MiT | **Ad Hoc Committee on Arts, Culture, and DEI**

Report and Recommendations

April 21, 2022

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Dear Provost Barnhart,

In April 2021, then-Provost Marty Schmidt charged the **Ad Hoc Committee on Arts, Culture, and DEI**, and asked that we serve as its co-chairs. Today, we are pleased to submit the committee's final recommendations.

The impetus for the committee sprang from the national turmoil over race, discrimination, and violence that came to a head in the summer of 2020, following the killings of George Floyd and many others. The committee's charge sprang from the powerful premise that, by paying fresh attention to and investing in certain aspects of the arts, our campus, and our culture, the Institute could help heal, strengthen, and revitalize the MIT community, in all its diversity and dynamism, and pave the way to a future in which everyone at MIT feels that they belong. Both the members of our committee and many others across the community met this concept with broad enthusiasm, enabling the committee to gather and generate dozens of creative ideas.

Our recommendations—and an overarching concern
This report describes how, from this wealth of options, the committee extracted its five final recommendations. We hope the Institute will give all of them serious consideration, as they serve a range of different purposes and parts of our community.

However, we are keenly aware that our community is *already* home to many compelling curricular and extracurricular programs, groups, and individual efforts in the arts that speak to and celebrate MIT's diverse cultures—and we know that many of them depend on shoestring budgets or are forced to resort repeatedly to one-off rounds of fundraising.

While this report recommends a set of new actions, we are convinced that an equally powerful step MIT could take in this realm would be to increase funding and other support for these existing efforts. And even as we urge that priority be given to hiring *more* faculty of color across all disciplines, including the arts, it is vital that the Institute attend to the voices and foster the work of those individuals already here.

Areas requiring further attention
Two elements specified in the original charge do not appear in these pages: a comprehensive audit of all efforts at MIT related to the arts, culture, and DEI, and a strategy for funding.

The committee began its work with a community survey, intended as a first step in the audit process. Unfortunately, the uneven distribution of survey responses made it clear that a thorough, cross-Institute accounting of such activities would require focused, one-on-one outreach to units, groups, and individuals. We continue to believe that conducting such an audit and assessment of impact is a very good idea, not least because enumerating existing programs and efforts is a first step in getting them more support! However, we concluded that it was beyond what we could achieve as a committee of volunteers.

On the question of funding for the recommendations, we would welcome the opportunity to

work with colleagues in Resource Development, once the administration decides on an approved list of recommended projects, to augment funds provided by the Institute.

Finally, on behalf of the entire committee: It was a privilege to be asked to take on this assignment, and the work itself was a pleasure. All of us learned a great deal about MIT's culture, its history, and the current state of the community. We hope that what we learned can spark further exploration and reflection for the community as a whole, and that it will be possible to bring our recommendations to life.

We welcome the chance to answer any questions and to determine the best next steps in terms of sharing our work with the community.

Sincerely,

John H. Dozier, Institute Community and Equity Officer, Office of the Provost
Philip S. Khoury, Associate Provost and Ford International Professor of History

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Committee Members

Co-Chairs

John H. Dozier, Institute Community and Equity Officer, Office of the Provost

Philip S. Khoury, Associate Provost and Ford International Professor of History

Members

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Kelvin Green II '22, Physics and Literature, UA Officer on Diversity (2021–22)

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Caroline A. Jones, Associate Dean for Strategic Initiatives, School of Architecture and Planning, Professor, History Theory Criticism Section, Department of Architecture

Leila W. Kinney, Executive Director of Arts Initiatives and MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology (CAST)

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Alex K. Shalek, Associate Professor, Chemistry; Institute for Medical Engineering and Science (IMES)

Craig Steven Wilder, Barton L. Weller Professor of History

Katherine Higgins, Senior Producer, MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology, *Staff to the Committee*

Process

The Ad Hoc Committee on Arts, Culture, and DEI was first proposed by President L. Rafael Reif in his **July 1, 2020 letter** to the community outlining steps MIT would take to address systemic problems regarding racial equity at the Institute. He asked the provost to form an ad hoc committee "to recommend artistic and cultural responses that will affirm and inspire our community in this complex moment, and to identify ways to fund them."

The committee is co-chaired by John H. Dozier, Institute Community and Equity Officer, and Philip S. Khoury, Associate Provost with responsibility for the arts and Ford International Professor of History. As shown on the preceding page, this diverse committee includes faculty, staff, students, a postdoc, and an alumnus—26 members in total. The committee met from April 2021 through February 2022.

The co-chairs condensed the components of the charge the provost provided and divided the work into themes, to be explored by three working groups:

1. **People:** Create nimble and flexible programs to recruit artists of color and broaden the diversity of artistic talent showcased at MIT—through collaborations, visiting fellows and artists, or other means of support. (Co-chaired by Martha Eddison and Alicia Carina Sanchez)

2. **Physical Campus:** Examine the campus as an artistic expression of MIT's values and learning environment and recommend ways that we can reinterpret the Institute's history and project a more equitable vision for the future *through physical experiences of MIT's culture*. This effort should include but not be limited to diversifying the artists represented in MIT's public art program. (Co-chaired by Leila W. Kinney and John A. Ochsendorf)

3. **Digital, Performing, and Visual Experiences:** Examine the campus as an artistic expression of MIT's values and learning environment and recommend ways that we can reinterpret the Institute's history and project a more equitable vision for the future *through digital, performing, and visual experiences of MIT's culture*. (Co-chaired by Azra Akšamija and William Lockett)

In its first months of work, the committee produced 27 recommendations and received another 42 suggestions in response to an all-campus email. To begin to sort this profusion of ideas, committee members ranked them using a straw poll that Institute Research helped design. The ideas were assessed according to three standards:

1. Which are most important and feasible.
2. Which can have the greatest impact, no matter how long it takes to implement them.
3. Which can be accomplished in one or two years after the report is submitted to the provost.

The straw poll results were helpful but not definitive; as described in the following section, the committee then chose to develop a problem statement, which made it possible to arrive at a manageable set of five compelling ideas. We also identified several priorities that the committee as a whole strongly endorsed but that clearly fall outside our scope.

In mid-November 2021, committee representatives presented their near-final ideas and related endorsements to the Academic Council. Feedback from that meeting helped shape the final report.

The committee was charged to produce recommendations, not to be responsible for implementing them. However, we kept feasibility in mind in forming our recommendations, and many committee members would be natural partners in bringing the ideas to fruition.

Defining our scope

Through the committee's three working groups—on people, programs, and the physical campus—we came up with dozens of promising and appealing ideas at many different scales of scope, time, and difficulty.

However, we concluded that our work would be most useful to the MIT community if:
- We limited ourselves to ideas that were substantially new and not obviously accounted for by other MIT initiatives.
- We focused on addressing a manageable number of important problems and proposed clear, practical responses that would make a big difference.

Supporting efforts that fall outside our scope

Many ideas we considered overlap in important ways with existing efforts at MIT. Therefore—though we determined that the following items fall outside our scope—we want to endorse several ongoing priorities:

1. **Recruit and retain more faculty of color**

   The committee strongly endorses the emphasis in the Institute's [Strategic Action Plan for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) (DEI SAP) on recruiting and retaining more permanent faculty of color. Our focus is naturally on those in the arts, representing a range of cultural backgrounds.

   Of all the remedies we discussed, this one stood out as having the largest and most lasting benefit to MIT. Increasing faculty of color in any department will bring new perspectives and, simply by their presence, help MIT attract and inspire talented people from diverse backgrounds across the Institute, in every role. Temporary arts programs or even permanent monuments will never replace the living presence of these valued perspectives in our midst, our governance, and our teaching. We also believe that establishing areas of study (e.g., Native American studies and African American studies) with dedicated faculty lines will encourage cultural diversity in the arts. And to retain these faculty, it will be important, as the Strategic Action Plan outlines, to attend to cultural issues that will increase their sense of community and belonging.

2. **Use the MLK Visiting Professors and Scholars Program to attract artists, poets, novelists, and performers of color**

   In addition to tenure-track and tenured positions, we strongly endorse recruiting artists of color through the [MLK Visiting Professors and Scholars Program.](#)

   The Institute Community and Equity Office (ICEO) has already begun this work. This well-established annual program may be the fastest route to bringing a diverse range of outstanding artists, designers, writers, musicians, and performers to join the campus community.

3. **Conduct ongoing reviews of the curriculum and other programs with eyes and ears open to diverse views and voices**

   Many departments are already engaged in this work, formally or informally, and we strongly encourage such efforts, present and future.

   Such reassessments should be the first step in a comprehensive review of the MIT curriculum and a general audit of co-curricular programs, projects, and collections with an eye to inclusion; this is in the spirit of the [recommendations of Task Force 2021 and Beyond around social equity and civic responsibility.](#)

Our problem statement

To hone our thinking, we developed the following problem statement.

The nation is grappling anew with longstanding economic inequalities and racial injustice—two conditions the pandemic has made plain and made worse. At MIT, this larger struggle is echoed by the fact that members of our community from a range of backgrounds report feeling unseen, unheard, and marginalized.

As MIT works to address these deep concerns on its own campus, it also faces the immediate challenge of physically reuniting its diverse community after a long pandemic scattering and building a fresh sense of shared culture.

In other words, this is a moment for reform—and for reforming.

In that context—and with a signature MIT enthusiasm for hands-on making and learning by doing—the committee seeks to find artistic and cultural ways to lead the Institute towards a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive future by addressing the following problems:

1. After so much pandemic disruption, in a time of both personal struggles and national unease, our diverse community urgently needs in-person, participatory

opportunities for mutual appreciation, inspiration, and joy.

2. Many practical measures that kept the community safe through the pandemic served to radically interrupt MIT student culture. Cultural and performing arts that are naturally centered on in-person, on-campus practice have always struggled for space and support; during the pandemic, they were especially hard hit and are now struggling to survive.

3. Our public art collection and other campus artifacts do not yet reflect the breadth and diversity of our community today; we need to make room for new voices and perspectives.

4. Important aspects of MIT's story have gone untold—both negative aspects and positive achievements have been left out of the central stories the Institute tells about itself. We believe MIT would benefit from a thoughtful examination of the past and present that would help remedy the effects of such institutional forgetting and promote a more expansive view of whose stories should be told and where.

5. The Institute continues to reevaluate the legacy of its third president, Francis Amasa Walker, and the building named in his honor (Building 50). Walker played an essential role in rescuing MIT from financial ruin and transforming it from an ambitious technical school to a university with a national reputation. But his institutional contributions pale in comparison to the impact he made, before and during his time at MIT, as an influential and outspoken proponent of purportedly "scientific" racial discrimination, including attitudes and policies that encouraged genocidal action against Indigenous peoples and harshly discriminatory treatment of immigrants and anyone he deemed non-white; for many who use Building 50 today, the weight of this legacy is palpable.

In effect—just as the Institute has made enormous strides in addressing the backlog of deferred maintenance in its facilities—we believe MIT needs to attend to considerable issues of "cultural deferred maintenance." Such historical reassessment, cultural repair, and renewal are important in themselves. But we aspire for MIT to address these challenges in ways that allow it to become a leader in shaping a culture of belonging through the arts. By extending the range of voices and experiences portrayed and celebrated at MIT, we aim to help the community as a whole grow stronger.

Recommendations

In this section, we expand our five strongest ideas, in line with the five key elements of the problem statement. Briefly, in rough order of immediacy, they are:

1. **Create and sustain an arts festival**
2. **Increase support for student groups in the performing and visual arts**
3. **Diversify MIT's public art collection**
4. **Create a "DEIA" (A = accessibility) tour of the MIT campus**

5. Recontextualize and rededicate Building 50

The committee is very concerned with how to make our ideas and efforts outlast the life of the committee. Recommendations 1, 2, and 3 build on past examples and ongoing efforts; we hope this increases the odds of long-term success. Recommendations 4 and 5 require significant new planning and funds, but we believe they embody a vision that could attract appropriate long-term support.

To attract outside funding, it will be essential for MIT to step forward with significant internal support. We would also strongly encourage the Institute to engage Black and Indigenous artists and designers in carrying out the ideas we propose.

We mark each idea with an appropriate number of the following icons:

Time	Money	Difficulty	Impact
⧗ ⧗ ⧗	$ $ $	🦫 🦫 🦫	💥 💥 💥

Recommendation 1: Create and sustain an arts festival

Time	Money	Difficulty	Impact
⌛⌛	$ $	🦫🦫	💥💥

From the 2011 **Festival of Art, Science & Technology (FAST)** to the three **OneWorld@MIT multicultural arts festivals** that featured student performers, when MIT has publicly celebrated the artistic accomplishment of its students, staff, postdocs, and faculty, and the dazzling range of its cultures, the community has been profoundly enriched and inspired.

We propose that MIT hold an arts festival designed to celebrate our pluralism—the strength we gain from being a single community reflecting a mosaic of perspectives and cultures.

We recommend beginning by providing funding for a pilot festival to be held as soon as the pandemic allows, while exploring options for a permanent, recurring event on a two- or three-year rhythm.

We envision a joyful, distinctively MIT celebration—an arts and pluralism festival—that will:

- Celebrate the extraordinary range of cultures at the Institute, making room for voices from across the community, while taking special care to support and feature the work and perspectives of marginalized communities and cultures.

- Provide support for and showcase existing programs, groups, and individuals in the arts at MIT—students, faculty, postdocs, and staff—and also reach out to include artists of different cultural backgrounds from the surrounding community.

- Include a wide range of performances and other artistic expression, potentially including music, dance, drama, poetry, film/video, multimedia, visual arts, and more—perhaps with a particular focus in any given year.

- Emphasize not only performance but also participation, perhaps through collaborative and hands-on opportunities for making and sharing food, making art, sharing stories, and dancing. Such in-the-moment participation at the festival could be designed to encourage lasting engagement with the array of arts and cultural opportunities at MIT.

In the short term, an arts and pluralism festival would give everyone at MIT—students, staff, faculty, and postdocs—a way to join together in appreciating one another's cultures and reveling in the delightful richness of our community; a recurring festival would become a signature feature in the life of our community, an exuberant expression of the people, spirit, and values of MIT. And because sharing food is a profound, simple, entirely "democratic" way to bond across cultures, in off years we would also encourage grassroots food festivals with cross-cutting cultural themes.

By offering highly visible public art or performances (as FAST did, with its large, dramatic illuminated installations) or by bringing local performers to MIT, the festival could also help strengthen the Institute's ties to its neighbors in Cambridge and Boston.

Recommendation 2: Increase support for student groups in the performing and visual arts

Time	Money	Difficulty	Impact
⌛	$	🦫	💥💥💥

As one undergraduate put it, "Performing arts student groups have had a very, very hard time maintaining relevance through the pandemic—more opportunities to perform live in meaningful, celebratory ways would help us (+ general student body) to 'recuperate' and help new student groups form … (which, I expect, will be a multiyear process)."

A quick, high-profile way to address this problem in this period of pandemic ebb would be to use the inspiration of the festival to encourage such groups to reform or grow, in order to participate in the festival and gain visibility from it.

But overall, we understand that student arts and culture groups urgently need more support, both in terms of funding and access to space. This does not depend on the festival—and would offer a tremendous benefit to the entire community. The students who make time amidst the pressures of MIT to pour themselves into the arts benefit not only themselves and their peers but all of us; examples include the **OneWorld@MIT** multicultural festival, a showcase for student talent, and the **Borderline Mural Project** that students created in the tunnels.

Recommendation 3: Diversify MIT's public art collection

Time	Money	Difficulty	Impact
⌛⌛⌛	$ $ $	🦫	💥💥💥

MIT's public art collection—including the many sculptures and other works that dot the campus—is considered by many to be one of the leading collections of public art on any university campus in the world. To maintain this reputation for excellence and properly reflect and celebrate the diversity of today's MIT community, MIT should make a deliberate and sustained effort to diversify our public art collection by gender, nationality, race, and all aspects

of identity. In the past decade, the collection has grown to include more work from women, but more needs to be done to commission outstanding public art by women and people of color.

Recognizing that past selection committees did not always consider diversity in the selection process, we must do so now. Our committee strongly recommends that this policy be extended to architecture commissions. The Institute should also diversify its major campus collections (e.g., archives, libraries, MIT Museum). Diversifying MIT's permanent collections will take awhile; while this effort proceeds, the Institute could commission intentionally temporary public artworks or performances designed to engage, reflect, and celebrate a wide range of communities.

Recommendation 4: Create a "DEIA" (A = accessibility*) tour of the MIT campus

Time	Money	Difficulty	Impact
⏳ ⏳	$ $	🦫 🦫	💥 💥

When we are all working and learning on campus, MIT is a place that requires a great deal of moving around—for many of us, on foot. In pre-pandemic times, MIT also welcomed hundreds of tourists and other visitors a day. We propose that MIT transform this natural flow of curious minds into an educational opportunity by researching and installing a OneMIT, DEIA (A = accessibility) campus tour that would tell a more complete and inclusive version of the Institute's history.

The tour we envision would bring to light hidden figures and forgotten episodes from MIT's past, highlighting dimensions of our history that have been disregarded or erased—and celebrating members of our community, past and present, whose accomplishments and contributions have been neglected or unrecognized.

We imagine a natural link with the efforts described below under Recommendation 5; spaces in or near significant sites on campus—whether iconic or previously overlooked—would be animated by physical kiosks, plaques, murals, or monuments. In some cases, these elements could be enhanced by augmented reality, projections, sound, and storytelling. Visitors could engage the sites and markers via self-guided tours.

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* There were robust discussions with the Ad Hoc Committee on Arts and Culture about physical accessibility—especially related to this recommendation. Unfortunately, the final report did not fully reflect those discussions. We regret this omission and are adding this commentary to acknowledge that even though the committee's intent was to work with a definition of accessibility that fully reflects MIT's commitments to equity and inclusion as they specifically relate to people with disabilities, our final output fell short. In the implementation of recommendation 4 (and all other recommendations), we will be more careful and deliberate in creating a stronger sense of belonging and inclusion for all members of our community. *(This footnote was appended to the report in January 2023.)*

We also strongly encourage the Institute to deliberately incorporate the most important elements of the tour as "stops" on MIT Admissions' campus tours. Taking this step will also require providing the tour guides with sufficient historical background to present the material with confidence.

Other universities, including **Harvard** and **Tufts**, have already created such campus tours; we recommend consulting these and other examples for inspiration and ideas. In weighing different approaches, the Institute might consider having research for the tour project begin with existing classes that are exploring MIT's history. We also believe the MIT tour should be connected to larger, external efforts to counter or expand dominant narratives, such as Boston's **Black Heritage Trail** and the **Boston Women's Heritage Trail**.

An important consideration is that the first 55 years of MIT's history occurred before the move from the Back Bay to MIT's current Cambridge campus, so the designers would need to consider where to place markers for milestones, people, or events from the "Boston Tech" period.

Recommendation 5: Recontextualize and rededicate Building 50

Time	Money	Difficulty	Impact
⌛⌛⌛	$ $ $	🦫🦫🦫	💥💥💥

Walker Memorial/Building 50 is a historic landmark in need of physical restoration and, we believe, spiritual and cultural reclamation. We believe that the process of rehabilitating this structure could also serve as a path for community healing and repair.

As **President L. Rafael Reif wrote last summer**, MIT is coming to terms with the difficult legacy of Francis Amasa Walker, the building's namesake. A noted statistician and economist, he led the Institute with great success from 1881 until his death in 1897.

Over a period of years, many members of our community have called for a reassessment of Walker as an honored figure on our campus, citing his role in **promulgating the cruelties of the reservation system** as the nation's commissioner of Indian affairs; his establishment, as leader of the U.S. Census, of the statistical category of "whiteness" (indicating only those born on American soil before 1790); and his **vitriolic public disparagement of immigrants**.

It is instructive to consider that the slice of humanity that Walker considered worthy would exclude almost everyone currently at MIT.

In the decades after Charles Darwin's evolutionary insights were popularized as the "survival of the fittest," countless theories raged that promoted supposedly "scientific" justifications for discrimination according to race, and specifically for the superiority of white Anglo-Saxon

protestants. Walker's views were certainly therefore shared by many of his contemporaries. Some might argue this offers some excuse for his behavior.

But today, as members of an institution with great reverence for both science and humanity, we see his role in rallying others to adopt and act on these views as further reason to distance ourselves from him—and to bring this ugly part of his legacy into the open.

While Walker deployed science to viciously disparage and harm people of every "race" but his own, his contemporaries included prominent advocates of racial justice and equality, such as Frederick Douglass and Wendell Phillips. His own father—the economist Amasa Walker—had been active in the anti-slavery movement. In other words, the brutality of Francis Amasa Walker's views represents his choice and his intentional rejection of alternative and inclusive visions of American society.

Today, many at MIT find Walker's legacy mortifying and unacceptable. Our Indigenous students and alumni find it particularly harmful. As Alvin Harvey, SM '20 G, and Luke Bastian '21, MEng '22—both members of the Navajo Nation—have explained, they see a reimagining of Walker Memorial not as a blanket condemnation of MIT's history but as an opportunity to say, "We're here. We exist."

In the view of the committee, MIT needs to "reclaim" Building 50 through a thoughtful process of community engagement and meaningful intervention. Recognizing that securing funds for a top-to-bottom renovation would potentially take many years, we propose that MIT take a phased approach, built on these basic steps:

- Begin by promptly unearthing, acknowledging, and publicly discussing Walker's role in promoting and institutionalizing racist policies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

- Hold an artistic and architectural competition to confront this legacy and explore concepts for remaking Walker Memorial in a creative and reflective way.
    - Phase 1: Analyze whether the competition should be geared toward smaller, temporary art intervention projects, toward a major physical and programmatic transformation of Building 50, or some combination. Celebrate this phase with the arts and pluralism festival (discussed above).
    - Phase 2: Launch a design competition to generate ideas for the site; begin fundraising.
    - Phase 3: Exhibit the competition results online and on-site, with a growing focus on fundraising and community discussion about one or more appropriate interventions.

    NOTE: Professional design competitions are a standard way of attracting top talent and fresh thinking to an interesting challenge; holding such a competition would not lock MIT into executing the winning idea.

- Proceed with a series of artistic or architectural interventions to reclaim the memorial over time.

- In choosing how to proceed, it will be important to minimize disruption or displacement of student groups that currently make their home in Building 50.

While the Walker process unfolds, we recommend using the building as the site for various aspects of the arts and pluralism festival or the related multicultural food festivals, so our diverse community can begin, step by step, its joyful reclamation of this central campus space.