



AAW
ARTISTS AT WORK

ARTIST TOOLKIT

Sample
2023-2024



ARTISTS AT WORK TOOLKIT

This sample toolkit serves as a glimpse into the Artists At Work program, a national workforce resilience program in the spirit of the WPA that is designed to support artists and their communities through artistic civic engagement.

By offering this toolkit at the onset of the term, AAW aims to equip AAW Artists with essential tools and guidance for getting the most out of the program. The intention behind this toolkit is twofold: firstly, to provide AAW Artists with practical resources to facilitate their engagement in community-building work, and secondly, to offer insight into the overarching objectives and components of the AAW program.

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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.

ABOUT US

Artists At Work (AAW) is a national workforce resilience program that provides artists with a living wage salary, health benefits, professional development, and an equitable framework to leverage their creative skills to address the pressing issues of their local community.

The AAW program is structured as a dynamic network of partnerships between artists, cultural organizations, and community partners that sets artists up with strong local and national professional contacts.

AAW Artists are employed for a period of one year to work collaboratively in response to local community needs across a range of issues including mental health, antiracism, migrant justice, climate resiliency, substance abuse recovery, and youth welfare, among others.

We are steadfast in our commitment to providing support to and meeting the needs of today's artists who are both navigating a difficult gig economy and being called upon to address civic and community needs.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

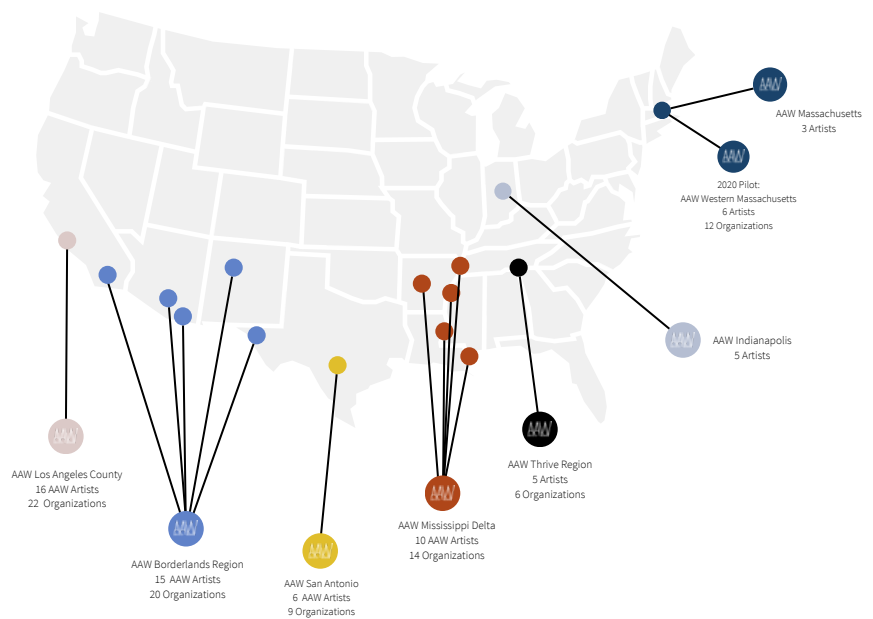
VALUE ARTISTS AS WORKERS by paying them a salary to support their artistic practice and enable them to launch creative projects that serve their communities.

SUPPORT THE CULTURE SECTOR by partnering with organizations and providing funding and resources that enable them to host AAW Artists and bring their work to the public.

HELP COMMUNITIES FLOURISH by embedding AAW Artists in local social impact initiatives, allowing them to contribute their creative problem-solving skills to crucial programs that benefit community members.

GROWTH & IMPACT

To date, Artists At Work has provided 70 artists across 11 states with a salary and health benefits, leveraging their power and creativity in partnership with over 80 cultural and community organizations throughout the nation. We are proud to invest in artists and their communities. As we continue to expand with new cohorts launching in 2024, we are focusing on amplifying and sustaining the impact of these investments by modeling new public/private partnerships and funding streams to support artists.





AAW VALUES & PRINCIPLES

WE VALUE ARTISTS AS WORKERS

We intentionally provide artists with a 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 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, partner orgs, 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.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The Artists At Work program provides an equitable framework – structured as a dynamic network of partnerships between artists, cultural organizations, and community partners – that sets artists up with strong local and national contacts, professional development, and systems of support. More information about the roles of organizational and community partners can be found below.

AAW Artists are employed for a period of one year to deepen their art practice and work collaboratively in response to local community needs across a range of issues including mental health, antiracism, migrant justice, climate resiliency, substance abuse recovery, cultural preservation, and youth welfare, among others.

Each AAW Artists works directly with community members over the one-year term to co-create projects that benefit communities in one of three primary ways: promoting community wellness, preserving cultural legacy and heritage, or advocating for and amplifying community voices on behalf of issues that are directly impacting their lives and well-being.

AAW MILESTONES

The AAW Team works closely with each AAW Artist in an ongoing way throughout the year, providing mentorship, professional guidance, and project development support.

At the top of each month, we send AAW Artists a Monthly Milestones document with that can serve as a guidepost as with key questions for reflection, goal setting benchmarks for projects, upcoming workshops, and other general announcements.

Through these Monthly Milestones documents, we aim to provide structure to empower artists to continue in their practice and community engagement. You can find an example in the Artists Toolkit.

HEALTH INSURANCE & BENEFITS

The Artists At Work program is thrilled to be able to provide 100% employer-paid health insurance for all AAW Artists during their term with the program, as well as access to a 401k retirement savings plan option. The finance team at THE OFFICE performing arts + film can help answer any questions you have about health insurance or other employee benefits. You can find their contact information in the Artists Toolkit.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Artists At Work also provides participating AAW Artists and Alumni with professional development workshops on workforce sustainability topics. These workshops cover areas such as fundraising as an independent artist, overall financial wellness and budgeting, social media, grant writing, PR & marketing, and trauma-informed practice and self-care for artists. More information on workshops and guest speakers will be included in each Monthly Milestones document.



BEING AN AAW ARTIST

What does work look like for AAW Artists during the term of the program?

AAW Artists are employed for a period of one year with two primary areas of focus: (1) to engage with and deepen their own art practice and (2) to work collaboratively with local partners in response to community needs across a range of issues including mental health, antiracism, migrant justice, climate resiliency, substance abuse recovery, cultural preservation, and youth welfare, among others.

During your time as an AAW Artist, you will:

- **Make Art!** – This is the primary responsibility of each AAW Artist – to continue and make time for their own art practice on their own terms. (Approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ of your time each week).
- **Develop a Community Project** – Each AAW will work collaboratively with local partners to develop a project that actively engages with and addresses the needs of their community, leveraging art and creativity for social impact. (Approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of your time each week).
- **Document Your Process** – AAW Artists will keep a video, audio, or written journal and/or other documentation of their process throughout the year. Team AAW is invested in amplifying the inspiring work of AAW Artists and their communities through storytelling on social media and other platforms.
- **Participate in Professional Development** – Artists At Work (AAW) will regularly host workshops throughout the year aimed at helping to equip AAW Artists with new skills and training to better leverage their creativity for community engagement work and sustainable employment opportunities.
- **Set Milestones & Give Program Feedback** – Team AAW embraces a growth mindset and collaborative learning. AAW Artists will receive suggested monthly milestones during the term of the program to help guide the process and will be asked periodically for open and honest feedback on the program.
- **Share Your Work** – AAW Artists will share their work publicly with members of the community at two points during the term – at the midpoint for a works-in-process presentation and at the end for a final celebration!

“During my time with AAW I was able to devote a chunk of my time in developing curriculums that are still relevant in my work and continue to offer me financial support. AAW allowed me the time that I needed to not have to worry about selling my art but instead to focus on developing future projects, creative freedom and skills development.”

-AAW Artist, Karina Ceja (Los Angeles County 2022)



PHASE	GOALS	WORKSHOPS
ONBOARDING AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING		
<p><i>MONTHS 1 - 3: GETTING STARTED</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Payroll and healthcare onboarding <input type="checkbox"/> Orientation <input type="checkbox"/> Personal goal setting <input type="checkbox"/> Identify and solidify social impact partnership <input type="checkbox"/> First anchor meeting: goal setting with organizational partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Wellness • Mindful Intention Setting and Career Planning • Mental Health and Trauma-Informed Practice • Managing a Project Budget
PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION		
<p><i>MONTHS 4 - 9: IN PROCESS</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Projects in progress <input type="checkbox"/> Progress survey <input type="checkbox"/> Second anchor meeting: public activations, midpoint gathering prep <input type="checkbox"/> Midpoint gathering <input type="checkbox"/> Continued implementation of projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant Writing • Promoting Your Work, Social Media • Building a Strong Portfolio • Legal Workshop • Self Care
DOCUMENTATION AND FUTURE PLANNING		
<p><i>MONTHS 10 - 12: LONG TERM SUCCESS</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Third anchor meeting: continued activation, documentation of projects <input type="checkbox"/> Video interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Off boarding <input type="checkbox"/> Exit interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Final presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alumni Discussion • Financial Planning • Networking • Calibrating Your Compass • Artist Series

AAW ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS

What is the role of AAW organizational partners?

The Artists At Work (AAW) program provides an equitable framework – structured as a dynamic network of partnerships between artists, cultural organizations, and community partners – that sets artists up with strong local and national contacts, professional development, and systems of support.

There are two primary types of organizational partners that participate in the Artists At Work (AAW) program:

Cultural Organizations – These are organizational partners that are deeply rooted in their local artistic community. They can be museums, performing arts centers, local municipalities or arts agencies, philanthropic foundations, collectives of artists or culture bearers, and more. Wherever they sit in the local cultural landscape, they are critical partners to Team AAW in providing resources and local knowledge, expertise and help in identifying the AAW Artists that participate in the program.

With financial resources from the Artists At Work (AAW) program, Cultural Organizations may also provide direct support and mentorship to AAW Artists during the term of the program. For example, Cultural Organizations may:

- Provide curatorial or administrative support to AAW Artists – i.e. studio space, mentorship, professional connections, etc
- Promote and/or host exhibitions, performances, work-in-progress showings, and other presentations of the work of AAW Artists
- Collaborate with AAW Artists and their Community Partners on project development
- Provide information and data to Team AAW on the number of constituents AAW Artists have reached through the program and other markers for evaluation and impact

Community Partners – These are organizational partners that are deeply engaged in social impact work within their community. They can be a non-profit organization, mission-driven collective, or other stakeholder working with and on behalf of local constituents in response to community needs including mental health, antiracism, migrant justice, climate resiliency, substance abuse recovery, cultural preservation, and youth welfare, among others.

Team AAW helps connect and pair AAW Artists and Community Partners through a collaborative process. The Artists At Work (AAW) program provides financial resources to support capacity building for participating Community Partners.

Community Partners will work directly with AAW Artists on an ongoing basis throughout the term to:

- Provide knowledge, expertise and other resources to AAW Artists on their social impact area of focus and the mission of their work in the community
- Connect AAW Artists with their constituents and other community members
- Ideate and collaborate with AAW Artists on a community project that aims to actively engage with and address the needs of their community, leveraging art and creativity for social impact
- Provide Team AAW with metrics, engagement statistics and other qualitative data for impact reporting and program evaluation

“I think our organization can be an access point for artists to learn and understand more about the human experience in all of its beauty and pain, to connect to people they might not otherwise meet, to be inspired to write stories/songs they might not otherwise have written, to feel the reward of being a part of someone's healing.”

-The Alianza Project, AAW Community Partner (Western MA Pilot 2021)

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE OFFICE & AAW?

Who is THE OFFICE performing arts + film and what is their relationship to Artists At Work (AAW)?

The OFFICE performing arts + film is an independent performing arts and film curator and production company based in New York and London that works in ongoing partnerships with festivals, venues, and institutions to create cultural programming that is unique and mission specific. We produce events locally, nationally, and internationally, and consult on programming with organizations ranging from museums to universities to libraries to performing arts centers to philanthropies. We work in both the non profit and commercial arts worlds, and we have a special focus on making art happen that has a positive impact on society.

Artists At Work (AAW) is an initiative of FreshGrass Foundation and THE OFFICE performing arts + film. As such, THE OFFICE serves as the engine room for the program and the employer of record for all AAW Artists during the term, providing:

- **A Living Wage Salary** – Artists are workers! THE OFFICE is thrilled to put all AAW Artists on payroll for the term, with payments issued twice each month.
- **Health and Retirement Benefits** – THE OFFICE provides 100% employer paid health care coverage for all AAW Artists and the opportunity to contribute to a 401k retirement plan.
- **Professional Development & Training** – THE OFFICE and Team AAW will regularly facilitate and host workshops throughout the year aimed at helping to equip AAW Artists with new skills and training to better leverage their creativity for community engagement work and sustainable employment opportunities.
- **Connections to Local Partners** – THE OFFICE and Team AAW help connect AAW Artists to local cultural organizations and community partners and work together to build trusting relationships for successful collaborations.
- **Project Development Support** – THE OFFICE and Team AAW will work directly with AAW Artists to help support the realization of their Community Projects and provide a stipend for materials and other project-related expenses.
- **Mentorship** – In addition to setting milestones to help guide the process throughout the term of the program, THE OFFICE will meet 1:1 with AAW Artists to discuss individual career goals and provide mentorship and professional connections.
- **Documentation & Promotion** – THE OFFICE and Team AAW are invested in amplifying the inspiring work of AAW Artists and their communities through storytelling and will help document and share publicly on social media and other platforms.
- **Evaluation & Advocacy** – THE OFFICE is deeply committed to evaluating the impact of the Artists At Work (AAW) program and utilizing our learnings to advocate for better support systems for artists and to strengthen the arts sector for the health and vibrancy of our communities.

“Artists are workers whose work product is crucial to the health of every society. We are thrilled to bring Artists at Work across the country and to help artists lend their creative visions to the flourishing of their communities.”

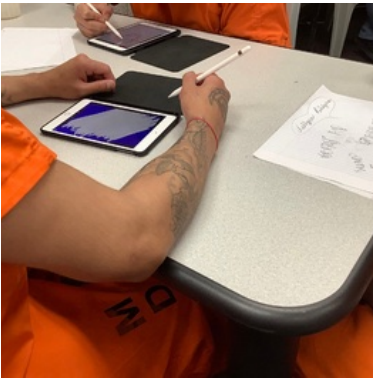
-Rachel Chanoff, Founding Director of THE OFFICE performing arts + film

WHAT DOES AN AAW COMMUNITY PROJECT LOOK LIKE?

One of the key aims of the Artists At Work program is to leverage art and creativity for social impact. This happens through projects that are led and developed by AAW Artists in partnership with members of their local community. While the creativity, variety and scope of the community projects that AAW Artists have developed during their time with the program is boundless, we have found that these projects benefit communities in one of three primary ways: promoting community wellness, preserving cultural legacy and heritage, or advocating for and amplifying community voices on behalf of issues that are directly impacting their lives and well-being.

Below are just a few examples of the many projects created by AAW Artists that have left us incredibly inspired. For more, please visit our [AAW YouTube channel](#).

COMMUNITY WELLNESS



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 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, their hope was 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.

[HEAR FROM AMANDA](#)

ADVOCACY



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 a resistance encampment called "El Pueblito." The activation was anchored by Friends of Friendship Park, with an invitation to the region's grassroots organizations, activist groups and beyond.

[HEAR FROM NATALIA](#)

CULTURAL PRESERVATION



Lisa Hicks-Gilbert

Delta Commons Group | Lee Street Community Center

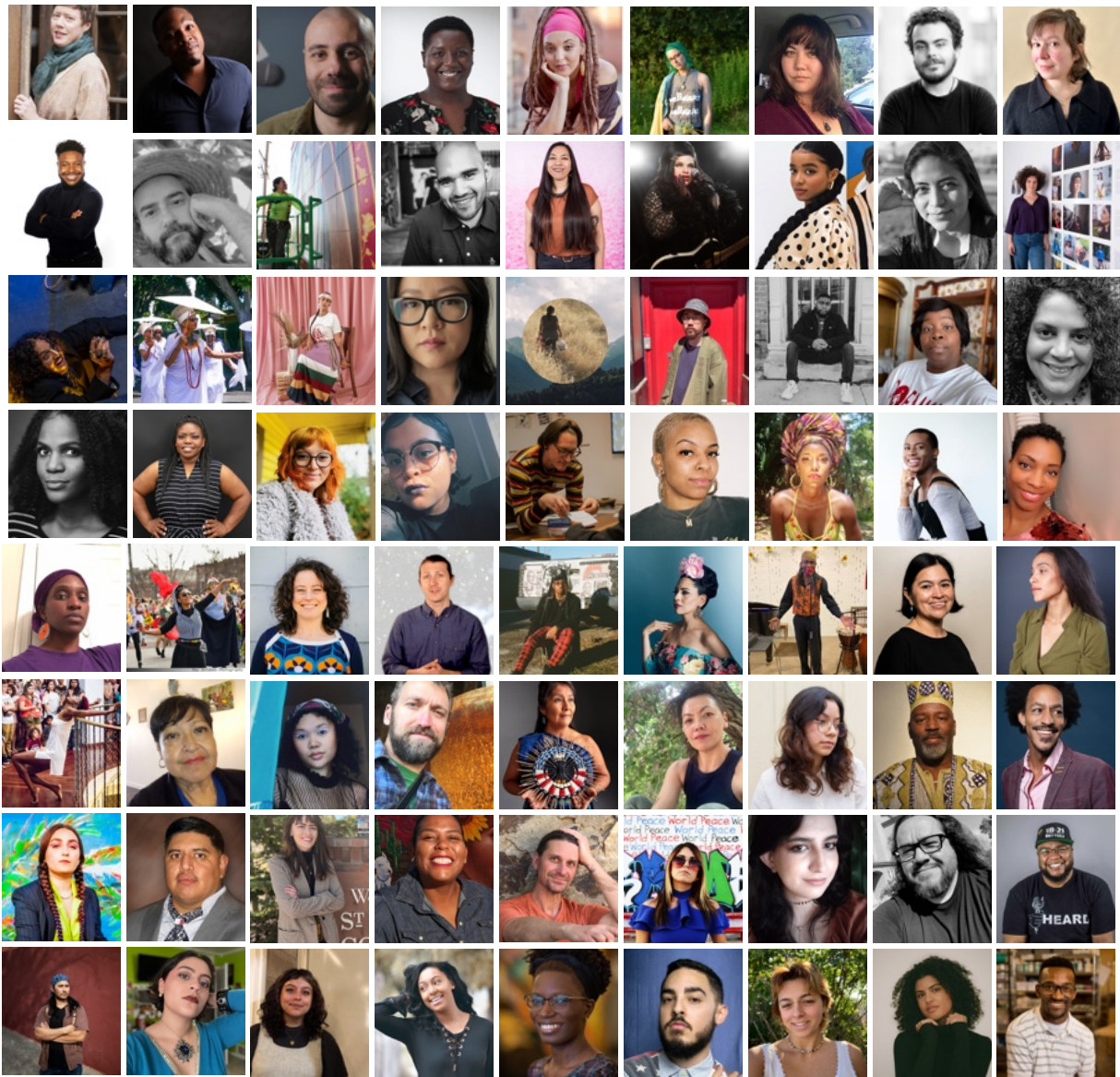
Lisa Hicks-Gilbert launched "Silent No More," a multimedia exhibition memorializing the Elaine Massacre of 1919, unsealing the previously untold stories of the victims, survivors, and descendants. During her year with AAW, Lisa Hicks-Gilbert also was elected the first Black Mayor of Elaine, Arkansas, 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 FROM LISA](#)

THE GROWING ARTISTS AT WORK COMMUNITY

Spread across the United States, AAW Artists live in major cities with nationally-known anchor institutions and in rural regions with populations in the 100s and grassroots arts infrastructures. They are recent graduates, new parents and grandparents, ranging from established artistic voices to veterans serving their communities to young artists developing their visions and voices. They are 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.



70 Artists

80+ Partners

11 States

Numbers reflect AAW Cohorts as of March 2024





“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

“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



AAW

ARTISTS AT WORK

*Investing in Artists
and their communities*

