



City of  
**OAKLAND**  
California

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News from: **Economic & Workforce  
Development Department**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**City of Oakland Announces 10 New  
Cultural Strategists-in-Government**

*Oakland, CA* – Today, the City of Oakland announced a new cohort of 10 Cultural Strategists-in-Government (CSIG) that will embed in seven different entities in the City. The program is a partnership between the City’s Cultural Affairs Division and the Oakland Fund for Public Innovation, with funding for 7 of the 10 individuals provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

“The unique skills and new perspectives these cultural strategists bring to City government will lead to creative solutions to pressing challenges throughout Oakland,” said Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf. “Engaging these creative thinkers who are rooted in a broad range of communities will help us build the sense of belonging among all Oaklanders.”

The Cultural Strategists-in-Government program was developed to advance the City’s Cultural Plan “[Belonging in Oakland: A Cultural Development Plan](#)” to embody the plan’s tagline – “Equity is the Driving Force, Culture is the Frame, and Belonging is the Goal.” The CSIG Program seeks to discover new ways of fulfilling the City’s aspirations by working with strategists from communities most impacted by inequities who can bring a new lens to the work of building a just city.

“The Oakland Fund for Public Innovation is excited to support the expansion of the Cultural Strategist-in-Government program,” said Juma Crawford, the nonprofit’s Chief Executive Officer. “We believe that innovation comes from the inherent talent and people who are from – and live in – the communities of Oakland. This program will advance the critical work of ensuring that, as a city, we continue to put people first and strive for equity and belonging for all Oaklanders.”

In addition to the seven individuals funded through the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation program, the Department of Transportation, the Environmental Services Division, and the Mayor’s Office have also opted to engage a second cultural strategist into their project team using their own funding resources. These strategists will use their expertise to collaborate with and strengthen the efforts of the other participants.

Cultural strategists are individuals working in the realm of culture, art making, and aesthetic practices who bring unique skills and perspectives to bear on city challenges through an equity lens. Oakland-based artists, artist-activists, creative entrepreneurs, traditional culture bearers, community historians, and others

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knowledgeable of culturally specific practices, history, or heritage relevant to residents of Oakland applied to the competitive program to be embedded in various government offices for a year.

The CSIG program is an investment in creative thinkers who imagine and test new ways of working from a position inside government that advances how dialogue, deliberation, risk, and innovation can impact governmental systems in a transformative way to operationalize civic belonging.

The City entities and their associated cultural strategists to join the program are:

**AssistHub project/Mayor’s Office: Jamica El and Cheo Tyehimba Taylor**

A part of Oakland’s music/arts community, Black business community, and Black parent community, [Jamica El](#) has a unique hybrid of creative publishing experience, digital communication skills, and expertise in physical computing to tell compelling stories at the intersection of art, technology, and wellness. El will partner with the Mayor’s Office to increase the reach and effectiveness of [AssistHub](#), a platform that seeks to eliminate the barriers that make it hard for people to access public benefits. El will lead a narrative change project to shift perspectives currently embedded in public policy and popular discourse, which too often undermine the dignity of our communities and reinforce systemic barriers. The collaboration seeks to address an estimated \$60 billion in public assistance benefits that go unclaimed every year because of these barriers.

[Cheo Tyehimba Taylor](#) is a writer, filmmaker, and multimedia strategist with years of extensive collaborative experience with non-profits, arts organizations, foundations, and City agencies. He will support the AssistHub project in the Mayor’s Office by providing digital storytelling and strategic communications thought leadership. Tyehimba Taylor’s engagement is being funded by AssistHub.

**Community Homeless Services/Human Service Department (HSD): Sabereh Kashi**

An independent documentary mediamaker from Iran, [Sabereh Kashi](#) has made housing – and what it means to find and make a home – a theme of her creative work for many years. Focused on personal stories, Kashi seeks to capture the lives of people as whole complex human beings rather than as symbols defined by current issues or political labels. Kashi will team up with the [Community Homeless Services](#) program of HSD to support resilience and promote healing for unhoused families and individuals who are experiencing the trauma of living without a permanent home, compounded by the misunderstanding that can dismiss, judge, or simply ignore those living on the streets.

**Department of Transportation (OakDOT): Walter Wallace and Binta Ayofemi**

Founder of the Black Film Guild, a place for Bay Area creators to acquire photography and filmmaking skills, [Walter Wallace](#) is an Oakland writer, cinematographer and editor with a drive to be the change he wants to see in the world. His experience of working with CalTrans and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District makes him well placed to collaborate with [OakDOT](#) to activate communities to participate in designing safe, accessible streets that facilitate public gatherings, placekeeping, and belonging in capital projects such as the 14th Street Safety Project, East Oakland Neighborhood Bike Routes, and 7th Street Connection.

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[Binta Ayofemi](#) is an Oakland-based artist with a background in sculpture, landscape, and architecture. Honored with an Oakland Public Art award, Ayofemi is the founder of Ground, transforming vacant spaces and storefronts as community facing artworks in East Oakland, West Oakland, and Downtown. Ground's projects have included a new park and BBQ surrounded by a living fence, a musical courtyard and a general store. As an OakDOT CSIG, the artist will create new sidewalk spaces for the public, and prototype street-level activations and green spaces working to enhance OakDOT's projects. Ayofemi's engagement is being funded by OakDOT.

**Department of Violence Prevention (DVP): Umi Vaughan**

[Umi Vaughan](#) is an Oakland native, a percussionist and singer, a cultural anthropologist and educator, a griot and part of the Dimensions Dance Theater family who wishes to use his skills to build community and decrease violence in our city. [DVP](#) views violence as a communicable disease that disproportionately infects individuals and families living in communities with underlying conditions such as historical structural racism, chronic economic disparities, absence of quality health care, scarce educational opportunities, and early and pervasive contact with the criminal justice system. Together with the DVP, Vaughan will harness culturally relevant art forms that will serve to promote community cohesion, belonging, and connections to ancestral traditions as a protective factor against violence.

**Environmental Service Division/Oakland Public Works (OPW): Maddy Clifford and Pacita Rudder**

A writer, hip hop lyricist, performer, educator, and activist, [Maddy Clifford](#) wants to use her creative and communications talents to change public perception about what an environmentalist looks like. Clifford will support two of the Environmental Services Division's (ESD) critical efforts at the crossroads of climate, resilience, and environmental justice: building electrification and waste sorting/reducing single-use plastics. They will be working together employing an equity lens to support the frontline communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

[Pacita Rudder](#) is an artist who has been a professional cultural strategist for the past six years working with organizations in California such as Oakland Rising, the Queer Cultural Center, and Power California. As a cultural strategist she has led national cultural campaigns that center BIPOC communities and integrate art, organizing, communications, and culture. She will be working with the Environmental Services Division to position their work to new potential supporters. Rudder's engagement is being funded by ESD/OPW.

**Office of Council President District 2 Councilmember Nikki Fortunato Bas:  
Tanisha Cannon**

[Tanisha Cannon](#) is a sociologist, educator, and food justice advocate who seeks to use her skills to help equitably empower event organizers and vendors who utilize Oakland's public spaces. The [Office of the President of City Council](#) wants to explore how to better activate outdoor spaces with programming citywide to enhance the social, cultural, and economic well-being of all Oaklanders. Together, they will explore making compliance and permitting processes for the culture and events community more accessible, particularly by lowering barriers to BIPOC and low-income event organizers to support joyous and responsible activation of our civic commons.

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**Cultural Affairs Division/Economic & Workforce Development Department:  
Sorell Raino-Tsui**

[Sorell Raino-Tsui](#) has been curating, showcasing, and producing public art in Oakland for the past decade. With the lived experience of creating permanent public art installations, Raino-Tsui hopes to build bridges between city government and the artist communities that feel disenfranchised from the public art world. The [Public Art Program](#) will work with Raino-Tsui to find creative ways to reach, recruit, and orient emerging and established Oakland BIPOC artists to the specialized knowledge and the lengthy and complex processes that public art projects can entail in order to bring more diverse voices into the civic realm.

**First Cohort of CSIGs Previously Announced**

In February, the City [announced the first cohort](#) of four Cultural-Strategists-in-Government. They included Celia C. Peters partnering with the African American Museum and Library, Kev Choice working with the Citywide Communications team in the City Administrator Office, Candice Wicks-Davis collaborating with the Department of Race and Equity, and David Peters supporting the Planning & Building Department.

***About the Cultural Affairs Division***

The Cultural Affairs Division is housed in the City's Economic & Workforce Development Department. The division includes the City's cultural funding program, which provides approximately \$1.5 million in grants to support the arts in Oakland and the public art program, which has more than \$1 million in funds currently dedicated for public art installations across Oakland.

***About the Oakland Fund for Public Innovation***

The Oakland Fund for Public Innovation reaches across the city, engaging private partners to innovate, test and scale ideas that enhance Oakland. The Fund strives to improve the prosperity, safety and quality of life for all Oaklanders with projects that:

- Build a more trustworthy and responsive government
- Allow Oaklanders to stay rooted and thrive in our city
- Create a more vibrant and connected Oakland for all who live, work and play here.

***About The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation***

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive.