



ARTISTS AT WORK ANNOUNCES 24 ARTISTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN 2025-2026 COHORT



Albuquerque • Dearborn • Indianapolis • Los Angeles County • New Orleans • Tucson

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For Immediate Release

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The FreshGrass Foundation and **THE OFFICE performing arts + film** have announced the artists selected for their **Artists At Work (AAW)** initiative's 2025-26 cohort. Working in Albuquerque, Dearborn, Indianapolis, Los Angeles County, New Orleans, and Tucson, these 24 artists will receive salaried employment, benefits, and wrap-around support for 18 months. They began their term on June 1, 2025.

Artists At Work is a national workforce resilience program, in the spirit of the Works Progress Administration, that supports artists and their communities through artistic civic engagement. AAW leverages the creativity of artists to address pressing issues in their local communities—from substance abuse to youth welfare to public health, among others—and fosters new economic models of support for artists. AAW provides artists with W2 employment, health benefits, and access to retirement benefits; and supports local cultural and community organizations to host and work with those artists as key contributors to the well-being of their local communities.

AAW was recently able to grow thanks to \$2 million in new funding this year from the **Mellon Foundation** to work with 20 artists in five urban centers, and a partnership with **Herbert Simon Family Foundation** to support four additional artists in Indianapolis. Artists At Work is also funded by the **Hearthland Foundation**, **Fresh Sound Foundation**, and the **WLS Spencer Foundation**.

The new funding supports the provision of salaries at a \$40,000 annual rate (gross earnings totaling \$60,000) for the 24 artists, fully employer-paid health benefits, and access to retirement benefits for an 18-month term; workshops on fundraising, financial planning, budgeting, PR & marketing, and holistic well-being, along with responsive mentorship and networking opportunities; artist-led public projects and initiatives aligning with local priorities such as community health disparities and climate resilience; ongoing and long-term evaluation to refine program design and maximize impact; and engagement with arts

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AAW collaborates with lead partners in each location, including local government, anchor cultural institutions, and hybrid cultural organizations/service providers. 2024-26 partners include, in Albuquerque, **City of Albuquerque Department of Arts & Culture**; in Dearborn, **The Arab American National Museum**; in Indianapolis, **Herbert Simon Family Foundation**; Los Angeles County: **Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture**; in New Orleans, **Ashé Cultural Arts Center**; and in Tucson, **Southwest Folklife Alliance**.

In Albuquerque, in partnership with the City of Albuquerque Department of Arts & Culture, local AAW Artists **Ashley “Saywut?!” Moyer, Jade Cruz, Lynn Johnson, and Naomi Natale**, will explore how creative practices and public spaces support dreaming forward, healing from collective/individual grief, and strengthening community connections/individual identity.

In Dearborn, The Arab American National Museum will connect with their parent organization, **The Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS)**, to explore community initiatives with AAW artists **Lubana Al Quntar, Raphique Barakat, Layan Srour, Kamelya Omayma Youssef**, who will engage on impact areas related to community health and safety.

In Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture has identified recovery and resilience from the devastating 2025 wildfires as the area of focus for four local AAW artists. Two will partner with local nonprofit organizations (**Alma Cielo** in collaboration with **Los Angeles Conservancy** and **Natalie Godinez** in collaboration with **Los Angeles Public Library/Library Foundation of Los Angeles**) in areas recovering from the Altadena and Palisades wildfires to support and strengthen community identity, cultural preservation, and civic memory. **Benjamin Morales** will partner with **Boyle Heights Arts Conservatory** to explore arts-based environmental sustainability practices that contribute to community climate resiliency. **Alexander McNab**, in collaboration with **LA Commons**, will explore the role of the arts in health and wellbeing at the individual and community level.

In New Orleans, through Ashé Cultural Arts Center, **Cherice Harrison-Nelson’s** and **Geer Mendy’s** work will center around cultural preservation in collaboration with the **Alliance for Cultural Equity**. AAW artists **Donney Rose** and **“AJ” Haynes** will work and be trained as Community Health Workers in the **I Deserve It** health and wellness program, with Rose focusing on the neighborhood and built environment as social determinants of health, and Haynes focusing on Black maternity health and reproductive rights.

In Tucson, the **Southwest Folklife Alliance** will collaborate with AAW artists **Harrison Preston, Shane Beeshligaii, Katrina Kerstetter, and Porfirio “Pilo” Mora** through its **Loom Market** program, which connects heritage-based artists committed to strengthening their communities through traditional art. Preston will be working with a local **Tohono O’odham Pottery Collective**, Kerstetter with **Iskashitaa Refugee Network** on their ongoing **Refugee Garden Art Program (RGAP)**, Mora with the **Regeneración** (currently helping create a Center for Cultural Organizing) in Southern Tucson, and Beeshligaii with the living agricultural museum **Mission Garden**.

In Indianapolis, AAW artists will bring their skills and creative thinking to four local social-impact organizations, with community connections facilitated by Herbert Simon Family Foundation as a lead regional partner. These cross-sector partnerships, led by **Ash Robinson, Andre Parnell, Bryn Jackson, and Mariah Ivey** will focus on serving and activating the local community through artistic and civic engagement projects.

Chris Wadsworth, Founder, President and Executive Director of the FreshGrass Foundation, said, “The FreshGrass Foundation is thrilled to be expanding Artists At Work, a program driven by the belief that artists are essential to healthy local communities. Artists At Work aims to support them playing this crucial role by providing them with something all too scarce: salaried employment with benefits—and by engaging them to bring their imaginations and unique creative practices to the work of social impact organizations in the cities and towns they call home.”