



# Artist-Led Giving Circle

Reimagining Wealth  
Redistribution and the  
Creative Economy

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Binta Ayofemi  
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## SUPPORTED BY



# The Artist-Led Giving Circle

## Reimagining Wealth Redistribution and the Creative Economy

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“We were gathered from across the country. We met as strangers joined by common dreams. We came as dancers, dreamers, theater folk, organizers, founders, poets—doers of all types; all lovers of Livy. Wanting for one another what we wanted for ourselves: we became community”**

— AYODELE NZINGA, ARTIST-LED GIVING CIRCLE MEMBER

In September 2020, YBCA, along with a national partnership of arts organizations and funders, co-convened 14 artists from across the nation to attend the annual social impact investment conference, SOCAP. Emergent from an initial meeting together as a cohort, 14 individual artists quickly expressed a desire to form a collective body that could support their individual work and immediate needs, while building something bigger and more deliberate. Inspired by this sentiment of mutual care and by the practices of traditional gifting circles, the cohort formed into an Artist-Led Giving Circle (ALGC) in October 2020.

This report highlights the forming, impact, and learnings from this majority-Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) cohort, who came together to dramatically reimagine wealth redistribution as a community and artist-led alternative to capitalism. This report is intended for arts and culture organizations, economic security advocates, and funders entering or deepening their involvement in solutions that collectively build a more just economy.

### ABOUT YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS (YBCA)

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) is San Francisco's center for art and progress. Opened to the public in 1993, YBCA was founded as the cultural anchor of San Francisco's Yerba Buena Gardens neighborhood. Our work spans the realms of contemporary art, performance, film, civic engagement, and public life. By centering artists as essential to social and cultural movement, YBCA is reimagining the role an arts institution can play in the community it serves. Our mission is to generate culture that moves people.

The Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) is committed to resourcing and sustaining economic models that address systemic racism, inequity, and economic insecurity in both the arts and culture sector and society. YBCA believes artists are essential to the systems-level change necessary to move us towards a more equitable, democratic, and sustainable economy.

The ALGC partnership was made possible through the shared values of YBCA's national partners: [Alternate Roots](#), [ArtPlace](#), [Ignite Arts Dallas](#), [Rasmuson Foundation](#), [William Penn Foundation](#), and [The Village Arts and Humanities + Research Fellow at The Foresight Lab](#), as well as seed funding from the [#startsmall foundation](#).

This paper:

- Situates artists as central contributors to economic development investment strategies and new economic models.
- Explains additional challenges facing artists and arts funding based on pandemic numbers, and the realities of the COVID-19 impact on our nation.
- Provides a brief overview of how YBCA reimagines its role as an arts institution in the community.
- Shares recommendations for resourcing and sustaining giving circle, mutual aid, and other examples modeling artist-led social and solidarity economies.

## Artist-Led Giving Circle Founding Members

### [Binta Ayofemi](#)

- Artist, Founder, Builder, Dancer, Mover, Maker
- xučyun (Oakland), Chochenyo Ohlone land, and yelamu (San Francisco), Ramaytush Ohlone land

### [Fay Darmawi](#)

- Film Festival Producer, Community Development Banker, Urban Planner
- yelamu (San Francisco), Ramaytush Ohlone land

### [Vashti DuBois](#)

- Artist, Organizer, Leader
- Lenapehoking (Lenni-Lenape) (also known as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania))

### [Christy NaMee Eriksen](#)

- Poet, Teaching Artist, Organizer
- Tlingít Aani (Tlingit) (also known as Juneau, Alaska)

### [Yngvil Vatn Guttu](#)

- Musician, Composer, Producer, Festival Director, Community Organizer
- Immigrant from Norway via the UK and Canada to Anchorage, Alaska, which we are learning to call Dena'ina land in Dgheyay Kaq'

### [Ayodele Nzinga](#)

- Artist Theoretician/Producer, Actor, Changemaker, Word Slanger
- Still searching for her home; xučyun (Oakland), Chochenyo Ohlone land

### [Louis Travino and Vincent Medina](#)

- Capitán (Cultural Leader), Teachers, Culture Bearer
- The work of mak-ámham is done primarily here at home in halkin (San Lorenzo, Castro Valley, Hayward, Southern Oakland, Alameda)
- Cafe Ohlone is located in xučyun (Berkeley), Chochenyo Ohlone land

### [Victoria Rae Moore](#)

- Writer, Dancer, Facilitator, Producer, Co-Founder
- Kusso & Sewee (also known as North Charleston, South Carolina)

### [Maria Cherry Rangel](#)

- Cultural Strategist, Resource Organizer, Cultural Producer, and Equity Coach
- Chahta Yakni (Choctaw) & Chitimacha (also known as New Orleans, Louisiana)

### [Darryl Ratcliff](#)

- Artist, Poet, Founder, Investor
- Jumanos, Wichita, Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo) & Tawakoni (also known as Dallas, Texas)

### [Melissa Shaginoff](#)

- Ahtna and Paiute person, Artist, Curator, Auntie
- Dena'ina land in Dgheyay Kaq' (also known as Anchorage, Alaska)

### [Aku \(Allison Akootchook Warden\)](#)

- Iñupiaq, Daughter, Installation Artist
- Dena'ina Elnena & Dēnéndeh (also known as Anchorage, Alaska)

### [Erin Washington](#)

- Artist, Scholar, Waymaker
- Mvskoke (Muscogee) & Mvskoke (Muscogee) (also known as Atlanta, Georgia & Montgomery, Alabama)



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**WITH GRATITUDE**

We extend deep gratitude and appreciation to the members of the Giving Circle, whose generous invitation for YBCA to join the first part of their journey allowed us to briefly bear witness to the incredible vision, power, and growth of this dynamic group of change makers, agitators, and wayfinders.

Generally speaking, economy is the exchange of resources for shelter, food, health and well-being. There are many types of economies, the most dominant of which is the market economy — where the method of exchange is through a value system in which money or capital determines the value or worth of an item, service, or goods. In this economic structure, power and resources have been consolidated in prioritizing the needs of the few through extraction from and exploitation of the many.

Through this logic of capitalism, people and society become resources to be exploited. Their value in the form of labor or social relationships are reduced to their worth in maximizing profits.

This concept has deep roots in slavery in our country. In the paper by Mark Stelzner and Sven Beckett, "[The Contributions of Enslaved Workers to Output and Growth in the Antebellum South](#)" they describe how "we find that enslaved workers were responsible for somewhere between 18.7 and 24.3 percent of the increase in commodity output per capita nationally between 1839 and 1859 — comparable to the increase in commodity output deriving from the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in New England." Their findings also show that income inequality increased between White Southern households with enslaved Americans and those without.

Since 1981, the incomes of the top 5% of earners have [increased](#) faster than the income of other families. [This rise in economic inequality in the U.S.](#) is tied to several factors. These include, in no particular order, technological advances, globalization, the decline of unions and the eroding value of the minimum wage. In [a paper by Carter C. Price and Kathryn Edwards of the RAND Corporation](#), the cumulative tab for forty years of radical inequality had grown to over \$47 trillion from 1975 through 2018. Nearly all the benefits were captured by those at the top.

Years later, and coupled with the onset of a global pandemic, we continue to see how even inequality is issued unequally. Low-wage workers and their families, disproportionately people of color, suffer from far higher rates of asthma, hypertension, diabetes, and other COVID-19 comorbidities; yet they are also far less likely to have health insurance, and far more likely to work in "essential" industries with the highest rates of coronavirus exposure and transmission. It is no surprise then, [according to the CDC](#), that COVID-19 inflicts "a disproportionate burden of illness and death among racial and ethnic minority groups."

In the podcast, “Next Economy Now”, co-host Kevin Bayuk of LIFT Partners [describes](#) the economy as, “the collective set of strategies we use to meet our needs.” He goes on to say, “there are other economic structures that move, and sustain our collective well-being and livelihoods.” By that definition, there’s an opportunity for more expansive interpretations for how we might view and value the exchange of resources, labor, and products in a more shared and equity-centered economy.

**But, what if we had an economic system built on solidarity, trust, and mutual benefit? An economy where all our needs were met? An economy where there was always enough to go around and no one was left out — where people measured wealth by well-being and overall community health? Imagine how much richer and more resilient our communities would be.**

Known by many names, this concept of a social or solidarity economy is a global movement that puts people and planet over profit and growth. Rooted in strategies and practices moving us to a post-capitalist world, solidarity economy models value democratic governance and shared ownership for building

community power and economic control. Solidarity economy, or social economy, is an alternative structure where we reject the commoditization of our planet and people in favor of a collaborative, cooperative structure of shared resources and reciprocating benefits for all. From community land trusts, worker co-ops, to mutual aid networks, and participatory budgeting, solidarity economies provide radical alternatives for self-determination, economic liberation, and strengthening community health and wellbeing.

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**“We are performing economy in a new way and rehearsing the forms that we would like to see in the world.”**

— BINTA AYOFEMI, ARTIST-LED GIVING CIRCLE MEMBER

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# The Pandemic and Arts Funding

Artists play a critical role in the well-being of our communities and in the economic, social, and cultural fabric of our cities. Artists bring unique talent and skill to fostering cohesion and belonging, building trust, activating civic engagement, addressing mental health, cultivating collective safety, and celebrating community identity.

Artists are doing and will continue to do the essential work of helping us to make meaning of these times. Not only that, but artists have a direct impact on the health and well-being of their communities, creating the conditions for healthy, cohesive, safe, and engaged communities.

Though essential to our cultural fabric, the COVID-19 pandemic [revealed the inadequacy](#) of our existing systems to fully support artists. Jobs in the creative economy took a hard hit: the U.S. experienced an estimated 4.8% reduction in GDP that resulted in a current-dollar loss of \$191.2 billion in the first quarter of 2020. Over 21 million jobs in March and April 2020 were lost, translating to a 14.7% unemployment rate. The crisis resulted in an estimated loss of more than 2.7 million jobs and more than \$150 billion in sales for creative industries between April 1 and July 31 of 2020. And the sector has been slow to recover.

For artists who typically relied on grants as the bedrock of their financial stability, they faced an ecosystem of an abundance of relief grants coupled with an abundance of individuals all vying for the same resource.

“Artists grants are crazy, and competitive especially right now — redistributed mostly to emergency funding. Throughout the pandemic everybody is vying for this funding whereas pre-pandemic people were making money off presenting, touring, and live demonstrations. We’re all applying for the same resources. Our colleagues apply for the same grants and sometimes you get it and sometimes you don’t.” said Toran Moore, Giving Circle gift recipient.



Applying for grants can often feel like a full-time job with limited resources. From the complicated and sometimes cryptic set of guidelines and questions, coupled with the shifting landscape of artistic-excellence expectations, the necessary networking, and the ultimate task of waiting for a response — having to delay creative output or put off projects with no guarantee that funding will be awarded. The federal arts agency, the National Endowment for the Arts, whose primary focus is grantmaking to nonprofit arts organizations, public arts agencies, and individual writers and translators, showed a FY2020 appropriation of \$162.5 million. This constituted only roughly .003 percent of the federal budget. [As this resource states](#), “more than 80 percent of the appropriation is distributed as grants and awards to organizations and individuals across the country.” This means splitting these funds across all sectors, large and small organizations, and individual artists in every state throughout the U.S. The NEA [FY-2023 budget proposal](#) requests \$203 million, an increase of \$23.55 over 2022 levels. These incremental changes are nothing compared to the \$773 billion [proposed FY2023](#) budget for the Department of Defense, for example.

For Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) artists, the numbers are even more staggering: the latest research from the [Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equality](#), which seeks to generate enough power among disenfranchised people to change the fundamental rules of society, shows that only about 8-9 percent of grant-making from foundations goes into communities of color [in the US].

Now, pair those factors with geographic challenges: [often regarded as “the land of opportunity”](#), the United States is better thought of as a collection of societies where these opportunities differ. If you divide the U.S. up into four sections, the South suffered the worst job losses in the pandemic, followed by the West, Northeast, and Midwest. When examined more closely, the size of the states’ respective creative economies comes into play.

The South has four states with more than 250,000 employed in the creative industries and three states with more than 200,000 in creative occupations. The West has only two states with more than 250,000 employed in the creative industries and only one with more than 200,000 in creative occupations. Less community, less resources, and a more difficult road to traverse for arts funding and creative individuals.

**When artists have access to [adequate resources](#), they strengthen communities and improve health and well-being outcomes.**

**Artists are an underutilized leadership asset and have struggled with financial precarity even before the onset of the pandemic.**

**In the face of COVID-19, with the odds stacked against artists and creative workers, specifically those in vulnerable communities, YBCA imagined a new way to meet the needs of artists and sustain communities.**



City Is Alive, [SUFF](#)

PHOTO COURTESY OF: Fay Darmawi



# The Call for Radical Change

In September of 2020, YBCA gathered a cohort of artists to attend the [SOCAP Conference](#), one of the largest conferences of impact investors in the country. Each member of the majority BIPOC group had a track record of significant impact, including long term forms of community based creative practice and radical visions for systemic change. YBCA put forth a transformative thesis to the SOCAP community: if you care about equity, health and wellbeing, investing in artists is essential, and this particular group was a powerful place to start.

“We understood that the creative economy was the most impacted by the ongoing pandemic, and were deeply invested in what sustainable and long-term alternatives could look like for building economic security and community wealth for artists in our creative ecosystem.” said Meklit Hadero, Head of Creativity and Impact at YBCA.

In their first meeting together, the cohort of artists deeply interrogated the purpose of presenting at SOCAP2020 and the inherent competition-based model they’d be in to fight against each other for the same resources. It was during this first meeting that the group pushed back against a structure that, even in a best case scenario, might only see a few projects “win” funding.

Instead, they asked, what if the cohort committed that funding to each other? What if funding for one meant funding for all? What if cooperation allowed everyone to win? Through a very simple, but radical act of affirmation, each member of the cohort said yes to a shared model and formed together as a circle. The sense of collective potential was electric.



## The Vital Conditions for Community Health & Wellbeing

### Social Cohesion & Belonging

Having positive social relationships, experiencing the sense of interdependence among individuals in a community — the bond that ties people together.

### Community Safety

Collectively addressing broad issues that create risk and vulnerability, so that community members feel safe where they live, work, or spend their leisure time.

### Civic Engagement

Making a positive difference in the quality of life in a community through both political and nonpolitical processes, recognizing yourself as a member of a larger social fabric.

### Community Identity / Community Narrative

Understanding the shared culture, belief systems, social norms, and practices of a community; ensuring the community is in charge of its own narrative; and protecting against harmful mainstream narratives that dehumanize and harm individuals and communities.



Gift recipient, Marie Arnaq Meade  
PHOTO: Yngvil VG

“If it had been a different group of people that may have gone differently. It was the timing and the invitation. None of us knew who else was going to be in this Circle. I received this open invitation through a secondary organization. I had no idea that this would put me in a relationship with YBCA. Now I feel I could reach out to any one of them at any time, and we have a foundation.” said Victoria Rae Moore.

Inspired by the decision-making amongst the artist cohort and in response to an invitation from the artists for YBCA to show up at this moment, YBCA seeded an initial investment of \$250,000. Offered with no strings attached, and no specific mission to fulfill, the funds were simply to be used for community well-being — a concept already at the root of the artists’ work. The premise was trust based and immediate: the money, power, and decision making all belonged to the Circle. They would regift the funds according to their own wisdom, perspectives, and experience. YBCA would act as a holder of the funds, as well as facilitator and supporter, based entirely on the wishes, needs, and invitations to YBCA from the members of the Giving Circle.

For YBCA, the \$250,000 was about seeding the money and ceding the power— understanding that artists already know the best uses for the money and are more than capable of distributing the funds accordingly. Communities are the builders of the best models for themselves, and artists are central actors for this work. Communities don’t need outside power coming in and dictating what change should look like—they simply need the capital to continue the work that is already in motion by local change makers.

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**“I am not interested in allies. Allies sound like one country helping a foreign country.**

**I want co-conspirators. People are not interested in finding places to park their money, but rather places to make change.”**

— AYODELE NZINGA, ARTIST-LED GIVING CIRCLE MEMBER

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## Challenging Organizational Structures

YBCA's investment in the Artist-led Giving Circle was one of the most radical acts that the organization had ever undergone. Several specific conditions were in place which allowed this to happen.

**FLEXIBLE FUNDING** – YBCA had recently received a flexible grant from the #startsmall Foundation. Acting with a speed unusual for an organization of its size, this grant allowed YBCA to respond to the needs and intentions of this exceptional group of artists.

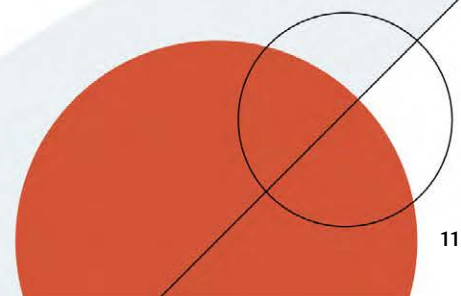
**COVID 19 PANDEMIC** – In fall 2020, with the pandemic well situated into our collective consciousness, the world was still in shock. While there was already an understanding of the need for new systems, the pandemic highlighted that the models that weren't working were in fact failing and falling apart. There was a sense that the ecosystem urgently needed alternatives, including safety nets, an economic floor, and income security for artists. This allowed the organization to make bold choices that would likely have been difficult in other times.

**LEADERSHIP** – YBCA's leadership were willing to try radical ideas. Based on their extensive experience in regenerative economics, and an understanding of alternative financial models, they also applied their lived experience in using these different models for individual, family, and community wellbeing and shared futures. Additionally, staff had experience in process management, facilitation of consensus processes and non-hierarchical decision making.

**NETWORKS** – YBCA held extensive networks of local and national relationships that came together to convene this group, including: Alexandra McKay at the Rasmuson Foundation, Clarissa Crawford from Alternative Roots, Clyde Valentin (at the time at Southern Methodist University), Erik Takeshita at Art Place America, Jamie Bennett at Art Place America, Judilee Reed now at United States Artists, Michael O'Bryan Fellow at the Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation at Drexel, and leadership at YBCA.



Yngvil Vatn Guttu, Artist-Led Giving Circle Member  
PHOTO: John Christensen



## From Cohort to Circle

After that first, cataclysmic meeting, the artists investigated different forms of collaborative giving. Respectfully sharing their perspectives, ideas and intentions, the artists built consensus around the concept and structure of a giving circle.

This centuries-old idea is based on a practice where participants agree to pool funds or resources together, and collectively decide how they should be redistributing, often amongst their own communities. The implications of a circle are different: discussions, energies, and collective gifts can transform into community power, proactive change, and civic action. It also frees the recipients to create mutually beneficial collaborations not like in typical, competitive models. In October of 2020, the Artist-Led Giving Circle (ALGC) charged their group with the bold idea of using their collective wisdom to decide how to distribute community wealth and take care of themselves.

“Traditional, dominant structures of collaboration focus our attention on the return on investment or ROI and productivity mindsets.” said Stephanie Imah, Director of Artist Investments at YBCA.

“There is a need to root in the power of gathering, convening, and continuing to show up for each other and see ourselves in each other’s struggle and work. For years YBCA has been interested in understanding how to center artists in movements of social change. The pandemic did nothing more than truly highlight the urgent need for these solutions.”

The practice of pooling resources for collective and economic liberation is not new, especially within Indigenous and Black communities. Throughout the history of the United States we have many examples of this shared resourcing model: from potlatch practices in Indigenous communities to the forming of independent fugitive communities amongst free and enslaved African Americans, to mutual aid societies in the 18th century, and cooperatives working with civil rights activists. In each instance, Black and Indigenous peoples used cooperatives and shared resources to support themselves, their communities, and provide alternatives to a society that continued to leave them out.

“While African Americans have utilized cooperation since the first Africans arrived as indentured servants in the early 17th century, the first recorded cooperative efforts were mutual aid societies in the late 18th century. Both free and enslaved Black people pooled money to pay for things like burials, land, helping the sick and the orphaned, and even buying freedom for one another. Early forms of cooperation ranged from mutual insurance companies to buying clubs to collective farming. The Underground Railroad is a famous example of cooperative effort.” said [Lisa Barclay, Board Secretary, The Food Co-op, Port Townsend](#)

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### GIVING CIRCLE MISSION STATEMENT

We are a circle of artists funding artists.

Our mission is to collectively grow a fund to provide mutual aid for Circle members to engage in practices and work that benefits our communities.

We support Circle members from dream to manifestation in imagining equitable futures and the tangible effort it takes to go from dream to reality.

We value community autonomy, cultural sovereignty, and collective care.

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## The Safety to Fail

Conversation by conversation, Zoom chat by Zoom chat, the collective, co-facilitated with YBCA, gathered for two years in a series of discussions around their decision making, governance, basic needs, and the natural tides and currents of merely existing amidst these times. It was over those two years that this collective of artists and leaders were crafting a shared space together to dream, build intimacy, center care, learn, unlearn, remake, and transform.

“Due to colonialism, so many Indigenous and other communities have been interrupted in the roles we’ve been given and confused in the path through which we can support people. A lot of the ideas and notions of community and wealth and how it’s distributed in Indigenous communities through matrilineal societies, modern society can benefit from.” said Melissa Shaginoff.

The ALGC dreamed up different funding models and economic models, looking to age-old ingenuity and existing modern, non-capitalist methods to create something truly regenerative. They explored what success would look like, and also reframed failure and the pressures put on them as BIPOC artists. Every month the group met (mostly on Zoom), calling in from home offices, studios, community spaces, cars, parking lots, on set, and more, and established trust and a rare kind of kinship that comes from building something radical with each other and for each other.

“Colonization wants us to tell very linear stories and the ways that so many of us tell stories, even our process in this space, has been nonlinear in so many ways. I want to uplift that as a value.” said Maria Cherry Rangel.

**The faith and opportunity to dream and decide, push and innovate, was made possible by the unrestricted funds, collective support and encouragement, and the beautiful reality that they were in this together.**



Melissa Shaginoff tanning hide



PHOTO: Ed Washington



## The Gifts, The Seeds

One of the first decisions the group made by consensus was to disburse an initial gift of \$5,000 to each Circle member, to address urgent financial needs and urgent needs within their communities. The gifts were used in a number of different ways: some forwarded the entire sum to their organizations, some split up the gift into smaller microgrants for artists in their communities. Artists bought materials, covered medical expenses, created a mini giving circle, and even received some money back from regenerative-minded (and -abled) recipients. One member was able to fund the work of a drum maker, a fellow member of her Indigenous community whose practice is of utmost cultural significance but overlooked by typical institutional support.

“We got \$5K, which might not be much in California, but in the South, we can buy a piece of property with that.” said Erin Washington.

**Contrary to the field of social impact and philanthropic investing, the ALGC embodied a model of resource sharing and wealth distribution that looked at the needs of their communities and met those needs where they were at.**

Whereas traditional sources of funding would require some form of application or criteria requirement, members of this collective were in an active process of dismantling barriers to resources — barriers that often keep funding away from communities most impacted by systemic inequalities — specifically Black/African American, American Indian, Alaska Native, Latine/x, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, LGBTQIA+, disabled, and immigrant communities.

Liberating artists from the requirements to squeeze themselves into boxes in order to receive funding, this collective rooted their gifting process in trust, care, and solidarity for their community.

“The Circle set out to raise \$25 million dollars. Just knowing this encouraged me to dream bigger, think deeper, and interrogate the ways I think about capitalism and relationships between creative artists and institutions. Thinking more about abundance in black, and brown and indigenous and queer communities I represent in the south.” said Washington.



## A Letter From Karen Smith

Ayodele,

Gratitude, from the earth to the sky, for your \$1000 Impact gift. I am as humbled to receive it as I am surprised to have been chosen.

The gift was timely; it was also an opportunity for me to practice tithing, that is to pledge 10% of the grant to someone else who might appreciate it. We all, as artists, have great need during this time of COVID, SIP and turbulence. Having been chosen for this small gift, I couldn't accept it without sharing it.

I chose another metal artist to gift \$100 so that she might purchase metal for her work. I know firsthand that the cost of precious metals has been soaring; as well, I am also struggling to keep my own arts business afloat. So I chose Teaty Pawoo, another black woman metalsmith and gifted her with \$100 in silver.

The remainder I am using on my exploration of Durham, NC as I search for affordable housing and studio space. Having been forced from Oakland by the cost of living, lack of opportunities for artists and arts education as well as affordable housing opportunities, I recently decided to look at the southeastern part of the United States as an opportunity to continue to do the work I love without the extraordinary stress of attempting to pay exorbitant rents. I purchased my plane ticket and this gift was offered the very next day. It solidified my plans and enabled me to be able to visit for 10 days and rent a car to explore/network. In essence, this gift ensured that I was able to continue on the quest of finding, and settling into, new housing and communities. The Bay Area has not provided that security for quite awhile.

Thank you again for choosing me. And thank you for allowing me the opportunity to gift someone else a small token of support and encouragement.

May we all be free to live in safety, security and with ease.

Karen Smith,  
Metal Artist



# Lessons on Seeding Money to Cede Power

Over the course of nearly two years of collaboration, many lessons were learned. Below we list a series of learnings, which we hope will be useful to artists, funders, collaboratives, collectives moving into solidarity economy spaces.

## EMERGENT PROCESS

Trust emergent processes. The Giving Circle was formed from an emergent process where YBCA followed the invitation of the artists within the SOCAP Cohort. Emergent processes are non-linear by nature, responding to the real time needs, wisdom, and multi-capacities of a gathered group. However, it also means that there was no strategic plan entirely figured out in advance. Instead, the methodology was about listening, waiting for the invitation, and moving forward from there. There are many strengths from this approach, in particular as it relates to subverting white supremacist tendencies like power hoarding, paternalism, individualism and worship of the written word.

## BE CLEAR ABOUT POWER

Language is a building block. Indeed, as Circle member Ayodele Nzinga often says, “Language is an agreement.” Therefore, begin by defining the shared language. What do we mean by power? What do we mean by turning over power and decision making? What does it mean to be artist-led? These are massive concepts, which require time to unpack and clarify. Words on a page are not the same as collectively built understanding.

## CEDING POWER IS AN ONGOING PROCESS

Ceding power is not a one time decision. Instead, it is a decision that gets made again and again, nearly every time the project reaches a new threshold or touches another corner of an organization. Ceding power is in fact a muscle that must be strengthened, tested, and strengthened again.

Take the example of storytelling. Midway through the collaboration, contradictions began to emerge that required attention and clarification. For example — If the organization handed power and decision making entirely to the Circle, what did that mean for who told the story and how? Was YBCA able to share the story of the Giving Circle at conferences, in the press, etc? What exactly was the story? Who defined it? Over the course of 2 years, these questions were collaboratively answered within the context of monthly meetings. However, that functionally meant that YBCA was indeed retaining some of the power, as it related to storytelling specifically. This should be named and conscious.

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“Whatever you observe,  
you affect what  
you observe.”

– AKU

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Sa Amin Film Premiere, [SFUFF](#)

PHOTO: Austin Blackwell



### TRAUMA SHOWS UP

Many artists, especially those from historically under-resourced global majority communities, often have trauma around money and institutions, stemming from real experiences of historic, communal, and personal harm.

All parties, including both staff and Circle members, would have greatly benefited from YBCA's staff having had trauma-informed facilitation training to address trauma directly when it inevitably arises. The group and the facilitators need resources to adequately and sensitively name, accept, and move through this real challenge.

### CHANGE TAKES TIME

This kind of change work is monumental and generational, therefore, it must be given the time and space it needs to evolve and grow. Moreover, each of the artists simultaneously engaged full time with their creative practice, their own organizations, collaboratives and collectives. The Giving Circle was an additional effort, creating challenges of time and resources. As Ayodele Nzinga has said, "You can't change the world in an academic year. The commitment must be for longer." Organizations, on the other hand, often have to report to boards on the progress of their initiatives in ways that feel neater and more linear than the realities of life. Times to rest, build community, and center joy are just as important as working in design sessions and on deadlines.

### FIRST THINGS FIRST

Artists cannot support their communities if they themselves need support. The Giving Circle ultimately disbursed much of the Gift to themselves and each other, in addition to supporting and regifting to their communities. YBCA saw this as an essential and urgent part of the work. One cannot and should not ask artists such as this cohort to turn away from their own needs. They *are* part of the community, they *are*

supporting others every single day through the long term trajectory of their community based creative practice.

### DECOLONIZING PERSPECTIVES

In a transformative project such as the Giving Circle, concepts like "productivity" can be harmful. The Circle itself is about decolonizing power, wealth, and capitalistic structures. Much like power sharing, the organization must make a decision to think differently about "productivity/output/deliverables" again and again.

### ORGANIZATION-WIDE COMMITMENT

A project such as this must be socialized at the level of the entire organization, especially as it is being run by and defined by a different set of principles than the rest of the 30 year-old institution. Therefore, marketing, program, development, and the board, all must have an understanding of the commitment and the scope of work, so that the artists have consistent experience in each sphere.



[Sa Amin](#) Film Premiere, [SFUFF](#)

PHOTO: Austin Blackwell



# Breakthrough

In Fall 2021, members of the Giving Circle decided by consensus to redistribute the remaining funds from the initial \$250,000 from YBCA to each of the remaining Circle members.

The decision to disburse the funds was made with the agreement that those who wished to continue on with the work of structuring and stewarding a fund would reinvest \$1,000 into a shared pool — called the Breakthrough Fund — as a commitment to continuing the shared work.

This decision also invited those who no longer wished to continue on the opportunity to use the redistributed funds to resource themselves, their practice, and their community on a path separate from that of the Artist-Led Giving Circle.

Returning to the SOCAP conference two years after their first meeting, in October 2022 remaining members of the Artist-led Giving Circle will reflect on their experience as a circle, share best practices, and engage the impact investor community on methods used to decolonize normative capitalistic funding models.

“The idea of commodified time, and free labor and extractive relationships, all had to be taken apart for us to get to a point collectively to be where we are in a conversation now. And where we are in a conversation now, if I were to be predictive, we are about a year away from having a solid strategy that we can put in place and activate.” Ayodele Nzinga said. “A substantial plan that makes clear that this is the end goal, these are the steps in the middle, this is how we begin it.”



# The Members

Founding Members of the  
Artist-Led Giving Circle



# Binta Ayofemi



Artist, Founder, Builder, Dancer,  
Mover, Maker

LOCATION  
xučyun (Oakland), Chochenyo Ohlone land, and yelamu  
(San Francisco), Ramaytush Ohlone land

Visual Artist Binta Ayofemi shapes new urban forms and urban materials, evoking power, Black space, and the senses.

Inspired by the Black Panthers, Black Shakers, Ayofemi's works infuse an Afrofuturist narrative with objects and experiences gathered, honed, milled and performed. Ayofemi's artwork *GROUND*, a series of sites and buildings beginning in Oakland, generates new narratives around urban voids, economy, displacement, freedom, duration, and radical imagination.

Ayofemi explores movement, making, manufacturing, and authorship of public and private space. Ayofemi's activation of vacant sites, from an urban meadow to a reimagined corner store, suggests a state of mutability and transformation. Ayofemi's work has been featured by Untitled, Kadist Foundation, SFMOMA, the Carpenter Center, the Wattis Institute, the Asian Art Museum, the New Museum, *DOCUMENTA*, the British Arts Council, Rebuild Foundation, the AIA, the City of Oakland, and as a community partner of Black Cultural Zone.

[MORE INFO HERE](#)



# Fay Darmawi

Film Festival Producer, Community  
Development Banker, Urban Planner

LOCATION  
yelamu (San Francisco), Ramaytush Ohlone land

Fay Darmawi is a film festival producer, community development banker, and urban planner leveraging the power of storytelling to achieve social justice in cities. She is the Founder and Executive Director of the SF Urban Film Fest, a film festival collective focused on civic engagement inspired by great storytelling and which recently completed a two year Artists-in-Residence at YBCA. Fay has a hybrid background in affordable housing finance and screenwriting, including as former manager of the low income housing tax credit investments platform for Silicon Valley Bank, and screenwriter alumni of the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley.

Fay's formal urbanist training is from M.I.T. and the University of Pennsylvania but her love of cities is from her childhood in Jakarta, Indonesia. She is currently based in Yelamu/San Francisco and is the proud mother of two college aged twin sons.

[MORE INFO HERE](#)

# Vashti DuBois



Artist, Organizer, Leader

LOCATION

Lenapehoking (Lenni-Lenape)  
(also known as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Prior to creating The Colored Girls Museum (TCGM), Vashti DuBois held leadership positions at a number of organizations over the span of her 30-year career in non-profit and arts administration. DuBois' work focused primarily on issues impacting girls and women of color at organizations such as The Free Library of Philadelphia, Tree House Books, the historic Church of the Advocate, the Children's Art Carnival in New York City, the Haymarket People's Fund in Boston, Congreso Girls Center and The Leeway Foundation.

In 2015, DuBois opened TCGM to "honor the stories, experiences and history of Colored Girls throughout the African Diaspora." It is the first museum of its kind offering visitors a multi-disciplinary experience. DuBois was awarded the Arts and Business Leadership Award for Outstanding Dedication to Women and Girls of Color. DuBois is a graduate of Wesleyan University and a NAMAC Fellow.

[MORE INFO HERE](#)



# Christy NaMee Eriksen

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Poet, Teaching Artist, Organizer

LOCATION

Tlingít Aaní (Tlingit)  
(also known as Juneau, Alaska)

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Christy NaMee Eriksen is a multidisciplinary poet, teaching artist, and organizer whose work is grounded in social justice and community engagement. NaMee has received awards for both art and activism, is a co-founder of Woosh Kinaadeiyí (a community-based org empowering voices) and World in Progress (an arts-based racial justice training), and leads poetry workshops for all ages. She owns a post office promoting connection called Kindred Post, located in the heart of downtown Juneau. She is passionate about the power of art to tell our stories, bring people together, and activate positive social change.

[MORE INFO HERE](#)

# Yngvil Vatn Guttu



Musician, Composer, Producer,  
Festival Director, Community Organizer

LOCATION

Immigrant from Norway via the UK and Canada to Anchorage, Alaska, which we are learning to call Dena'ina land in Dgheyay Kaq'

Apart from being an inspired and captivating multi-talented musician and composer, Yngvil Vatn Guttu is a visionary community organizer and event producer. Hundreds of professional colleagues and thousands of students worldwide know her as an empathetic teacher/mentor and a transformational collaborator. Yngvil was born in Oslo, Norway and studied theatre and music in London and New York. She came to Alaska in 2002 with a theatre show and decided to stay.

Settling in Alaska allowed her to collaborate with numerous artists across multiple genres, create one off-events and initiatives that often developed into programs and even nonprofit organizations. She helped found and run artist co-op Trailer Art Center, founded Spenard Jazz Fest in 2008, NCE in 2012, AKIMI in 2016, Amplify Alaska in 2020 and All Ages Open Mic in 2022. She is part of steering the incubation of Music Alaska.

[MORE INFO HERE](#)





# Ayodele Nzinga

Artist Theoretician/Producer, Actor,  
Changemaker, Word Slanger

LOCATION

Still searching for her home; xučyun (Oakland),  
Chochenyo Ohlone land

Ayodele Nzinga is an arts and culture theoretician/practitioner working at the intersections of cultural production, community development, and community well-being to foster transformation in marginalized communities. Nzinga holds an MFA in Writing and Consciousness and a Ph.D. in Transformative Education & Change; she resides in the San Francisco Bay Area.

[MORE INFO HERE](#)

Nzinga is the founder of the Lower Bottom Playaz, Inc. She is the founder of the Black Arts Movement Business District Community Development Corporation, Oakland (BAMBD CDC), and producer of BAMBDFEST. Nzinga is a Cal-Shakes Artist Investigator Alumni, founding Artistic Director of the original Recovery Theater, and a Helen Crocker Russell Arts Leadership Fellow. She is a member of the Alameda County Women's Hall of Fame; and recognized by Theater Bay Area as one of the 40 faces in the Bay Area that changed the face of theater in the Bay Area.

# Louis Travino & Vincent Medina



Capitán (Cultural Leader), Teachers,  
Culture Bearer

#### LOCATION

The work of mak-‘amham is done primarily here at home in halkin (San Lorenzo, Castro Valley, Hayward, Southern Oakland, Alameda), Cafe Ohlone is located in xučyun (Berkeley), Chochenyo Ohlone land

Louis Trevino is a cultural leader in the Rumsen Ohlone community and is a teacher of the Rumsen language. Vincent Medina is Capitán, cultural leader, of ‘Itmay Cultural Association—a group of dedicated Verona Band culture bearers working to strengthen East Bay Ohlone identity. He is a teacher of the Chochenyo language. mak-‘amham/Cafe Ohlone (Vincent Medina) is an Ohlone cultural institution empowering their Indigenous community with tradition—they teach the public, through taste, of our unbroken roots. mak-‘amham/Cafe Ohlone operates in their Indigenous East Bay homeland; this work, made possible by their elders, is centered on reviving and strengthening traditional Ohlone cuisine and culture for the well-being of their community, and to honor those who came before us. Through mak-‘amham, they lead weekly Chochenyo and Rumsen language classes, gathering trips, and cultural and cooking classes to ensure traditional culture grows stronger within their Ohlone community. They also operate Cafe Ohlone, where decadent, multi-course meals are prepared with ingredients that have been loved by generations of their family.

[MORE INFO HERE](#)



# Victoria Rae Moore

Writer, Dancer, Facilitator, Producer,  
Co-Founder

LOCATION  
Kusso & Sewee (also known as North Charleston, South Carolina)

Victoria Rae Boynton Moore is a writer, facilitator, producer and co-founder of TINYisPOWERFUL — an interracial, intergenerational collective effort linking artists, cultural workers, youth and tiny business partners to support and promote TINY BUSINESS in the South as a vital part of neighborhood and commerce.

[MORE INFO HERE](#)

Victoria is the leader of TINYisPOWERFUL and received a three year Partners For Change award from Alternate ROOTS and the Surdna Foundation, continuing a long history of art in/with community to affect structural change. It was supported in 2018-2020 as a project -conNECKtedTOO by the Charleston Rhizome Collective- by an ArtPlace America Award.

As a multi-racial black woman native to Charleston, SC with black and indigenous roots also in Georgia and Alabama, Victoria is committed to social change through the arts. She studied dance at Charleston County School of the Arts and earned a BA in journalism from the University of South Carolina.

# Maria Cherry Rangel



Cultural Strategist, Resource Organizer,  
Cultural Producer, and Equity Coach

LOCATION

Chahta Yakni (Choctaw) & Chitimacha (also known as  
New Orleans, Louisiana)

Maria Cherry Rangel is the daughter of agricultural workers and musicians who worked the land of Southern states. A New Orleans-based cultural strategist, resource organizer, cultural producer, and equity coach, Cherry’s advocacy ensured that millions of dollars were redirected to Southerners, BIPOC communities, and LGBTQ communities. As Director of Strategic Initiatives for Foundation for Louisiana, Cherry launched FFL’s arts and culture program, and utilizes her expertise in organizational growth, cultural strategy, racial justice, and LGBTQ organizing to inform FFL’s future. With Ron Ragin, she co-authored *Freedom Maps: Activating Legacies of Culture, Art, and Organizing in the US South*. With Sage Crump, she co-authored the forthcoming *Queer (Re)public: a QTBIPOC Liberatory Artistic Aesthetics Framework for the Theater Offensive*. Cherry was a 2018-19 Intercultural Leadership Institute Fellow. Cherry wrote her first arts grant at the age of 15 in support of her father’s application to be a master folklife artist.

[MORE INFO HERE](#)

# Darryl Ratcliff



Artist, Poet, Founder, Investor

LOCATION

Jumanos, Wichita, Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo) & Tawakoni  
(also known as Dallas, Texas)

Darryl Ratcliff is an award-winning artist and poet with a writing and curatorial practice based in Dallas, TX whose work engages communities and mobilizes social issues. Ratcliff is the co-founder of Gossypion Investments with Maya Crawford. Gossypion focuses on real estate development, cultural investments, branding and PR, cultural consulting, and artist management. In 2020, Ratcliff was selected as part of the inaugural Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and Social Capital Markets artist cohort of artist-entrepreneurs who actively create community impact. In 2019, Ratcliff along with Krissy Bodge, created Dallas The Remix, a conceptual art piece that reimagined the 80s TV show Dallas as a tool for political education and equity. He has received artist awards from the Dallas Museum of Art, Nasher Sculpture Center, City of Dallas, D Magazine, Dallas Observer, Embrey Family Foundation, George and Fay Young Foundation, Carnegie Mellon Foundation, and Common Field.

[MORE INFO HERE](#)

# Melissa Shaginoff



Ahtna and Paiute person, Artist,  
Curator, Auntie

#### LOCATION

Dena'ina land in Dgheyay Kaq' (also known as Anchorage, Alaska)

Melissa Shaginoff is part of the Udzisyu (caribou) and Cui Ui Ticutta (fish-eater) clans from Nay'dini'aa Na Kayax (Chickaloon Village, Alaska). She is an Ahtna and Paiute person, an artist, a curator, and an Auntie. Her work is shaped by the framework and intricacies of Indigenous ceremonies and social structures. She is currently in a year-long residency with The Nave, a historic building and community space in Dgheyey Kaq' (Anchorage). She curated and juried art exhibitions with the Anchorage Museum, Alaska Pacific University, University Alaska Anchorage, the Coe Center, the International Folk Art Museum, and the Fairbanks Art Association. Melissa has been published in the Alaska Humanities FORUM Magazine, First American Art Magazine, Inuit Art Quarterly, and the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center's Learning Lab. She is a founding member of Łuk'ae Tse' Taas (fish head soup) Comics, a new media collective focusing on Indigenous co-authorship and representation in science-fiction narratives.

[MORE INFO HERE](#)

# Aku (Allison Akootchook Warden)



Iñupiaq, Daughter, Installation Artist

LOCATION

Dena'ina Elnena & Dënëneh (also known as Anchorage, Alaska)

[MORE INFO HERE](#)

Allison Akootchook Warden is an Iñupiaq installation artist born in Fairbanks, Alaska with close ties to Kaktovik, Alaska. In 2016, she debuted “Unipkaagusiksuguvik (the place of the future/ancient)” at the Anchorage Museum. “Unipkaagusiksuguvik (the place of the future/ancient)” is a performative installation of an Iñupiaq ceremonial house that exists in the space between the hyper-future and the super-ancient. Warden received a 2018 Rasmuson Individual Artist Fellowship in the field of New Genre. She intends to travel to Abu Dhabi to do research for “Everybody Will Be A Millionaire”, a collaboration with Iñupiaq photographer Brian Adams, which will debut in 2024. Warden received a 2018 Native Arts and Cultures Foundation National Artist Fellowship in the field of Music. In 2015, Warden received an Alaska Governor’s Awards for the Arts and Humanities for her work with youth across the state of Alaska. She currently resides in Anchorage.

# Erin Washington



Artist, Scholar, Waymaker

#### LOCATION

Mvskoke (Muscogee) & Mvskoke (Muscogee) (also known as Atlanta, Georgia & Montgomery, Alabama)



Erin Michelle Washington is a Creative, Scholar, and Waymaker from Montgomery, AL. She attended Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University and obtained her MFA in Acting from American Conservatory Theater. In 2009, Erin started Soul Productions, a company that crafts new approaches to music and theatre. Washington has participated as a Digital and Creative Producer at Arena Stage, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, The Public Theater, Penumbra Theater, Howlround, and The Curran Theater. In 2016, Washington served as Interim Associate Artistic Director at American Conservatory Theatre where she was a producer and strategist for the Women's Leadership Conference and Creator and Producer of the Bayview Arts Festival. In 2018 Washington joined the faculty of Spelman College teaching in the Theater + Performance Department. She has since founded her second arts collective, SoulCenter, a content development space centering blk creatives 18-35. Washington's work continues to deepen in the South, with the co-creation of a legacy-based organization with her sister, Erica Washington, known as the Clarke Street Fund, which centers art, food sovereignty, and tech on the Westside of Montgomery, Alabama.

[MORE INFO HERE](#)



# Locations of Giving Circle Members & Recipients

**Key**

-  Artist-Led Giving Circle Member
-  Recipient



# Artist-Led Giving Circle

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to the members of the Artist-led Giving Circle, to the entire YBCA team and especially to Meklit Hadero, Stephanie Imah, Daniela Lencioni, and Emma GuttmanSlater; the #startsmall Foundation; to storytelling and narrative work of Isha Ran; and Natalie Sept for your close read and edits.

We welcome comments, feedback, and continued collaboration.

Please reach out to us at [hello@ybca.org](mailto:hello@ybca.org).

“Gratitude to everyone who shared their stories and their vulnerabilities and their strengths and processes and artworks, all they were willing to bring in of themselves and share. It was inspiring and it gives me hope.”

— **FAY DARMAWI**

“I still have deep gratitude for the possibilities that came from this effort — from this trial — from this kind of radical attempt at flipping the funding model. I have gratitude first to the resistance of the group of autonomous individuals who recognized our collective value.”

— **VICTORIA RAE MOORE**



### YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

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