

*SAFEDI:  
Social Art for  
Equality, Diversity &  
Inclusion*

EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY  
2022

SALLY FORT  
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Arts and  
Humanities  
Research Council



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SAFEDI – Social Art for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was a Fellowship project funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council, initiated by Professor Amanda Ravetz of Manchester Metropolitan University’s Art and Performance Research Hub, and developed with R.M. Sánchez-Camus (Lead Artist) in partnership with Axis and the Social Art Network. SAFEDI’s aim was to commission artists to work with people who have been marginalized from visual arts organisations, to collaborate, create artwork, and explore these works with arts partners, to create policy change better suiting people who have been excluded in the past.

The project included a research group of four co-researchers, six commissioned artists, a project team of producers and co-ordinators, six arts organisation partners, and a wide variety of participants / collaborators working with the artists.

SAFEDI has exceeded almost all its targets, met all its short-term outcomes, and made headway into most of its medium-term outcomes and longer-term impact despite an ambitious project plan for a twelve-month period, much of which was taken over by covid and lockdown periods.

***“Now rather than go straight to the usual sculptors we’re trying to widen that conversation. To think about how we do it, who for, who decides, who designs. Yuen’s helped us understand and think differently. Without his patient, gracious advocacy we wouldn’t have got to this. It’s gentleness used powerfully.”***

Rebecca Maddox, Sheffield City Council

*Cover image: Lack of Time Lady Kitt, 2021. Image description: Colour photograph, interior. A tiny paper sculpture of a pocket watch with a working clock face. It is green and pink and has pound signs and a tiny heart around the clock face instead of numbers. It sits in a green paper tube surrounded by pink paper. A light shines on the sculpture.*

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# PROJECT ACTIVITY

SAFEDI took place from January 2021 to March 2022. The project was designed to:

- Invite policy makers to take part
- Identify arts partners involved in each commission
- Commission artists to collaborative with people who have been marginalised to create artwork exploring barriers
- Investigate what the arts development process and artworks reveal about barriers
- Develop policies as a result of this learning
- Share the learning with the wider sector

A research team and project team supported the delivery of the six commissions and investigated the learnings along the way.

**The research team** comprised of Prof. Amanda Ravetz, Visual Anthropologist and Research Fellow; Dr. Anna Macdonald, Dance Artist/Scholar; Dr. César Cornejo, Anti- Architect; Dr. Kai Syng Tan, Artist / Curator; Dr. Patrick Campbell, Theatre Maker / Scholar. The group worked in partnership with commissioned artists to support them as a critical friend; learned from artists about how the social arts practice affects policy development; hold research group meetings as a space to share and reflect on their experiences of the project and how their own experiences of exclusion or bias fed into their understanding; joined in with team / artists meetings to ask clarifying questions and offer additional insight; worked with Amanda Ravetz to learn more about the process of research funding, collaborative fellowship practice and the relationships between academia and diversity; and collaborated with artists to create articles or other content for journal publications.

**The project team** involved Prof. Amanda Ravetz; Daniela Liberati, Project Co-ordinator, Social Art Network; Lucy Wright, Social Content Producer, Axis; R.M. Sánchez-Camus, Lead Artist and Producer, Social Art Network / Axis; Sally Fort, Evaluation Consultant, Independent. Their involvement was to make sure the programme happened; balance the big picture and the details; keep information flowing between funders, partners, researchers and artists; advise on ethical practice; promote opportunities and practice sharing online; co-ordinate communications and budgets; run fortnightly meetings to keep the project flowing and review learning; facilitate artist's wellbeing meetings; share findings with the wider sector and ensure the continuation of the work beyond SAFEDI's Arts & Humanities Research Council funding.

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The six commissions involved:

Lady Kitt + associate artists with Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art and Artists and creatives with learning disabilities

working online and off site using paper craft, music and recitations (spoken word) to explore why galleries are not inclusive of their disabilities.

Lily Lavorato with East Street Arts and artists and creatives with disabilities and chronic illness

working online and round the fire in conversation, with fire as a metaphor, and through words, charcoal sketches and photography, to discuss their negative and positive experiences of being in arts spaces.

JarSquad with Nudge Community Builders and Women experiencing racism / Men who do not access JarSquad

Working at pop-up community events and the JarSquad space, to think about collaboration, exchange and hierarchy whilst collecting surplus ingredients and making preserves.

Shama Khanna with not/nowhere and Black people and People of Colour

working online to produce a book covering a range of personal stories, thought pieces and responses to what exclusion feels like and why it happens.

The Women's Art Activation System and National Gallery (unofficial) and Mothers and care givers of young children

visiting the National Gallery to document barriers for those with small children, and investigate how motherhood is represented in the collection through a purpose made eye-spy game.

Yuen Fong Ling with Sheffield City Council Cultural Decolonising Group and artists of colour

working in meetings, online, in creative workshops and at arts and community events in the Theatre Deli (former shop) space to explore the role of the plinth in the exclusion of inclusion of people in colonial contexts.

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# IMPACT

The work of all the collaborators involved in SAFEDI has so far led to...

- 220 community participants
- Over 50 high quality artistic outputs
- 28 project meetings
- 20 policy makers
- 9 arts organisations involved
- 6 six short reports on each commission<sup>1</sup> on the Axis blog
- 4 policy change works in progress
- 4 researcher mentees
- 4 mentoring meetings
- 2 debrief sessions
- 2 commissions archived digitally<sup>2</sup> on the Social Art Library
- 1 position paper in Arts Industry<sup>3</sup>
- 1 inclusive shortlist of 6 artists / collectives totaling 12 individual artists.
- 1 set of commissioning social artists recruitment and commissioning guidelines
- 1 co-created accessible consent form
- A new database of British Sign Language interpreters with experience of working in the visual arts
- A dedicated new microsite for all things SAFEDI<sup>4</sup>
- A full independent evaluation report

In addition, the seeds planted by SAFEDI will continue through:

**3 confirmed continued relationships between artist and arts partner**

**2 continued relationships between artist and arts partner pending debrief meetings**

**1 SocialWorks? Journal**

**1 new research and networking group**

**Inclusion in the Social Art Network Summit**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.axisweb.org/safedi/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.socialartlibrary.org/search?q=SAFEDI>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.artsindustry.co.uk/feature/2502-the-word-finding-your-new-visual-arts-audience>

<sup>4</sup> <https://safedi.org.uk>

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**SAFEDI has helped create change** for people who have faced exclusion and bias; for the commissioned artists; for partner organisations and for the wider sector. The outcomes below were designed into the aims of SAFEDI from the start. Additional unplanned outcomes follow these.

1. **Marginalised people feel more valued: Strongly achieved.** All the commissions showed that the communities involved with the practice felt valued by the artists throughout the process.
2. **Marginalised people feel more represented: Well achieved.** This was achieved by most commissions, based on which were able to bring the profile of excluded people and their voice to the attention of arts organisations.
3. **Increased resilience of artist led organisations in covid times: Achieved.** SAFEDI brought new or deeper business support to three artist led organisations via commissions; and supported the growth of the Social Art Library.
4. **Improved understanding of the support social artists need: Achieved.** In commissions, this was most strongly where artists became stronger advocates for themselves. It was also achieved through researcher-artist relationships and research mentoring meetings, and in confidential artist wellbeing meetings and evaluation interviews.
5. **New audiences reached: Marginally achieved.** This was the hardest outcome to achieve, and where it happened, the artists themselves became new audiences to the arts organisation involved in the commission. What started out as impenetrable and huge at the outset, became familiar and 'theirs' by the end.
6. **New understanding of EDI in arts and cultural organisations: Achieved.** This was successful in three commissions where the relationships between the artists and the organisations were the strongest and had prior history together, so more could be achieved in the time available.
7. **Stronger existing research and engagement networks: Achieved.** Two commissions grew out of existing networks. The added value from SAFEDI was the opportunity to test out ideas in practice. In the research group, researchers worked more closely than they had before; overcame preconceptions about one another; bonded more as colleagues; and improved understanding of funding, policy, and community engagement.
8. **New research and engagement networks reached: Well achieved.** Two commissions plugged into wider networks of artists, practitioners, programmers, and curators; two arts partners are now in touch to discuss a possible new national consortium for the visual arts sector; and the research group have secured funding to grow the new Social Art Inclusion Lab (SAIL) network.
9. **Raised profile of social art practice: Achieved.** Arts partners already on the way to more inclusive policies were most open to what social art could uniquely offer and three want to continue working with the artists. One significantly changed their engagement and commissioning practice; one their outlook on internal infrastructure and commissioning potential; and one on more accessible policy making. Two partners are including their commissions in National Portfolio Organisation applications.

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## Additional unforeseen outcomes included

*“A highlight for me was talking with our researcher. She had such a deep willingness to attend to this project and our work in general. It was really nice just to be seen in a different way. We don’t normally get that level of attention.”*

Sarah Dixon, WAAS

### Participants / collaborators who have been marginalised

- Greater independence and a better knowledge of local resources and places for women newly arriving in the country
- New friends made across cultures for women newly arriving in the country

### Artists

- Increased profile, status, and experience for future work for newly commissioned artists
- More formal approaches to taking care of and advocating for their health and wellbeing, especially for artists living in with disabilities and long term health conditions
- Adaptable models of transferable activity that can be promoted to or commissioned by other arts organisations
- Feeling part of something bigger
- More confidence in their practice because of recognition of the value of their work in an academic context
- Experience of new types of arts practice
- New experience of working in partnership, especially with visual art venues

- Potential new commissions and future work with their partners
- Better knowledge of and confidence in arts production skills; and understanding the role and value of involving producers
- Feeling less alone

### Arts Organisations

- New staff voices informing internal inclusion
- Proof of more creative ways to identify access barriers by comparing arts commission results to formal access audits

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**Longer term outcomes and impact** have also started to grow.

### **Stronger Advocacy**

- The Human Memorial commission feeds directly into the Racial Equality Commission findings for Sheffield City Council because of the ideas now tested out in practice.
- Follow-on research network SAIL will widen its membership and host symposia.
- SAFEDI's lead partners have met with Arts Council England to discuss how to improve the visual arts sector.
- Documentation exists for reference across Axis, Social Art Network, Social Art Library; SAFEDI and artist's websites.

### **More Inclusive and Representative Decision Making**

- Sheffield City Council's public art commissioning is now a co-constructed process, making art with and for Sheffield.
- The Baltic leadership team will review the en-SHRINE commission and meet with artists to update access policy.
- The research group can create more inclusive funding applications, following a collaborative not individual approach, and to be responsive not prescriptive.

### **More Inclusive Policies**

- This is work in progress. Sheffield, the Baltic, and several small arts organisations are changing their positions because of the commissions. Axis is now sharing policies online and using the commissioning guidelines as standard.

### **More diverse and inclusive programming**

- Commissioning and procurement documents in Sheffield have been reviewed for bias and recommendations made to encourage a more diverse range of artists, in addition to their new co-constructed approach to public art.

### **More representative collections**

- Changes in engagement and commissioning at Sheffield will lead to a more representative public art collection.
- The Baltic diversified their archive collection by accessioning a small paper sculpture from the en-SHRINE commission as a reminder of accessible processes.

### **More diverse workplaces**

- Although there are no indications of this yet, though commissions with East Street Arts and the Baltic both have the potential to start these conversations.



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# RECOMMENDATIONS

To support the sector and respond to the findings from the project, these recommendations can help further policies and practice. Context for the recommendations is detailed in the full report.

## ALL PARTIES

1. **Make no assumptions.** Take time to build trust, really ask questions, listen and be open to mistakes and keep shared goals in mind. What might seem obvious to one person, might be revelatory to another.
2. **Invisible conditions are overlooked.** Barriers experienced by people with neurodiversity, struggling mental health, chronic illness, disabilities, and experience of trauma affected every aspect of SAFEDI perhaps more than any other. Mental health and anxiety are protected within the disabilities section of the 2010 Equalities Act, yet the pressure to be competitive and work quickly amplify anxiety, cut out opportunities to think clearly, recharge, process effectively, and do the best work possible. More must be done across the sector to champion wellbeing and change the way work is delivered so it supports the mental and physical health of those working in it, as well as the people we want to see more represented in our arts communities.
3. **Ask people you work with how they prefer to communicate** and if there is anything you can do to help them be at their best. This improves access for everyone, regardless of what they do or don't disclose about themselves.

4. **Do ask if people have access needs and invite them to revisit the conversation at any time.** It's hard to disclose personal information before trust builds but people may need later.
5. **Don't ask people to revisit trauma.** Commissions showed what excluded people want is to make things better, look to the future, experience joy, and feel valued. Focus on what can change, rather than what's gone wrong in the past.

## UNIVERSITIES

1. **Improve safeguarding and ethical protocol to be more accessible.** Anything required for community engagement and public engagement should be accessible for, and developed in consultation with, those it aims to reach. Look to existing good practice with specialist charities who have already done the work.
2. **Create systems that support non-hierarchical collaboration.** Engagement beyond academia is changing, with fewer leader-recipient relationships; and more facilitator-collaborator relationships. Protocol needs to flex to better support equality, diversity, and inclusion.

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## FUNDERS

1. **Invest in development grants** so new partners can spend time unpicking assumptions, asking questions and listening / learning, and building trust *before* creating plans for delivery. The output from such funding should be an action plan for delivery, rather than measures of delivery itself.
2. **Ask specialists to carry out a review of unsuccessful applications** make recommendations for removing bias and barriers which may be excluding the people you want to attract.
3. **Explore ways to improve the culture of competitive over-commitment in applications**, which affects mental and physical health of those who need to work slowly and deeply rather than broadly and quickly – as is often the case for people who have experience exclusion, bias, trauma or mental, physical, or developmental conditions.
4. **Encourage your sector to make safeguarding and ethical protocol accessible.** At present the formality of these systems can exclude the very people they are intended to protect. An over reliance on form filling as the preferred communication format adds to the problem of exclusion. As a minimum, invite applications in writing, audio, or video. Application open days can be more accessible for those who tend to be under-represented.
5. **Arts funding needs to remove systematic bias against social art practice to ensure better diversity of artists and audiences.** Arts funding is structured according to categories of artist (assumed to be included in arts organisations, and an active leader in delivering art) or communities / audiences / participants (assumed to be consumers of art). Social art sits in the blending of these categories. Social artists are often from excluded communities and feel excluded from arts organisations. They don't deliver 'to' but work unhierarchically 'with'. Often their communities are other excluded creatives. This blended, flat, inclusive model doesn't fit current funding structures which fund, commission, monitor, count and report with categories of artist or audience. As a result, the arts sector is preventing some of the people best placed to encourage excluded communities because of its own systems bias.

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## ARTS ORGANISATIONS

1. **Leadership and governance teams should consider who their work and their policies are for and develop them accordingly.** Most arts organisations have not-for-profit or community interest status and receive public funding, so have a clear obligation to public benefit. Policies need to be reviewed with that public in mind and involved to be as effective as they can.
2. **Whenever excluded people invest their time and emotional energy, always return, and let them know what changed as a result.** Without reassurance their experiences led to change, alienation and exclusion is amplified.
3. **Commission social artists to support internal business development.** Social art is rich in process and can be powerful in supporting infrastructural change. Inviting social artists in to support development can help unstick old patterns, humanise bureaucracy, improve communication by highlighting different ways to share information and depersonalise challenging conversations.
4. **Go to excluded people in *their* spaces to do this work** – be this online or in community environments. If they are not reaching your arts organisation, the barriers preventing that should be removed before you can ask them to help.
5. **Include those who are under-represented in every stage of your policy development,** so they hold weight in decision making stages not just information gathering. Try to create a pool of external representatives so that no single person is expected to represent a whole culture on their own.
6. **Share your policies online, invite feedback, and review regularly.**
7. **Check practice informs policy and vice versa.** Include ground-up practice in policy reviews; and ensure policies are enacted not just documented.
8. **Use accessible language. The word policy was found to be synonymous with control or coercion** among people who have been marginalised. Would commitment, intention or similar be more inclusive?
9. **Use formats that can accessed by different senses or reading / writing levels.** Just as interpretative text, website or journalistic writing can be tested for accessibility, could any of those standards be used to test your policies? Can it be shared through a range of multisensory formats?

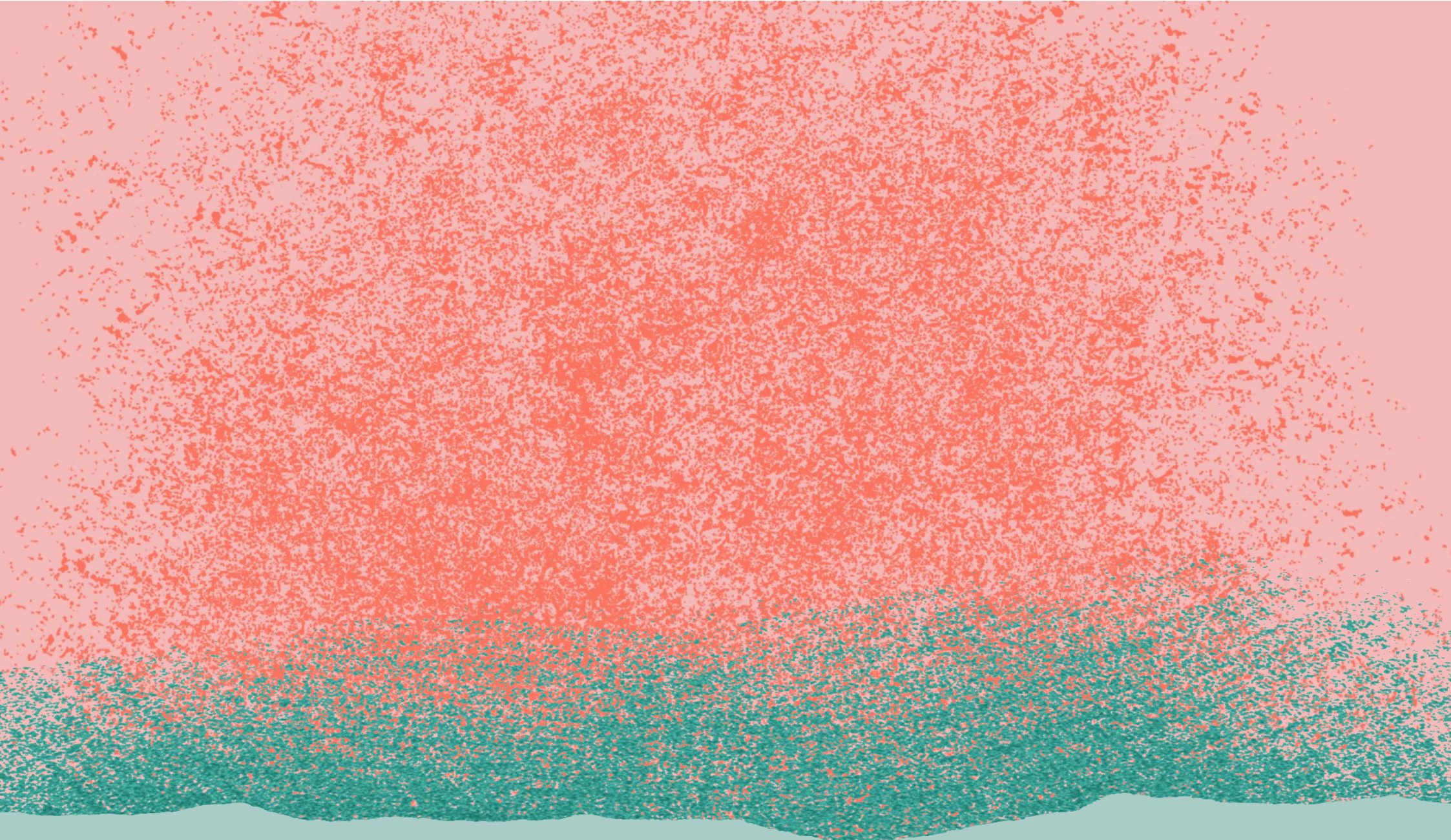
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## ARTISTS & COMMUNITIES

1. **Create your own policies, commitments or values for equality, diversity, and inclusion.** Through this process several artists / collectives realised they have not stopped to take stock of what they want to offer and protect for themselves and others. This will help those who have been marginalised be stronger advocates for themselves and each other; build more resilient individual or collective groups, practices, or businesses; and provide useful experience to take into other organisations with

you. It may also challenge you to identify where you might make assumptions just as others may make them about something you have personally experienced.

2. **Be your own advocate when you feel safe to do so.** Others don't know what they need to ask you precisely because of the barriers in the way, so when you can - say what you need to when you need to in the ways you want to and highlight bias or barriers when the conditions feel right.



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