

# Art Belongs to Everyone:

**Expanding Representation in the Literary World**



2023

# Executive Summary

Supported by Illinois Humanities, in 2023, Lucky Jefferson engaged with over 100 writers and artists through surveys and focus groups, to evaluate the experiences of Black, African, and African-American writers and artists in Illinois and across the United States.

Responses revealed insights into the barriers faced by these artists in literary spaces, particularly around publication biases, access to networks, and community support.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Survey methodology: Percentages reflect combined "yes" and "sometimes" responses to capture the full scope of challenges experienced. Illinois survey: 73 respondents; National survey: 34 respondents

# Key Findings

## Bias in publishing

**63% of respondents in Illinois** felt influenced and discouraged by the perception that white perspectives are more likely to be published.

**55% of respondents outside of Illinois** reported feeling influenced by the perception that white perspectives are more likely to be published.





## Hesitancy to self-identify

**35% of respondents in Illinois** expressed hesitancy to submit to literary magazines that require them to disclose their race or ethnicity, citing concerns about bias or stereotyping.

**9% of respondents outside of IL** expressed hesitancy to submit to literary magazines that require them to disclose their race or ethnicity, citing concerns about bias or stereotyping.

## Barriers impacting publication:

**32% of respondents in Illinois** noted that there are fewer submission calls specifically targeting Black writers, limiting their opportunities.



**50% of respondents outside of IL** reported that accessing calls for Black artists and writers is more challenging compared to calls for other artists.

**26% of respondents outside of IL** identified economic barriers, such as submission, contest, and workshop fees, as obstacles preventing them from participating in certain calls for submissions.

## The fight to belong:

**33% of respondents in Illinois** prioritize publications that are Black-led or have diverse ethnic representation on their mastheads, reflecting a strong preference for inclusive publishing environments.

**49% of respondents in Illinois** express no hesitancy about submitting to publications that are Black-led, or those with diverse ethnic representation on their mastheads, indicating comfort with inclusive publishing environments.

**50% of respondents outside of IL** prioritize publications that are Black-led or have diverse ethnic representation on their mastheads, reflecting a strong preference for inclusive publishing environments.

# Recommendations

## Hire & Co-Create with Communities Served:

Hire editors from diverse backgrounds to bring varied perspectives to decision-making.

## Reducing Bias in Publishing:

Implement unconscious bias training and provide ongoing diversity awareness programs for all volunteers and staff involved in editorial processes.

## Transparent Submission Processes:

Make submission processes accessible by clarifying selection criteria and offering feedback to historically marginalized creatives of color.

## Enable Network Accessibility:

Design programs that foster connections between creatives of color and established literary networks.

## Community-Centered Programs:

Workshops and mentorship programs should be prioritized to support community-building, alleviate isolation, and foster growth among Black creators.

## Get Involved

Learn more about our initiatives and find out how you can help us in making the literary world a more inclusive space for everyone.

Visit [luckyjefferson.com/research](https://luckyjefferson.com/research) for more details.

