often, we stay in generalized knowing [academic theories, logic models, theories of change, etc.] and practical knowing [acting in ways that are informed by previous actions, turning our generalizations into practice], rarely dipping into foundational knowing [lived experience, indigenous/ancestral wisdom, and spiritual/natural wisdom] or artistic knowing [creating understanding of experiences through story, visual art, movement, music, etc.] in meaningful ways. By not intentionally drawing on these, our theories and action plans are often disconnected from our values and beliefs, and the bedrock experiences of our lives.

Moreover, privileging one way of knowing over others marginalizes and ignores other truths that people bring from other ways of knowing. This marginalization often lies at the core of conflicts, systemic barriers to change, and inequity.”
People’s multiple ways of knowing matter. The feelings and perspectives people are left with after engaging Common Field are relevant, even if those feelings and perspectives contradict empirical data.

**Whiteness**

Common Field operationally “forgets” who they talk about wanting to center. There is a disconnect between the call for Black, Brown, queer and trans people to apply to present and speak at convenings, while the most visible organizations in Common Field are primarily white. In fact, the first perspective we learned regarding the racial dynamic of Common Field came from our strategic advisor, Sage Crump. Sage, a queer Black woman whose first time at a convening was as a presenter, said upon entering the space in Minneapolis, “you have to be intentional to make a space this white.”

While some of the Black and Brown Network members who attend convenings indeed function outside of the high Arts field, many of the Black and Brown people whose needs are centered in Common Field’s decision-making and ways of being are Warhol-vetted and a part of or accepted by the high Arts field.

This dynamic is important to note because it reinforces that even when the people are Black and Brown, whiteness maintains control of determining who gets access, and based on what expectations.

Also, to be clear, there is not a simple binary of those who are chosen to have access and those who aren’t. There are levels of distance and of proximity to the privileges that come with being known and invited by the white institutions that maintain control of funding and visibility.

Many people who present exciting, diverse ideas and models at convenings do not stay on to become Network members. The majority of those who do stay on essentially replicate exclusive race and class dynamics. This contradicts the vision that Common Field purports to have: building platforms and advancing thinking that supports diversity in the field.

These dynamics of exclusion can also be seen in events surrounding the convenings, by noticing whose house/spaces are open for events such as pre-convening dinners, and also noticing who is able to attend. In addition to race, those spaces depend on the exclusion of people with less class privilege.

Many people who look around to see majority white-cis-het people assume “that’s just who makes up the arts and culture field.” Time has been up on that response and it shouldn’t have to be the queer, trans
Black and Brown people taking the most risks to call it out. Undoing the ways disparities have been baked into the foundation of Common Field requires the willingness of staff and board to interrupt when disparities occur structurally and interpersonally.

**Academics**

Common Field was described to us as being academically oriented/adjacent and feeling like grad school, with absolute class exclusion at play. As Network member Danny Orendorff expressed, “The more academic and institutionalized the convenings have gotten, the further away the relevance has gotten from on-the-ground, smaller, buck-the-status quo organizations and artists.”

**Institutions & Resourced Geographies**

Common Field is heavily tilted toward administrators, program managers and executive directors of larger, resourced, well-known institutions and nonprofits. While independent artists and organizations are centered in the language of the mission statement, many of the organizations who are given the biggest platforms and most visibility are 501(c)3s and come from cities/urban spaces/higher-density geographies. This essentially skews the topics of conversation and information shared, as well as distribution of resources, away from groups who aren’t nonprofits, who have less visibility, and who are from areas that are less invested in, and/or geographically isolated.

“There has been a disproportionate centering of those who are from and of the Contemporary Art World—capitals intended—the chosen select individuals, organizations, and projects that have already received recognition from art institutions and foundations.”

- *Aurora Tang, Former Board Member*
MEMBERSHIP & LIMITATIONS

“Members should know how their money is invested back into the Network. Common Field should be clear whether membership is benefits-driven (i.e. what it gets members), if fees represent members’ support for and belief in the mission, or both.”

-sharon maidenburg, Former Board Member

“I’m not sure what paying to be a member meant. What doors opened up? What resources did it create access to?”

-Network Member

“There is this big push to expand Network membership, while at the same time there are minimal opportunities/access for members to connect with each other.”

-Network Member
2.2 Network Membership

“Membership is about networking. The convening and the website are ways to connect with folks.”

-Former Board Member

“Being transparent about the relationship between Common Field and the Warhol Foundation opens up room for that relationship to more effectively serve the Network.”

-dana bishop-root, Current Board Member

“The work of the E.D., the staff, the board, is to effectively engage the Network.”

-sharon maidenburg, Former Board Member

“If Common Field is doing their work, Common Field is not the visible entity. It’s not about the executive director, it’s not about the board, it’s not even about the staff. We are there to create space for the work of Network members to be visibilized and supported.”

-Aurora Tang, Former Board Member

COST

“Membership doesn’t really offer anything outside of the convening, and you still have to pay to attend the convening.”

-Network Member

“Is it possible to construct a simple rubric that asks important questions to determine how much members are paying or what the sweat equity among members with differing privileges/positionalities is? A sliding scale does not address the root of the problem.”

- Network Member
“Eliminate members’ dues! Why does Common Field charge for membership when they get a ton of money and yet still ask for a ton of volunteer and low-paid labor? It’s not okay.”

- Network Member

“I love the fact that Common Field gave out one year free memberships.”

-Ashley DeHoyos, Network Member

“The credit card system excludes many people. We’ve tried to do away with it, as well as the automatic auto-renew function, but it’s been difficult on the tech end, so there is still no way to get around joining the Network without a credit card.”

- Chris Tyler, Current Staff Member
2.3

CONVENING

People love and get a lot out of the convenings. This is true even though much work must be done to uncover and undo the overwhelming whiteness and class disparities of the convenings. This is true even though this section outlines many things that have not worked well about the convenings.

What Worked?
Multiple people shared that they learned skills and information at the convenings which changed their ways of showing up, in turn improving their work. Some people can even trace life-expanding opportunities back to moments at a convening.

One person reflected on how his involvement in Common Field accelerated his partnership building, which greatly benefited his career. A woman shared that several of her students she brought to the convening got internships as a result. One arts administrator appreciated being able to invite local artists to the convening held in her city, to share their work and ideas with a sizable audience.

“When the convening was good, it was really good. There were panels with critical responses to what was happening in the lives of artists.”

-Former Staff Member

(The words in the image above reflect the written words in this section, “Convening”).
Also, several board and staff members of Common Field became a part of the organization’s leadership after attending convenings and becoming excited about the work.

Some of the turnouts for sessions were amazing, including crowds as large as 500 at the 2020 convening. Many people noted that the transition to an online format taught a lot of people virtual skills they’ve now been able to incorporate into their own work.

While virtual convenings do not replace the value of being together in person, they do alleviate barriers created by travel, and Network members better understand ways that they can be talking with each other more often.

The topics presented cover a lot of relevant ground. Of particular note was the usefulness of conversations focused on grassroots groups and artists with a social justice praxis. Over the years, Common Field has cultivated some great tools to increase accessibility for disabled people. Lastly, cutting checks to panelists and presenters before the convening is something that rarely happens in other spaces. The fact that Common Field does this is awesome.

WHAT DIDN’T WORK?

Houston

We would be remiss if we did not begin this section by acknowledging what happened in Houston. The 2020 convening scheduled to take place from April 23rd—26th was cancelled due to COVID-19, and pivoted instead to the virtual realm. Lines of communication between Common Field and the many community members in Houston who invested countless hours of labor and

“Houston’s art scene didn’t get to experience the support of an on-the-ground convening, I wish there could be some form of restoration to the organizations who heavily invested in the planning process or another conference in the future.”

-Ashley DeHoyos, Network Member
resources into planning the convening, came to a halt. More than a year later, amends remain unmade.

During the spring of 2020, every human being on the planet was dealing at some level with abrupt changes and/or heightened vulnerability and stress due to the pandemic. We have empathy for the amount of work it took Common Field staff to shift gears toward the virtual realm with little room to process, recalibrate, or breathe. That said, there was little-to-no demonstration of empathy and care extended to the people of Houston who were involved in planning the convening.

Several people shared that there was no attempt made to reach out to give people opportunities to explore creative ways to still share the work they’d prepared. Immediately after cancelling, Common Field decided that the next in-person convening wouldn’t be in Houston. That divestment was described as “incredibly disrespectful.”

Also following cancellation, Common Field decided not to print the booklets designed by members of the Houston arts community, which were intended to be included in convening swag bags. The booklets contained stories about the local artists and art projects, as well as information specific to the convening.

“Feedback from local groups is that the planning process left a negative taste in people’s mouths. As of now, most groups in Houston are done with Common Field.”

- Network Member

While Common Field shared a digital version with convening participants, there was an opportunity for the booklet to be adapted to serve as a story-telling archival project, and shared with the Houston community. That opportunity was missed because people were told that the money which was already earmarked for printing would no longer be made available. The project became another loss in the litany of losses that the Houston community experienced while collaborating with Common Field.

The problems began before the in-person convening was cancelled. There was no Common Field person on the ground mapping out the conference, and instead the organization relied on the host committee to do the work. At first people were told, “Tell us your ideas!” And after investing time, energy, and labor to bring forth ideas, they were presented with what the limitations actually were.
Decision-making became a formula. It seemed that Common Field had ideas of what they actually wanted in spite of what the hosts offered. (Staff? The executive director? It was hard for Network members to know who was behind which decisions, but what they did know was that no one interrupted the dynamic.)

Halfway through the process, Common Field decided to bring in a new contingent of partners to join the original planning committee. There was no explanation about why new people were brought into the fold and according to several people, the new contingent entered with assumptions of needing to “shake up” and “radicalize” the work that the original committee had started. Simple logistics became harder and interpersonal relationships were negatively impacted.

There was also tension about the budget. One partner organization had a hard time knowing how to contract artists due to a lack of clear communication about availability of funding to cover artist’s fees. This took place late in the planning process, and in spite of Common Field’s commitment from Warhol to cover the costs of the convening.

Another partner organization, Aurora Picture Show, took personal responsibility for repairing relationships with the artists they initially made commitments to, after the convening was moved to a virtual format. After much back and forth and a noticeable delay, Common Field followed through with paying the artists. Out of respect, Aurora Picture Show also found ways to incorporate the work those artists had prepared to share, into other projects.

Furthermore, at the height of an unprecedented global pandemic, presenters planning to travel to Houston were told to return the money they received to cover travel fees. Money designated to cover the costs of independent artists and those representing smaller groups and collectives were told to return it, though they had already incorporated it into their own budgets. A time when we were collectively experiencing massive loss of life and the consequential loss of income opportunities and access to vital resources was exacerbated. Multiple people shared with us that artists they worked with who experienced this declared, “this is the LAST Common Field convening I will be a part of.”

“When Common Field goes into a place to hold a convening, the network in that place should be made stronger. That was not the case in Houston.”

-Network Member
Exclusivity & Disparities
In many ways, Common Field has strayed away from their original aspirations of creating an alternative arts field that centers independent artists and smaller projects. Larger, more resourced institutions were often chosen to give the opening remarks and to have their names highlighted on the marquee. A consequence of giving more visibility to the higher resourced institutions was that smaller organizations and independent artists didn’t have tangible ways to network with people who can offer resources such as funders, curators, and presenters.

While there were open calls for people to submit proposals to present their work, there were patterns of the same people being selected and given platforms. The language and efforts to create inclusion were described as performative.

One person shared how disempowering it felt for their Black, queer, gender non-conforming identity and positionality as a member of a small artist collective with limited access to resources to be centered in the language used to describe Common Field’s commitments, while their proposal was rejected and those who were accepted were almost entirely white, cis-gender, and heterosexual.

“So many people have come to the conference and felt like, ‘this isn’t for me.’”
- Former Board Member

Convenings were described by numerous Network members and partners as “too exclusive,” and with an “air of elitism.” Conversation topics were described as institutional and academic, and at times people felt as though they were being “talked at.” There were limited ways for people to actually connect and learn from each other. One person shared that she was weary about recommending people to join the Network, so she told them that truthfully the main fruits happen outside of Common Field.

“The convening felt like an inside/outside dynamic and coming from a small arts organization, I ultimately felt on the outside.”
- Network Member
Field—you meet folks at the convening and then nurture your relationships and work together outside of that space.

Common Field perpetuates other disparities in access. The work centers large cities like Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, which are often held up as centers of social and cultural production. A number of Network members shared that they weren’t actually able to afford to attend convenings. We learned that prior to Warhol increasing Common Field’s funding in 2020, the convening operated at a financial loss and yet Common Field still always ensured that scholarships were made available. Now, with increased funding there is more room to revisit the question of how to make convenings more financially accessible.

The Philadelphia location was not set up to accommodate disabled bodies, older bodies, or bigger bodies. From what we understand, the Executive Director Courtney Fink, wanted to keep enrollment open because of the possibility that some people wouldn’t show up. However they did show up and as a result, too many people were squeezed into too small of a space that lacked enough chairs and therefore required lots of standing and floor-sitting. Lunch ran out before everyone ate and while more food was ordered, by that time people had already left to get food on their own. Philadelphia also lacked language interpretation and translation and consequently presenters whose dominant language was Spanish had to present in English. A former board member shared that during the Philadelphia convening, they experienced a ton of people going to them with questions about their access concerns. There was no plan for much of what people needed and as a new person to the organization, all they could do was improvise and apologize.

At every convening, the responsibility of responding to racism has been mishandled on multiple levels. During the Q&A that followed a panel organized by board member Eunsong Kim, a white man stated that talking about the word and construct of race is in itself racist. She took the mic away from him. Multiple people approached Eunsong afterward to tell her they’ve witnessed that man regularly derail conversations about race and that her taking the mic away from him was one of few times they had seen someone from Common Field not be complicit through silence.

The Miami convening, which took place in 2016, was hosted in Little Haiti at a time when the Black community was being heavily gentrified. A large, majority white group of people entered Little Haiti with very few relationships, partnerships, or
participation with and from the local arts community. Network member Bob Snead recounted, “Here came a huge group of majority white artists invading the space. And what was ironic was that we entered with this identity as scrappy marginalized artists.”

In the version of this report shared internally with Common Field’s staff and board, there were a number of detailed incidents that occurred over the course of several years, involving external parties. Out of respect for the sensitivity of those people’s experiences, we have omitted the details of what took place from this public report. We have reached out to those parties to share that we’ve included reflections about their experiences in the internal report. Common Field is in the process of initiating communication with those parties, with the intention of learning what can be done now to make amends.

Extractive Labor
Common Field has subsidized the costs of convenings by extracting labor from local organizations while calling them partners and paying small stipends. Partner relationships were described as collaborative—but without the lens of racial, class, and gender justice, the reality of working collaboratively with Common Field actually meant that partners were exploited. People are aware that Common Field has resources and it doesn’t make sense to operate as though that wasn’t true.

In feedback given in the spring of 2020, after the convening and before Courtney’s termination, the partnership model was described as one that privileged partners who had the backing of their organizations. This applied to how fees and resources were allocated, and to how decisions were ultimately made by those with the most flexibility to meet the timeline set by Common Field. That being said, partners backed by their organizations were still left burnt out and exhausted with the workload while simultaneously working to prepare art to share at the convening. Multiple people shared that there were way too many emails from Common Field, and that they were way too long.

“`The yearly convening is set up to highlight a particular place, but the people of that place who serve as hosts and partners provide a huge lift of labor to produce the convening, and the visitors benefit more greatly than they do.”`
- Network Member
Common Field was hands-off as far as offering ideas for panels, while they crowd-sourced folks for content ideas. Rather than proposing ideas they believed Network members were interested in, based on staff observations and convening evaluations, the onus of the work to create content was placed on volunteers and partners.

Partner organizations who made up host committees also experienced their ideas for hospitality being shut down. They were told to come up with whatever ideas they had, and then in turn were told that several of the ideas would not be applied. This was disempowering because people who cared about the experience that visitors would have in their hometown weren’t able to truly help to curate that experience.

As mentioned in other sections of this report, Common Field should have led with what the parameters were rather than wasting people’s time and energy to generate ideas and plans, only to then limit them afterward.

The experiences of jurors—the body of people responsible for selecting proposals—mimicked the experience of partner organizations. Jurors were disenfranchised because some of the conclusions they came to were overridden with what felt like staff had decided from the start, and had pressured the jurors to agree to. Also, jurors often worked for more than eight hours with minimal breaks. A lot of labor was invested into a process of performative inclusion.

Not only have predominately white-cis-het presenters been selected to share their work at convenings, numerous people shared with us that they are also who makes up the majority of applicants. This includes several of the same presenters who have gotten selected year after year. One part of the dynamic is that as more Black and Brown, queer, trans, immigrant, and working-class jurors are brought on, they share the word with artists who might not already know about Common Field.

Also, the lens of who is and is not selected to present at convenings becomes reflective of the worldviews and life experiences of a more diverse body of jurors. As Network member Ashley DeHoyos said, “It does matter who the jurors are. Relationship-building in the city that hosts the convening is key.”

Presenters for the 2020 convening experienced deep pressure to adjust to the virtual realm in ways that were misaligned with their original plans and agreements. Common Field prioritized itself over its members. Administration of the transition was sloppy and there was a lack of care for the people throughout the process. A former board member asked:
“Did we have to have a convening? Could we have just given people checks? It could have been that simple, and that is the politic at work. People are telling you ‘These are material needs we have’, and we had the resources to give it to them but we didn’t!”

In addition to partners, volunteers, presenters, and jurors being overworked with convenings, contractors were also stretched beyond limits. Contractors characterized what they experienced and witnessed among staff as people working around rigid structures and a lack of agency or autonomy, while keeping their heads down. In order to navigate the tension, people avoided interaction with Courtney, and therefore potential for conflict.

Anna Drozdowski shared her experience with signing a contract, which was neither artist-friendly nor aligned with Common Field’s mission and values:

“I had a strange encounter when signing my contract to work as a convening staff person in Philadelphia. For the first time in my career, the organization wouldn’t entertain any adjustments or amendments to their 'standard document'. With some hindsight, this lack of collaboration seems to have been an early symptom of centering power.”

Staff members were told by Courtney that board members would be assigned to work alongside them, but we learned that never happened. A former staff member reflected on her experience with board members during a convening that a board meeting was folded into:

“When staff asked for the board’s help around the ways they were being overtaxed, board members not only failed to offer assistance, they also enjoyed the fruits of the staff’s overtaxed labor. Even the people of color on the board were either checked-out and/or strung along. They treated us as disposable.”

-Former Staff Member
It is now the work of the current Common Field board and staff to undo and replace these practices with ones rooted in appreciation, care, and mutuality. The current leadership has collectively demonstrated willingness to embrace the discomfort of reflecting on past harms and to work toward implementing the feedback offered by so many people who quite frankly don’t owe anything to Common Field. The willingness of so many to share generously and candidly is a demonstration of the larger community’s collective belief in this organization’s capacity to be accountable and transform.
This section will heavily reference founding member and former executive director, Courtney Fink. While she bears great responsibility for shaping the culture of the organization, she is in no way entirely responsible for the structural power imbalances inequities throughout Common Field. We have decisively not named staff and board members because there have been several different configurations of people throughout the span of time that the incidents in this report occurred. We are reporting reflections and insights from an amalgamation of people who worked with Common Field between 2015 and 2021.

Though Courtney was terminated by the board of directors at the end of 2020 and almost all of the founders have cycled off the board, the work of undoing the power inequities that were embedded into the organization continues.
Common Field was founded and has been maintained on the values and tenets of whiteness, namely the valuing of an art aesthetic that centers whiteness. While Common Field is far from the only arts organization or non-profit in or out of the arts field, operating from a place of whiteness, it sticks out because the founders wanted it to be radically different. In all accounts of the earliest meetings, the original founders named a strong desire to be non-traditional and experimental—an intentional space for artists outside of the non-profit system.

Through interviews with the founding members, we observed that beyond the very early days when people were willing to experiment with different ways of working together, there was not much experience in actually trying different organizational models nor an understanding of the tools, skills and power analyses needed to implement and sustain these models. Even as the organization’s Network grew past the founders’ organizations, it was to the white people and white organizations they already knew—which is one way white institutions are grown and maintained. In these same conversations, we also observed an assumption of shared politics when in fact not everyone meant the same thing when using radical phrases like “non-traditional” or a “different kind of organization.”

As different ideas about what Common Field would be arose, there were few tools for engaging conflict with the purpose of moving through it as opposed to shutting it down. This led
to burnouts and pushouts, which led to more conflict and tensions. Two of the first co-directors, Shannon Stratton and Stephanie Sherman, were often in direct conflict with the other director, Courtney Fink, about the vision and direction of the organization. Courtney took a “no one else is doing it and it needs to be done, so I will do it” approach. Instantly, a sense of scarcity was created. (How do you know no one else will do it? Are you sure “it” needs to be done? What does this say about the collective capacity?), which then led to a false dichotomy that doing “something” is better than doing “nothing.” The more challenging work of experimenting with non-traditional ways of structuring Common Field fell to the wayside as Courtney, and those who supported her, moved forward with doing “something”—the more familiar work of implementing a traditional non-profit with top-down leadership.

When one decides to lead from this place of scarcity where they believe they are the only one willing to make the decisions, a sense of urgency to make decisions without the input of others is created and they inevitably end up holding power inequitably. This dynamic is further compounded when—as was true in the case of Common Field—funders expect that the organization swiftly formalizes their systems of operating as support expands to accommodate the requirements of obtaining a 501 (c)3 status entity.

This sense of urgency also supports the idea that you must hold power unaccountably because there is no time to slow down, no time to get input, and no time to be transparent about this process. Non-profit culture and “grind culture”—both limbs of the capitalist root system—perpetuate this, so of course Common Field is not the creator of this dynamic. However, this does not change the responsibility and agency of Common Field’s decision makers, both past and present, for continuing to participate in and perpetuate this dynamic.

Through interviews, we observed this “no one else is doing it” mentality further grow a narrative of white victimhood, where Courtney in particular operated as if the stewardship of the organization was “thrust upon” her and she had no agency. This framing was used to justify why she was not accountable for the actual authority she had. Through interviews, as well as a review of exit interviews and staff grievances, we observed this refusal to acknowledge agency and authority evident in treatment of staff, including contractors, consultants, temporary employees, and volunteers.
There is agreement among most current and former staff that the leadership structure was very top-down, where the Executive Director made all the decisions and there was very little space to question or make decisions for the work each person was responsible for. The sense of urgency and sense of scarcity that created this dynamic, had a tremendous impact on staff, temporary workers, contractors, consultants and volunteers.

Many staff and board members shared with us that Courtney would often ask for help or input and then criticize and/or undermine their suggestions. Furthermore, people shared that Courtney would often cry in response to them trying to assert necessary boundaries. These dynamics, of using crying as a defense mechanism and of crowdsourcing ideas only to dismiss them, are unfortunately utilized by many people in positions of authority.

While not inherent to a hierarchical structure, hierarchy was used to maintain the white organizational culture of scarcity and urgency. This culture of whiteness also shows up in the large number of white staff and consultants hired. The people of color that were hired were almost entirely lighter in complexion. There were very few Black staff. A Black former staff member said, "It felt as though the white Los Angeles art scene Common Field represented was one that permitted me to be a part of it. I frequently felt like an outsider. But also in a way I felt like I was the type of Black person those kinds of art spaces feel most comfortable around. Light-skinned, art-school educated. I also feel like I put up with more because I was aware that my background might have made it harder to get a job elsewhere."

This dynamic perpetuates the anti-Black idea that certain people of color are less threatening and easier to assimilate into a white structure. It also works to ensure the Black and Brown people who do work there won’t get the support they need because they are seen as more likely to accept and not challenge the oppressive racial dynamics.

Another pattern that surfaced during our interviews was former staff’s observations of racially coded language used to describe Black
employees, such as describing people's appearances as "rough." Subsequently, white employees were requested to be the ones to perform public roles and engage with funders. Our team is not aware of any men of color, First Nations/Indigenous people or Latinx people who worked at Common Field.

We also observed explicit trans-misogyny, where Emily Aeyer, a white trans contractor, was deemed “unprofessional” because of their gender expression. Emily said that the entire time they were at Common Field, they felt like the “token trans hire.” Lastly, we must note the way increased vulnerability due to staff members’ immigration status was used to further perpetuate fear of voicing disagreements.

These microaggressions extended to the treatment of Network members, which impacted many people’s perception of Common Field. One Network member stated forthrightly, “It was clear from being in direct communication with staff that they did not have decision-making power.”

Though relatively small and only eight years old, Common Field has a high rate of staff departure—citing burn out, fatigue and unsatisfactory, harmful work environments. Some staff shared about their experiences of not being trusted to do their job and how that lack of trust had a disempowering impact on them, especially on the few immigrants, women of color and transgender people. One source of the burnout, fatigue and unsatisfactory work environments was Common Field’s insistence on part-time positions with full-time responsibilities.

**BOARD**

“As much as the board wanted to think we were working “outside the system” no one had actually done so, and with most of us being EDs of our own orgs they put ourselves in her shoes thinking ‘I wouldn’t want my board to step in.’”

- Nat May, Founding Member

“Lack of onboarding process—I walked into the middle of an old mess.”

- Former Board Member

While Courtney Fink’s tenure, as both a founding member and long-standing executive director, saw much of the structural inequities play out, the very nature of structural inequities are that they demand compliance from others to maintain, whether actively, passively, or under pressure. The Common Field Board
of Directors played a major role in maintaining these dynamics for several years, by not taking responsibility for the organization. Leadership and responsibility require power holding and sharing. As Common Field founding member and former board member, Nat May, stated, “Courtney was good at claiming authority and having her claim it made it easy for us as the board to let her take it, because no one questioned if she should have it.”

Not Taking Responsibility = Power Giving

Common Field’s board meetings were set up to report to Courtney. She was on every subcommittee and led each of them. One former member recalled the meetings often went in circles and that people had good ideas but Courtney either shut them down or complicated the process until people gave up. While there were individuals who challenged these dynamics, the board as a whole did not take responsibility to interrupt her from having near total decision-making power. This led to a board culture of indecision and inefficiency. This lack of power sharing coupled with a top-down decision-making structure ensured Common Field existed in the default mode of operation, which is white supremacy. Once it became the organizational culture, it was much harder to challenge and dismantle. Shallow attempts to correct this included tokenizing Black and Brown people to join the board and expecting Black women board members and other women of color to “check” and teach Common Field. These expectations, which are inherently racist and sexist, led to a higher turn over of women of color members.

As a result there was consistently a need to recruit new members. It was hard to do this for several reasons. The board functioned in ways that did not feel healthy for members, and many members were hesitant to bring new people in because they didn’t want to be responsible for others’ poor experiences. While pointing out the need and desire for diverse class and race representation, current Board member Dana Bishop-root noted, “it is irresponsible for the board to recruit new members — especially BIPOC members— because it is currently a clusterfuck and in need of figuring out some fundamental definition of roles. Right now, it requires too much labor for folks who don’t have flexible work schedules and financial stability.”

This led to the early departure of several board members, including the few women of color, as well as people’s disengagement with Common Field after their terms ended.

New people who were recruited were insufficiently oriented to the board’s ways of operating. As a result of the collective confusion about roles and
responsibilities, no one understood it as their place to openly address the organization’s imbalanced power dynamics with new recruits. Essentially, new people entered the board without understanding the dynamics they were coming into and yet inheriting responsibility for them.

Four Primary Reasons the Board Contributed to a Lack of Transparent and Shared Decision-Making:

1. Board members were isolated from staff members.
   There were concrete ways Courtney made decisions, whether inadvertently or intentionally, to silo staff from the board, including sending new staff announcement emails to the board without including staff members in those emails or in subsequent communications. The board tacitly approved this by rarely insisting on connecting with staff. Other examples are Courtney’s strategic decision to override board input and to recruit people she knew, which increased support for her on the board and worked to shut down those board members who questioned the power arrangement.

   Courtney’s habit of crying when questioned or challenged continued on the board and made it difficult for members to engage her. As she did to the staff, she would ask for input and then criticize and/or undermine suggestions. One board member reflected how she was so busy personalizing the dynamic between her and Courtney that she could not see it was a structural problem and then later felt shame around internalizing the personal issues.

   One former board member described the experience of being on the board as holding responsibility without authority. Because Courtney had assumed the role of director, and it was not intended to be a permanent arrangement, earlier board members knew it was necessary to proactively develop a transition plan. One part of that plan involved an evaluation. Some members put in a significant amount of work to create the evaluation methodology, but due to the ways in which board members were disempowered to actually make decisions, the process kept going in circles and wasn’t implemented until after staff members began submitting grievance letters. By then, a great deal of damage had already occurred. We recognize the disempowerment that board members experienced for so long means that the board never developed an operational rhythm. We also see burn out resulting from the process people went through to address staff grievances.
2. People questioned their perceptions.

Not having effective and healthy outlets to process their concerns together led many board members to question the accuracy of their perceptions. Some questioned if their discomfort with Courtney’s work style was a result of how their own relationships to power were being reflected, rather than there actually being a need for intervention. Or if what they observed as dysfunctional was actually their unconscious bias against women in leadership. People who had first hand knowledge of what it’s like for their leadership to be questioned because of biases against their race, class, gender, or sexuality worried about enacting similar dynamics onto Courtney.

3. People were afraid to lose Warhol funding

Until 2019, Courtney was on the Andy Warhol Foundation’s Board of Directors. This alone is concerning, given that Warhol is Common Field’s primary funder. It rose to a blatant example of unaccountable power holding once we learned that many board member’s organizations were also funded by Warhol. People are less likely to hold someone accountable when they know that person has the power to help determine the funding future of their organization.

We know it is incredibly risky to so candidly offer critiques involving a funder who is not only Common Field’s primary support, but also a funder to several of the organizations represented by board members and Network members. It is our hope that the foundation embraces this opportunity to engage honest and challenging struggles in a principled manner.

4. Some people were enablers.

Because so many board members were, and still are, directors of their own organizations, there was a practice of not wanting to model an organization where directors have lessened power and share so many aspects of decision making with their board. At times, there was a sentiment of ‘I don’t want this done to me, so I won’t do that here.’ We observed it may not have been completely conscious but it still played out as a barrier to accountability.

Other board members have put the blame for the imbalanced power dynamics on the non-profit industrial complex as the “real problem.” While the larger non-profit system is also responsible for perpetuating power imbalances, it is also true that individuals in positions of authority within organizations have agency to resist those dynamics. In the case of Common Field, there were many missed opportunities to transform these dynamics.
WARHOL FOUNDATION

As mentioned, Courtney was a Warhol Foundation board member. We received feedback from some board members and several Network members about feeling uncomfortable with challenging Courtney because of her position on the board. This shows the immense power that she held as both a board member of Warhol and the executive director of Common Field. This is reinforced by the reality that Courtney solely held Common Field’s relationship with Warhol, something often encouraged by Warhol’s programmatic staff.

In addition, we learned that Common Field has a special relationship to the Warhol Foundation and it is important for that information to be shared transparently. While $8 million goes out annually through the Warhol Foundation’s regular grant program, there is a separate allocation of $500,000 that goes out annually to Common Field, as well as to Creative Capital and the Arts Writers Grant. Common Field has to apply for and report on these funds each year, and the budget is drawn up anew and approved every year at Warhol’s April board meeting.

CURRENT

In the summer of 2020, several (now former) staff members forwarded grievance letters and exit interviews to the board detailing the oppressive work environment and leadership style under Courtney. Almost immediately, the board placed her on administrative leave as they diligently investigated the claims. For several months, board members—primarily the Executive Committee—did a tremendous amount of investigative and intervention work, including the launch of this audit process, to address the need for accountability. This investigation culminated with Courtney’s termination in December 2020.

We have observed the toll it took on the board to simultaneously contend with their own experiences of disempowerment while also learning of and responding to staffs’ experiences. The board has had little access to recover from the ways in which they were impacted by these leadership challenges and changes.

Then, through this audit process, the board has spent another ten months reckoning with the harmful dynamics inflicted upon the Common Field community. Many expectations have been projected onto them by Sheetal (whose expectations, while high, have been necessary for her to do her job), the staff (who are also enduring this reckoning process) and us, the audit team (whose expectations have also been high and necessary as we support staff and board for what it will take to implement the outcomes of this process.)

Shortly before we were contracted to conduct this audit, Sheetal Prajapati was
hired as Interim Managing Director. We’ve observed Sheetal, a Brown woman, be faced with the task of figuring out how to reorganize and clean up the interpersonal and professional disarray created by harmful decision-making, genuine mistakes, and also complacency. We’ve observed this happen without preparation, acknowledgment, or consideration for what it means for her to be the first woman of color in leadership at Common Field.

During the process of the board hiring Sheetal, they did not effectively communicate the depth of disarray that the organization was in. She learned most of what current and former staff experienced after she was already in her role. This is likely due to the limited awareness that the board had since it had taken years for them to push through the ways they’d been siloed from the staff and to take responsibility for holding the director accountable.

The lack of open communication between board and staff continued. There are discrepancies around the vision the board held for Sheetal’s role as Interim Managing Director, and staff’s understanding that she was hired to support operations, not to direct the organization. It is unclear to us how much of this difference in understanding came from the board not effectively communicating with staff, or staff coming to their own conclusions. No space was made for staff and board to come together and metabolize the impact that these leadership transitions—Courtney’s termination and Sheetal’s entry—had on all of them. All of these factors helped to create a dynamic where staff resists Sheetal’s leadership.

Other factors have contributed to this resistance. In an effort to protect themselves from the ways hierarchy has been misused to maintain inequitable power, we’ve observed some staff conflate ‘management’ with ‘oppression’. We also see that a part of the resistance stems from political leanings toward collective, flat leadership versus a non-profit hierarchical directorial model. We’ve observed
the concept of “we” be used to signify working collaboratively and building people power, while in actuality, there is little-to-no room made for people’s autonomous decision-making and people are pushed into agreement. In this dynamic, whoever has the loudest voice or strongest push gets their way. As stated eloquently by a former board member, “A consensus-based organization model is not in and of itself more ethical. It may ask of folks equally but not equitably and I have seen the form used to argue folks into silence instead of the listening-compromise ideal.”

It is of concern to us that there was silent complicity with white director Courtney, and now in contrast, vocal and clear resistance to Sheetal. While staff may have sound reasons to disagree with Sheetal at times and also while it is true that Sheetal and any other person of color is capable of perpetuating the harms of whiteness, we see how staff is overcorrecting for the ways they were disempowered by Courtney, by resisting and defying Sheetal’s authority.

It is our belief that while there are many models of leadership, the work to construct those models often happens in phases. One phase is the work of an interim leader to help identify and implement the shifts necessary to interrupt prior dysfunction. There is value in this inherently temporary position. When there is organization-wide commitment to working together in exploring possible models of power sharing, this interim position can serve as the launch needed to get the organization to a place stable enough to implement people’s collective reimagined vision for leadership.

We have strongly encouraged the board to organize a series of facilitated mediation sessions with staff. These sessions would give room for people to address and process the impact of leadership transitions, ineffective communication, and the residual tensions that exist. This includes space for board members to reflect on the ways they’ve been negatively impacted throughout this transition, including being overworked during 2.4 Structural Power
the investigation into grievances against Courtney, and also drained by expectations to be involved in day-to-day decision-making. The board is currently building out plans for ‘audit reflection and action.’ Furthermore, our strategic advisor, Sage Crump met with the organization as a whole to support Common Field to get into right relationship with change.

This phase of the transformation work feels laden with hardship. There is no other way to get to healing and the exciting work of reimagining Common Field’s arrangement of power and culture without moving through this hard part of the process. James Baldwin said, “not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” We have experienced staff and board members show up to this process willing to face a multitude of challenges. They’ve openly received critical feedback, engaged challenging conversations, vulnerably acknowledged responsibility for missteps, and they’ve struggled together in principled ways.

The willingness these human beings that make up Common Field’s leadership have demonstrated throughout the past six months, to reckon with the ways the organization has perpetuated unjust practices, dismantle those structural elements and in their place build upon a culture of care, makes us confident in the team’s ability to not only make Common Field a stronger human-centered organization, but also to model what it looks like to engage in change work.

2.4 Structural Power
Reflections on Repair & New Ways Forward
HOPES & EXPECTATIONS FOR THIS AUDIT

Our Black Feminist praxis teaches us that each decision we make and our subsequent actions either helps to resist or perpetuate white supremacist-hetero-patriarchal-capitalism. We find that understanding this framework grows our agency to be able to consciously resist injustice more than we perpetuate it. It is our hope that Common Field’s current leadership commits to bravely practice being in alignment with the values they believe in, more times than their actions have been misaligned in the past.

“Common Field is not unique in this situation. Treating this in the most transparent way possible and making it a learning experience...is key for the future success of the organization.”

-Aurora Tang, Former Board Member
3.1 Hopes & Expectations for this Audit

“Use this moment to build a new structure that is able to sustain itself professionally and materially beyond any one staff or board member.”

-Chris Tyler, Current Staff

“I was so excited to see the announcement where y’all were working on this, because the work might actually root in the way that is necessary.”

-Jeffreen Hayes, Network Member

“It is so important that this process is happening publicly and not internally.”

-Network Member

“I deeply appreciate the questions your audit team has asked. They’ve given me quite a bit of food for thought and I’m buoyed by the sincerity and comprehension of this process when there is so much lip service around every corner these days. I am often referencing Audre Lorde’s writing about whether the Master’s Tools can Dismantle the Master’s House. This is both the question of our time and also overdue.”

-Anna Drozdowski, Former Staff Member

“There is an opportunity for Common Field to really expand the way that they’re thinking about the field. Especially artists... it would be so exciting if that thinking was part of the core mission, and encouraging national arts organizations to really think in that expansive way about what we’re doing. I’d be really excited to be part of an organization like that.”

-Matt Fluharty, Current Board Member

“This audit process can serve as a mechanism for assessing all aspects and choosing what to undo and what to keep.”

-Aurora Tang, Former Board Member
3.1 Hopes & Expectations for this Audit

“This audit process can serve as a model for other white supremacist arts orgs.”  
-Former Staff Member

“I agreed to this process after researching and learning about the audit team’s backgrounds. I felt like I would be heard. I felt like I could possibly get closure.”  
-Former Staff Member

“My greatest hope really is that with this audit, and potential reimagination of Common Field, that there is just space held for folks who have not been cared for or at the table.”  
- Network Member

“How can we begin to look at repair and reparations through a lens of JOY? Oftentimes these convos only arise when orgs are brought to their knees or are on their death bed. We need a reframe in order to build.”  
-Lauren E. Turner, Fishbowl Participant

“The survey piqued my interest back in Common Field—I appreciate the creation of a line for feedback.”  
- Network Member

“I would like to see the survey results made publicly available.”  
- Several Survey Respondents

“Change is possible! Organizations like Three Walls have gone through deep transformation to become the organization it is today, as well as Recess, which has been going through a reckoning for the past five years to address structural inequities.”  
- Allison Freedman-Weisberg, Network Member
This is not a checklist and our recommendations are not commands. We are offering pathways and we expect that shifts will emerge as the people holding this work come together to digest our ideas, determine what resonates, and move forward. It is not every day that organizations stand humbly before their community with the extension of an invitation to collectively apply skills and wisdom gained from lessons learned, and to reimagine how to function and how to be. We have no doubt that building the required capacities and implementing many of these recommendations will greatly shift the organization’s culture.

It is the work of staff and board to create dedicated times to sit together and review the negative impacts and in some cases harm that Common Field has had on people, and to create action plans that seek deeper understanding of what next best steps are. In some cases, there is a need for further investigation to learn what happened and how Common Field can make amends. At times, we are making recommendations of particular decisions; at other times we are recommending Common Field make space to begin conversations and engage explorations, led by an external facilitator when needed.

The following suggestions represent the ideas of a wide and diverse array
3.2 Recommendations & Required Capacities

of people from Common Field’s community. While staff and board members assess these suggestions, we implore you to heed the sage insight of a former board member that, “capacity is both about hands on deck as well as space to reimagine.” Part of the commitment Common Field’s leadership is making is to transparently share with each other where there may be disagreement and where there are capacity gaps. Capacity gaps may indicate a need for tending and strengthening, or they may indicate where Common Field’s limitations are. Part of the work is identifying when to expand and grow, and when to let what is, be.

“The process is rigorous and there is no quick fix; not a workshop but an ongoing working group.”
- kai lumumba barrow, Fishbowl Participant

REFLECTIONS ON REPAIR AND RESTORATIONS

While there is utility in being clear on who held what power and how it was enacted, here are some grounding reflections on why the organization as a whole is responsible for making it better:

“The collateral damage in the bodies of these folks who are holding it down is unaccounted for, it’s inequitable, people don’t get compensated for it, and they have chronic health issues for the rest of their lives. Not appropriate. Not okay. No more, as far as I’m concerned.”

-Fishbowl Participant

“Let’s talk about repair. Let’s talk about reparations. Let’s talk about ceding something, because you’ve had this history and these years to build something and build wealth and extract and exploit, and you’ve built up something that isn’t yours to begin with. So how do we start to talk about ceding something and understanding that...these things aren’t really yours to begin with?”

-Lauren E. Turner, Fishbowl Participant
“Listen to those who were harmed, in particular former staff. There has been RADIO SILENCE from board and staff in regard to those who were once a part. Take responsibility to acknowledge what has happened to people. Center relationships and build in the work of maintaining communications with people. Operationalize it, make it a part of the culture.”

-sharon maidenbug, Former Board Member

CREATION OF A TEAM TO DREAM

- We recommend the creation of a paid implementation body inclusive of former and current board and staff, founding members, and Network members. This body will build off recommendations and repairs laid out in this report, but also respond to what else is revealed through the implementation process. This implementation body would engage in the study of new leadership models, and principled ways to handle conflicts and hardships.

One excellent resource that supports groups in laying groundwork to be able to engage conflict in principled ways, is the Tenets of Principled Struggle, which is a complex framework made succinct and more accessible by N’Tanya Lee:
- Be honest and direct with compassion.
- Struggle to deepen understanding and unity.
- Take responsibility for your feelings and actions.
- Seek deeper understanding…. ask/read 1st
- Consider this may or may not be the container you need.
- Side conversations should build not divide or check out...can you bring this side conversation to the full group?

- We further suggest creating a reflection document (both text and visual), in which current and former staff and board, including founding members, are invited to share their perspectives about mistakes made, repair work needed, and lessons learned.

- Share a post-audit update in December 2021, highlighting the work Common Field has done to implement this power audit. Consider sharing a ‘Reimagined Power’ update every six months, continuing to transparently engage the larger community in the change process.
Lastly, consultant(s) should be hired to work with this body to support the implementation work, including leading a strategic plan. Some consultants we recommend are:

AORTA
Art at the Intersections
Vision Change Win
Gibran Rivera
Betty’s Daughter Arts Collaborative
For The Culture

“Whose lens is defining the composition?”

-Aurora Tang, Former Board Member

REDEFINING WHOSE NEEDS AND PRIORITIES COMMON FIELD CENTERS

We’ve observed Common Field avoid asserting a political point of view and analysis of the field, and instead claim to want to serve “everyone” and be open to “all.” We see this as a liberal attempt to be neutral, which we don’t believe is actually possible because to be human is to hold particular perspectives and biases. Not acknowledging these perspectives and biases does not mean that our actions aren’t informed by them. It does however leave decision-making ungrounded.

When we aren’t intentional about whose needs and priorities to center our focus, those with access to more than their share of power, resources, and opportunities as a result of structural and cultural conditioning will continue to dominate by default. As a consequence, people whose needs and priorities are pushed to the margins as a result of structural and cultural conditioning—Black and Brown people, queer and trans people, immigrants, and working-class people—will continue to be deprived of the resources they’ve cultivated yet don’t get equitable access to benefit from.

As we conducted interviews, we asked people to share whose priorities and needs they believe Common Field should center when making decisions, allocating resources, and designing structures, programs and communications. People’s answers echoed each other’s despite the difference of their relationships to Common Field. From those who hold the organization in high esteem, to those who resent it; those who’ve poured their hearts into building it, to those who barely know why it exists: the patterns were made plain.

“Common Field could narrow its focus to increase its impact.”

-Roya Amirsoleymani, Network Member
3.2 Recommendations & Required Capacities

Types of Arts Practitioners

• As Common Field determines to whom they will channel their resources and connections, we recommend they revisit those who were at the center of the original founders’ vision, and who are described within the mission, vision, and values of the organization: independent artists, arts administrators, artist-run groups, collaboratives, organizations, non-pyramidal formations, collectives, and projects that are independent, alternative, smaller-scaled, lesser-resourced, DIY, nimble, under-the-radar, intergenerational, aesthetically different from mainstream art, and made up of folks who are self-taught and not academically trained; who are dreaming and imagining exciting ways forward.

• Many spaces for smaller organizations and groups are focused on growth. Common Field can choose to center the priorities of people who don’t necessarily want to become larger or more formalized or incorporated as a 501(c)3 by presenting content that is relevant to smaller formations.

• Originally there were questions of whether museums or larger organizations should be a part of Common Field. Explore what it means to include more resourced, established entities while centering those that are under-the-radar and struggle to sustain themselves. One Network member pointed out that there is a perception about long-standing and stable organizations that they are not grassroots. In actuality there are long-standing and stable organizations that are run by and for the community they are rooted in. Committing to centering smaller and lesser resourced organizations does not depend on a binary in which more stable and long-standing organizations become deprived of the support and resources that Common Field offers.

“Common Field feels like a mix of different sized and shaped entities, which is great. Focus should be put on creating space/ways for artist projects run out of garages to be placed as peers and on the same playing field of importance as entities such as the MacDowell Artist Colony.”

-Bob Snead, Network Member
3.2 Recommendations & Required Capacities

Geographies
• Many Network members are eager for Common Field to divest from big urban centers and instead invest in rural areas, small towns, Indian country, the Deep South, and the southwest. We recommend Common Field explore what is required to work collaboratively with smaller and oftentimes lesser-resourced communities in a good way.

Identities
• To undo the perpetuation of oppressive hierarchies based on identities, Common Field must dedicate time and energy to grapple with how to center the spectrum of varying priorities, needs, and beingness of Black, Brown, Indigenous, queer, trans, gender non-conforming, immigrant, disabled, fat, working-class and poor artists, culture bearers, cultural organizers, curators, and arts administrators. These are people who have been historically exploited for labor of all kinds, while being systematically denied equitable access to benefit from their own resources.

• An ongoing challenge is to address the question of how to make convenings more accessible to those who struggle to participate due to the expense, limited time off from work, and family responsibilities. There’s also the question of how Common Field considers the needs of artists who are primary caregivers.

• People have distinct relationships to power and oppression and are not in the same place along their journeys of transformation. Some have lost and sacrificed a whole lot and some have not. A part of Common Field’s ongoing work is for each member of the organization to grapple with which benefits, connections, access, and authority they are willing to give up or redefine their relationship to. What has already been lost or given up?

“Imagine if Common Field actually committed to centering the lives, work, priorities, dreams, and desires of Black, Brown and Indigenous folk, disabled folk, LGBTQ folk, and other people not in positions of privilege based on their racial or cultural identities and abilities.”

-Jeffreen Hayes, Network Member
“A lot of the people I met through my tenure as a board member of Common Field were queer young people who in no way did we have the capacity to support. I want to see queer young people lifted up and given space to say what they need to say and supported to do what they need to do. Our relationship to disability justice could have been stronger. Our relationship to Native folks could have been stronger. That felt really glaring to me.”

-Former Board Member

**COMMON FIELD ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

Common Field has many exciting opportunities to increase open communication and healthy connections between board, staff and the Network. We recommend:

- Undergoing a public-facing strategic planning process that is transparent, supports accountability, and allows for Network feedback.

- For the purpose of clarifying the levels of power that each role holds in decision-making, create a flowchart that outlines roles & responsibilities and also a decision-making matrix that indicates which decisions belong to which role(s).

- Engaging in political education to create a shared understanding of what a non-hierarchical organization is, including what consensus, responsibility, and leadership mean in these formations. Make sure to consider the power dynamics of race, class, gender, immigration status, etc., and how that connects to roles and skills when talking about lateral pay. Think deeply about the many parts of what it takes to create a structure that allows for shared decision-making, distribution of responsibility, labor and transparency.

“All parts have to be involved for a culture shift to happen. If it’s simply transactional—if the organization’s principles and values are not in alignment—then the organization is gonna have to make a culture shift to meet its mission and it seems those two things are now in contradiction.”

-kai lumumba barrow, Fishbowl Participant
3.2 Recommendations & Required Capacities

• Reflecting on this Supervision + Accountability Framework: Support without accountability is permissive; accountability without support is punitive; low support and low accountability is neglectful; high support and high accountability is restorative.

• Several interviewees requested that a timeline of the organization’s history, including the events of 2020 which led to Sheetal Prajapati’s hiring, be created and published on the website.

• Publicly sharing financial statements regarding how much of the budget goes to Black, Brown, Indigenous, queer, trans, disabled, working-class, immigrant, white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-upper class, US citizen art practitioners.

• Creating a board ad hoc committee, which may include former board members who desire participation in the work of imagining the next iteration of Common Field’s board. Current board members may determine that being a part of this ad-hoc committee is a better fit for their capacity, than continuing to be a board member.

• Conducting new board recruitment and board training, including mapping out the components of an active, healthy board as imagined by the ad-hoc committee.

• Starting a regular practice of opening portions of board meetings to staff, an annual staff and board retreat, and an annual/semi-annual board meeting open to the entire Network.

• Creating a Network advisory council to inform programming and decision-making.

• Conducting a Network-wide needs assessment with regional clusters, facilitated by a third party. It should include these components: access mapping (who is here?), needs mapping (what do those who are here need?), resource/response maps (resource shares, collaborations, and Common Field serving as an intermediary/bridge for Network members to connect with each other and to resources).

• As Common Field considers regional and local Network hubs, consider the utility of a chapter-based Network governance model.

• While thinking of how to invest in creative newer structures to organize Network members, consider how to invest equitably rather than equally, with an emphasis on prioritizing communities who are less invested in by funders and receive less benefit from arts-related policies.

Here are a few organizations and people Common Field can study for different ways of structuring:
3.2 Recommendations & Required Capacities

Alternate Roots has structured entry points for members.
Experimental Sound Studio has a horizontal power structure.
Beta Locale has a three-year leadership model.
Diverseworks cultivates toolkits and methodologies around growing equity within arts and culture organizations.
Brenda Hernandez supported the Allied Media Project in designing regional clusters for in-between their annual conference.
Fractured Atlas is an example of an organization that resource shares and offers life supports to network members.
Three Walls has a podcast of the work they underwent to reimagine and transform whiteness. Common Field can consider a podcast to highlight and reflect on their work as it unfolds.

“Apologies? Yes, but then, structurally, change a fucking thing!” – Network Member

CONTRACTORS, STAFF & BOARD: FORMER & CURRENT

Common Field owes so much of this transformation work to the current and former staff who found ways to resist the oppressive dynamics. The grievances and exit interviews shared with the board played a large role in the call for a 360 audit process and later the termination of Courtney Fink. We have shared recommendations for necessary changes to Common Field’s structure, and now also want to share our thoughts about restorations and repairs to current and former staff, as well as suggestions to improve communication and power sharing between board and staff.

Within weeks of beginning, Sheetal Prajapati began to correct some of the structural wrongs that had been at the root of many people’s negative experiences. This includes extending paid time off with personal days; creating a bereavement policy; providing immediate back pay to current staff whose payroll had been mishandled in fall of 2020; and hiring Convening Program Director E. Maude Haak-Frendscho full-time.

Throughout the first half of 2021, Sheetal has created a Finance & Human Resources position; restructured the organization’s finances and opened access so staff are able to review the budget; developed and provided terms for an extended family
leave in absence of any established policies; and built a staff of seven team members (up from two in December 2020) to better support Common Field’s organizational and programmatic work for 2021 and beyond. These changes seek to allow current staff to work in more sustainable ways. In addition to this work, we recommend:

• Forming a board committee (including former employees and Network members) to develop/build upon existing personnel policies and staff handbook. Include a restorative grievance process, preferably with a third-party entity.

• Inviting former and current board members and staff, consultants, and contractors to participate in a series of healing sessions, including transformative justice processes when needed. Listen deeply to the ways people were impacted through their experiences with Common Field. This should be an accountable space where folks are open to sharing how oppressive dynamics have impacted them, but also to receiving how they have perpetuated these dynamics and the impact on others. It is not a one-way conversation for staff to hold the board accountable.

• Facilitating mediation sessions among current staff and board to metabolize leadership transitions and people’s willingness to work together.

We have brought this suggestion to the staff and board already and there is some movement to actualize it.

• Conducting a compassion-centered assessment of current board members’ capacity of time, energy and emotional bandwidth to continue to hold a role in this promising yet exhausting change process. Make space for members to give themselves permission to leave.

• Developing a practice of proactively onboarding staff and board members based on programmatic and Network needs, not only in reaction to a crisis.

• Appointing a “staff liaison” from the board of directors. Their job is to maintain a critical connection with the staff that does not require engagement with the executive director. They should be picked with input from staff and board.

• Providing pathways for part-time staff and contractors who have the capacity and desire to become full time. Before hiring more part-time staff, reflect on what has not worked in the past around inequitable expectations and power dynamics of some staff being part-time and others full-time, yet working on the same project.

• Incorporating a paid sabbatical option for full-time employees, with a prorated option for part-time employees.
• Taking heed of the Arts Administrators Bill of Rights, shared with us by former employee Crystal Baxley along with Jen Delos Reyes and Latham Zearfoss as Open Engagement. This is applicable for all arts-and-culture employees and consultants.

FUNDING & BUDGETS
We know talking about funding and budgets is often awkward and uncomfortable. But it is a necessary part of equitable power-holding and resource sharing. We recommend Common Field:
- Establish board relationships—with support and input from staff—with the Warhol Foundation's program director and manager so that the chances of a relationship with a single person are minimized.
- Ask the Warhol Foundation to publicly share their special relationship to Common Field.
- When talking with existing Network members and those in the greater arts and culture ecology, share more transparently about Common Field's history with Warhol and the power that results from that history.
- Publish Common Field’s budget on the website, along with what the organization budget considerations are and values relating to access and accountability.

CONVENING Restorations
- Send 2020 travel fees to all people who were supposed to receive them but did not, and return the amount that people were forced to send back when the in-person convening was cancelled.
- Send recordings of people’s presentations and other works from the 2020 convening to those who didn’t receive a copy.
- Reach out to each Houston artist and host organization to check in about what was lost in the pandemic chaos—what were they preparing to share and what might they still want an opportunity to share and/or receive?
- Reach out to the people who worked to create the swag bag booklet for Houston, which never got printed. Cut a check for the amount of money that would have covered print costs.

“We have to talk about the elephant in the room.”
- Former Board Member
• Provide slots that are specifically for Houston organizations to present their work at the next convening. Commit to outreach to the Houston community if they are underrepresented in open calls.

• Consider recruiting a Common Field board member from Houston, someone that the people in the arts community trust, as a way to restore a connection to the community.

Practices
• Approach decision-making through the lens of caring about how people will be impacted through their experience of working with Common Field. Seek to prioritize care of human beings over logistical convenience. Choose paying people well over saving money for the organization. Assess all the possible ways to be flexible rather than rigid.

• Create spacious timelines and thoughtful caring touches such as feeding people well, investing in childcare at meetings and events, offering transportation support, incorporating breaks, and honoring agreed-upon end times. Embrace the wholeness of the people involved in the work.

• Be inviting to parent/guardian artists. Offer childcare vouchers to parents/guardians who are attending virtual events and planning meetings, so they have support in being present while their children are also paid attention to. Be explicit that children are to be seen and heard and are welcomed to show their faces on those little Zoom boxes.

• Develop well-organized and resourced childcare at convenings. The Allied Media Conference has developed a version of the convening curriculum that is adapted for the littles.

• Make explicit mention that chest/breastfeeding is welcomed in all Common Field spaces. Imagine a generation of “Common Field kids;” children who grow up understanding convenings as reunions with other kids and adults they get to see at this special event.

• Prioritize language justice by offering interpretation and translation services in all participants’ dominant languages. In addition to interpretation at convenings, ensure that pre-and post communications are also translated, as well as printed materials such as programs.

• Develop agreements of ethical practices around event and program rescheduling or cancellations.

• Reserve space in the program for organizers to participate as attendees.

• Define clear space and time in the program for partners to showcase their work.
Prioritize programming that contextualizes and lifts up the community that the convening takes place in.

Convenings present an opportunity to match support between more- and less resourced local organizations. With support from paid partners, Common Field can identify larger institutions in the area to reach out to and explore what services and guidance they may need that smaller arts organizations can be hired to provide.

Develop a reflective tool that measures how effectively the organization actualized its goals and aligned with its values by analyzing feedback from convening participants, partners, jurors, panelists, presenters, staff, and contractors. Make this a shareable annual report.

Content
- Hold a series of internal and external conversations about whose art Common Field is about. What is considered art? Political art? Cultural art?
- Be mindful when centering content by and about Black and Brown people, to include work that is about more than trauma and pain.
- Have conversations and make plans for facilitators and moderators to be more equipped to interrupt oppressive dynamics as they show up, particularly with audience members.

While continuing to engage membership primarily online, be open to ways of engaging that aren’t as familiar or formal, but rather can be more emergent, responsive to shifting needs, and also weird; consider mixed media methods and program types, as well as integrating pre-recorded content and artist projects.

Roles & Responsibilities
- Two years out, determine where the next convening will be held. Spend time entering that community and building with the local arts community. Pay local people to participate on a committee that supports field research and the mapping of convening locations, supports outreach, and advises on the hiring of an organizer who is rooted in the local arts community. This committee and the organizer should reflect racial, class, and gender diversity as well as diversity of position within the arts ecology (i.e. independent artists, not all directors etc).
- For at least a year, the organizer who is hired (with full benefits) works with Common Field staff and the host committee/partners to support relationship building and on-the-ground planning.
- Work with local partners to develop a Community Benefits Agreement that is tailored to the town or city that the convening will be held. The
agreement should include partners’ expectations for how Common Field engages their community, as well as growth and resource opportunities that Common Field commits to cultivating/supporting.

• Create decision-making matrixes or agreements for working with partners, presenters, jurors, and other roles that clarify who weighs in on which decisions, who has authority over which decisions, who is responsible for implementation, and a methodology for dealing with disagreement. This should also include clarity around budget parameters.

• Ask presenters if they would like their fee to be paid directly to them as individuals or to the institution they work for.

• Connect previous year partners with prospective partners to directly share about the experience.

• Define entry points for Network members to pool knowledge and to weigh in on decisions, including around convening locations, caterers and other vendors, artists and organizations to reach out to, etc.

• Common Field leadership must commit to supporting convening staff, partners, and host committees to step into their power and agency.

Geographies & Space
• Identify areas of the country that are not heavily invested in as it relates to the arts, including small towns and rural areas. Ask local leaders the best ways to go about assessing community interest in Common Field holding a convening in their area.

• When selecting a space to hold the convening, assess the relationship between the space and marginalized people in the community to determine if people are treated in ways that align with Common Field’s values.

• When selecting a space, enact a lens of disability justice and language justice: How does the space physically accommodate disabled people with various needs, fat people, children, elders, and people who don’t have personal transportation? Are there accessible outdoor areas? Are the rooms and hallways spacious and do they have ample comfortable seating? Are sound acoustics good for hearing? Ensure that IDs are not needed to enter so that people with differing immigration statuses (such as Undocumented people) are not excluded or put in harm’s way.

Costs
• There is a power dynamic between members who are showing up with limited resources, and those showing up on the dime of their institutions. Perhaps those who can
afford to, pay a fee, and that money is used to subsidize housing and food costs of Network members who don’t have institutional backing or ample personal resources to cover their costs. Determine pay based on a rubric rather than a sliding scale.

• The 2013 New Orleans Hand in Glove convening created a house share, where local artists hosted artists from out of town. The local artist received a stipend from Hand in Glove, and Network members with less resources didn’t have to worry about paying for hotels or Airbnb rentals. It not only reduced costs, it fostered relationship building and deepened visitors’ understandings of the local arts community. Common Field should revisit the viability of this model.

BEYOND THE CONVENING

A former Board member named, “there are four competing pillars for Common Field that need clarity/prioritization: advocacy, publishing, convening and regranting.” The following recommendations pertain to each of those areas.

Advocacy

We see the potential for strengthening how Common Field functions as an intermediary organization. The following are possibilities that we recommend Common Field make space to explore:

• Construct avenues of support for Network members by leveraging access to funders and serving as a bridge.

• Common Field can serve as a bridge that connects curators with collectors and artists; individual artists with residency staff; labor organizers with arts workers who want to unionize (i.e. museum workers union, etc.) This can happen through creating webinars and curating in-person mixers/workshops that connect people seeking resources and opportunities from and with each other.

• Part of leveraging is advocating for the importance of smaller-scale arts to the larger ecology. Founding member Shannon Stratton, shares ideas about how to do this:

“Generate an advocacy project that shows the impact of small, local/community, and regional arts organizations on socio-political life. Empower the Network members to be their own case studies by paying members to author white papers on the work they and their colleagues do in their local communities. Developing this research can help shape this lifting up/advocacy of small/local/community/regional arts on our lives.”
3.2 Recommendations & Required Capacities

Publishing
Common Field once commissioned artists to write field history essays. We recommend that Common Field explore what capacity it would take to reinstate this archival project through the lens of voices that represent racial, age, class, and regional diversity. It would not only open up opportunities to support Network members, it would influence the shaping of culture by expanding collective knowledge.

Connecting Network Members to Each Other
Although connections happen at convenings and also outside of convenings when initiated by members, there is value in Common Field building containers for members to carry forward conversations that begin at the convening. While there are many ideas for ways that Common Field can bring people together, there is also the question of what it actually takes to provide additional programming beyond the convening.

A former board member shared their perspective about what it takes to cultivate additional programming and resources: “Common Field should not do additional things unless/without not only labor capacity, but knowledge and ability to do it well. Real space to think deeply. It’s harder than people think, to build containers for peer-to-peer exchange because it requires clearly defined parameters and expert guidance.”

With consideration to the wisdom of their framing of what is required to cultivate additional programming, members had lots to say about ways that Common Field can serve as a hub.

- Common Field can support opportunities for members to connect based on self-identified priorities, such as: the development of collaborative toolkits and arts projects; ongoing resource-sharing; peer-to-peer exchanges of best practices; creation of knowledge-sharing documents and a resource library that gets e-blasted on a regular schedule, and coaching cohorts for people in different roles such as directors, independent artists, curators, members of arts collectives, etc.

- Webinars for smaller, targeted conversations:
  - Conversations around how artists are using the arts to push for human rights; responding to climate change, displacement, cultural erasure, food insecurity, police brutality, Medicare for all, a Green New Deal, income equality, etc. Also, conversations around how artists are working to create new/local economies for cultural workers to create sustainability without as much dependence on capitalist structures.
  - Retiring outdated art-world conventions and creating new models for programming/
3.2 Recommendations & Required Capacities

“Collect the existing field history essays that CF has commissioned in the past and revive this archiving project, with an eye to commissioning new field histories from writers from the field who have histories to tell.”

-Martha Wilson, Current Board Member

- fundraising/advocacy in the wake of the pandemic.
  - Cultivating safer spaces/harm reduction.
  - Realistic conversations about how much of the small-to-mid-scale arts landscape is built on free and underpaid labor, including how to communicate this issue to power-holders.
  - Support the development of Crisis Management/Contingency Plans (How are we gonna get through this pandemic? How can we break down the disparities that are being exacerbated by this? Role of artist post-pandemic, a 2-year plan); Ethical practices around event/program rescheduling/cancellations.
  - Racial justice & gender justice—engage Black and Brown artists in Common Field’s work beyond opportunities to perform and beyond awarding more grants. Grapple with how to work with communities you may not have many deep connections with.
  - Queer and trans visibility within the arts and culture world.
  - Support facilitation for “Movement-building for Beginners”—political discourse in place-making, artists coming from social justice movements to the arts, how artists try to make a historical argument for work they do.
  - What can we learn from national museum workers unions? How can we work together to shape a different future for organizational structures, funding models, and socio-economic inequities and issues within our own orgs as well as our communities?
3.2 Recommendations & Required Capacities

- Models for healthy work practices in many different kinds of project/organizational arrangements (e.g. standards for compensation, life/work balance, cultivating safer spaces/harm reduction, financial stability and fair compensation for artists’ labor); Universal Basic Income.

Regranting

- Explore developing a reallocation practice that funnels a percentage of Common Field’s funding to small-scale art projects and independent artists. There can be a particular focus on rural artists, Black and Brown artists, queer and trans artists, small organizations that don’t have relationships to Warhol, the NEA, Mellon, or other major funding sources. Perhaps there can be an emphasis on supporting those who operate without a 501(c)3.

- Conduct research and stay abreast of the national work that has and continues to be done around establishing equitable pay for artists.

- As Common Field thinks through developing requirements for grants and scholarships, keep an eye on eliminating obstacles, which often-times deeply impact the immigrant community, folks whose first or dominant language is not English, Black and Brown and working-class folks. Consider including ways to engage audio clips, videos, supporting languages other than English, etc.

- Loosen the restrictions on grants, especially smaller ones under 3k. Create more streamlined and available ways to offer cash infusions to small organizations and independent artists to support stability for projects, printers, equipment, materials, stipends, etc.

- Look at the ways that the National Performance Network (New Orleans, LA) and Alternate Roots (Atlanta, GA) create grant opportunities for members, as well as monthly town halls and other systems of connecting members to each other and to resources.

“Three days of a conference doesn’t change culture—there is a need for other programming.”
- Network Member

Resource sharing

- Provide budget transparency and create opportunities for members to weigh in on how funds are used.

- In addition to giving project grants, pay Network members to share reports that outline best practices, and to also lead workshops.

- Consider creating and paying a co-op of administrative assistants for independent artists and small organizations. This can include everything from calendaring, grant and report writing, filing taxes, legal support around contracts, correspondences, website design, self-advocacy trainings, insurance...
3.2 Recommendations & Required Capacities

“Anytime folks are able to loosen their reins on money is positive.”

-Danny Orendorff, Network Members

coverage, accounting, and budget design and management.

- Explore a way to create a shared health care Network where members can pay a fee to buy into a group plan.

- Support a collective grant-writing project to a funder that only funds large budgets. For example, current board member Martha Wilson’s organization, Franklin Furnace, is part of COSA, a NY initiative of smaller arts orgs combining in order to make requests to such foundations as Booth Ferris, which require applicants to have a $1M budget or more.

WEBSITE

In addition to information already available on the website, we recommend Common Field:

- Publish this final report and the survey results on the website, and make them accessible from all social media.

- All applications/forms should allow for video and audio uploads, multiple languages, and screen readers.

- Acknowledge the labor of Chris Tyler and Sheetal Prajapati to work through how to remove the credit card requirement from membership registration. If it continues to be a barrier, think through migrating to an entirely new website host or platform where it is possible to construct a registration process that does not require a credit card.

- Share the work of designing the monthly newsletter with stipended Network members. Each month can be in the style and language of that month’s writer(s).

- Consider organizing ways to give members edit access or to share putting up content on the website, similar to the way members have done IG takeovers.

“Once the pandemic and the 2020 protests for racial justice began happening it was sickening, really, how easily foundations and grantors were suddenly able and willing to remove a lot of the obstacles people faced in trying to access them. It allowed me to see that they weren’t real, and that they were never necessary.”  - Lauren E. Turner, Fishbowl Participant
IN CLOSING

To the artists whose visual, sonic, written, and embodied expressions of what it means to be human beings on the planet are undermined, invisibilized, under-resourced, stolen from, tokenized, and not regarded as sacred: we honor you.

Black women culture bearers, strategists, curators, arts administrators, and artists who shout the loudest and take the most risks to name directly and refuse to cooperate with white supremacy: we honor you.

We want for y(our) collective needs and priorities to be what shapes decisions, designs structures, channels resources, and cultivates supports. We want for y(our) collective bodies, imaginations, desires, and breath to experience unlimited space to dream, wonder, wander, experiment, be guided, make mistakes without punishment, be lovingly held accountable, come again, be nurtured, honored, feel joy and pleasure and sacred and completely vital.
Addendums & Glossary of Key Terms
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: 360° ORGANIZATIONAL AUDIT

Common Field developed and released this RFP in September 2020 to identify and engage with consultants for this Audit process. Through this process, Shana Turner and Mandisa Moore-O’Neal and their team were selected by board and staff.

PROJECT SCOPE
Common Field requests proposals from qualified consultants/facilitators to perform a 360° Organizational Audit. More information about Common Field can be found here.

This audit will begin with the foundation of identified internal and external challenges and background information already gathered from Common Field staff and board. The audit will include interviews with former and current staff, board, Network members and funders; a review of existing documents, policies, programs and surveys. We are interested in Network participation and want it to be a transparent and collective process.

Good candidates will have experience with nontraditional nonprofits and cooperative organizational models. They will have the skills and experience to be able to critically assess how power is shared and enacted throughout an organization. They will engage in this process with a lens towards collaboration across structural and cultural hierarchy and will be well practiced in assessing and strategically addressing organizational working dynamics.

While we remain open to the process of bringing new information and needed outcomes to light, Common Field has currently identified the below lists of challenges and desired outcomes:
4.1 Request for Proposals

Identified Challenges & Needs

• Racial Equity – Numbers and data around gender, race, hiring, systems. Process and strategies to enact the racial justice that is desired at all levels of the organization.

• Quality of Relationships – Assess the quality of relationships across different nodes of the organization. Do the members of the Network feel they have a voice in the Network? Do the members of the board feel they have a voice? Do staff members feel they have a voice?

• Ways of Working (externally) – Trouble answering big questions at all levels: What is our work? Analyze current convening model and programs in response. Are there fundamental challenges to fundraising within the current convening model? Assess whether programs are aligned with stated values and if the values are enacted as well as they could be?

• Ways of Working (internally) – Assess internal systems of working and their effectiveness. Understand how the board works and the needed adjustments. Determine how to identify, deal with, and address conflict. Does staff leadership feel valued and empowered?

• Organizational Narrative – Review and understand multiple histories, and how current organizational narrative leaves some members and participants empowered and others disempowered. How do we understand the function or multiple organizational histories?

Desired Outcomes

• A racial, economic, gender justice centered audit of programs, policies, structures, practices, and culture resulting in qualitative and quantitative data regarding the current work and workplace of Common Field as well as stakeholder perspectives and expectations for immediate organizational culture and structural change.

• Identification of the multiplicity and complexity of structural and interpersonal roots, causes and impacts of our challenges.

• Analysis and interpretation of all findings of the interconnected organizational patterns, structures, and alignments/misalignments between staff, Network, funding, program vision and process.

• Identification of opportunities for more collaborative and transparent communication and ways of working amongst board members, organizational leadership and staff.
2021-2022 Process Timeline

This timeline provides an outline of the Audit process in 2021 as well as steps the organization has and is taking to address the report outcomes to shape the sunsetting process in 2022.

January 2021: Audit Consultant team and Common Field board and staff establish process and scope of assessment for the organization.

February – March 2021: Network-wide Online Survey
A Network-wide survey developed by the Audit team with support of Common Field staff is distributed to solicit feedback, critique, and experiences of Network members to identify areas of alignment and misalignment.

February – April 2021: One-on-One Interviews
The Audit team engaged current and former staff, board members, founders and a cohort of over 30 Network members and Convening partners in one-on-one interviews. All constituents – except for current staff and board members – were compensated for their participation in this phase of the audit process.

April – May 2021: Facilitated “Fishbowl” Dialogues
The Audit team curated a series of three facilitated gatherings with a group of voices from many parts of the Common Field community to dive deeply into focused topics that emerged through the survey and interviews results. Invited guests for these sessions were compensated for their time and participation.

April - June 2021: Staff Capacity Building
Common Field expands staff to provide previously absent and much needed support for operational and programmatic work, including a Network Associate to develop the membership program and an Administrative Manager to manage finances and operation with staff leadership and ensure proper checks and balances.
4.2 Process Timeline

**June - September 2021: Report Review**
During this period, the Audit team in collaboration with Common Field’s board and staff worked to ensure the final report shared here was reviewed by all parties whose quotes or critiques were included in the final narrative, including those who wish to remain anonymous. Common Field also engaged legal counsel to review this report and shared this with our primary funder and supporter of this process, The Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts.

**September 2021- February 2022: Assessment of Organizational Sustainability**
During this time, Common Field leadership identifies a critical financial challenge related to the short and long term sustainability of the organization. With this new information, leadership pauses the release of the Audit report publicly and vision planning to begin a process of considering how to best move the organization forward responsibly. Organizational leadership remains in dialogue with primary funders, The Andy Warhol Foundation of Visual Art, about support for possible paths forward and engages with trusted advisors in the field to better understand all possibilities.

**March 2022: Staff Engagement and Decision Planning**
Common Field leadership holds a series of meetings with staff to discuss organizational challenges in depth, share the various paths considered for moving forward, and announce sunsetting to them with next steps for team members and organizational work. Common Field engages public relations consulting support for announcement and maps out timeline for closing programs and projects. Leadership reaches out to the organization’s internal stakeholders to inform them of Common Field’s planned closure prior to the public announcement.

**April 2022**
Common Field announces publicly it will close as a 501c3 organization on December 31, 2022 sharing an intentional process and timeline for sunsetting along with this report.

**May 2022**
Common Field shares its final programs and initiatives for the year.
GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

These are our working definitions of key terms that support shared understanding of the framework, analyses, and recommendations in this report. (These definitions are simplified snippets of complex realities).

Power: the ability or authority to decide what is best for oneself, or others; the ability to decide who will have access to resources; and the capacity to exercise control over oneself or others. Oppression is the exercise of power or authority in unjust, abusive, and controlling ways. Power arrangements are the ways in which access to power and authority varies for people within a shared configuration. Power dynamics describe how power affects relationships between two or more people.

Equality & Equity: Inequality is unequal access to opportunities. Equality is evenly distributed tools and assistance. Equity is custom tools that identify and address inequality. Justice is fixing the system to offer equal access to both tools and opportunities. [Tony Ruth’s Equity Series]

Liberalism: a political practice rooted in a focus on fairness, niceness, equality, and ultimately maintaining the status quo. Someone engaging in liberalism is more concerned with the intent of their words/actions rather than the harmful impact of their words/actions. Liberalism is ultimately about engaging in short term, instantly gratifying performative shows of solidarity, as opposed to the long-term, often uncomfortable dismantling work.

Liberation: “We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy...If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression....” -Combahee River Collective
4.3 Glossary of Key Terms

**Accountability:** the ways in which refers to the ways in which individuals, organizations, and communities hold themselves to their goals and actions, and acknowledge the values and groups to which they are responsible. To be accountable, one must be visible, with a transparent agenda and process. Accountability demands commitment and requires becoming a true stakeholder in the outcome. From a relational point of view, accountability is not always doing it right. Sometimes it’s about what happens after it’s done wrong. [Definition adapted from Racial Equity Tools Glossary]

**Advocacy through a lens of justice:** a practice in which priority is given to increase visibility, resource support, and the decision-making power of artists, culture bearers, and institutions that are rooted in communities which have been extracted from, while never receiving adequate resources. [Definition adapted from Freedom Maps: Activating Legacies of Culture, Art, and Organizing in the U.S. South]

**Transformative justice:** a political framework that works to actively resist punishment and alienation as a response to conflict, harm, abuse and/or violence. As a political practice, it aims to address and confront oppression on all levels and treats this concept as an integral part to accountability and healing. [Definition adapted from TransformHarm and Philly Stands Up!]

**White Supremacy:** political and socio-economic systems rooted in exploitation of land, animals, resources, and people’s bodies, labor, and cultures. People who are determined to be “white” are afforded structural advantages and rights that other racial groups are not, both at a collective and an individual level, and over the course of generations.

**White Race:** The formation of what is now considered “the white race” is a social construction which plagues the globe. It has developed over centuries as a method of designating power and domination of land, resources, and production to people considered “white”—the definition of which is not fixed and has continually shifted throughout history but essentially refers to people of European descent who have light skin and are positioned at the opposite end of the racial spectrum as Black people. (A person’s racial designation does not express their ethnicity(ies). A consequence of whiteness has been the systematic erasure and distancing from ethnic identity)

**Whiteness:** the set of cultural practices of social control that function to maintain white supremacy. When the white way is enforced as the right
way, Black and Brown people are viewed as divergent, and marginalized as a result. Whiteness especially upholds aspects of European cultures that stem from violent domination of Indigeneity, including the Indigeneity of European people. Proximity to whiteness is a complicated and nuanced spectrum. All people make many decisions each day that either partner with or resist whiteness. Black and Brown people have the capacity to partner with whiteness—even though ultimately detrimental to their own lives—and white people can also be exploited by whiteness—even while simultaneously experiencing systematic privileges.

**Inclusion:** when Black and Brown people are “allowed” to enter white spaces under the conditions of agreeing to comply and assimilate to whiteness projects as they attempt to rebrand themselves. [Adapted from a tweet from La Tanya S. Autry]

**Colorism:** a term first coined in 1982 by Black feminist author Alice Walker—is prejudice that occurs within and between groups of Black and Brown people, favoring lighter skin color, hair texture that is closer to straight and facial and body features that are closer to European. Colorism is a global cultural practice which has emerged as a result of European colonial and imperial history. [Definition adapted from Learning for Justice “What’s Colorism?” by David Knight]

**Anti-Blackness:** being a two-part formation that both voids Blackness of value, while systematically marginalizing Black people and their issues [Defined by The Council for Democratizing Education]

**Respectability:** from the term "politics of respectability," coined in 1993 by Professor Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. Respectability politics uphold the idea that the supposed worthiness of a marginalized group should be evaluated—that is, by comparing the traits and actions of the marginalized group to the values of respectability set solely by the dominant group. Because the rules of respectability are constantly subject to change, the dominant group can consistently ensure marginalized groups never meet every facet of these rules. Correspondingly, a lack of respectability is then used as a justification for harm. [The Problems with Respectability Narratives by Jenny Dorsey and Emily Chen]
4.3 Glossary of Key Terms

**Ableism:** a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be ‘fixed.’ *[Definition adapted from the Center for Disability Rights]*

**Disability Justice:** built because the Disability Rights Movement and Disability Studies do not inherently centralize the needs and experiences of folks experiencing intersectional oppression, such as "disabled people of color, immigrants with disabilities, queers with disabilities, trans and gender non-conforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless, people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who have had their ancestral lands stolen, amongst others." Initially a group of queer disabled women of color, Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, and Stacy Milbern, who eventually united with Leroy Moore, Eli Clare, and Sebastian Margaret, these activists formed the Disability Justice movement to strive for collective liberation. *[Disability Rights, Studies, and Justice]*

**Patriarchy:** the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women, trans, and gender non-conforming people.

**White Feminism:** a form of psuedo-feminism rooted in the belief that the issues of white cis-het women are representative of all women. White feminism is notoriously one-dimensional, focusing on white cis-het women as oppressed by patriarchy yet not seeing them as perpetrators of white supremacy and thus the co-oppressors to Black and Brown people. White feminism relies on the sexist, racist and classisit construct that white cis-het women are passive and without agency for their lives and actions.

**Transphobia:** the irrational fear, hatred, disbelief, or mistrust of people who are transgender, thought to be transgender, or whose gender expression doesn’t conform to traditional gender roles. It includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence. Transphobia occurs on personal, institutional, and societal levels and can prevent transgender and gender nonconforming people from living full lives free from harm. *[Definition adapted from Planned Parenthood]*
Homophobia: the irrational hatred and fear of LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, plus) people or people who are perceived to be LGBTQIA+. Homophobia includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence brought on by fear and hatred. It occurs on personal, institutional, and societal levels. [UCSF Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resource Center]

Capitalism: is an economic system in which a small number of people, through state and institutional power, maintain ownership and control of resources, means of production, and labor of the majority.

Classism: is differential treatment based on social class or perceived social class. Classism is the systematic oppression of subordinated class groups to advantage and strengthen the dominant class groups. It’s the systematic assignment of characteristics of worth and ability based on social class. [Class Action]

Elitism: is the belief that select groups of people who hold (and those who aspire to hold) disproportionate amounts of wealth, privilege and political power are more valuable than other groups of people, and therefore deserve greater authority.

Fishbowl Conversations: people seated inside the “fishbowl” actively participate in a discussion by asking questions and sharing their opinions, while people seated outside listen carefully to the ideas presented. People take turns in these roles, so that they practice being both contributors and listeners in a group discussion. [Facing History and Ourselves]