



# National Association for Music Education

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Access  
Current State Study

Findings & Recommendations Report

October 2019

# Current State Study Executive Summary

---

Given the mission-driven nature of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), the organization is uniquely positioned to champion diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA). The potential for impact, on both music educators and their students, is significant.

This Current State Study, conducted by Cook Ross, identifies enablers and barriers to DEIA at NAfME. Taken together with the Summary of Findings, these enablers and barriers represent the current state of DEIA within the Association as a whole.

Cook Ross has also made recommendations for helping NAfME improve DEIA. Cook Ross recommends the organization focus interventions on critical pain points to maximize early wins, create the foundation for a sustained DEIA strategy, and develop metrics for measurement that inform progress. Select recommendations, chosen for both feasibility and potential for impact, are included in this Executive Summary. A more comprehensive list of recommendations is included in the full report.

Integration of DEIA across NAfME will advance the mission of providing music education for all and will differentiate the organization in the profession. Intentional DEIA efforts have the potential to make NAfME the organization of choice among music educators and their students across the country.

# Enablers

---

- Members generally are encouraged by NAFME's recent efforts towards DEIA, specifically the investment in this study. Many acknowledged and appreciated the shift in national programming over the past few years to prioritize DEIA.
- There is a shared understanding and agreement from many members that prioritizing DEIA will bring value to NAFME, ranging from increased membership to the benefits that come with embracing new, diverse music offerings.
- Members care deeply about DEIA and how they can be more intentional about their teaching methods and curriculum in the classroom, and with their students.
- NAFME's reputation and position in the profession provides a platform to impact DEIA in music education nationwide.
- NAFME is known and well-respected for its advocacy at the national, state, and local levels. There is a palpable amount of energy calling for DEIA to be placed at the forefront of the policies NAFME supports.
- In the context of advocacy, DEIA can be framed as a "non-partisan" priority. While it certainly can be thought of as political -- diversity, equity, inclusion, and access are cultural values educators feel they can get behind to better support their students.
- Music is known to many as a "carrier of the culture." As such, this provides a unique platform for which to enhance cultural awareness, celebrate diversity, and build bridges across difference.
- Given the mission-driven nature of the organization, NAFME members are generally motivated by "doing good" and are service-oriented. DEIA can be positioned so educators understand more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible policies and programs aimed to provide and strengthen music education for *all* students.
- DEIA has the potential to be a strong brand differentiator for NAFME in the music education profession.
- NAFME's federated/local autonomy structure provides opportunities for the national organization to trickle down DEIA support, guidance, and advisory to music educators at the local level.

# Barriers

---

- NAFME lacks clear organization definitions for diversity, equity, inclusion, and access. Stakeholders do not understand the full meanings of these terms or how they relate to NAFME.
- Many members are discouraged by the lack of visible diversity on NAFME's Board and other prominent leadership positions. The lack of visible diversity is believed to contradict NAFME's stated commitment to DEIA and, as a consequence, dilutes trust in the organization.
- Participants in this study reported having experienced and overheard racist and sexist remarks, contributing to an organizational culture of exclusion.
- NAFME leadership at board, national, and state levels are not aligned to the value DEIA can bring to the organization.
- Many leaders are believed to currently lack the cultural competence and inclusive leadership behaviors to carry DEIA work forward.
- NAFME's federated/local autonomy structure compromises the efficacy of national programs and initiatives at the state level; the structure impacts National's ability to regulate and hold state associations accountable to DEIA and how they choose to operationalize NAFME's mission, vision, and values.
- The high rate of volunteer turnover within leadership positions results in the cycling of incoming, new leadership who are unprepared in their decision-making due to insufficient institutional knowledge transfer and context.
- There are significant operational challenges (e.g., communication, governance, decision-making, etc.) that exist between the NAFME Board and the national office staff that prevent efficiency, collaboration, and consistency.
- Aligning stakeholder groups is a challenge for NAFME. As a complex, multifaceted membership organization, diverse groups emerge in different regions, teaching positions, and music specialties; members often share competing and conflicting priorities, making agreement and alignment challenging.
- Current organizational resources do not appear to be able to support large scale, sustainable DEIA efforts towards culture change.
- Many music educators are hesitant to embrace diverse music curriculum and programming beyond Western European canon. NAFME members who do try to include different music offerings into their curriculum report having a hard time finding diverse composers.
- Communication channels between members, the state association, and NAFME National are insufficient to carry DEIA content.

# Barriers

---

- Volunteer turnover of individuals who sit on committees is a pervasive issue that disrupts progress and advancement on DEIA programs and initiatives already in flight.
- Throughout the profession, music teachers are overstretched and overtaxed. Many do not have free time to devote to a volunteer organization. These barriers often lead to a single type of NAFME volunteer and exclude music educators who do not have the resources or administrative support to join and volunteer.
- Financial barriers prevent NAFME members from engaging in, and even joining, the organization. Members report the cost of NAFME membership, events, and programs participation present a hurdle that many members with low socio-economic status, cannot overcome. When music educators are unable to participate, that often leaves their students out as well.
- NAFME has not fully embraced and included collegiate members. College students currently do not have the right to vote and are not allowed to serve on the National Executive Board, limiting their ability to have their voices heard.
- NAFME lacks a well-known and understood brand identity as it relates to DEIA. 25% of non-member questionnaire respondents agree that NAFME promotes diversity in the Association and profession and 32% agree that NAFME advocates for DEIA.
- The music education profession has historically prioritized band and orchestra. Members report this singular “old school” focus creates defensiveness and tension when other music genres are offered to students or promoted within NAFME.
- Many members report that NAFME has a reputation of being an “old boys club,” with an elite culture and worldview that is resistant to change. “Traditions” in the music education profession are believed to limit DEIA progress.
- Music auditions and competitions are inherently biased and exclusionary. As a result, one’s sense of belonging to the music profession can diminish over time.
- Different school districts struggle with varied DEIA issues, ranging from lack of quality instruments to no music programs at all. This range of DEIA priorities makes guidance and support from the national level challenging.
- Active, lapsed, and non-members report financial barriers being a challenge to accessing equitable music education. If students cannot afford quality instruments, private lessons, or transportation to competitions, they are often placed at a disadvantage.
- Historical systems of oppression (including, but not limited to racism, sexism, and ableism) have created systemic barriers to DEIA in music education and have prevented diverse musicians, educators and composers from gaining visibility. These historical systems have created additional challenges to NAFME DEIA efforts.

# Summary of Recommendations

## Leadership

Define the terms diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, and clarify what these terms mean in NAFME's specific organizational context.

---

Develop NAFME's DEIA value proposition and align leadership around it.

---

Revise NAFME's position statements to highlight DEIA and ensure consistency.

---

Revise the Government Bylaw to allow Board members outside of the current National Executive Board (NEB) composition. Consider appointing members that have not historically been represented on the NEB, who represent demographics of membership trends, and/or who represent what the Board hopes future member demographics will look like.

---

Define NAFME-specific inclusive leadership behaviors and create a plan to hold leaders accountable.

---

Create a DEIA Toolkit or "handbook" specifically for NAFME division and state leaders to support the operationalization of DEIA at the regional and state levels.

---

Expand NAFME's resources and infrastructure to support and implement large-scale, sustainable DEIA efforts throughout the organization.

---

Clarify and strengthen selection criteria for national and state leadership positions. Create candidate review templates to mitigate bias when Nominating Committees review candidates for Society and Council positions and National and Division Presidents-Elect.

---

# Summary of Recommendations

## Culture

Share the Executive Summary, DEIA definitions, and the DEIA value statement with members after first socializing with NAFME leadership.

Formally partner with the Institute for Composer Diversity and heavily promote the Composer Diversity Database. Work with the states to add these diverse songs to the solo and ensemble lists at auditions and competitions.

Strengthen current DEIA professional development/training opportunities and identify new ones for both members, and non-members.

Create a DEIA thematic campaign that's clever, wide-reaching, and well resourced that compliments and promotes the forthcoming DEIA strategy.

Create NAFME Affinity Groups to provide a space where historically marginalized groups can connect, feel safe and support one another. Ensure all groups are open and accepting to all NAFME members, so knowledge sharing and allyship can thrive.

Capture and share DEIA best practices between the states by hosting a quarterly webinar featuring 2-3 music educators who focus on DEIA efforts at the state level. Invite others to share lessons learned after asking the panelists questions.

Strengthen advocacy resources to outline the benefits of music education and the need for all students to have equitable access to those opportunities. Promote these updated resources to members and explicitly link them to DEIA.

Create DEIA resources for music educators to embed DEIA in their teaching style and curriculum. Tailor resources to account for differences in elementary, secondary and higher education classrooms.

Prioritize DEIA in NAFME-sponsored honor ensembles and auditions by taking steps to mitigate bias, ensure accessibility accommodations, and expand the music genres and song lists allowed.

# Summary of Recommendations

## Member Recruitment

Revise NAFME's membership fee structure to reflect an alternative flexible pay structure or sliding scale based on each individual member's self reported salary.

---

Expand NAFME's Registration Fee Adjustments policy (I.I.013) to include people who report needing financial support.

---

Improve NAFME's outreach strategies to recruit diverse potential members and supporters.

---

Create partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic, Native American, and other non-predominantly white institutions to raise NAFME's visibility on these campuses with faculty, staff, and students.

---

Embed DEIA into NAFME's marketing and branding efforts. Create a sustainable multi-year plan to improve DEIA in recruitment and marketing materials.

---

Create a National resource to pass on to state leaders around how to authentically and effectively recruit diverse new members.

---

Expand opportunities for NAFME to "open up its doors" to non-members by making some resources or professional development opportunities accessible.

---

Change the policies so that collegiate members can vote and hold elective office.

---



# Summary of Recommendations

---

## Music Education Marketplace

Create a visible and easy-to-navigate separate DEIA page and/or tab on the website linking to NAFME DEIA updates and resources.

---

Create a strategy to intentionally focus on supporting teachers and students living with disabilities. Explore partnerships with organizations with expertise here.

---

Create a NAFME-sponsored award that recognizes select music educators (that don't have to be NAFME members) doing exceptional DEIA work in music education.

---

Expand NAFME's strategic partnerships in-and-outside the music education marketplace to bring equity into the forefront.

---

Continue to award funding for policy and pedagogical research around DEIA in music education through NAFME's SRME Research Grant and NAFME's Designated Research Fund.

---

Offer dedicated DEIA grants for teachers and students to create initiatives that improve access to quality music education. Eliminate the red tape of having to be a NAFME member for eligibility.

---

Identify and partner with a music industry artist that has name recognition and has a skillset that goes beyond the "traditional" big three (band, orchestra, choir).

---



## Cook Ross

8515 Georgia Avenue, Suite 800  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

301.565.4035

[LookingForAnswers@cookross.com](mailto:LookingForAnswers@cookross.com)