

Cultural Assessment

Conversation: Theme 2 Report

Prepared by Jacob Babb, Daryl Lynn Dance, Patti Poblete, and Michelle Bachelor Robinson

Executive Summary

The second cultural assessment conversation was held via zoom on November 8, 2024 and hosted by Jacob Babb and Patti Poblete. To provide context on the organization's recent history, [a timeline](#) of recent events was distributed in advance of the meeting as well as a link to the Theme 1 Report. Twenty-two people registered for the event and 15 attended. Twelve participants filled out the demographic survey, which offers the following details on the participant group as a whole (note: some people have identities that spread across multiple categories in terms of race and institution type):

- Race: 7 white, 3 Asian, 2 African American, 1 Hispanic
- Gender identity: 10 women, 2 men
- Age: 5 in the 45-54 range, 5 in the 35-44 range, 1 in the 55-64 range, and 1 in the 25-34 range
- Sexual Orientation: 7 heretosexual/straight, 3 bisexual, 1 queer, and 1 prefer not to say
- Institution type: 5 from Regional Comprehensives, 3 from R1 institutions, 2 from Small Liberal Arts Colleges (SLAC), 2 from a Two-Year College, and 1 from a Historically Black College and University
- Region of the country: 5 from the South, 4 from the Midwest, 2 from Northeast, and 1 from the West

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the first theme of the [Cultural Assessment Report](#), "Inclusion and Validation," which can be found on pages 11-13. We used definitions of these terms provided by One Eight CREATE:

- **Inclusion** is a culture of belonging where people feel valued and respected. Inclusion is experienced when people believe that their unique and authentic self is valued by others while at the same time having a sense of connectedness to the community.
- **Validation** goes beyond passive acceptance; it proactively respects each person's unique background by empowering them so they feel seen, heard, and valued within all organizational structures. Validation in practice also challenges dominant narratives and addresses power imbalances by elevating marginalized voices.

After a quick review of this theme and these definitions, participants were asked to fill out an anonymous survey about their feedback. Twelve people responded to the survey. This report presents the themes that emerged from the survey data and chat in relation to key topics:

- **Definitional Groundwork:** Respondents discuss negative and positive experiences with CWPA that relate to inclusion and validation, which led to reflections on the purpose and goals of the organization
- **Challenges:** Five challenges were identified, including recruitment/community building, leadership, affordability, focus, and follow-through
- **Opportunities:** Several opportunities were identified, including the need for ongoing conversation, more inclusive membership practices, ways to support WPAs from different kinds of institutions, and working toward sustainable growth as an organization.
- **Questions:** Questions raised addressed organizational identity, expanding the organization's scope, rehabilitating the organization's public reputation, recruiting new members and leaders, and critiquing inequitable power structures

While this data set is small, our hope is that others will find their experiences with the organization echoed by some comments. We intend to continue considering these voices and perspectives as the organization continues to collectively process the Cultural Assessment Report. Our goal overall is to both understand "where we are" as an organization and to chart a path forward together.

The authors of this report want to thank CWPA president Kelly Blewett for her support as we prepared this document. We also want to thank everyone who participated in this fruitful discussion. We hope that we can continue to host open, frank discussions as we explore the remaining themes of the One Eight CREATE report and as we work together to define the future of CWPA.

Qualitative Themes

1. Definitional Groundwork

The theme of "Inclusion and Validation" resonates with me or feels consonant with my experience in CWPA because. . .

This theme is particularly applicable to our organization because . . .

These prompts were analyzed together because similar themes emerged. "When I am in a community where I feel included and validated," one respondent wrote, "there is simply nothing better. It feels so good to be known and appreciated." The importance of an inclusive community emerged in many answers, but often making a distinction between the community at large and the smaller groups that coalesce within, a sense of division that can be seen throughout the survey responses. Further, it was noted, the theme acknowledges "the limited ways diverse groups are engaged in CWPA." In an organization where "insularity" has been perceived as an unfortunate hallmark, the permeability of

barriers becomes a vital issue. While this may be a challenge that many parallel organizations face, it seems imperative that we consider how valuable affirmation from CWPA might be to its members (and those who might consider becoming members). Validation, in fact, might be more of a concern, as respondents noted how conversations within the organization might often mirror the lack of affirmation they seek ("imposter syndrome") within workplace settings as well. As a community organized around administrative and pedagogical *practices*, inviting in new voices and welcoming emergent discussion are vital ways to affirm through inquiry. "[T]his framing," one respondent concluded, "may help us as an organization to be clearer and more focused on tangible goals--especially regarding validation."

To see a full set of coded qualitative survey responses for each theme, [click here](#).

2. Challenges

Some of the challenges in addressing "Theme 2: Inclusion and Validation" include:

It turns out we cannot, in fact, burn it all down and start from scratch as an organization--at least, not while working within the boundaries of institutions built upon and within oppressive structures themselves. Therein lies the first challenge: Finding ways to include and validate members of the community without replicating historical and structural imbalances. This entangles with the second challenge, which is one inherent to many organizations: CWPA is run entirely volunteer labor. To seek out new members--as the field has historically been represented by white, cisgender, female, and middle class--means to ask often multiply-marginalized community members to contribute additional labor to an organization that has, in the past, not been appreciative of such. (And, as one respondent noted, the precarity of some kinds of work may be institutionally or even legislatively constrained.) The perceived difference between authenticity and performativity, particularly in these cases, is remarkably slim.

To see a full set of coded qualitative survey responses in these five categories, [click here](#).

3. Opportunities

Opportunities to work on Theme 2: "Inclusion and Validation" include:

Respondents to this question pointed toward a range of opportunities the organization could pursue based on this theme. Some of these opportunities carry over from the Theme 1 report, including "Ongoing discussion" and "diversity and inclusion in leadership and membership." Among the "ongoing discussion" responses, the sense is that facilitating conversations about these themes is valuable work that we need to continue pursuing, but there is an additional element that we have the opportunity to make this work more visible for those both within and outside the organization.. Among the "diversity and inclusion in leadership and membership," respondents pointed toward the need to rebuild our relationship with WPA-GO as a means of not only recruiting new CWPA members but also to broaden the organization's effort to include and validate more viewpoints. One respondent also suggested the organization needs to invite more early career WPAs into leadership roles. Additionally, responses pointed toward the need for being patient with efforts to improve the organization and to work toward sustainable growth ("sustainable growth"). One particularly in-depth response suggested the need for considering how the organization can build both the large community of the organization while

supporting smaller communities, similar to the special interest groups model that other organizations use (“micro/macro communities”). One respondent emphasized the need for listening, particularly in relation to the upcoming WPA Outcomes Statement revision, which bolstered another respondent’s suggestion to do more research on non-R1 WPAs to learn what kinds of work they do, what support they need, and how to communicate with them (“listening”).

To see a full set of coded qualitative survey responses in these five categories, [click here](#).

4. Questions

As I read through “Theme 2: Inclusion and Validation,” some of the questions that occur to me are the following:

Many of the questions raised by respondents during the session asked what CWPA as an organization should be moving forward (“organizational identity”). Such questions include: What purposes does the organization serve at this point? How can we focus the organization’s efforts on collective, collaborative action to help WPAs? Other respondents wondered how the current structure of CWPA may be altered to be more welcoming toward more WPAs (“expanding scope and access”). For example, how can the regional affiliates of CWPA play a role in serving those with fewer resources for travel? How can the organization serve WPAs and those who do WPA work from a broad range of institutional types with varying levels of resources for disciplinary engagement? Some respondents wondered about how the organization can restore its reputation (“public reputation”) and recruit new members (“recruitment”). How do we impact the views others outside the organization and who have left the organization hold about CWPA; in other words, how can we work to restore the organization’s reputation? A related question was how can we take action to recruit more diverse members? One respondent asked how such actions “will be different from empty promises” (“critique”)? Another person suggested the need for a renewed affiliation with WPA-GO; a month after this event, CWPA announced its reconnection as a sponsor organization, and our general sense of responses during the Theme 2 discussion was that such a reconnection can only be a positive development for CWPA.

To see a full set of coded qualitative survey responses in these five categories, [click here](#).