

# Artist Innovator Award 2020 Timeline

## NOVEMBER

Artists submit applications for the two unrestricted \$25,000 awards.

## DECEMBER

Five panelists are invited by Artist Trust to select awardees.

Four are People of Color (PoC) and one is White.

## FEBRUARY 3

Panel completes first round of all 127 application reviews online.

## FEBRUARY 7

Panel meets in person and selects eight finalists.

**During the meeting, panelists are asked to declare their conflicts of interest both verbally and in writing.**

Artist Trust requests disclosure of two kinds of conflict of interest:

1. Direct: if an applicant is a spouse, partner, relative, or [current]\* business associate. You will be asked to abstain from discussing or voting for this applicant during in person panels.
2. Indirect: you know the applicant (colleague, friend, etc.) and your prior knowledge may or may not influence your vote. Either you choose to abstain from discussing or voting for this applicant or, if you feel you can remain fair and objective, your participation will be adjudicated by Artist Trust staff.

\* 'current' appears in some Artist Trust conflict of interest documents but left out of others

Several indirect conflicts are declared. During discussions, panelists with conflicts are asked to speak last and permitted to vote. At no point does the Program Director request a panelist to leave the room, abstain from discussion, or withhold their vote.

## FEBRUARY 13

Panel interviews the eight finalists with 30-minute in-person interviews.

## FEBRUARY 14

Panel selects two awardees and one alternate.

The one White panelist stays behind to speak with Artist Trust staff while other panelists leave the room at the end of the session.

## FEBRUARY 22

Panel selections are sent to the Artist Trust Board for approval.

## FEBRUARY 26

**The Board votes to *not* approve the panel's awardees, citing an undisclosed direct conflict of interest between one of the panelists and one of the awardees.**

Board refuses to disclose who is involved in the alleged undisclosed conflict of interest.

Board declines to award one of the alternates in place of the disputed awardee.

Board plans to start over with a new panel.

FEBRUARY 27

Artist Trust notifies the eight finalists that the process is void and will start over.

FEBRUARY 28

**Four of the five panelists communicate to Artist Trust their distress and disbelief that this decision was made without further consultation:**

Here we are—with our work and integrity completely undermined—without due consultation. We feel blindsided and discredited.... If you truly appreciated and valued us, you would have afforded us conversations before secretly coming to a decision of this magnitude—which have serious implications for all involved.... Despite Artist Trust extracting significant emotional labor from us as artists and people of color, we cannot remain silent. What's heartbreaking is how full of joy and accomplishment we felt when we came to an agreement....

**Artist Trust Board and leadership respond: give us a week to get back to you.**

Artist Trust lawyers reportedly advise the Board against further specifying to any of the panelists the alleged undisclosed conflict of interest.

MARCH 10

The four (PoC) panelists attempt to bring the fifth (White) panelist into the conversation. Fifth panelist declines, responding they “will trust the process....”

One of the panelists writes the Board:

For me, the crux of the matter is that no panelists have admitted to being the offending party, which says to me that either one of us is badly mistaken regarding our connection to one of the finalists, or that the board is reacting to faulty information.... And the only way to clear this up is to confront the panelist in question and allow them the opportunity to refute the accusation or clear things up. I admit that I am a bit frustrated that this still has not happened.

MARCH 12

**Board finally contacts the panelist with the alleged undisclosed conflict of interest.**

Accused panelist disputes:

I specifically stated that I had a conflict and specifically noted that my partner worked on her film as a director and cinematographer.... I also stated that I felt I could still fairly judge and assess her work because I did not know her work very well. Additionally, I listed her name along with 10 other artists that I knew [on the disclosure form]—and noted that I had an indirect conflict with them.

**Other panelists corroborate that this conflict of interest was discussed during the panel meeting, and was disclosed by the panelist both verbally and in writing.**

MARCH 13

At the request of the panelists, Artist Trust leadership meets with panelists and a facilitator on a Zoom call.

MARCH 16

Artist Trust Board and leadership write a letter to the panelists expressing gratitude for their work, apologizing for the harm caused by their actions, admitting to weaknesses in their process, and listing commitments to improve:

- A more robust panelist selection process...
- Commitment and skill enhancement for facilitation and communication...
- A full revision of observer policy and procedures...
- Review and improve... conflict of interest definitions and policy
- Revision of code of conduct guidelines and development... ensuring a safe space
- Communications plan for all phases of decision making...
- Develop and adopt a process evaluation protocol for panelists to provide feedback...

MARCH 17

Panelists respond:

Thanks for your apology.... To be clear, are you signifying in your conciliatory message that you plan to move forward with this panel's recommendations [to award the panel's selections] at this immediate moment?

Board:

While we all share regret in the outcome and definitely in the unhappiness this situation has created, the board hasn't changed its decision to convene a new panel.

MARCH 19-23

Panelists pursue further correspondence:

Even after our facilitated conversation where broken processes were revealed and mistakes were admitted to on the part of the board – that the board will not even consider investigating the errors made [in response to] an ethical and transparent [panel] process deeply speaks to your lack of due diligence and your ability to be stewards of community assets and trust.

Artist Trust was wrong in their actions and our labor should not have been dismissed in this manner. Artist Trust falsely accused [my partner and I] of an erroneous direct conflict with a finalist. The board admitted they were given misinformation. All 5 panelists testified that the information was disclosed during our deliberation process.

Panelists plead *at the very least* to not penalize the eight finalists. They argue that if the Board believes it must start the process over, they should begin with the finalists.

MARCH 23

Artist Trust planned to publicly announce awardees. No announcement is made.

JUNE 8

Artist Trust planned to publicly announce awardees from the new panel process. No announcement is made.

JUNE 24

A panelist writes:

I am both disgusted and disappointed that an organization that artists rely on for support has demonstrated how stubbornly inept and callous they are. I cannot help but suspect that AT's decision to have a jury made up of mostly people of color was merely window-dressing, yet another demonstration of tokenization in the art world. Otherwise, they would have heeded and respected our decisions, as well as the effort and thought we put into them.

JUNE 27

**No information forthcoming from Artist Trust about the process or timeline for awarding the 2020 Artist Innovator Awards.**

A community process begins to deliver Artist Trust an open letter demanding a restoration of fractured community trust.