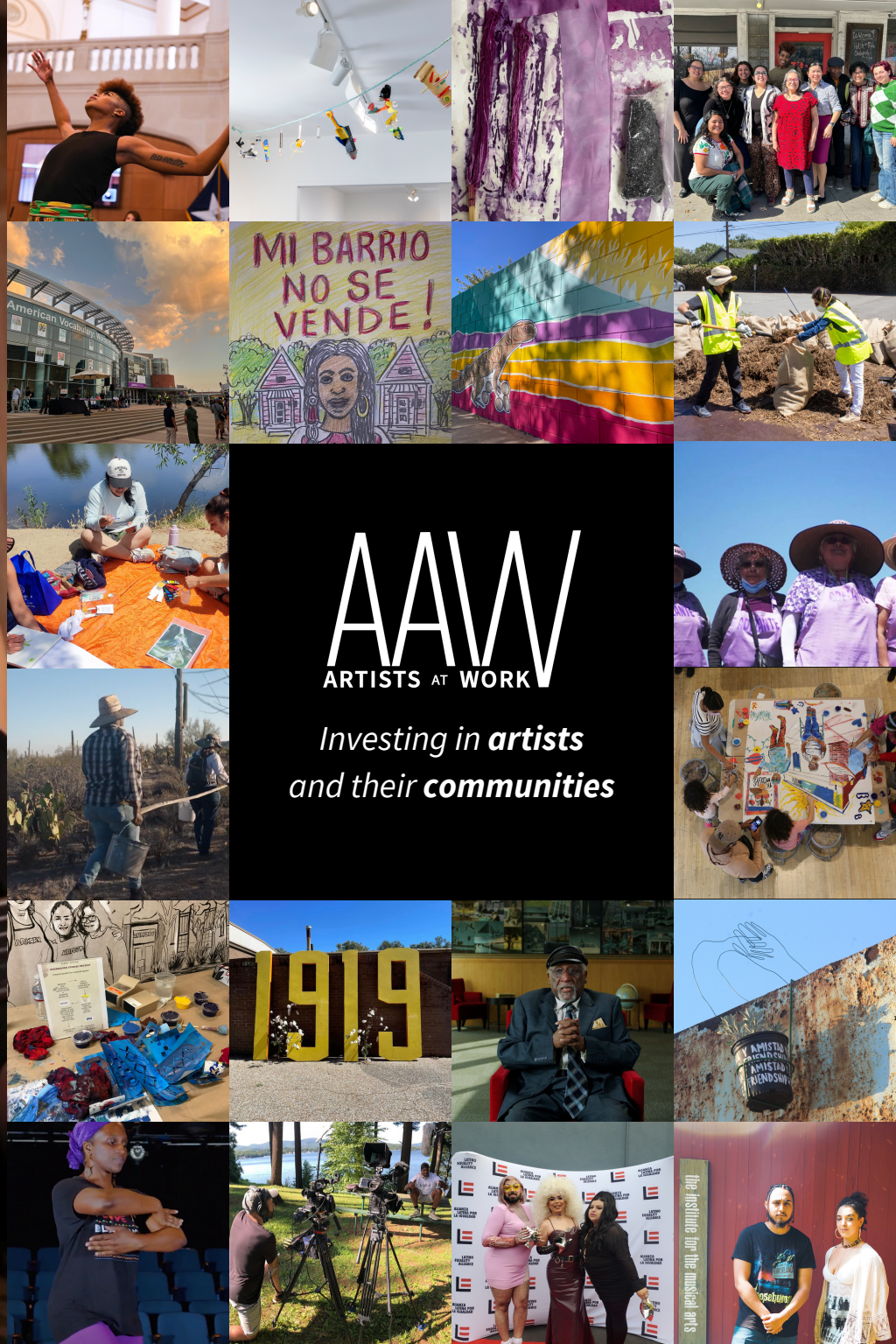


Artists At Work:
Supplemental Impact Report
2021-2023



AAW
ARTISTS AT WORK



AAW
ARTISTS AT WORK

Investing in *artists*
and their *communities*



Artists At Work (AAW) is a national workforce resilience program in the spirit of the WPA that is designed to support artists and their communities through artistic civic engagement.



In the three years since the Mellon Foundation's generous support, Artists At Work (AAW) has exceeded its original goals, establishing a national workforce resilience program for artists. Growing the program across Los Angeles County, the Mississippi Delta, and the Borderlands region through the grant from Mellon, AAW was able to leverage this support and expand into San Antonio and the Greater Chattanooga Thrive Region for a total of 57 artists and culture workers employed through the program over the past three years. Two new cohorts have just launched in March 2024 in Indianapolis, IN, and North Adams, MA, highlighting our commitment to continuous expansion and impact.

Successes and reflections from AAW's National Expansion 2021-2023 include:

Employment and Professional Development for 57 Artists and Culture Workers Across the U.S.

A recent AAW Alumni survey revealed that 81% of participating artists experienced expanded networking, with 88% securing paid work opportunities post-program. Impressively, 75% maintained partnerships and community work initiated during their tenure, showcasing sustained impact beyond immediate employment.

Local Ecosystem Impact on the Culture Sector and Communities

Beyond individual artists, AAW positively influenced local ecosystems. With financial support disbursed to a network of 71 cultural and community organizations across 9 states, and new partnerships formed, the initiative addressed critical issues such as anti-racism, mental health, criminal justice, immigration, and environmental justice.

Equity and Inclusion

AAW's commitment to equity is evident in the diversity of its participants and partners. Over the three-year expansion, 82% of participating cultural organizations and 80% of social impact partners are BIPOC-led or BIPOC-serving; 48 of 57 AAW Artists and culture workers (84%) are BIPOC individuals, with 94% reporting the program offered an equitable framework of support.

Narrative Change: Valuing Artists As Workers

Integral to AAW's impact has been its advocacy for recognizing artists as essential workers. AAW is proud to share some of our efforts in narrative change, challenging societal perceptions of artists and their work. Through strategic partnerships and collaborative initiatives, AAW has contributed to broader discussions, aiming to reshape how society values and acknowledges the essential role of artists in our cultural and social landscape.

Lessons Learned and Future Endeavors

Adapting to diverse geographies, AAW aims for long-term solutions to artist employment, addressing financial precarity and institutional support. Future plans involve deepening public-private partnerships, drawing from successful experiences during the initial national program expansion.

This executive summary serves as an introduction to a Supplemental Impact Report that provides a comprehensive overview of Artists At Work's achievements and insights from our national expansion 2021-2023. What follows are detailed findings, participant testimonials, and a deeper analysis of the program's sustained impact in workforce resiliency, partnerships, and community ecosystems. Reflecting on the successes and learnings, we look at the foundation laid for continued growth in the years ahead.



ARTISTS AT WORK 2021-2023

Reflections on Program Goals, Outcomes & Key Learnings from AAW's National Expansion

Supplemental Impact Report for the Mellon Foundation

Table of Contents

- 2 Executive Summary**
- 4 AAW National Expansion Outcomes Snapshot**
- 5 Goal #1: National Expansion: Employing Artists Across the U.S.**
- 6 Who are AAW Artists?**
- 7 Goal #2: Workforce Resilience & Professional Development**
- 9 Goal #3: Supporting Local Ecosystems: Culture Sector & Community Partners**
- 10 AAW Impact Projects Spotlight: Community Wellness
Cultural Preservation
Advocacy**
- 13 AAW as a Catalyst for Sustained Impact**
- 14 Goal #4: Develop an Equity Framework**
- 15 Narrative Change: Valuing Artists as Workers**
- 16 Key Learnings**
- 17 AAW Looking Forward: Sustainability Through Public-Private Partnerships**

AAW NATIONAL EXPANSION OUTCOMES SNAPSHOT



AAW is an effective workforce resilience program

- 94% of AAW Artists gained new and/or improved upon existing professional skills through AAW's workshops
- 81% reported that they found expanded or improved networking opportunities through AAW
- 88% received paid work opportunities in their field after the term
- 3 of 4 AAW Administrative Fellows found full-time employment in their local cultural sectors with all reporting their participation in the program offered valuable training, experience and local connections vital to their career advancements



AAW centers an equity framework and supports BIPOC artists

- 84% of AAW Artists and culture workers—including 100% of our AAW Administrative Fellows—are BIPOC
- 82% of participating culture organizations and 80% of social impact partners were BIPOC-led or BIPOC-serving
- 94% of AAW Artists felt the program offered an equitable framework of support to artists across a diversity of identities, backgrounds, disciplines, geographies, and caregiving roles



AAW fosters deep community connections & impact

- 100% of AAW Artists felt they made a positive impact on their communities through the support of AAW in the three areas of impact: Advocacy (33.3%), Community Wellness (33.3%) and Cultural Preservation (33.3%)
- 94% responded that they made above-average, meaningful connections with members of their community and those they worked with in their social impact work
- 75% reported they are still involved in the community work they developed during AAW



AAW develops sustainable cross-sector partnerships

- 75% of AAW Artists responded that they made above-average, meaningful connections with partnering organizations
- 75% reported that they are continuing their relationships with their partnering organization(s) after the AAW term
- 75% have also received additional opportunities or support from these partners

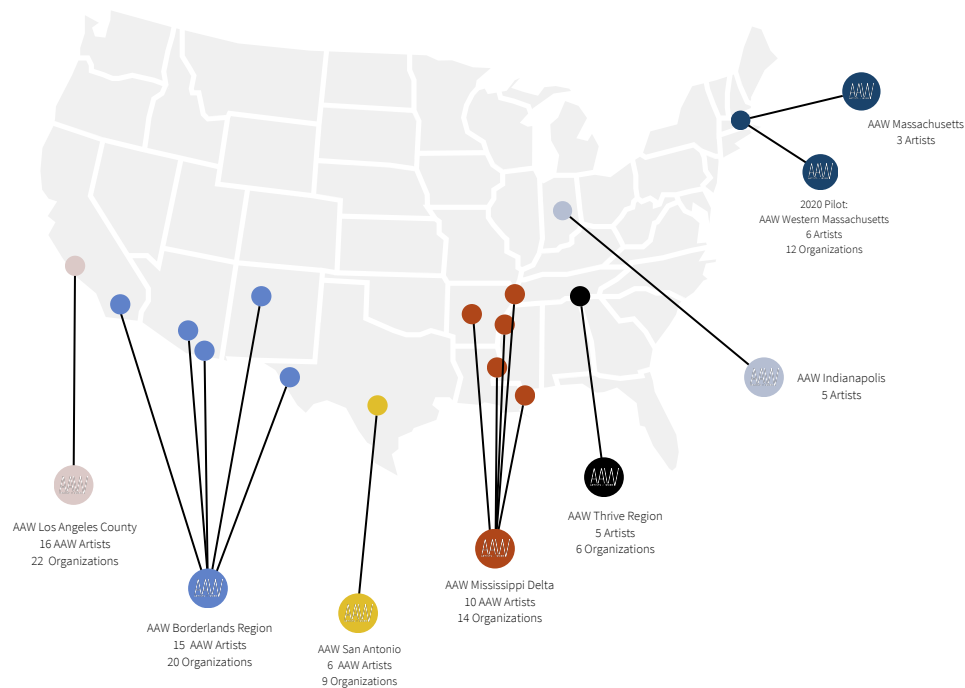
Goal #1:

National Expansion: Employing Artists Across the U.S.

Our originally proposed goal for the funding term from 2021 - 2023 was to employ 43 artists across 3 regions (Los Angeles County, the Mississippi Delta, and the Borderlands Region); Artists At Work has employed 57 artists across these three regions and by additionally leveraging Mellon's foundational support into two additional satellite programs in San Antonio and the Greater Chattanooga Thrive Region with local funding from the San Antonio Area Foundation and the Lyndhurst Foundation.

As the program concludes its current Mellon funding term, we have just launched two new cohorts in March 2024 with 8 new artists in Indianapolis, IN and North Adams, MA. This continues our goal to simultaneously expand and scale the program while building sustainable commitments in communities where the program has already had impact.

From 2021-2023, with the Mellon Foundation's generous support and other local funding, AAW was able to employ an additional 57 artists and culture workers across 9 states in partnership with 71 cultural and community organizations.



57 Artists
71 Partners
9 States

AAW VALUES & PRINCIPLES

WE VALUE ARTISTS AS WORKERS

We intentionally provide artists with a living wage salary, and full health benefits, rather than a stipend or grant in order, to show value for their work product and set them up to be able to use resources like retirement and unemployment benefits and COBRA following their term in the program.

ART IS ESSENTIAL TO A HEALTHY SOCIETY

Culture and artists are indispensable parts of American life and our local economies.

PRIORITIZE LOCAL VOICES

While AAW sets up an overarching national framework for its workforce resilience program, each AAW cohort reflects the local ecosystem through partnerships with local leaders, organizations, artists, and audiences that know their communities best.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ARE PARAMOUNT

In selection of locations, hubs, staff, advisors, fellows, and artists, AAW is committed to equitable and diverse representation across age, race, gender, and sexual orientation as well as cultures, disciplines, and geographies.

PUBLIC ART IS A PUBLIC GOOD

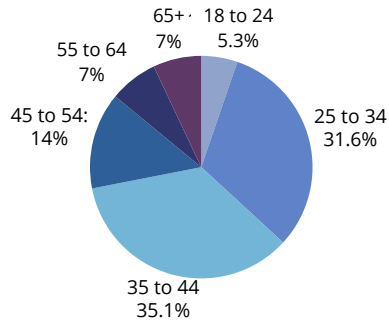
Art and culture are woven into the fabric of our lives—not as a luxury we can do without, but as a vital part of a functioning society, integral to our economic, social, and civic life.



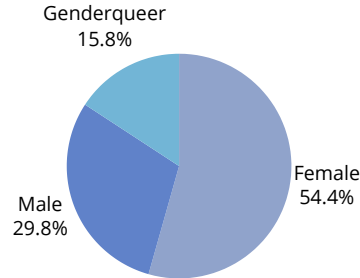
AAW Artists: By the Numbers

From 2021-2023, with the generous support of the Mellon Foundation and other local funding partners, AAW employed a diverse group of 57 artists across 9 states reflected by some of the following demographics:

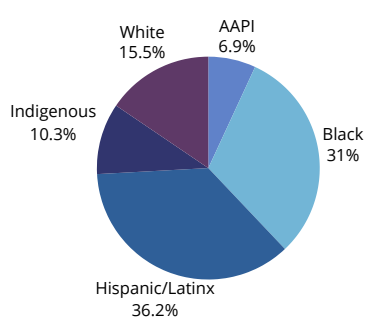
Age



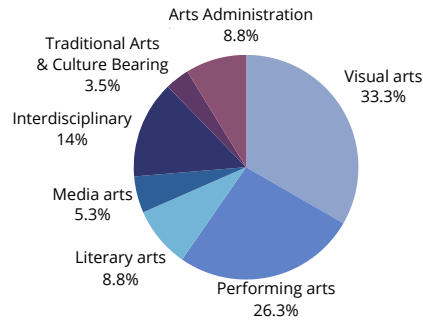
Gender Identity



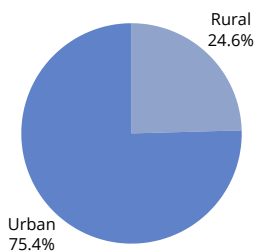
Race / Ethnicity



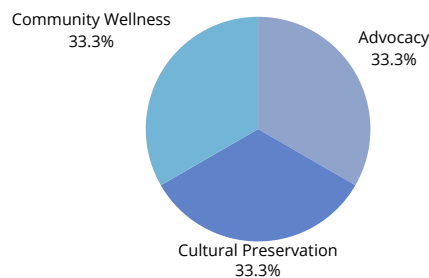
Discipline



Rural / Urban



Community Focus



Who are AAW Artists?

Data can only partially tell the story of the incredible cohorts of AAW Artists we've been honored to work with over the past three years. Spread across the United States, these artists lived in major cities with nationally-known anchor institutions and in rural regions with populations in the 100s and grassroots arts infrastructures. They were recent graduates, new parents and grandparents, ranging from established artistic voices to veterans of serving their communities to young artists developing their visions and voices. They were storytellers amplifying unknown histories in rural Black Belt communities, illustrators building public messaging campaigns in the face of rising racism against the AANHPI community, musicians acting as trans adult role models and creating space to celebrate and empower LGBTQIA+ youth, and culture bearers carrying forward traditional knowledge, from language preservation to harvesting practices.

With their valuable trust, collaboration and feedback, we are proud to be continually strengthening our systems of support in the program to be responsive and flexible to the interests and needs of a true diversity of artists.

“I do feel like this was the year that I got to take the time to heal from things and do inner personal transformation work in order for it to come through my artistic work. That is going to make me a better advocate as I go through my work.”

**- Nancy Woo, AAW Artist
Los Angeles County**



Goal #2:

Workforce Resilience and Professional Development for Artists

Though the program is structured as a one-year employment term, we aimed to develop Artists At Work as a sustainable workforce resilience program with rippling effects beyond the term for participants. In an industry and gig economy where resume building is difficult and barriers to entry can be high, participation in the program offered artists key opportunities and structures aimed towards sustaining their careers like:

- workshops to build critical professional skills and confidence, including financial and career planning, trauma-informed mental health training, grant writing, legal education and information, and civic practice
- local partners and national networks of support
- individualized mentorship from the core AAW staff
- proof of concept and documentation of work

Longer term results are now showing improved employment prospects for the majority of participants.



AAW Artist Alumni Impact

As Mellon funding allowed us to iterate the program over a longer period of time, we have now been able to gauge some of the long-term effects of the program in terms of workforce resilience in a recent survey of alumni of the program from Los Angeles County, the Mississippi Delta, and the Greater Chattanooga Thrive Region, who are now 1-2 years beyond their direct Artists At Work employment:

94%

of AAW Artists gained new and/or improved upon existing professional skill through AAW's workshops and report using many of these skills in an ongoing way

81%

reported that they found expanded or improved networking opportunities through Artists At Work

88%

have received paid work opportunities in the field after the program

75%

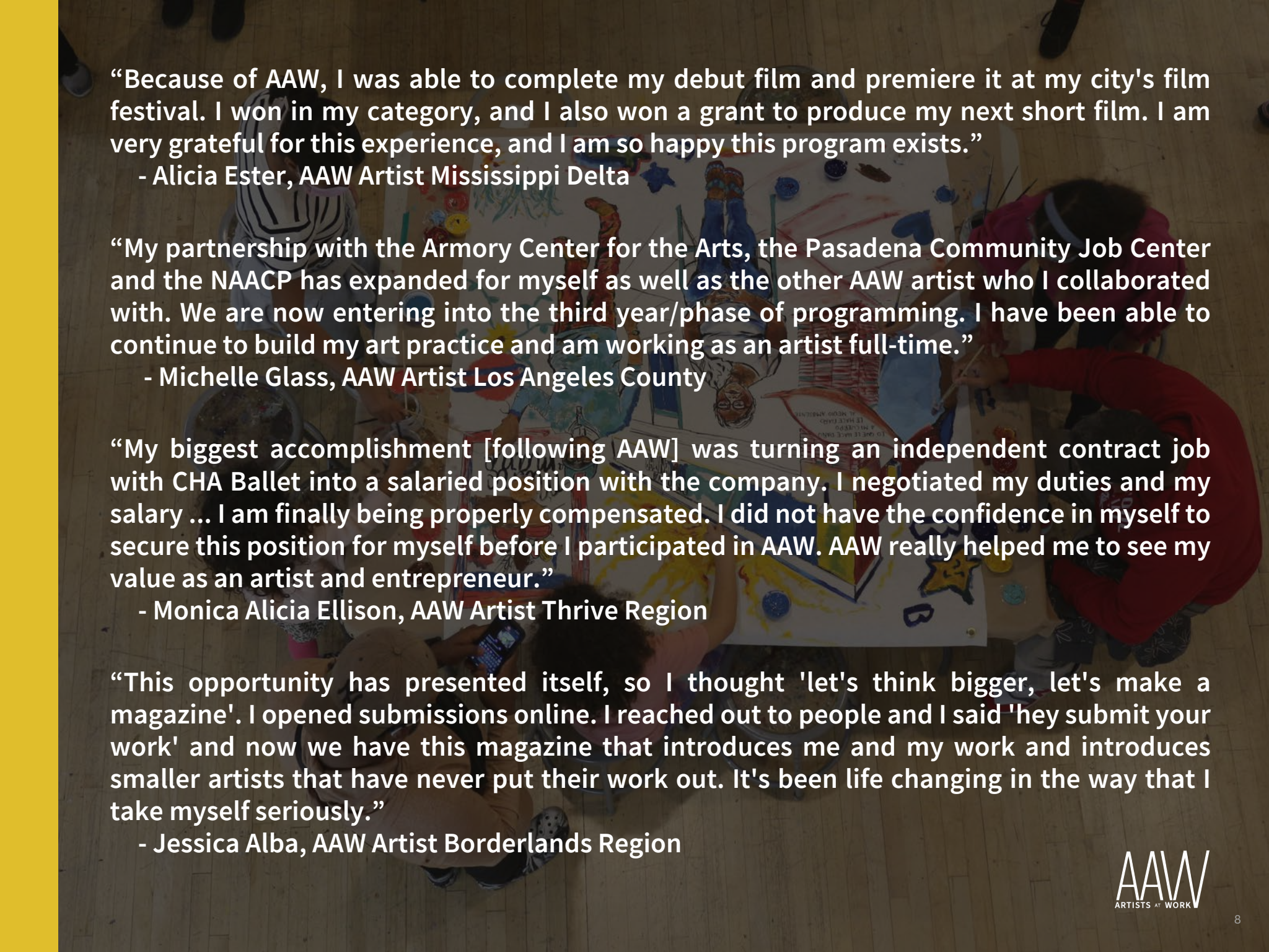
responded that they made above-average, meaningful connections with organizational partner(s) and have received additional opportunities and support from this connection

75%

are continuing partnerships and community work they began during AAW, often with new sources of funding or new positions



Common qualitative feedback included that the program increased participants' confidence and perceived legitimacy as working artists – both in their own eyes and those of potential employers – leading to a variety of new opportunities.



“Because of AAW, I was able to complete my debut film and premiere it at my city's film festival. I won in my category, and I also won a grant to produce my next short film. I am very grateful for this experience, and I am so happy this program exists.”

- Alicia Ester, AAW Artist Mississippi Delta

“My partnership with the Armory Center for the Arts, the Pasadena Community Job Center and the NAACP has expanded for myself as well as the other AAW artist who I collaborated with. We are now entering into the third year/phase of programming. I have been able to continue to build my art practice and am working as an artist full-time.”

- Michelle Glass, AAW Artist Los Angeles County

“My biggest accomplishment [following AAW] was turning an independent contract job with CHA Ballet into a salaried position with the company. I negotiated my duties and my salary ... I am finally being properly compensated. I did not have the confidence in myself to secure this position for myself before I participated in AAW. AAW really helped me to see my value as an artist and entrepreneur.”

- Monica Alicia Ellison, AAW Artist Thrive Region

“This opportunity has presented itself, so I thought 'let's think bigger, let's make a magazine'. I opened submissions online. I reached out to people and I said 'hey submit your work' and now we have this magazine that introduces me and my work and introduces smaller artists that have never put their work out. It's been life changing in the way that I take myself seriously.”

- Jessica Alba, AAW Artist Borderlands Region

Goal #3: Supporting Local Ecosystems: Culture Sector & Community Partners

Artists At Work aimed to employ artists while also making an impact — both financial and social — in the local cultural sectors and wider community ecosystems.

The immediate local impact from the artists' work can be difficult to summarize across the many disciplines, types of projects and cross-sector areas including mental health, antiracism, migrant rights, environmental justice, substance abuse recovery, criminal justice system reform, housing, and youth welfare. However, we made strides in articulating common areas of impact:

- Advocacy
- Community Wellness
- Cultural Preservation

More information on these types of impact with case studies and project examples follows in the next pages.

We found additional impact within Artists At Work's program structure and facilitation, which lays the groundwork for sustained community connections and affects participants beyond the term. We are now seeing the outcomes of AAW acting as a catalyst for future work, opportunities and resources locally.



Local Ecosystems Impact: By the Numbers

Organizational partners were surveyed and interviewed throughout the term to gather feedback about their organizations' experiences working with the AAW Artists and how it impacted their resources, capacity and reach in the community. Their feedback is included along with responses from our alumni survey below:

13,400+

Estimated number of community members reached during the 3-year national expansion

100%

of AAW Artists responded that felt they were able to make a positive impact on their community through the support of Artists At Work

94%

responded that they made above-average, meaningful connections with members of their community through their work

75%

of AAW Alumni Artists reported that they are continuing partnerships, projects and community work they began during their AAW term

71

Cultural and cross-sector organizational partners spread across our national network of 9 states (including Arkansas, Arizona, California, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Tennessee, Texas).



Qualitative feedback from organizational partners included that AAW Artists built a strong sense of community, expanded their capacity, and added new connections and accessibility to current resources and programming.

AAW Impact Projects Spotlight

Community Wellness

One-third of AAW Artists reported that their work addressed community wellness. From educating and reaching out to their neighbors about available local health resources to creating spaces and opportunities for them to connect, safely dialogue on difficult histories or process heavy emotions, artists contributed to the health, social cohesion and broader well-being of their communities in innovative and holistic ways.

Examples of AAW Artists whose projects centered on promoting community wellness include:

Amanda Romero

City of Albuquerque's Department of Arts & Culture | The Sanitary Tortilla Factory

Amanda developed arts programming to offer to currently and formerly incarcerated youth and adults. In partnership with Gordon Bernell Charter School, Amanda implemented both long-term and short-term programs that will now work into the existing structure of Sanitary Tortilla Factory's ongoing framework and organizational capacity as artist and community advocates. By engaging with system-impacted populations, they hope to create ongoing dialogue and projects that not only allow for creative expression for those who are inside the system, but create sustainable connections during the transition out of incarceration.

J P 제피

City of Albuquerque's Department of Arts & Culture | NM Asian Family Center

J P 제피 is in relationship with members of the Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) community in Albuquerque to develop personal and collective storytelling. Responding to prevailing cultural exclusion and the systematic reduction of Asian Americans to ornament or threat, J P's project, called My Story is Golden, maps cultural knowledge and collective imagination as community members share and witness one another. J P is currently continuing to work with the city of Albuquerque to incorporate these narratives into a large-scale public work.

daniel johnson

SIPP Culture | Jackson-Hinds Comprehensive Health Center

In partnership with SIPP Culture and Jackson-Hinds Comprehensive Health Center daniel took time to discover areas of alignment in their work and strategies for creating overlap in the organizations. The burgeoning relationship included a campaign of hand-painted roadside signs for the public health clinic in Utica. Johnson has continued the relationship fostered during the AAW term in his new project with One Nation One Project.

[HEAR MORE](#) 



“The Artists At Work project created an expansive, patient space for me to learn about the community and facilitate my Culture Hub and Social Impact Partner in the development of a long-term, sustainable, collaborative relationship.”

- daniel johnson, AAW Artist Mississippi Delta Region 2022-2023

~ Call us for appointment

AAW Impact Projects Spotlight

Cultural Preservation

One-third of AAW Artists reported that their work involved cultural preservation. Utilizing creative mediums like films, podcasts, portraits and exhibitions, artists worked to conserve and contextualize history, tradition and heritage. Their work brought meaning and depth to their communities, provided younger generations an opportunity to connect to the past while advancing and innovating cultural traditions, and shined lights on histories that, unaddressed or unexamined, continue to impact the present.

Examples of AAW Artists whose projects centered on cultural preservation include:

Tanisha Tucker Lohse

Southwest Folklife Alliance | Tohono O’odham Young Voices Podcast

Guided by the teachings of her mother, Tanisha works to preserve traditional harvesting practices and restore native food ways. She developed recipes with native foods, discussed history, and hosted community tastings and classes in partnership with Tohono O’Odham Young Voices podcast. The podcast focuses on sharing tribal topics and stories of Southern Arizona within indigenous communities.

Alicia Ester

Historic Clayborn Temple | Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action and Hope

Alicia released her directorial debut film, *Spirit of Memphis*, in collaboration with Clayborn Temple. *Spirit of Memphis*, through a series of interviews, tells the history of black Memphis, the Sanitation Workers Strike, and Clayborn Temple. Following its release, Alicia received the Best Hometown Feature Award at the Memphis Film Festival as well as a grant from IndieMemphis to produce her next project *55 South*.

Lisa Hicks-Gilbert

Delta Commons Group | Lee Street Community Center

Lisa Hicks-Gilbert launched *Silent No More*, a multimedia exhibition memorializing the Elaine Massacre of 1919, unsealing the previously untold stories of the victims, survivors, and descendants. During her year with AAW, Lisa Hicks-Gilbert also was elected the first Black Mayor of Elaine, Arkansas, and the first female Mayor of Elaine, a historic moment for the town and its citizens. Mayor Hicks-Gilbert is currently serving her first term while continuing to cultivate the power of the arts to tell the important stories of Elaine’s history.

[HEAR MORE](#) 



“It is important for us to share this information because it lets people understand that it is not just a plant, it is not just a cactus; it is actually food and everything out here is food and medicine. It is this connection between our ancestors. We are walking in the same path they are walking on and we are seeing the same landscape—and sometimes picking the same saguaros they did.”

-Tanisha Tucker Lohse, AAW Artist Borderlands Region 2022-2023

AAW Impact Projects Spotlight

Advocacy

One-third of AAW Artists reported that their work involved community advocacy. We saw AAW Artists advocate on community causes and issues they care about from migrant rights to substance abuse recovery and step into roles like cultural organizers, imaginative problem solvers, and public messengers.

Examples of AAW Artists whose projects centered on advocacy include:

Natalia Ventura

Casa Familiar | The Friends of Friendship Park

Natalia brought needed attention to the construction of two parallel 30' walls through Friendship Park, a binational park located at the western end of the US-Mexico border where for generations people have gathered on both sides to meet with loved ones. Informed by the work of local doctors, activists, and community leaders who are mobilizing against 30' walls, Natalia worked with organizers to host protests, binational art installations, and a resistance encampment called "El Pueblito" to bring attention to the cause. The activations were anchored by Friends of Friendship Park, with an invitation to the region's grassroots organizations, activist groups and beyond.

Lorna Faulkner

Border Arts Corridor | Amigos Sin Corona

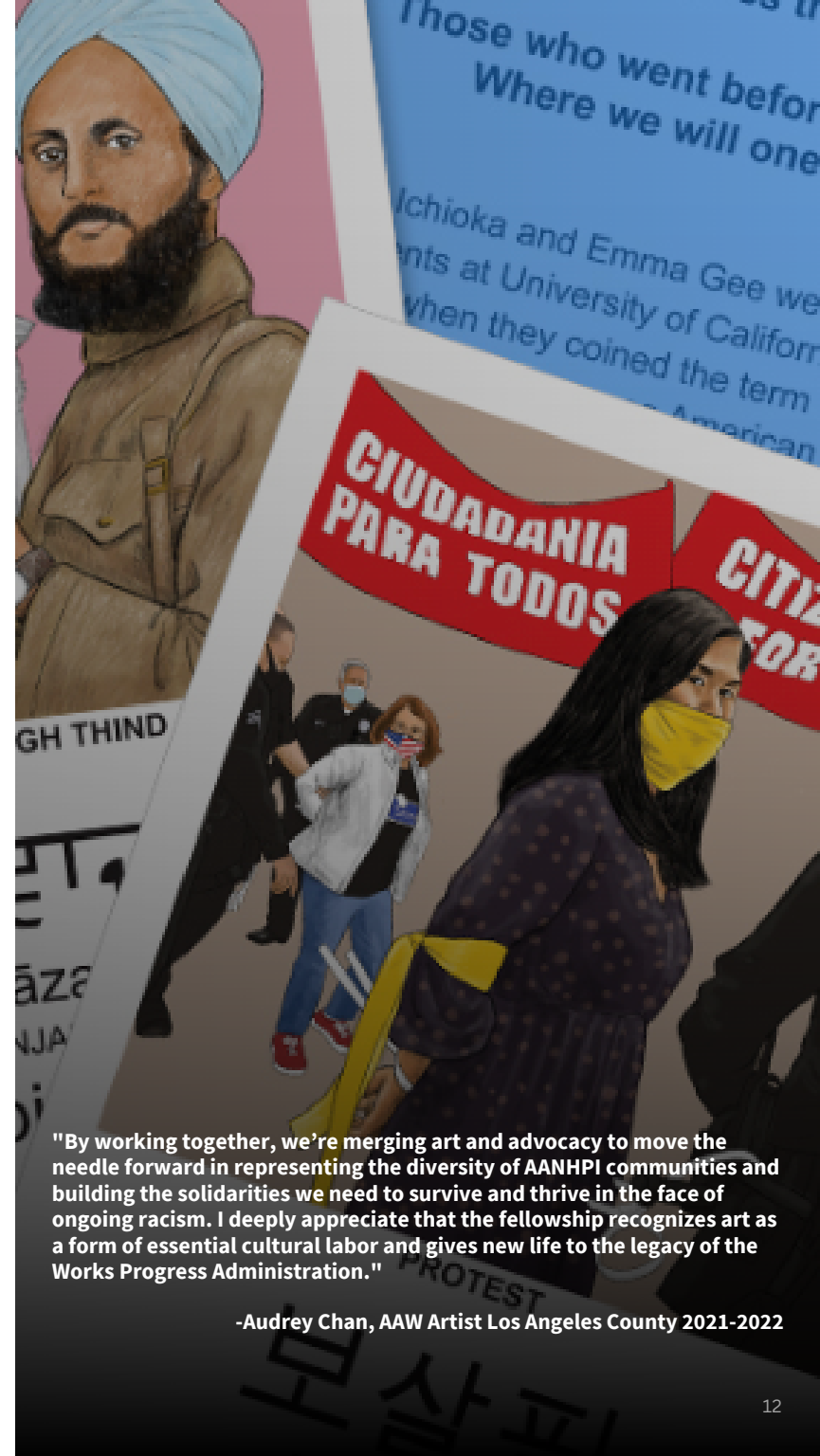
In partnership with Amigos Sin Corona, Lorna connected with members of her community to tell their immigration stories in a children's book format. Her goal is to address stigma and encourage empathy around the subject of migration, with a particular interest in supporting the wellbeing of children who have experienced displacement. She is donating copies and leading public readings of her book, *Imaginary Lines*, to libraries, schools, and immigrant resource centers for local children in the Borderlands

Audrey Chan & Jason Chu

National Center for the Preservation of Democracy at the Japanese American National Museum | Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles

Audrey Chan and Jason Chu developed their collaborative project, *An American Vocabulary: Words to Actions*, with JANM and Asian Americans Advancing Justice LA. The project consists of twenty flashcards pairing Audrey's illustrations with Jason's words, portraying figures, events, and actions illustrating the four themes of voice, ancestor, persistence, and care. The cards equip all audiences with a vocabulary for AANHPI agency and allyship in the fight for justice.

[HEAR MORE](#) 



"By working together, we're merging art and advocacy to move the needle forward in representing the diversity of AANHPI communities and building the solidarities we need to survive and thrive in the face of ongoing racism. I deeply appreciate that the fellowship recognizes art as a form of essential cultural labor and gives new life to the legacy of the Works Progress Administration."

-Audrey Chan, AAW Artist Los Angeles County 2021-2022

AAW as a Catalyst for Sustained Impact

As the program operates on a one-year term, we are particularly interested in measuring longer-term outcomes for our participants and identifying sustained partnerships, connections, and projects, especially as they build additional capacity, opportunities, visibility, and resources for the local ecosystem following participation in the program. A selection of examples includes:

- **AAW Borderlands Artist Amanda Romero and her partners received three-year funding from the Youth Civic Infrastructure Fund (YCIF) to support their visual arts programming for system-impacted youth.** Developed during the AAW term, the program focuses on mental health, expression, and sustainable connections for the transition out of incarceration. Funding will go towards integrating the program into Sanitary Tortilla Factory's structure and ongoing work in Albuquerque.
- Following AAW Los Angeles County, **18th Street Arts Center was selected to participate in the Californians for the Arts Creative Corps Program** and brought learnings from their participation in AAW. Their cohort included two AAW alumni, Michelle Glass and Audrey Chan.
- Building on his work with AAW, AAW Mississippi Delta Artist **daniel johnson now serves as the Cultural Strategist for the One Nation One Project** Utica, MS Community Advisory Group in partnership with the Town of Utica and both his AAW partners: the Mississippi Center for Cultural Production and Jackson-Hinds Comprehensive Health Clinics.
- **Casa Familiar was able to use AAW funds to increase their capacity and hire new staff.** During the term, they were **also awarded a two-year \$500K grant from the Mellon Foundation** to support their arts & culture programming.
- Following AAW Mississippi Delta, **New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA)—a regional anchor institution that was not a participant in AAW—hired Administrative Fellow Kelci Baker as its Community Engagement Manager** to manage its Creative Assembly residency, supporting local artists and community connection. Kelci continues to attend AAW professional development trainings to inform her new role in this program.
- **Building on learnings from the program, AAW Thrive Region's lead partner ArtsBuild launched the Chattanooga Art + Climate Project residency, hiring AAW Thrive Region Administrative Fellow Brianna Jones full-time to manage the program.**
- **During her term, AAW Mississippi Delta Artist Lisa Hicks-Gibert was elected the first Black Mayor of Elaine, Arkansas, and the first female Mayor of Elaine,** a historic moment for the town and its citizens. Mayor Hicks-Gilbert is currently serving her first term while continuing to cultivate the power of the arts to tell the important stories of Elaine's history.



Goal #4:

Develop an Equity Framework

While AAW was initially conceived to address the pressing financial and health needs of artists in the wake of COVID-19, a core tenet of the program was to acknowledge and address ongoing systemic issues in the arts and arts funding. One of AAW's primary goals was and remains to support BIPOC artists, organizations, and culture workers and work to build the program with an equitable framework by centering local knowledge, aligning with community priorities and fostering trust-based relationships with all participants.

- Over the three-year expansion, including the satellite programs in San Antonio and the Greater Chattanooga Thrive region, **18 of 22 (82%) participating cultural organizations and 39 of 49 (80%) social impact partners were BIPOC-led or BIPOC-serving.**
- **48 of 57 AAW Artists and culture workers (84%)—including 100% of our AAW Administrative Fellows—are BIPOC.**
- **94% of AAW Artists and AAW Administrative Fellows felt the program offered an equitable framework** of support to artists across a diversity of identities, backgrounds, disciplines, geographies, and caregiving roles.
- **3 of 4 AAW Administrative Fellows found full-time positions** within their local cultural sectors, including our Borderlands Fellow Gabriela Yadegari who was recently hired to our core team as the AAW Program Coordinator. All reported their participation in the program offered valuable training, experience, and connections vital to their career advancements.

“My work with the AAW Thrive Region allowed me to advance to a full-time position with the resident Cultural Hub partner ArtsBuild. I have also just recently accepted an opportunity to join a cohort of emerging producers. AAW was the perfect jumpstart to my career.”

- Brianna Jones, AAW Administrative Fellow Thrive Region



“ [AAW] made sure I had a salary and health insurance and support during the stress of the work and heaviness around being a descendant...while doing the work to tell my ancestors’ stories. It was so impactful.”

**— Mayor Lisa Hicks-Gilbert, AAW Alumni
at the NEA Summit in Washington D.C.
January 2024**

Narrative Change

Valuing Artists As Workers

AAW has been a leading advocate for artists and their value, developing and dialoguing with a broad national network of partners and colleagues across sectors and within government and policy spheres. We are passionate about advocating for artists while proceeding to serve as a strong case study for the broad impact artists can make with financial and structural support. We were honored to be included in the following conversations, working groups and publications below:

“Healing, Bridging, Thriving: A Summit on Arts and Culture in our Communities” hosted by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the White House Domestic Policy Council

- AAW Artist and Mayor of Elaine, Arkansas Lisa Hicks-Gilbert shared her experience and wisdom on a panel framing artists as workers and investigating how arts and culture knit the social fabric of our communities and are essential to advancing equitable outcomes. For a recap on the summit and Lisa’s panel, please visit [here](#).

Creatives Rebuild New York (CRNY) Artist Employment Program Working Group

- AAW Managing Director Nadine Goellner recently participated this working group that reflected on challenges, opportunities, and best practices in various artist employment programs. The working group considered how to amplify our shared learnings to leverage new support systems for artists, resulting in a set of strategic recommendations, just published by CRNY and available [here](#).

2023 SNF Nostos Conference on Mental Health

- AAW Alum Naia Kete spoke on a panel entitled “The role of the arts: Addressing trauma and mental health through creative expression.” Naia shared the stage with Christopher Bailey of the World Health Organization and Dr. Tasha Golden of the International Arts + Mind Lab at Johns Hopkins University—and AAW professional development consultant. Watch the conversation [here](#).

GIA: Building Structures for Equitable and Effective Support in Community-Engaged Practice

- The San Antonio Area Foundation and Artists At Work presented their work at the GIA Conference as case studies in scaffolded support for artists working across the spectrum of socially engaged practice, looking at the challenges and opportunities for connection and growth for the artists, funders, community partners and project participants.

Californians for the Arts: The Arts Work to Create Jobs Panel

- Founding Director of THE OFFICE performing arts + film and Artists At Work Rachel Chanoff and AAW Alum Naia Kete joined a conversation of leading thinkers and organizers from California and beyond that are reimagining how policy and systems can make the arts work for its workers. Watch the conversation [here](#).

KEY LEARNINGS 2021-2023

The ability to iterate and evolve the program over the past three years in new geographies allowed us to fine-tune the program structure, build materials to guide participating artists through the term, and offer best practices.

We've distilled some of our key learnings and insights into actionable bullet points, providing a snapshot of the critical considerations gleaned from our experiences that will inform the evolution of the program moving forward. From redefining artists' employment to streamlining operations and exploring extended employment durations, these lessons serve as guideposts for refining our approach, enhancing equity, and fortifying the sustained impact of Artists At Work.

Through this process, we have reaffirmed our belief that long-term solutions to artist employment – not just pandemic-era intervention – are critically needed.



Refining Employment Terms

- **Define Artists' Employment:** Clearly articulate roles and responsibilities in order to establish a standardized understanding of what constitutes artists' employment.
- **Extended Employment Duration:** Explore the transition from a one-year to a two-year duration, which emerged as a pivotal lesson learned from participant feedback. This adjustment is seen as essential for fostering sustained impact and deeper engagements with both artists and the communities they serve. This will require more financial resources.
- **Refine Pay Scale Framework:** Evaluate and refine the pay scale framework to ensure equitable compensation across diverse regions, considering factors such as states, rural/urban contexts, and individual circumstances (family v. individual). This will require resourcing the AAW program to be better able to accommodate higher salaries than base living-wage rates.

Streamlining Partnerships

- **Two Organizational Partners versus One:** Consider the impact and effectiveness of engaging with a single organizational partner versus two in the community engagement and project development component of the program.
- **Cultural Organizations as Selection Advisors:** Involve cultural organizations in the early stages of artists selection but prioritize matchmaking with social organizations, emphasizing the importance of this specific relationship in the community engagement process.
- **Timeline Flexibility:** Incorporate flexibility into program timelines to accommodate the evolving needs and dynamics of participating artists and organizations.

Optimizing Program Support

- **Professional Development & “High-Touch” Support:** Professional development and active ongoing mentorship throughout the term are key to successful outcomes for participating artists. Workshops must be tailored to best support the evolving needs of artists in the program, particularly for those new to doing community engagement and/or social impact work. AAW included certifications and more in-depth training for certain aspects of this type of work, such as trauma-informed practice and local environmental issues.
- **Minimize Required Reporting:** Streamline reporting and milestone requirements to alleviate the administrative burden on both artists and organizations, promoting a more efficient and participant-friendly operational structure. AAW transitioned from a survey model to an interview-based method to collect quantitative and qualitative data from participants.

ARTISTS AT WORK LOOKING FORWARD

Building on the success, partnerships, key learnings and foundational conversations from our national expansion, AAW is emerging from this three-year period with a new goal and strategic focus in its next steps to strengthen and sustain the program's impact through deepening public-private partnerships.

Next Steps for AAW

Sustainability through Public-Private Partnerships

The next phase of Artists At Work aims to model public-private funding streams for artist employment, emphasizing the pivotal role in cultivating public buy-in, contributing to policy initiatives, and driving narrative change to ensure long-term program sustainability for the benefit of artists across the nation.

While COVID-era financial distress was a catalyst for many artist employment programs and emergency funds to meet the moment, we have witnessed throughout the country that the majority of artists are regularly operating from a place of ongoing financial and employment precarity, lacking many benefits and protections of salaried employees and often operating independently without institutional support. In turn, artists suffer from inadequate access to healthcare, workforce training / career advancement opportunities, and resources for financial / retirement planning. We believe when society places artists in a cycle of economic vulnerability, it is also to the detriment of the broader communities where they live. Thriving artists actively contribute to economic health, community wellbeing, cultural preservation, and advocacy efforts on a range of cross-sector issues when given proper support and resources.

Expected Outcomes

Public Sector Recognition

Artists At Work anticipates increased recognition of the arts as a driving force for community development, fostering collaboration within varied levels of the public sector for sustained artist employment opportunities.

Policy Changes and Funding

Advocacy efforts and collaboration with government entities are expected to result in policy changes and increased funding, creating a conducive environment for artist employment.

Sustainable Artist Employment

Public sector engagement is envisioned to establish more sustainable artist employment, providing financial stability and fostering a thriving artistic community.

Cultural and Economic Enrichment

Artists At Work expects to contribute to the cultural vibrancy, economic development and equity of the regions involved, emphasizing the significant role of artists in shaping the identity and prosperity of communities.



AAW

ARTISTS AT WORK

For more information
artists-at-work.org

