
THANK YOU MELLON FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT!

ARTISTS AT WORK, A WPA-INSPIRED INITIATIVE RECEIVES \$3 MILLION FROM THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION TO EXPAND NATIONALLY FOLLOWING SUCCESSFUL WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS PILOT

ARTISTS AT WORK Brings Together Artists with Cultural and Community-Based Organizations to Address Deeply Rooted Economic and Social Issues Laid Bare by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

THE OFFICE performing arts + film's acclaimed **Artists At Work** (AAW) initiative has received \$3 million from **The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation** to expand nationally, launching programs in Los Angeles County (in 2021), the Mississippi Delta region (in 2022), and the Borderlands region (in 2022). AAW, inspired by FDR's Depression-era Works Progress Administration (WPA) and its Federal Project Number One, is conceived by THE OFFICE in collaboration with the **FreshGrass Foundation** as a public/private partnership that combines government, corporate, and foundation support. Founded as the pandemic ravaged artistic communities, halting careers and spurring dire financial struggle, AAW continues into a post-pandemic future, impelled by an urgent need to reimagine the culture sector and how we value artists' role in society--a need that the pandemic starkly revealed. Following a highly successful pilot program in Western Massachusetts, AAW will continue to provide financial and professional development resources directly to artists in other regions, connect them to local Social Impact

Initiatives to root them more deeply in their communities, and activate cultural organizations in support of both. AAW will partner with **LA County Department of Arts and Culture**; **Mississippi Center for Cultural Production** in the Delta; and **City of Albuquerque Department of Arts & Culture** and **Southwest Folklife Alliance** in the Borderlands region. National partners for AAW include the **International Storytelling Center** and **Theater of War Productions**.

The Mellon Foundation and **AAW** are aligned in their motivating beliefs that artists are workers; that their productivity is essential to the fabric of any healthy society; and that art and artists can be the messengers that lead us to a world where marginalized and disenfranchised people and communities are lifted up and justice is centered.



Artists At Work Filmmaker Joe Aidonidis filming as part of the Western Massachusetts pilot program. He is working with members of the community to document and discuss the opioid epidemic in the Berkshires during the pandemic in partnership with Gardner-Athol Area Mental Health Association (GAAMHA) and his host Culture Hub Images Cinema.

Photo courtesy of Shaun Laframboise.

“Artists at Work is visionary in its artist-centered, ecosystem-integrated approach, and we’re thrilled to support its growth,” said Emil Kang, Arts and Culture Program Director for The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

“Sustained artist employment and partnership models, such as those utilized by Artists at Work, are essential to driving systemic change and addressing deep inequities in the field. It is an important complement to Mellon’s recently announced Creatives Rebuild New York initiative.”

THE OFFICE founding director **Rachel Chanoff** says, “Artists are workers whose work product is crucial to the health of every society. Communities flourish when artists are woven into the everyday fabric of our lives. Here at **Artists At Work**, we are humbled, thrilled, and delighted to be supported by the visionary Mellon Foundation. They are inspiring game-changers and are leading the charge into a more equitable and beautiful future.”

AAW’s core elements include putting artists on payroll at a living wage salary and giving them health benefits; creating opportunities for artists to make new work and bring it to the public; embedding artists in community-based Social Impact Initiatives outside of the arts; and opening up avenues for young people of color to enter the culture sector’s workforce through an internship and fellowship program. AAW further engages with issues of inequality and representation in the arts world by providing visibility, recognition, and resources for artists, industry leaders, and organizations that represent and value BIPOC, LGBTQI, and disability communities.

Participating artists receive a living wage salary, calculated using the MIT Living Wage Calculator for their respective region, for a period of one year, as well as full healthcare benefits. Following their participation in the program, they are eligible for unemployment benefits, and may continue healthcare coverage under COBRA if they choose. Artists working

in any artistic discipline qualify for the program; they must be local to the region and actively interested in a social practice. An AAW Artist is required to do two things during their tenure in the program: continue their own artistic practice, and engage with and become a resource for their community by working with a local Social Impact Initiative. These initiatives can include a wide range of programs addressing critical issues—youth mental health, suicide prevention, food justice, prison reform, youth at risk, public health campaigns, and other civic engagements with the aim of fostering healthy communities.

THE MELLON FOUNDATION'S \$3M AT WORK:

- **3 NEW REGIONAL ACTIVATIONS**
- **42 ARTISTS ACROSS DISCIPLINES**
- **21 CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS**
- **36 COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL IMPACT INITIATIVES**
- **9 ARTS ADMINISTRATION FELLOWS AND INTERNS**

IMPACTING WHOLE COMMUNITY ECOSYSTEMS

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In each region AAW is launched, participating artists and Social Impact Initiatives are connected to a collection of Culture Hubs—cultural organizations of diverse mission and scale who serve as active partners and enthusiastic resources for the other AAW participants. A Culture Hub can be anything from a small community-focused arts program to a major performing arts center or museum with an international profile. The primary role of an AAW

Culture Hub is to act as a host for participating artists and support them in their practice while furthering their artistic engagement with the community. AAW prioritizes BIPOC-led organizations, while also considering a range of types and scale of organizations and artistic disciplines. With the generosity of the Mellon Foundation, AAW will have the opportunity to work with 21 cultural organizations, 42 artists across disciplines, 36 community-based Social Impact Initiatives, and nine arts administration fellows and interns across these three regions, impacting whole community ecosystems. More information on specific Artists at Work opportunities, Social Impact Initiatives, and Culture Hubs for each region to be announced later this year.

AAW began as a COVID-era rescue package and became a plan for the future—an ambitious effort to both safeguard and amplify the vital role art and artists play as we move together into a new world.



Artist At Work musician Naia Kete (right) works with Amerie, one of the seven youth she is collaborating with from The Alianza Project in Holyoke, MA as a part of the Western Massachusetts pilot. They are co-writing and co-producing trauma-healing songs inspired by their individual stories and becoming voices for change and understanding within their own community.

Photo courtesy of the artist.

The AAW pilot program in Western Massachusetts, which AAW is seeking to extend, has been profiled by [PBS Newshour](#), [The Boston Globe](#), [The Albany Times Union](#), and [artnet news](#), among other regional and national media.

For more about Artists At Work: artists-at-work.org

For more about THE OFFICE: artists-at-work.org/the-office

For more about The FreshGrass Foundation: artists-at-work.org/freshgrass-foundation

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