Ford Foundation Awards Project Row Houses $3.5M, Names It One Of America’s Cultural Treasures

HOUSTON – October 6, 2020 – The Ford Foundation awarded $3.5 million to Project Row Houses (PRH) and named the Third Ward cultural institution one of America’s Cultural Treasures.

Led by an initial investment of $50 million from the Ford Foundation — with leadership support from Bloomberg Philanthropies and Barbara and Amos Hostetter, and additional support from the Abrams Foundation, Alice L. Walton Foundation, and Tom and Lisa Blumenthal— the national component of the $81 million initiative will provide unrestricted operational and general support funds to an initial cohort of 20 organizations that are significant national anchors for artistic and cultural diversity in America.

“Transformational. There is simply no other word for this gift and this initiative,” said Eureka Gilkey, PRH Executive Director.

Gilkey explained: “Project Row Houses is struggling right now to answer some very challenging questions. What does collective creative action mean during a pandemic? What does it take to be a driver of equitable practices in the arts and culture community in 2020, and what are the risks of speaking up? How do we balance that work with Third Ward’s urgent needs during a health and economic crisis? As rapid gentrification overtakes our most historic Black neighborhoods, leaving legacy residents locked out and out of luck,
whose lives, exactly, matter? And how does our site-specific project adapt to the new normal of regular flooding and catastrophic storms?”

“Ford Foundation’s gift will create space for us to answer those questions in a way that reflects our vision and values, centering the lives of Third Ward residents and the history and culture of our community. We especially appreciate that the Ford Foundation has made this gift with no restrictions so that we have the flexibility to be dream big and be creative knowing we can meet our obligations. We are grateful for this recognition, and humbled by the responsibility and the work before us.”

PRH is the only organization in Texas, and one of only two in the south and southwestern part of the United States, to be included in this cohort.

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ABOUT THE FORD FOUNDATION
The Ford Foundation is an independent, nonprofit grant-making organization. For more than 80 years it has worked with courageous people on the frontlines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. With headquarters in New York, the foundation has offices in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. More information about the America’s Cultural Treasures grant program can be found at: https://www.fordfoundation.org/campaigns/faqs-america-s-cultural-treasures/

ABOUT PROJECT ROW HOUSES
Project Row Houses (PRH) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering people and enriching communities through engagement, art and direct action. PRH was founded in 1993 to be the catalyst for transforming community through the celebration of art and African-American history and culture. Inspired by the work of German avant-garde artist Joseph Beuys and African-American painter Dr. John Biggers, the seven founders – James Bettison, Bert Long, Jr., Jesse Lott, Rick Lowe, Floyd Newsum, Bert Samples, and George Smith – purchased 22 historic shotgun-style row houses on two blocks in a disinvested neighborhood in Houston’s Historic Third Ward and began using the houses as spaces for thematic art interventions. The PRH site now encompasses five city blocks and houses 39 structures that serve as home base to numerous community enriching initiatives, art programs, and neighborhood development activities. Since its inception, PRH has demonstrated over its 27 year-plus history that collective community artmaking is a sustainable vehicle for community transformation. Today, PRH serves as a model for not only the greater Houston region, but for communities all over the world. For more information, please visit projectrowhouses.org.