



City of
OAKLAND
California



Media Contacts:

Harry Hamilton
Marketing Coordinator
Economic & Workforce
Development Dept.
hjhilton@oaklandca.gov
510-238-6766

Alaina Long
Director of Operations &
Communications
alaina@oaklandfund.org
407-455-4579

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 15, 2021

Grant Award to Foster Creative Solutions in Oakland City Government Announced

\$900,000 Grant will embed 12 Cultural Strategists in City Departments

Oakland, CA – The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has approved a grant of \$900,000 to the New Venture Fund, in partnership with the Oakland Fund for Public Innovation and the City’s Cultural Affairs Division. The grant will support placement of 12 cultural strategists within City of Oakland government. These engagements infuse creative problem-solving in the participating City departments. This new grant funding expands the Cultural Strategist in Government (CSIG) program beyond a 2019 pilot.

“These creative minds working with our dedicated City staff will help develop new solutions to old problems,” said Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf. “Engaging the breadth of creative talent from our communities will strengthen the bonds between residents and government while resolving real-world challenges.”

The inaugural cultural strategist pilot coincided with the release of 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 artistic thought partners supported by the Mellon Foundation grant will work with individual City departments to serve Oaklanders in ways that foster civic belonging and community well-being. Two of the 12 cultural strategists will be engaged for up to two years, while the other 10 will be embedded for up to one year.

“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.”

Cultural strategists are individuals working in the realm of culture, art making and aesthetic practices who bring unique skill sets and perspectives to bear on thorny problems. They could be artists, artist-activists, creative entrepreneurs, traditional culture bearers, community historians or others who are knowledgeable about culturally specific practices, history or heritage relevant to residents of Oakland and who are interested in serving the community.

As thought partners to government departments, the CSIG fellows do not exclusively make “objects.” Instead, they make policy arguments via strategies for cultural shifts crucial to the work of realizing a Just City and civic belonging. 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 as we work to operationalize civic belonging.

(more)

Tentative Project Timeline

August 5 – CSIG call for proposals posted on www.OaklandCulturalArts.org

August 26 – CSIG proposals due from interested individuals

September 21 – Announcement of selected cultural strategists

October 4 – Strategists begin engagements with City departments

About New Venture Fund

The New Venture Fund collaborates with change leaders to build a fair, healthy, and sustainable world for all people. We help implement a range of public-interest projects on issues such as conservation, global health, public policy, international development, education, disaster recovery, and the arts.

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 and film production permitting.

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.

#