

GRUB street

CULTURAL EQUITY

*"Cultural equity embodies the values, policies, and practices that ensure that all people – including but not limited to those who have been historically underrepresented based on race/ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion – are represented in the development of arts policy; the support of artists; the nurturing of accessible, thriving venues for expression; and the fair distribution of programmatic, financial, and informational resources." – **Americans for the Arts***

Executive Summary

Last Updated: June 2021

GrubStreet is a creative writing center defined and shaped by the people who come to write, explore books, share work, and engage with other writers and readers. In line with our mission, we actively pursue diversity, equity, inclusivity, and belonging (DEIB) because we believe in the dignity of every human being and the inherent value of our stories. We commit to recognizing and addressing racism and other oppressive systems on interpersonal, organizational, and systemic levels to make GrubStreet an inclusive and equitable home for everyone. We commit to working toward and advocating for systemic change in the sectors in which we operate: writing communities, the publishing industry, and the arts sector in Boston and beyond.

With this report, we aim to acknowledge our historic complicity in perpetuating exclusionary systems in arts and publishing, give a brief history of our cultural equity work, and honestly articulate where we are on our journey. Our thinking about DEIB at GrubStreet is constantly evolving in both the language we use to talk about it as well as the initiatives we’re working on toward achieving our goals. We will aim to update this report twice a year to reflect these updates and the latest data we have available for measurements.

Our Reporting At A Glance

Cultural Equity Goals	Initiative(s)	Impact	Measurement(s)
GrubStreet is diverse organization with representative leadership at all levels	Inclusive hiring practices, professional development, and leadership opportunities.	Cultural equity in job creation, economic benefits, and leadership development.	Demographics of board, staff, instructors, Muse presenters, and leadership positions.
GrubStreet is supporting diverse arts community	Reducing barriers, investing in equity, ensuring access	Cultural equity in artistic expression and development.	Audience demographics.
GrubStreet is creating conditions of belonging for diverse community	DEIB training, new workshop structures, accountability measures, review of policy and practices throughout organizational structure	Staff and instructors have sense of ownership, agency and belonging. Learners get what they need to grow and thrive as writers and artists.	Annual staff and instructor surveys and classroom evaluations.
GrubStreet is creating cultural equity at systems level	Advocacy in publishing field and Boston arts sector, diverse vendor, partnership, and sponsorship rosters.	Educational pipelines and business connections leading to more representative voices in the cultural marketplace, equitable distribution of resources.	Measuring publications and business connections. GrubStreet investment in arts ecosystem in Boston. Report on list of vendors, partners and sponsorships.

**As part of our ongoing work, we are in the process of surveying our entire community in 2021 with the aim to update this report with the demographic measurements detailed in the chart above before the end of the year.*

This Moment And Our History

We've been working for many years to push equity forward at GrubStreet. However, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and a pandemic that is disproportionately affecting the health of BIPOC communities, we feel an even greater urgency to tackle issues of racial injustice and inequity in our own organization and to work and advocate for systemic change in the sectors we operate in: namely, the writing and publishing world and the arts sector in Boston and beyond.

We also feel the need to acknowledge our own complicity.

GrubStreet's organizational history has mirrored and perpetuated the cultural equity gap found in Boston's arts sector and the publishing and writing world at large. In our earliest years, we taught in Brookline, Cambridge, and central Boston until moving into the city and consolidating classes in the Theater District in 2005. Given the history of Boston's segregated neighborhoods, our decision to teach in one majority white-identified central location after having taught in majority white-identified and middle-class neighborhoods meant we were cultivating a mainly white-identified and middle to upper middle class student body. We created non-paternalistic and supportive workshops which broke down educational barriers to creative writing for many nontraditional students, particularly white women, but we failed to also recognize and engage the full range of talent and promise all around us in BIPOC communities and in other communities which have been historically underrepresented based on ability, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion. This failure translated into a cultural equity gap in terms of who benefitted as we grew and created more jobs and robust writing and business networks. Moreover, it meant, to the extent we were building pipelines to getting published, we contributed to the lack of representative books being sold and marketed to readers.

In 2013, a decade after we established ourselves as a nonprofit, we formed a Diversity Task Force made up of staff, board, instructors, and local authors to begin explicit conversations about the lack of diversity at GrubStreet and to create plans and benchmarks for change. In 2015, after failing to move the needle, we took bolder and more concrete action. That year, we rewrote our mission to center our commitment

toward inclusion, equity, and removing barriers to participation in our programs. We expanded our recruiting policies by posting jobs in a wider variety of places and holding positions open until we had qualified and diverse final candidate pools. We significantly increased investments in scholarships and free programming, began interrogating our cultural practices in our classrooms and offices, and started offering instructor and staff training to increase cultural competency. We also began building community in neighborhoods with majority BIPOC residents by teaching classes and hosting events in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan.

Our New Home

In 2017, we began looking for a new home because our building had changed hands and the new owner wasn't interested in keeping us on beyond spring 2020. We dreamt about a more permanent home given the rapidly increasing rents in Boston and the stress on our organization of moving every five or so years. As we searched for a new home, three qualities were non-negotiable: ADA accessibility, staying in Boston, and being reachable by public transportation. Options were slim. The few spaces we found that we could afford to rent were in old buildings, which weren't fully ADA accessible. Buying a building was out of our league as the cost alone of purchasing and fitting out a building in Boston is in the tens of millions. After years of searching, it became clear that our best bet would likely involve being part of a development project that included space for cultural benefit. Such an opportunity opened up for us through Chapter 91 law in the Seaport on the waterfront across from the ICA museum. Chapter 91 is a state law based on a legal principle that holds that "the air, the sea and the shore belong not to any one person, but rather to the public at large." The goal of Chapter 91 is to ensure that everyone has access to Boston's beautiful waterfront. Energized by the democratic spirit at the heart of Chapter 91, the beauty of the waterfront, the affordability of a space that would lead to long-term stability, the opportunity to launch a literary stage and a podcast studio, and the chance to host a bookstore for our community, our staff and board decided to move forward and build a creative writing center on Fan Pier at 50 Liberty Drive.

However, the decision wasn't an easy or uncomplicated one. We know that some members of our community, particularly in our BIPOC community, are concerned about the Seaport being a predominately white and exclusive space. We are taking those concerns seriously and know that we have significant work ahead to ensure that we are creating a safe artistic space for our BIPOC community and other marginalized communities. Toward that end, we have created a Task Force which is focused on identifying top priorities and projects to help create a safe and inclusive arts space for everyone – including having safety and behavioral protocols in place, establishing relationships with our neighbors and the building's security guards, and more. We are also already in conversation with neighbors who are equally committed to pushing for greater equity in this part of Boston. We are moving forward animated by the idea that artists – and all Bostonians – belong everywhere in the city.

Finally, we will continue to make significant investments in financial aid, transportation subsidies, community partnerships, and diverse programming in an effort to realize the vision of a truly multicultural and equitable space. We also want to note that we will continue teaching in Boston's neighborhoods and online so that our students will have many options for engagement and participation in addition to programming in our new home.

Where We Are Today On Our Journey

Building Diversity On Our Team And In Leadership:

The GrubStreet organization consists of our staff, instructors, Muse presenters, interns, and our board. Over the last few years, we've built a diverse team by hiring the most qualified candidates from diverse final candidate pools. We have also increased leadership of color across the organization. As a team, we are committed to dismantling oppressive systems and creating truly equitable and inclusive systems and spaces from our classrooms to our boardroom. It's important to say that while representation is necessary, it's insufficient. We have learned that it takes significant cultural work (more on that below) to create conditions where all staff, instructors, and

board members feel and truly have a sense of belonging, ownership, and agency. Our work in these areas is on-going, and we have significant work ahead.

Supporting A Diverse Arts Community: Removing Barriers

Financial:

Given the inequity and racism built into America's economic system, ensuring equitable participation requires removing financial barriers.

Financial aid:

We set a goal in 2015 to increase financial aid from \$30K per year to \$250K per year by 2020, moving from supporting 3% of our student body to 16%. While we are increasing aid each year, we haven't yet met our goals. In 2020, we invested \$170K, serving 285 students across all programs, representing 13% of our student population. In 2021, we have budgeted \$191K in scholarships across programs. In addition to the \$191K in scholarships, we committed up to an additional \$60K towards scholarships and funded programs. Increasing scholarships for under-resourced communities has meant more low-income students, BIPOC students, students living with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, and others have been able to participate in GrubStreet's programming. However, we are currently only able to address about 30% of the need.

Fellowships:

We created [Emerging Writer Fellowships](#) to give talented and committed emerging writers with financial need tuition-free access to our programs, mentorship opportunities, and access to the Muse and the Marketplace for one year. We choose fellows based on the following criteria: some introductory writing workshop experience, work samples that show a strong understanding of basic craft, clear goals

for their work, and a commitment to engaging with a diverse and multicultural community. We launched in 2017 with one fellowship. We added a second Fellowship in 2018 and a third award in 2021.

Reducing Transportation and regional barriers:

We endeavor to make traveling to our headquarters more affordable through MBTA subsidies for our teen students and discounted parking for our adult students. But we are also increasingly aware of the importance of working outside of our headquarters and partnering with community organizations to reduce regional barriers in accessing arts resources in our city.

Investing In Bipoc Writers And Communities

To reach equity at GrubStreet, we are making investments in BIPOC writers and communities that match the investments we've historically made and continue to make in white-identified communities and writers. Through partnerships, specific programs and events, and co-curation, we've explored multifaceted ways to invest in and amplify writers of color.

We launched [Write Down The Street](#) in 2016 in partnership with the Boston Public Library. The program offers tuition-free workshops, seminars, and events in branch libraries in Mattapan and Egleston Square. The focus is on making creative writing workshops more accessible to those who face challenges due to systemic racism, cost, language skills, lack of access to transportation, and other barriers. These classes are sometimes offered in Spanish and Haitian Creole. Every year, the program serves approximately 800 students.

In 2016, we also launched the [Boston Writers of Color Group](#) to offer free networking opportunities with publishing professionals, educational sessions, professional development, submission fee support, writing retreats, and informal social gatherings for writers who self-identify as writers of color. In addition to in-person and Zoom events, an active Facebook Group, a Meet-Up Group, and a monthly newsletter list all

help to connect our 2,000+ members and provide a way to share job opportunities, publishing advice, writerly articles, and more. Additionally, an important synergy has developed between BWOC and the rest of Grub's programs. BWOC members have gone on to take Grub classes, enroll in Incubator programs, attend Grub events, become Grub instructors, and more. In the other direction, many Grub instructors and students of color have joined BWOC and found community there. There's also been an astonishing amount of BWOC member publications, fellowships, and contest wins that members attribute directly to the group's support. In 2021, GrubStreet is increasing the program's budget by 50% while also increasing staff capacity to handle the expansion.

Since 2016 we've also offered and expanded a popular "Writers of Color" track of sessions at the [Muse and the Marketplace](#), which address craft and publishing issues that writers of color uniquely encounter. These sessions feature prominent thinkers in the field of the "craft of race." These have included sessions like "Reclaiming Our Narrative: How Black Women Writers Showcase Versatility Through Storytelling," "To Whom Are You Telling Your Tale? Race & the Question of Readership," "Self-Translation: Writing from a Non-English Perspective." Additionally, we've offered new sessions on the intersection of identity, culture, and art. They include "Writing Transgender Characters," "Approaching Race as a White Writer," and "Different Worlds and Different Bodies: the Disabled Figure in Literature." Each year we also expand our scholarships for low-income writers, writers of color, LGBTQ+ writers, writers under age 35, and writers living with a disability. So far in 2021, we have distributed \$12,000 worth of scholarships to 77 attending writers and hope to distribute even more.

New in 2021, GrubStreet is launching two [Teaching Fellowships for Black Writers](#) and educators. The fellowships will offer financial support, professional development, and artistic mentorship. The Fellows will teach classes and work with our instructors and staff to deepen our curriculum.

Accessibility

In 2005, we were offered incubation space at very affordable rates in an old building at 160 Boylston Street. We made the decision to move forward despite the fact that this

space, while legal and grandfathered in, wasn't fully ADA accessible, a decision that perpetuated the marginalization of artists in Boston living with disabilities. In 2012, we moved to 162 Boylston, which was better in terms of accessibility, but it fell short of creating a fully equal experience for our students living with disabilities. In 2017, GrubStreet participated in the Massachusetts Cultural Council's Universal Participation Initiative, earning [UP Designation](#). This work enabled us to update our website, including addressing alt text on all images, making improvements with color contrast for individuals with low vision, and redesigning the sitemap. This year, we have a goal of captioning all of our asynchronous online classes by the end of this month. For classes taking place on Zoom, we have captioning enabled in all of our accounts and have budgeted to try new accessibility add-ons as we refine this new class format. Moreover, we are in the process of building a new website in which accessibility for students and community members living with disabilities is a top priority in that work.

At 162 Boylston Street, we were limited with what we could do with the existing leased space. When it came to building our new home in the Seaport, we made sure to involve community members with disabilities and allies/caregivers in the initial planning phases to provide guidance about how to address their needs in the design of the space. In addition to the dedicated elevator that was already built into the space, our architects kept ADA accessibility top of mind when designing. Automatic door openers, ADA compliant restrooms, desk and table spacing, braille signage, classrooms with assisted listening capability, and access to the stage are some examples. We are currently working on a "Know Before You Go" guide for our website that will not only provide way-finding to get to the physical space, but also information on how to access our space and what to expect in general, in addition to including information on how to request accommodations, like our current Contact Us page does now.

Creating Conditions For Belonging

In the early years of this work, we focused mainly on diversity. We worked to recruit a representative staff, board and instructor pool as well as to reach a more diverse student body. And while that work is on-going, we have learned that diversity alone is insufficient. Building a truly equitable, anti-racist and anti-bias community involves an

interrogation of all policies, practices, cultural norms, systems, and structures at play in our organization. This kind of deep cultural work takes time, patience, and commitment. We push forward this work daily with successes and setbacks along the way.

On the educational front:

During our early conversations around increasing the diversity of our student body, several of our instructors and staff members of color brought up the important question of whether we had done the work of ensuring that our classrooms were a safe and enriching place for writers of color to be. As a result of those conversations, we realized that we had not, and that, before asking more writers of color to show up in our classrooms, we had to do the work of ensuring those classrooms equally served all of our students.

These efforts began in 2015 with a series of instructor conversations facilitated by instructors, board, and staff of color. In these conversations, we discussed issues that had come up in the classroom around identity and race and workshopped how to handle them in the classroom. These discussions grew into a series of instructor training sessions that eventually led to the creation of our first [Access and Inclusion Guide](#) – an effort to capture the best practices for facilitating classes to be as equitable and inclusive as possible. We continue to update and add to the guide annually, as both our organization and the conversation around DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging) grows and evolves.

As our classrooms became more diverse, we recognized that many of the traditional methods for teaching creative writing that we had previously relied on did not serve all of our students equally. Methods like the cone of silence often served to place writers of color and other writers from marginalized communities at a disadvantage. In interrogating these methods, we found that the traditional workshop model as a whole needed to be rethought: it exhibited too narrow a vision of “good art” that often served to silence historically marginalized writers, devaluing their experiences, perspectives, and approaches in service of fitting them into a more familiar or “acceptable” mode that has been designed by and for the dominant culture. After careful interrogation and experimentation, our programs team and instructors have implemented a more writer-centered workshop model to align our classes more directly with our core belief

that artistic growth and inclusion are inextricably linked. The primary components of GrubStreet's revised model are as follows:

- 1) The writer can actively participate in their own workshop.
- 2) The writer receives written feedback ahead of time (if written feedback is applicable).
- 3) Both craft and content, including cultural context, are part of the conversation.

We have continued to develop instructor and student resources with a focus on deepening support for instructors and students on the DEIB front. In addition to our Access and Inclusion Guide, these resources include a Guide on Creating Inclusive and Multicultural Classrooms and Curricula, student guidelines, first-day of class documents, ethical behavior guidelines, a new workshop model document for new instructors, and a resource database for instructors that highlights the work of historically marginalized writers. We think it's fair to say that these structural changes and resources have led to significant improvement and better pedagogy for all students, but there is still work to be done — we have not yet reached a consistent standard for cultural literacy for our instructors, which continues to adversely affect BIPOC students and students from other historically marginalized communities.

In 2021, our work will be focused on establishing a transparent instructor accountability system and on better measuring and evaluating how we're doing on the DEIB front according to our students. As part of class evaluations, we now ask students to rate our instructors on how well they manage cultural issues in our classrooms.

As a staff and board:

In 2017, we created a leadership DEIB team on staff, and, in 2018, we hired Carlos Hoyt — an author, psychologist, and DEIB expert — to work with our staff on helping us articulate together an anti-bias/anti-racism statement and cultural values. Working with Carlos also helped surface several key areas where we need to improve, including creating transparency in salary ranges and career trajectories as well as working to ensure that DEIB goals and responsibilities are included in every job at GrubStreet so that the work doesn't fall disproportionately to our staff of color. In 2021, we aim to make significant progress in all of these areas and will update this report accordingly.

GrubStreet's Board of Directors engaged in DEIB training sessions in the early years facilitated by board member Deborah Plummer — a novelist, psychologist, writer and DEIB expert — and has more recently engaged Carlos Hoyt to help articulate the right role for our board in moving DEIB work forward. The board surfaced a clear need to define terms for us and to agree upon appropriate metrics/reporting so that they can provide appropriate oversight. We are currently working on strategic planning. Once that work is complete, the board plans to create a Task Force made up of board, staff, instructors, and students to draft a proposal for measuring DEIB work and its impact at GrubStreet.

The board is also committed to being powerful ambassadors for our work and mission. A key part of that requires building the skills to handle uncomfortable situations/microaggressions in real-time that they might encounter in classrooms, at events, or in board meetings. They have engaged Carlos Hoyt for additional sessions dedicated to building their skills in this area.

Thirdly, the board is committed to creating a truly inclusive culture with high trust among its members. Toward that end, the Board Nominating Committee has committed to creating opportunities for board members to convene informally to get to know each other better as people and to discuss race and racism by sharing lectures and essays that board members can talk through together.

Finally, the board will be reviewing progress against DEIB goals at every meeting.

Cultural Equity At Systems Level

Advocacy:

Since 2013, we've been hosting conversations and networking events at our annual Muse and Marketplace conference to advocate for a more diverse publishing landscape. Yearly, we host a popular event called "Agents and Editors of Color Roundtable," which honestly addresses continuing issues with systemic racism and bias in publishing. We've created ongoing blog content about the unique experiences of

working, learning, and publishing as a writer of color. Each year, we work to ensure that our invited editors and agents of color at the Muse are representative in an effort to support publishing networks that reflect our country's demographics.

GrubStreet's leadership is active in LeadBoston, Mass Creative, the Barr Foundation Arts Amplified group, and other arts convenings dedicated to imagining and building a more equitable arts landscape and city. GrubStreet's staff routinely shares DEIB related documents, advice, and work with other nonprofit organizations in an effort to save other less-resourced organizations time and resources.

Sponsorships:

Recent co-sponsored events, which include both financial and promotional investments, have included partnering with organizations such as:

- 826 Boston
- Black Joy Project
- Black Poetry Review
- Boston Book Festival
- Boston in 100 Words
- Boston Public Library
- Brookline Booksmith - Transnational Literature Series
- Craft on Draft
- Harvard Book Store - New Voices in Fiction
- Mass Poetry
- Porter Square Books - Grubbie Debut Author Series
- Roxbury Film Festival
- Roxbury Poetry Festival
- Tell-All Boston
- WGBH

Organizational Partners:

**Woman-led/owned and/or BIPOC led/owned businesses..*

- BINCA*
- Boston Public Library Main Branch
- Boston Public Library East Boston Branch
- Boston Public Library Egleston Square Branch
- Boston Public Library Grove Hall Branch
- Boston Public Library Mattapan Branch
- Brooke High School*
- Brookline Booksmith
- Brookview House*
- Community Charter School Cambridge
- Excel Academy Charter School East Boston
- Excel Academy High School South Boston*
- Fenway High School
- Harvard Book Store
- New Heights Charter School of Brockton
- Porter Square Books*
- Prospect Hill Academy Charter School Cambridge*
- Rafael Hernandez K-8*
- The Estuary Collective
- William Henderson Upper*

Current Vendors:

**Woman-led/owned and/or BIPOC led/owned businesses.*

50 Liberty LLC
Acadia Insurance
Adobe*
ADP
Airtable*
Amazon
American Express

Attendify
BCBS*
Beacon Law Group*
Blick Art
Blue Planet Supply
Boloco*
Boston Park Plaza Hotel

Boston Private
Caffe Nero
Canva*
Chipotle
Cloudflare
Comcast
Craigslist

Cumberland	Insource Services	Shake Shack
CVS*	Jamaica Mi Hungry*	ShippingEasy
Dialpad	Janitronics	Staples
DocuSign	Jotform	Starbucks
DoorDash*	Letterfolk*	Strategy Matters*
Ebay	Level Up	Stripe
Elles Gianocostas*	Linked In	SurveyMonkey
Envelopes.com*	Lyft	Sweet Greens
Eversource	MA Nonprofit Network	TeenLife*
Facebook	Maggiano's	The Recognition Source
Fecteau Benefits Group	Mailchimp*	Uber Eats
Formaggio Kitchen*	Marika Prezioso*	Upstatement
GoDaddy	Marina Park Drive	USPS
Google ads	MeetUp	Vanguard
Grainmaker	Merge*	Vimeo*
GrubHub	MetroCreate	Vistaprint
Harvard Square Books	Otter*	VSP
Haymarket Books	Picco	Wagamama
Health Equity	Porter Square Books*	WB Mason
Hertz	Principal	Wet Ink*
Honeygrow	Pro Print	Wordpress
Hootsuite	Quickbooks*	Zapier
Hostgator	Rackspace	Zoom*
Idealist	Republic Services	

Cultural Equity Report Feedback

Thank you for taking the time to read GrubStreet's Cultural Equity report. Please use this [online survey form to provide feedback](#) about the document that you'd like to share with us. We will be reviewing every submission carefully.