The Pocket Guide to
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Role Models and Leaders in the Performing Arts

How to find one, be one and make a difference

MAYA PRODUCTIONS
BAME role models and leaders are important for increasing workforce diversity. Seeing BAME artists in the spotlight builds ambition in young people and motivates individuals to step into a career in the arts. Listening to BAME leaders in positions of power inspires confidence in the ability of the industry to reflect the rich tapestry of our society. Including more BAME workers across the industry takes us closer to the creation of great art that can speak to a wide range of people.

Role models come in different types, BRIGHT LIGHTS, GUIDES, FORGERS and ENABLERS. In different ways they all can influence others and make a difference.

This guide shows how BAME role models can help challenge and change the status quo. It shows how role models can change perceptions of who should and shouldn’t work in performing arts. It shows how leaders and organisations can take practical steps to open the sector up to a more diverse workforce. And it shows how to seek out role models and learn from them.

This guide is designed to help more Bright Lights, Guides, Forgers and Enablers take the stage and make the performing arts a more inclusive place to work.

Is it important to you that the arts and culture industry is representative and reflective of our diverse society?

Do you know why Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) role models and leaders are crucial for developing a rich and diverse arts workforce and audiences?

Could you be a role model or leader that supports diversity?

Are you a young or emerging BAME artist, looking for advice to support a career in the arts?

This guide is here to help.
Bright Lights

Bright Lights flick a switch. They shine in an instant transformative moment and prompt us to make a leap forwards, change direction and do something new. Bright Lights can have a short term but highly powerful impression on aspiring BAME artists.

“oh wow, she is writing as well as acting […..] and it was so funny and witty and heartfelt at the same time. Those things really inspired me and really made me think ooh, I want to do this”  
(on Meera Syal)

Visual reflection in terms of ethnicity is key to a Bright Lights moment on stage. Real, authentic, portrayals of BAME characters are vital.

looking back, maybe it was because they kind of looked like me and I subconsciously identified with them that I walked out thinking yeah let me give this a go.  
Reaction to Ishy Din’s ‘Snookered’

Guides

Guides chime with our values. Their star quality or exceptional work draws us towards them where we find positive behaviours to emulate. They challenge us to think and act differently and give us a route map for doing so.

“you watch it and sometimes you copy it. Sometimes you think ‘I am going to think about things like that’ or ‘I am going to do that’, ‘I am going to approach it like that’”

Often in the public sphere and leaders in their field, Guides can be observed from a distance or can be someone we are in direct contact with.
Enablers are active individuals who want to promote change. Making themselves accessible they intervene and contribute directly to others’ careers. Enablers take the time to give strength, support, insight, knowledge, encouragement, permission and access. Opening doors, demystifying the theatrical process and empowering others are but a few of the significant actions that lead to a legacy of inclusion. The impact of being supported by an Enabler role model can be profound and can particularly support BAME leadership in the arts.

She has always been about bringing (on) other people. ..... She said “right, you adapt something” so she trusted him and she gave him work and he brought in all of us to audition and then that became the company.

(On Vicky Ireland)

Rikki Beadle Blair

They do their own thing and they don’t have to work within the industry and the industry kind of comes to them after a while.

(On Rikki Beadle Blair)

Forgers carve a path that others want to follow. They have often fought hard to become leaders, breaking down barriers and taking risks to lead the way. Importantly, they have not closed the door behind them, inspiring and promoting difference. Their trail blazing creates an environment in which those from BAME backgrounds can succeed.

Role models who express their individuality and own culture can be particularly inspiring and empowering:

“young black man, athletic, brilliant personality, great character, small afro, I had never seen that working in the arts before, a hoody on that said BRAT across the back and he walked around like he ran the show [...] For me, coming from working at The National where the only people who really looked like me were the security guards and the cleaners, like really, that was like wow”

(On Anthony Gray)
BE A ROLE MODEL WHO SUPPORTS DIVERSITY

Demystify: Give everyone the insider knowledge that they need to progress and succeed. Be honest about how the industry works.

Be yourself: You don’t have to be perfect to be a role model. Have the courage to be your authentic self and that will inspire others. Difference encourages a richer arts workforce.

Empower BAME talent: Encourage everyone to reject the notion that if you are from a BAME background you need to be twice as good as white counterparts. Create a space for BAME practitioners to succeed, but to also learn through failure.

Open doors: We know it’s hard to get a foot in the door, but you can make the arts more accessible by actively seeking out, highlighting and bringing in BAME talent.

Mentor: Make a commitment to the next generation of BAME artists. Give regular practical support to those that you can, whenever possible.

Change recruitment processes: Build an inclusive culture that values difference. Don’t just hire who you know. Make the effort to advertise widely. Recognise your bias and then challenge it. Take the implicit association tests: www.projectimplicit.net

Be generous with time: Make yourself available for conversations with students and early career professionals. Offer that cup of coffee.

Share your knowledge and experiences widely at conferences, events, shows, in bars. You will have something unique to offer.

Be visible: Your work and career as a BAME artist or leader can inspire others. Consider using your networks, blogging and social media to shine a light on you and your work.

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IDENTIFY
five people in the arts or in society that you like or admire.

DESCRIBE THEM
What are their values? Key qualities? What jobs have they had? What actions have inspired you? What have been their challenges?

MAKE A NOTE
of the qualities and skills that they have in common. Why are you drawn to these qualities? Do you have them or can you develop them? What do your role models say about you? Have you discovered anything new about yourself?

CREATE A LIST OF ARTS JOBS
Do any of the qualities and skills you have or want to develop match? Can you see a natural next step? What advice can you give yourself?

TAKE ACTION
Write down three achievable actions that you can take in the next two weeks that will help you move forwards.
Paint a picture with colour: Do a detailed mapping exercise to find out where BAME artists/practitioners and leaders are working and publish it. This will increase visibility of and improve access to BAME role models.

Raise the profile: Seeing a number of BAME role models is key. Invite more BAME artists, practitioners and leaders to share their experiences at industry-wide conferences, symposiums, round table discussions and other events.

Change recruitment practices: Recognise inherent white bias, unconscious and otherwise, in recruitment procedures. Bring diverse perspectives into decision making processes and remember that talent is a social construct. Embrace positive action to be inclusive.

Keep the conversation focused on change: Create a space to facilitate regular, honest, open discussions on workforce diversity. Focus on actions that can deliver change for individuals, organisation and industry practices. Make sure that gatekeepers, decision makers, funders and leaders are in dialogue with BAME artists, students and young people.

Designate a legacy of inclusion: Ensure boards and senior leaders look at how Enabler activities can be incorporated into leadership and other relevant job descriptions. Make workforce diversity the responsibility of everyone.

Organisations can role model too. They can Guide, Forge or Enable BAME workforce diversity. Which one is in your company culture?
Suzanne Gorman is Artistic Director of Maya Productions and a Clore Fellow. Maya Productions create diverse theatre to create change; socially, politically and culturally. Our vision is of a world where people of all ages, abilities, culture and classes have the opportunity to experience theatre.

Discovering authentic, unexpected stories and finding new ways of telling them is at the heart of our work. We open the doors for a wide range of people to get involved in the arts and support exceptional talent, nurturing the next generation of artists. We do this in collaboration with artists, young people, organisations, academics and cultural leaders.

This guide has been produced in collaboration with the CAMEo Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies, University of Leicester. CAMEo brings together academic expertise on cultural and creative industries, media and the arts with practice and policy concerns. Together with a wide range of partners CAMEo explores how cultural and media economies are being defined, valued, enacted, experienced and represented.
This Pocket Guide builds on a Clore Leadership Programme and AHRC supported project, *Where Am I? BAME Role Models and Leaders in Performing Arts* undertaken by Suzanne Gorman, as part of a Clore Fellowship and in collaboration with CAMEo Research Institute, University of Leicester.

The project examined the impact of role models and explored what BAME workers in the arts found important about them.

The quotes in this booklet are taken from interviews and focus groups conducted with cultural leaders, arts practitioners and drama students. Thank you to all who contributed.

This project aims to facilitate change. We hope to spark vital conversations and actions that will support a diverse workforce and see confident, adaptive and resilient BAME workers and leaders across our cultural sector.

To find out more about how we can support you and your organisation please contact Suzanne Gorman.

Designed by Claire Brooks