



City of
OAKLAND
California

Media Contact:

Harry Hamilton
Marketing Coordinator
hjhamilton@oaklandca.gov
510-238-6766

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

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**City's Cultural Strategists Pilot Program Seeks to
Advance Equity, Transform Government**

Oakland, CA – Last week, the Cultural Affairs Division in the Economic & Workforce Development Department convened the inaugural cohort of Cultural Strategists-in-Government (CSIG) pilot program. Seven individuals, rooted in the realm of culture, artmaking and aesthetic practices of Oakland's various communities, will bring new perspectives and skills to five City departments over the next year. Their engagement will help infuse City practices with new creative and culturally-competent thinking and problem-solving to promote civic belonging and well-being.

“These creative minds working with our city government will help us develop new solutions to old problems,” said Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf. “The Cultural Strategists pilot program moves us closer together as a community, and reminds all residents that in Oakland, everyone belongs.”

Cultural Strategists-in-Government are thought partners who understand that sharing their cultural knowledge is a way of serving their community and the greater community of Oakland.

Candice Wicks-Davis - Department of Race & Equity

Candice is an artist and equity and social justice consultant who uses art to provoke emotion and inspire actions and solutions. She is the founder and CEO of Edutainment for Equity. The Department of Race & Equity's Equity Indicator Report from July 2018 identified the Black community as the most impacted by racial disparities. Candice will work with the department to deepen the awareness of how anti-black bias/racism operates structurally and advance efforts to dismantle inequitable systems.

Chelsea Burton - Planning & Building Department

Chelsea is a documentarian specializing in engaging diverse communities in dialogue around social and geographic change. Chelsea will work with the Planning & Building Department to establish an ongoing means of communicating, ideating and documenting concepts that capture the shared values of Oakland's diverse community members.

Elena Serrano - Department of Transportation

Elena is a producer, presenter and community organizer with a focus on East Oakland. She is a Program Director at the EastSide Arts Alliance & Cultural Center. Elena will work with the Department of Transportation to identify how Oakland's community members can reclaim a share of the public realm through community building activities that can be conducted in public spaces.

Hodari Davis - Department of Transportation

Hodari uses literary, media and inter-disciplinary arts as a part of his community engagement efforts in Oakland. He is the CEO & Senior Facilitator at Edutainment for Equity. Hodari will work with the Department of Transportation to identify how Oakland's community members can reclaim a share of the public realm through community engagement activities.

(more)

City Launches Cultural Strategists-in-Government Pilot Program to Advance Transformational Change and Equity throughout Oakland.

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Michelle “Mush” Lee - Human Services Department

Mush is a poet, educator and arts & culture advocate. She is the founding CEO of Whole Story Group, Inc. Mush will work with the Human Services Department to encourage a transformative internal dialogue about best practices through an equity lens, help build staff capacity and shift the cultural narrative about health, hope and belonging in Oakland.

Rosesharon Oates – Human Services Department

Rosesharon is a visual artist, restorative justice consultant and holistic health educator. Rosesharon will work with the Human Services Department to design a creative holistic element to the second cycle of ReCAST (Oakland Resiliency in Communities After Stress and Trauma), where the mission is to build resiliency and equity in communities that have been impacted by high levels of violence, trauma and civil unrest.

Sabereh Kashi - Mayor’s Office on Housing Security

Sabereh is a documentary filmmaker passionate about her community members having equitable access to safe, affordable, and stable housing in Oakland. She will work with the Mayor’s Office on Housing Security to encourage dialogue amongst community members about Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs or “in-law units”), share knowledge and inspire property owners to consider the positive community benefits of building ADUs, while developing answers to real questions around the process.

The pilot program began with a call for applications and three informational workshops in early December 2018. More than 50 applications were received before the January 7 deadline. Submitted Cultural Strategist applications were reviewed by Cultural Affairs staff together with the partnering department. In February 2019, eleven finalists were interviewed by a combination of staff from the Cultural Affairs Division and partnering departments.

While initial plans called for the engagement of five Cultural Strategists, strong interest by leadership in the Department of Transportation and the Human Services Department resulted in both of those departments sponsoring one additional placement each.

For their individual engagements, each strategist will receive \$10,000. The funding for this program came from a special one-time appropriation by the Oakland City Council in the Adopted FY 2018-19 Midcycle Budget.

The CSIG program is one of two pilot initiatives launched as first implementation steps of [“Belonging in Oakland: A Cultural Development Plan”](#) that was adopted by City Council in July 2018. The other pilot initiative, [Neighborhood Voices grant program](#), resulted in the award of \$80,000 in grants to eight Oakland-based nonprofit organizations to lift up seldom-heard voices in our neighborhoods by supporting the expression, recognition and understanding of the array of diverse communities that make our city unique, vibrant and resilient.

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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 million in grants to support the arts in Oakland; the public art program, which has more than \$1 million in funds currently dedicated for public art installations across Oakland and staff working on special events, film production permitting and a walking tours program.