ZAPP's Guide to Equitable Jurying

Since its inception, ZAPP®—created by the regional arts nonprofit WESTAF—has been focused on creating a more equitable application and jurying experience for visual artists. Transitioning to a digital application and jury process has undoubtedly helped level the playing field for artists, while encouraging shows to adopt industry-wide practices. While this standardization helped display visual images and collect applicant information more equitably, WESTAF and ZAPP continue to seek opportunities to learn about and promote equitable best practices as part of our overall equity journey.

When it comes to jurying, the ZAPP team recognizes the importance of creating equitable and inclusive processes for selecting artists. We believe that creating a diverse jury panel that reflects the communities in which the festival takes place is critical to promoting equitable jurying. Providing clear guidelines and criteria for selection, along with transparency in the decision-making process, can help minimize bias and give all artists an equal opportunity to participate. Through our experience helping art fairs and festivals facilitate their juries for almost two decades, we have learned valuable insights on the best practices for ensuring fairness and equity in the selection process.

We've created this resource to share these lessons and provide questions for you to consider as you conduct your jury. We hope this information will be helpful for all event organizers looking to create an inclusive and diverse event that promotes fairness and equity for all artists.

Consider Equity from Day One

When setting up your application, it’s important to consider accessibility for all artists and identify any potential barriers to make the application process more equitable. Consider the following questions:

- How is your application accessible to all artists, regardless of their background or access to resources? For example, do you offer language translations or have staff or volunteers who are bilingual? Do you offer assistance with the application process for artists with disabilities? Have you considered waiving application fees for artists in need? Another way to consider this question: are there any artists who might have more significant barriers than others when applying to your show?

- Are there ways to broaden the eligibility criteria for artists to create a more inclusive process for artists with varying levels of experience, skill, and artistic backgrounds?

- How do you promote the application to reach a diverse audience, such as partnering with community organizations, promoting on social media channels that reach a wide audience, or using targeted advertising to reach underrepresented communities?
What kind of information do you collect about artists, and should you expand or limit this collection? For example, some shows choose to collect demographic information that is for internal use only as part of their grant reporting requirements. Consider the use case for every piece of information you collect and how you’re explaining the use of the information, especially with sensitive information such as one's background and identity.

**Emphasize Transparency**

Being transparent about the entire jury process to potential applicants is key to promoting fairness and building integrity as an event. Disclose information about how your jury will be conducted. This may include:

- Jury start and end dates.
- The number of artists that will be invited to participate in the event.
- Policies regarding artists who are exempt from the jury (e.g. previous award winners).
- Juror information, such as:
  - How many jurors will there be?
  - What is the composition of the jury panel? (peer artists, industry professionals, members of the public, etc.)
  - Who are the jurors and what are their backgrounds?
  - Are there any potential conflicts of interest that you need to disclose?
- Information on the scoring process, including:
  - Will this be an anonymous jury where the artists’ names and other identifying information is hidden from the jurors?
  - Will the jurors conduct the review as a group or independently?
  - How are the jurors viewing the artwork? (e.g. digital projection equipment, computer/laptop, iPad or tablet)
  - What supplemental materials will be considered as part of the jurors’ scores (artist statements, booth shots, etc.)?
  - How much time will each application be reviewed? Is there a time limit per application?
  - What criteria will be used to score the applications?
  - What scoring rate will jurors be instructed to use? (e.g. Rated 1-5, 1-10, Yes/No/Maybe)
  - Do you anticipate conducting multiple rounds of jurying? If so, how many?
  - Is any part of the jury open to the public?
- What the artist can expect following the jury, such as:
  - When and how will the artists be notified of the results?
  - Will the artist have access to scores and/or written comments left by the jury?
  - Is there a process for artists to ask clarifying questions about the jury process?

**Select Your Jurors with Intention**
Consider the makeup of your jury and how you can select jurors who reflect the diversity of the communities in which the festival takes place. In this case, consider all types of diversity: race, gender, age, class, artistic discipline, etc.

Use these guiding questions to evaluate the makeup of your jury and if there are any opportunities to better represent your community:

- Have you considered including members from underrepresented communities on your jury panel to ensure a more racially diverse perspective on the artwork being judged?
- Do you have a balance of jurors with experience in all of the artistic disciplines you’re including in the event? If not, how do you ensure that the jury panel has the necessary expertise to evaluate the quality and craftsmanship of artwork across a variety of disciplines?
- If your intention is to keep artist identities anonymous, are there jurors who may compromise the anonymity?

**Addressing Bias Ahead of Time**

Everyone has implicit biases and it’s important to consider how biases may show up in the jury process ahead of time. Consider the questions below and think about sharing anti-bias resources with your jurors to minimize the impact of biases while you jury.

- Do you have a system in place to prevent conflicts of interest among jury panel members, such as recusing themselves from judging artists with whom they have a personal relationship?
- How do you ensure that jurors are trained to recognize and appreciate different styles and approaches to art, including those that may be less familiar to them or come from non-traditional backgrounds?
- How do you balance the need for established artists with different skill levels with emerging artists who may have less experience but have potential for growth and innovation? For example, do you have an emerging artist category or are there different guidelines for artists with less exhibiting experience?

**Resources:**

- **Creative Equity Toolkit**: Search for links to hundreds of practical resources, inspiring case studies and important research on increasing diversity in the arts.
- **Nonprofit Learning Lab | Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion**: Curated list of helpful resources on diversity, equity and inclusion.
- **National Museum of African American History & Culture | Being Antiracist**: Explanation on the types of racism, and an introduction to unconscious bias with actionable steps about how to commit to making unbiased choices.
- **Catalyst | 11 Harmful Types of Unconscious Bias and How to Interrupt Them**: Defines the different types of unconscious bias.

**Rethink the Traditional Jury Structure**
Think strategically about each aspect of your jury process to minimize implicit bias and promote equity in the selection process. Such aspects may include:

- **Booth shots**
  - How important are booth shots to your jury?
  - If an artist doesn’t have a booth shot because they are new in their career, what alternative options can be allowed and considered by the jury equally?

- **Judging artistic excellence**
  - Do you instruct your jurors to consider the “artistic excellence” of the artwork? If so, how could this be redefined to better promote equity in the selection process, particularly for artists from underrepresented communities?
  - What other criteria could be considered along with—or in lieu of—artistic excellence? For example, is originality, creative or cultural expression, or innovation important when evaluating artwork?
  - Does your current jury process favor artists with formal education, those who are self-taught, or both equally?

- **Blind juries**
  - When deciding whether to conduct a blind jury, consider the following questions:
    - When considering the composition of your jury panel, how likely do you think it is that applicant identities will be known by jurors based on recognition of the artwork? How do you address situations in which this may occur?
    - While a blind art jury can help prevent bias and discrimination based on factors like the artist’s gender, race, or ethnicity, are there any potential downsides to this approach, such as overlooking important cultural or historical references in the artwork that may be central to the artist’s message or identity?
    - How do you ensure that the blind art jury process does not perpetuate existing power imbalances in the art world, such as favoring established artists with more resources to produce high-quality photos of their work or artists who are more familiar with the submission process?
    - Are there ways to supplement a blind art jury process with additional information or context about the artists or their work, such as artist statements or biographical information, that can help ensure a more equitable and informed evaluation of the artwork?

By addressing transparency, intentional selection of jurors, and unconscious bias, event organizers can take steps to create an equitable and inclusive jury process. These steps are essential to promoting fairness and integrity in art fairs and festivals. WESTAF and ZAPP are working toward this goal by sharing our knowledge and experience through resources like this guide. For more information about WESTAF’s equity work, visit [www.westaf.org/equity](http://www.westaf.org/equity).