

CRAFT EQUITY

Craft Equity year end report

Craft Equity's Instagram account shared stories of personal experiences of inequity, harassment, and discrimination in the craft field. It operated for one year, from May 2021 to May 2022.

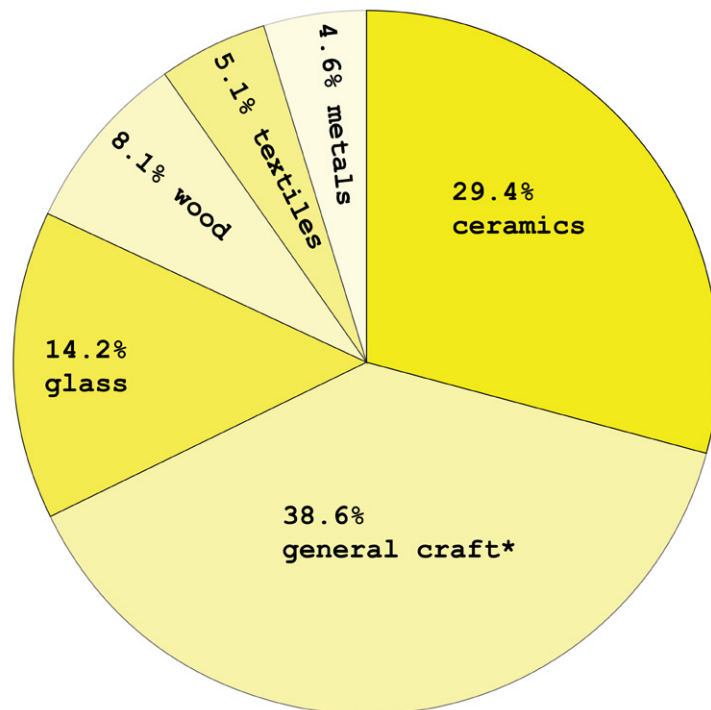
This report outlines the thinking of the Craft Equity organizing team throughout the project, makes observations about the types of stories we heard, and provides a record of our experience for future activists who might pursue similar projects. This document was written collectively, and all quotes are from individual members of the Craft Equity organizing team.

Data

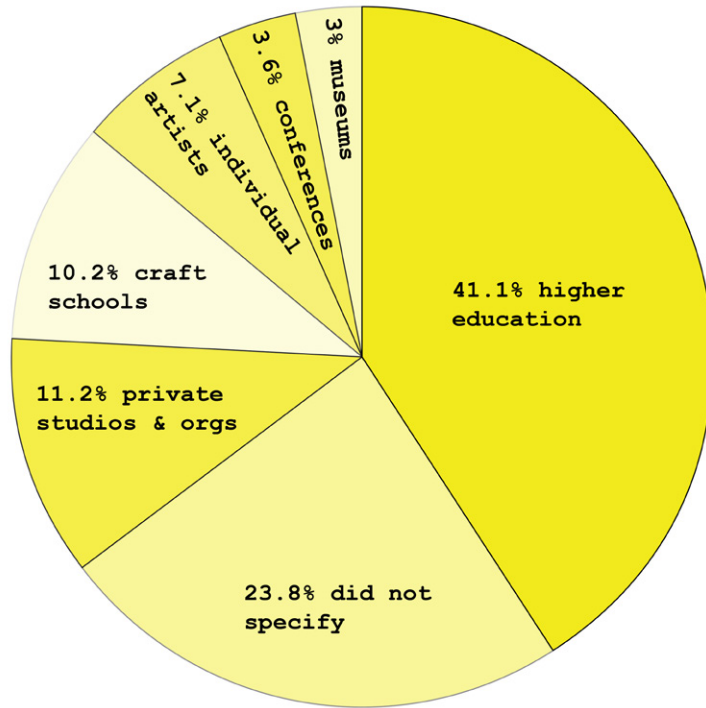
The data used in this report comes from our Instagram account, and is based on individual stories that were shared with us anonymously by the community. At the termination of this project the instagram account had 6012 'followers'. The following data and interpretation is derived from the 197 submissions to Craft Equity's original form, and does not include data from the second form which requested stories of support and inclusion.

This data paints a troubling narrative about the types of issues and abuses that are being upheld within the professional craft and education field.

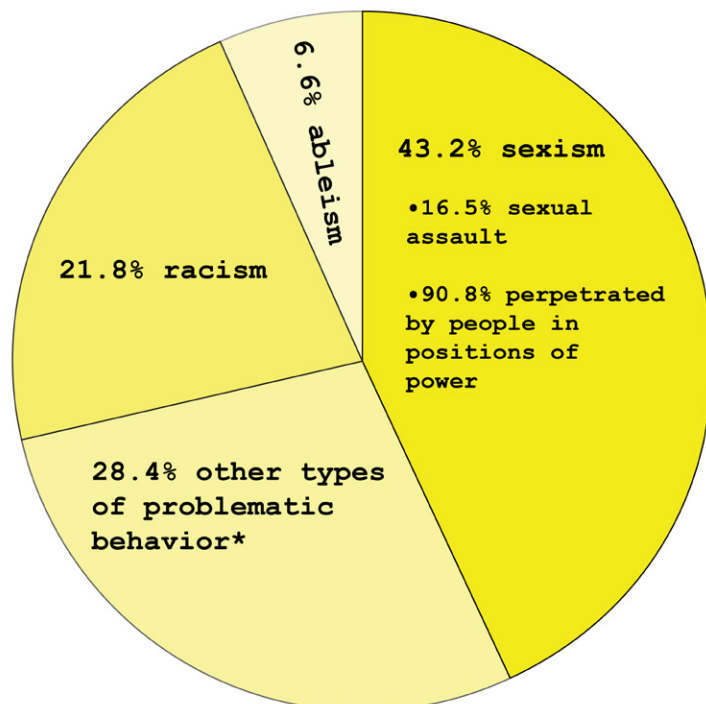
However, we acknowledge that this is a very specific and subjective snapshot of these experiences; this account focuses on issues of misogyny and gender-based discrimination, sexual assault, racism, and ableism and does not presume to give a full picture of the intersectional and systemic problems that we as a community face. The following data and interpretation is derived from the 197 submissions to Craft Equity's original form, and does not include data from the second form, requesting stories of support and inclusion. Looking at a data set of 197 responses: 29.4% were about the ceramics field, 14.2% were about the glass field, 8.1% were about the wood field, 5.1% were about the textile field, and 4.6% were about the metals field.



*We also had another 38.6% of stories from printmakers, conservators, paper artists, sculptors, painters, life drawing, performance, design technology, plus general attitudes and toxicity in the craft field more widely. Within these 197 posts: 41.1% were concerning higher education, 11.2% were concerning privately run studios/organizations, 10.2% were concerning craft schools, 7.1% were concerning individual artists or makers, 3.6% conferences, 3% museums, and 23.8% of submissions did not specify a place.



Out of the many issues that were reported within this data set: 43.2% included accounts of sexism. Out of this 43.2%, 16.5% were direct accounts of sexual assault. Out of this 43.2%, 90.8% were perpetrated by people who were in positions of power 21.8% included accounts of racism and 6.6% included accounts of ableism.



*We also had stories that included accounts of: emotional coercion, abuse of power, class discrimination, toxic masculinity, low wage, boys club attitudes, gender pay gaps, pregnancy discrimination, blackmail, gatekeeping, toxic environments, threats to career, mismanagement, lack of institutional accountability, fear of speaking out, violations of labor regulation, inaccessible working conditions, bullying, favoritism, unwarranted arrest, transphobia, unsafe working environments, grooming, ageism, antisemitism.

Findings and observations

Most of the reports submitted occurred in the 2010s, which was the largest category of recent years. We infer that this has something to do with the age of the user demographics of Instagram, which we are aware heavily influences the data set.

When looking at the data compiled from our 197 posts, we can surmise that the craft field suffers from a pervading culture of sexual harassment and general toxicity and discrimination. This is underpinned by a Boys Club attitude that largely favors white, well educated cis-men and, at times, actively works against those with marginalized identities and women. Incidents reported ranged from innuendo and inappropriate banter to violent assault. There were also numerous examples of threats to career, bullying, and general abuse of power.

Craft Equity feels it is important to note that while a high proportion of the sexual abuse seems to come from within larger institutions, the accounts were mostly about incidents directed at a single individual and from people in positions of power. What is also important to note here is that these were often not reported at the time for fear of jeopardizing their career or other ramifications. When institutions were notified, there was a pervasive lack of institutional accountability or support for the victims, with most if not all accounts being dismissed or ignored by higher management, peers, and colleagues. Very few of those who submitted stories actually named either individuals or institutions in their stories.

We can also assume from this data, that the LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC communities continue to not only be

underrepresented but also suffer significant abuse, gatekeeping, and general tokenism in our craft spaces. There are also problems around classism and financial accessibility to education more broadly, as well as significant barriers to career progression for these groups. This is compounded by a lack of representation and mentorship within our universities and craft schools, where a culture of nepotism, cronyism, and deference to legacy creates a hostile and unsupportive environment for students who are not of the same background or worldview as their teachers.

When gathering these reports, for reasons of anonymity, we did not collect data on the identities or protected characteristics of our participants. This means that we acknowledge that this data is speculative and subjective. Although we cannot independently confirm the accuracy of this self-reported data, we believe that submitters told their stories truthfully. Our own experiences support these narratives. However, this data does not include information about the good work and supportive environments and incredible mentors that we have also experienced and that we know are out there.

While we acknowledge that this data is qualitative in nature, we feel confident it offers a picture of systemic issues and toxic culture that are far too present within our craft field. This report offers this data as a tool for future research and a springboard from which to further identify the intersectional and historical issues that continue to create unsafe environments for artists and students.

We are a group of queer, racially diverse, multi-national craft artists working in each of the traditional craft mediums (glass, metals, ceramics, textiles, and wood). We started Craft Equity because, in 2020 and early 2021, we were seeing craft institutions grapple with inequitable structures either for the first time or more actively. However, they often responded to criticism with quick fixes, performative statements, and not infrequently, silence. We wanted to make the inequities in our field more visible to these organizations and to the communities they serve, so that those communities could use this platform

to hold institutions to account. These individual stories, collected together, show how one person's experience of injustice affects more than that one individual. We hoped that Craft Equity would be a part of making substantial changes to racist, sexist, ableist, and oppressive institutional policies and studio cultures.

"Craft communities have the power to be healing and supportive, but also carry a tendency to be exclusive and sometimes harmful. I've been mocked for my identity; I've seen it happen to others. I've seen performatively progressive spaces hurt the people they attempt to proudly support."
-Craft Equiter

Craft Equity was designed to serve as a centralized resource to share the stories and warnings that have been informally passed between people in craft, making that information available outside of personal social networks in a way that could not be discounted as gossip. We had known that there were problems in this field, but there was no central platform for discussing them, and no recourse if institutional policies failed—through the stories it shared, Craft Equity showed that craft is not always the progressive, safe space we wish it to be. These truth-tellings are necessary first steps in any restorative justice processes that could take place in our field.

"I feel like the biggest lie told in equity conversations is that we're all alone in this struggle." -Craft Equiter

Our most direct goal was to give people who have experienced harm a place to tell their stories, to help with healing and provide community support.

What we did

Craft Equity asked people to submit their stories through a google form. These stories were posted to the Instagram account as written, and submitters remained anonymous unless they expressly identified themselves in the post or the comments. The Craft Equity organizing team believes that people who have been harmed should be heard and believed, and we did not take independent steps to corroborate the information we received.

We were inspired by the work of the instagram feed @changethemuseum. Craft Equity was modeled on its account and submissions structure, although Craft Equity diverges from @changethemuseum in significant ways which will be discussed further in this report.

The Instagram account is accompanied by a website, craftequity.org. The website lists resources for submitters' legal, social, and therapeutic needs, in recognition of the fact that telling your story can be activating or re-traumatizing. The Craft Equity team's pro bono legal representation, the New York-based [Crumiller firm](#), offered to represent on a contingency basis any submitters who faced legal action as a result of their submissions, and also offered to facilitate anonymous communication between a submitter and any institution where they had experienced harm. Additionally, we consulted with Susan Crumiller on many issues of safety (both ours and that of submitters) and potential liability. Her involvement gave us much-needed support and expertise; she put things in perspective for us, offered a sounding board, and often eased our fears.

As we evolved the project, the website came to contain a FAQ section that answers common questions about the Craft Equity project and its organizing team. It also records a set of Community Guidelines that requested kind, constructive, responsible behavior from people interacting with the account.

In addition to posting submitters' stories, the Craft Equity team corresponded with submitters, moderated comments, and responded to community critique. We supported, as much as we were able to, submitters who asked for our help through Instagram DMs or over email. We responded to community members seeking clarification, resources, or a listening ear.

Early in 2022, we switched from the original Craft Equity google form to a new form that asked submitters for stories of support and inclusion in the craft field. We made this shift for two reasons. First, over December and January we experienced a few crisis-level situations with individuals that caused us deep concern about our capacity to meaningfully intervene and our own legal liability.

Secondly, the tone shift in the Instagram comments, and the likelihood of a pile-on for a commenter expressing dissent, was leading some people to DM us with their thoughts because they were afraid to comment with them publicly. This both added labor and, more importantly, deviated significantly from our hopes of community-driven support. This was the tipping point that signaled that the account was no longer functioning in a constructive way.

The switch to the new form was made with the intent of initiating a new phase for the account, leading up to its planned dormancy, that would allow positive stories to surface. We wanted the last months of the feed to show examples of change and accountability in our fields in order to illustrate possible paths to restorative justice. While some stories did come through, the general response we received (through both instagram DMs as well as in the new form) was negative, citing a desire for the original model to be reinstated or a desire for both forms to operate simultaneously. This change to positive stories was not well met and the account's user engagement seemed to drop off significantly, as witnessed by the number of story submissions, the number of instagram "likes," and the amount of comments and DMs.

What we hoped

We hoped that Craft Equity would shed light on very real equity issues that exist within a field we tend to view as progressive. We hoped that this project would make a community of support for those who had been dismissed and abused by giving them a space where they would be believed and validated. We hoped to bring their stories to a larger audience and educate those who were less aware of craft's longstanding issues of racism, classism, gender discrimination, and anti-queer and ableist policies.

"The biggest thing I think I hoped it would make was a community and support for those who had previously been dismissed and abused. Ideally it could also be used to hold people and institutions accountable, but also educate the community and pull into the light issues that have too long been ignored." -Craft Equiter

We hoped that this vital awareness would lead people to demand that institutions hold themselves to their equity statements, if they had them, and to pressure those institutions who had not addressed equity to do so. Many institutions let their policies lie unexamined, allowing abuse to continue: abusers are, to some extent, a symptom of those inequitable policies and inadequate support for BIPOC, queer, and disabled people. Even well-meaning institutions and administrators fall short of their stated goals, using public statements to shield themselves from meaningful action. Craft Equity hoped to pressure institutions into making good on their promises.

"I wanted craft artists to feel that they had some organizing power in a field that is diverse and diffused—that together, we could pressure our institutions to do better. I hoped that people following the account would find each other in the comments and work together to demand change." -Craft Equitter

Organizations that bring in new and diverse communities should devote time and resources to supporting those individuals. We hoped that the stories told through Craft Equity would signal policy shifts and new financial and budgetary priorities to those in leadership at institutions. We also hoped to connect the people whom those organizations serve so that they could organize to demand those shifts, working together toward collective change.

What happened

Although we conceived of Craft Equity through thinking about institutional change, we know that craft is a large field: craft is practiced in educational and curatorial institutions, small workshops, individual studios, backyards, and living rooms. The craft field prides itself on this horizontal, decentralized method of transmitting knowledge. Although not all craft education works that way (there is significant gatekeeping around craft programs in academic institutions), when knowledge transmission is informal, that can be both a virtue and a hindrance. While the informal relationships between mentors and mentees, or

artists and apprentices, can be deep and beautiful, they can also be problematic. There are few systems for accountability or restorative justice when these relationships involve discrimination, harassment, or abuse. We intentionally cast a wide net for stories, accepting stories from museums, schools, community workshops, fabrication studios, and solo practitioners, among other sites in the craft field.

In the beginning of the project, we received stories about all these places. We were cheered to see people receive the words of support they needed from commenters who validated the submitters' experiences in various craft organizations. But as the account grew, more and more of the submitted stories focused not on institutional policy deficits, but on interpersonal conflict. Most stories concerned small operations without written policies about equity or one-on-one harmful situations. As this gradual shift from the institutional to the personal was happening, the account steadily gained followers. With many more commenters interacting with the account, it became more difficult for a commenter to state an opposing point of view, as that commenter would be criticized by a large group of others. Conversations were stifled. Some followers expressed in DMs that they felt afraid to participate in the comments. This combination of stories aimed at individual people and a larger audience ready to condemn them made the platform punitive. We also received an increase in threats and began to worry about our own anonymity and safety. We were out of our depth with what was unfolding on our account and in our DMs.

"It had become clear by then that the Instagram platform had already given things much more of a personal and individualized tendency. While there were undoubtedly connections made and people called out, I think the nature of Instagram, especially as the following grew, meant that the community support and organizing that we'd hoped to encourage was less prevalent." -Craft Equiter

Our decision to let the project go dormant after one year is due to the change in tone on the Instagram account. We have come to believe that an account of this size is not capable of maintaining careful and supportive dialogue. In some cases, harm has resulted from conversations on the platform, and we are unwilling to risk any more damage.

Of the posts that did address institutional inequity, very few posters felt comfortable directly naming the institution. Many submitters feared retaliation and feared for their own anonymity and safety. Of the posts that did name institutions, we received a range of responses. Some institutions listened and wrote back thoughtfully. Some made actionable moves towards addressing inequity. Some became defensive. In one case, an administrator tried to excuse an abuser's behavior as nothing more than frat boy behavior.

"We know for a fact that more stories are out there and that people are still screwing up their courage to tell their stories and to take significant risks. I'm sorry the project has not gone on longer to accommodate them." Craft Equiter

Submitters to Craft Equity bravely told their stories at significant risk to themselves, their reputations, and their careers. We know that there are many stories yet to be told.

How we were surprised and challenged

For our team, this has been an intense project that offered many challenges. We would like to offer some of our story as a record of the project, in the hopes that our experiences and struggles might inform the future work of any activists who pick up the Craft Equity torch.

A key challenge was the time commitment required by the Instagram account. We rotated week-long shifts as the person to be "on" during that period. That person was responsible for posting submitted stories, making Instagram stories, moderating comments, responding to DMs, and checking email. While there was always one team member on duty, issues frequently arose that required the whole group to discuss—we had a robust group chat and met

often on zoom to put our heads together and compose responses to requests or criticism.

"It was challenging not to respond and comment back to commenters. I didn't always agree personally to some people's point of view. But we worked as a group to talk through and make decisions not based on our own bias, but rather stay sensitive to our readers' thought process."

-Craft Equiter

Because there are no natural limits to the hours we were expected to be on Instagram, these tasks were required relatively constantly, and at any time of day and over holidays. We took our responsibility to our community seriously, and we did not respond to criticism or requests for help until several team members could reach consensus. This was frustrating for people looking for a more immediate reaction, and it took a lot of our time, but we felt it was our responsibility to work together as a team to create the most brave, productive, and healing online space that we could. Even so, it could be intensely emotional, and we lacked boundaries to keep that energy in check. It was sometimes difficult not to respond to misinformation about us or cruel speech, either in the comments or directly to us, with immediate emotion. This intensity was magnified by the sometimes virulent criticism we received, as well as threats of legal action and threats of doxxing, violence, and rape.

"There were many challenging parts. There was hate speech directed at us, there were threats. Those moments stick with me. I don't think people realize that we had to be ON 24/7, sometimes fielding issues unfolding on or with our account through the night and even on holidays. We never responded to anything lightly."

-Craft Equiter

Our most fraught interactions happened over DM, where people in crisis would ask us for help. We did our best to suggest legal, social work, and therapeutic resources that could help people in

their areas. But we did not have the training necessary to operate what became a de facto crisis line, and we were concerned that our inexperience and lack of knowledge would cause us to do more harm than good.

We also struggled to devise a coherent policy for comment moderation and the limits of our engagement. At the beginning of the project we were committed to a hands-off moderation policy, wanting to allow conversations to develop without our own personal points of view. We always deleted harmful or offensive comments, but we realized that the tone of the conversation was chilled by commenters who, while not offensive, nonetheless behaved aggressively. We saw speculative comments about the identity of persons described in the stories and personal jibes to other commenters that showed the kind of harassment that this project was designed to speak out against. In response, we developed three community guidelines—Be Kind, Don't Speculate, and Be Constructive. These were outlined in detail on our website, posted to Instagram, and highlighted in Instagram stories. However, in the time it took for us to develop these, community members lost faith that the moderators could not maintain a nuanced and thoughtful space on social media.

We tried to keep our communication methods transparent. At the start of the project we would DM commenters who asked for clarification or expressed criticism in the comments. Those DM conversations often became unproductive and diverged from our hopes for the account. In order to keep the project on track and hold our boundaries, we consistently referred back to our community guidelines to help guide our behavior.

"Looking back, by not engaging more in the beginning, people saw us as a kind of bogeyman, without accountability. If I had to do it over again, I would advocate for more direct engagement at the outset, because I no longer think there is such a thing as neutrality. By leaving some comments up, a chill could be put over a conversation that could have been

fruitful. The fraught encounters that were full of misinformation probably did more damage than we thought they did at the time. We were meeting weekly, trying to thread, with care and grace, what felt like an impossible needle.” -Craft Equiter

The team was surprised by how the Instagram community expected us to behave and what assumptions were made about our identity, time availability, and expertise, despite numerous occasions and locations where these details were explained. We fielded questions about our identity as best we could while maintaining our anonymity, but many people did not find our answers satisfactory. This might be the nature of anonymity on the internet: that it is easier to feel entitled to an anonymous service than to an individual person's time, or that people who are not visible online are assumed to be hiding for malicious reasons. We recognize that a power dynamic is created when not everyone has the privilege of anonymity. Our hope was that we could create a culture in which people felt safe enough to take risks in discussions and that others would give them the benefit of the doubt and respond generously. However, we discovered that a few vocal and prickly commenters can quickly sour discussions made in good faith. Our mistake was that we did not moderate more actively at the outset to foster the culture that we wanted.

“One fascinating experience, as anonymous organizers who are race-and-gender diverse, was how people perceived us based on our interactions. When we were enforcing moderation or announcing community guidelines, several commenters would refer to us as white men, presumably because we were exercising power in that moment. When we posted stories that highlighted harmful behavior by BIPOC people in the craft field, commenters assumed that we were white women. When we posted a story about sexual assault, we received gendered rape threats. These experiences have made me more aware of the too-easy correlations we make between

someone's subject position and their worldview." -Craft Equiter

How we were rewarded

Organizing Craft Equity has been rewarding in several ways, the most primary of which has been watching the online community react to stories of harm with encouragement and solidarity. Story submitters have often responded with gratitude to the belief and support they receive from commenters, both in the comments and privately to us. Many have thanked commenters for their kindness or thanked us for the opportunity to tell their stories, saying that they felt relieved of a burden just by saying what happened to them. Although we did seek to hold offenders to account, the majority of submitters were only looking to speak their experiences out loud and not take the issue any further. Some of these stories led to action, but most of them did not, and we do not consider that a failure. All submitters were in different stages of processing trauma.

"I thought Craft Equity would be a space for community building and working towards collective change. In so many instances, this did happen. There was some really rad stuff that happened through this account."
-Craft Equiter

When stories did lead to action, it was rewarding to see Craft Equity play a part in holding people to account. In a few cases, commenters organized themselves to demand policy changes or get abusers removed from institutions. Students at Edinboro University in Pennsylvania leveraged a Craft Equity post to demand that a sudden hike in student fees be addressed fairly by the school. In the comments of a post about a glass instructor at Wheaton Arts who had sexually harrassed students and residents, many commenters said that they had also been sexually harrassed by that instructor. They filed complaints with the organization, and the instructor departed within months. We also personally witnessed administrators in real life taking the account seriously, bringing these concerns to their own institutions.

As the Craft Equity organizing team, another big reward was the experience of working together

closely on this project. This project has required us to support each other and talk things through exhaustively. We did not always agree on the best course of action, but we found ways to make choices we could all live with. We were inspired by each other's dedication to increasing equity in craft, and we saw our teammates work with care, grace, strength, and humor to support our group as well as the larger community we fostered.

"The most rewarding moments came for working alongside each other. My Co-Craft Equiters are a strong, kind, and inspiring group of individuals who are deeply dedicated to achieving equity in their fields. I have learned so much from each and every one of them." Craft Equiter

Who comes next

This account is now dormant. We are considering new projects that our team might take on together, and we are taking what we've learned here into our individual equity work. We challenge you to do the same. Here we would like to submit some advice, generated from our experience with this project, to new Craft Equiters who might pick up this torch.

Work through institutions, and work against institutions.

Each project launch is going to have to work for the group that's launching it. Prepare as much as you can, but know that you can't predict everything and will need to adjust.

Put boundaries around your availability from the start, and communicate to your community about those boundaries, in order to avoid burning out.

We operated as a team by building consensus. Consider if this is the right method for your team—we found it supportive and collaborative, but it is slow-moving and a significant time investment.

Community projects often require immediate reactions, but equity work is a life-long practice with a skill set we all have to hone over time. Take time for reflection and long-term thinking.

Be careful about social media, which can be toxic. How can Craft Equity's Instagram-specific conversation broaden to include more platforms and voices?

Understand that it is not possible to control what other people say and think and it is sometimes hard to watch differing opinions unfold before your eyes.

We found it helpful to develop clear community guidelines to fall back on when we had differences of opinion. There will most likely be differences of opinion on your team about where to draw the line/s between supporting justified anger, tone policing, and what constitutes trollish behavior.

Not everyone will like what you are trying to do and you need to be ok with that.

Get yourself good legal counsel! This should not be a luxury for activists— if you are not a lawyer, you should not expect yourself to be. Reach out to people with expertise.

Make in-community work your priority. Organizing around local issues and institutions is often the most effective.

Thank you

We would like to thank everyone here for participating in these urgent and necessary conversations about equity in craft.

We are grateful to all who have followed this account and acknowledged the bravery of people sharing their stories. Commenters have supported those stories, and supported each other, in moving and generous ways. Thank you to those who gave their time to talk respectfully and informatively to strangers on the internet, and thank you to those who asked questions in a spirit of honest inquiry.

We are inspired by much that we have seen here. It has not been perfect, but it has been full of moments of appreciation and learning. We come out of this with a deeper love for the communities of practice we have dedicated ourselves to: the level of engagement with this account shows how much these communities care about equity.

Although we are letting this account go dormant, we hope that even in its rest, it serves as motivation for addressing inequity in craft.