

# TREASURES

**The Heinz Endowments has joined a national “cultural treasures” initiative created by the Ford Foundation to elevate and celebrate the talent, innovation and contributions of arts organizations representing historically marginalized populations—and to back up the praise with cash investment. By Elwin Green Illustrated portraits by Kagan McLeod**

## Beginning the search

**L**ast summer, Ford Foundation President Darren Walker found himself between a rock and a hard place. The rapid contraction of the economy had left many of the nonprofit organizations that relied on Ford’s support gasping for air and in danger of being forced to close their doors. They needed relief and quickly.

At the same time, the foundation’s own endowment had already shrunk and was still subject to whatever financial market shocks might be around the next bend. It was not a good time to make previously unplanned expenditures.

“We were in an unprecedented moment and had to think innovatively and creatively and disruptively as to how we could respond to the moment of COVID-19 and the moment of a racial reckoning in America that was unprecedented in my lifetime,” Mr. Walker said.

“We needed to raise more capital, and we couldn’t take it out of our endowment because at the time our endowment was down

15 percent. It would not have been smart to start selling out of the endowment at that time.”

So, he did some innovative, creative and disruptive thinking, and came up with an idea: Borrow money to give it away.

The idea became a plan, and in June last year, the foundation, one of America’s largest charitable organizations, took a page from the playbook of for-profit corporations, and issued \$1 billion in bonds—\$300 million worth set to mature in 30 years, and the remainder to mature in 50 years.

It was the first time that any foundation had issued a “social bond”—a bond requiring that the money raised would be used for social good—to the for-profit market.

But this story is not about the Ford Foundation making history last summer. It is about the history yet to be made with part of that \$1 billion.

The bond offering “made possible an idea that had been simmering in my head for some time,” Mr. Walker said—namely, to change the foundation’s paradigm for funding arts organizations.



**“I’ve always lamented the fact that we talk about our cultural treasures and often left out are organizations that are Black, indigenous and people of color — culturally specific — and also led by people of color.”**

**Darren Walker**, President, Ford Foundation

In September, the Ford Foundation announced a new program for doing that: America's Cultural Treasures.

America's Cultural Treasures changes the paradigm for arts funding in two ways, and it is a response to long-standing challenges in the arts community that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. First, it focuses on providing support to arts organizations representing historically marginalized populations: African-American, Latinx, Asian and Indigenous communities.

"I've always lamented the fact that we talk about our cultural treasures and often left out are organizations that are Black, indigenous and people of color—culturally specific—and also led by people of color," Mr. Walker said. "What are often discussed in cultural circles as our treasures... are the larger, legacy cultural organizations. In fact, we have many treasures that represent the experiences of African American people, or Asian American, Pacific Islander people, et cetera."

Second, the paradigm shift focuses on long-term support through a matching-grant approach that includes other foundations rather than the project-based or short-term

support of one year or less that has been the more traditional form of funding.

"We recognize that general operating support is the rarest and yet the most important capital a nonprofit can receive," Mr. Walker said. "It's our position that for too long we have project-supported to death our grantees. So, the reason that the match is a general support match is that we want these organizations to have the opportunity to deploy the capital flexibly, based on their needs."

### Enlisting the teams

The program is divided into two segments, national and regional. For the national portion, Ford put up \$80 million of the proceeds from the bond sale to support a select group of arts organizations that were deemed national cultural treasures. Almost immediately, a host of other foundations joined in with matching grants to bring the total to \$165 million.

For the Regional Cultural Treasures program, Ford has announced partnerships with 10 local foundations in seven cities to support organizations in their regions. In each region, Ford is contributing \$5 million to be matched by its regional partner.

For the Pittsburgh region, the foundation tapped The Heinz Endowments to be its partner. Arts & Culture Program Officer Shaunda McDill and Creativity Vice President Janet Sarbaugh are leading the development of a program for distributing \$10 million to local Black arts organizations over the next four years.

Nine other foundations were on board at the program's launch: the Barr Foundation (Boston), Getty Foundation (Los Angeles), Houston Endowment (Houston), John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (Chicago), Joyce Foundation (Chicago), McKnight Foundation (Minneapolis), The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation (Los Angeles), Terra Foundation for American Art (Chicago) and William Penn Foundation (Philadelphia).

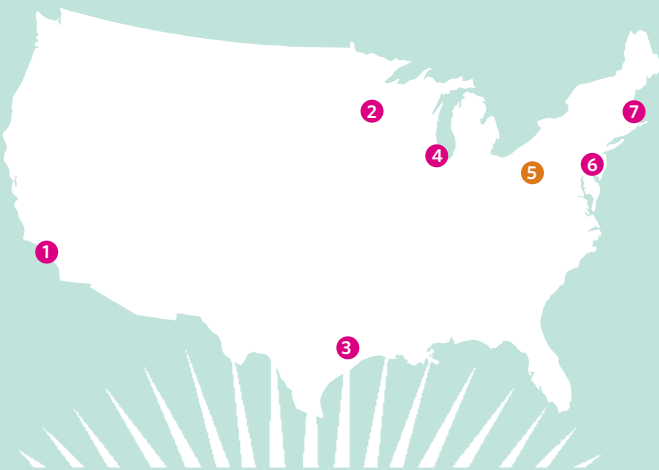
At the Endowments, the focus is consistent with the years-long work of supporting Black artists and arts organizations through its Advancing Black Arts in Pittsburgh program, Ms. McDill said, and can help the Endowments explore ways to expand its support of work by other artists of color in the future.

For the new initiative, Ms. Sarbaugh and Ms. McDill have opened up the term

## 10 Foundations: 1 mission

The regional component of the America's Cultural Treasures initiative created by the Ford Foundation includes partnerships with 10 foundations in seven cities. Ford has awarded \$5 million in matching funds to each regional partner, who has been tasked with celebrating local arts organizations that represent historically marginalized groups while providing them with critical support. The participating foundations are:

- 1 **Los Angeles, CA**  
Getty Foundation  
The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation
- 2 **Minneapolis, MN**  
McKnight Foundation
- 3 **Houston, TX**  
Houston Endowment
- 4 **Chicago, IL**  
John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation  
Joyce Foundation  
Terra Foundation for American Art
- 5 **Pittsburgh, PA**  
The Heinz Endowments
- 6 **Philadelphia, PA**  
William Penn Foundation
- 7 **Boston, MA**  
Barr Foundation



PITTSBURGH'S  
CULTURAL  
TREASURES



**The primary impact of the program will be “to ground and establish [arts organizations] and stabilize them in the most profound way possible, so they can contribute to the region and the world.”**

**Celeta Hickman**, Co-founder, Ujamaa Collective

“cultural treasure” so that it can include not only organizations and people, but places, like the August Wilson House, the National Negro Opera House and the New Granada Theater—places that are to be treasured because they are parts of narratives that make up a history.

The importance and potential impact of the national effort and what will be known locally as the Pittsburgh’s Cultural Treasures program cannot be understated, Ms. McDill said, because “historic underfunding of Black cultural institutions and systemic oppression have impacted the field . . . These are facts, not feelings. Hopefully, we can begin to disentangle personal feelings from the work that do not advance us toward solutions.”

Multiple studies of the arts sector support her assertions.

In 2011, a report written for the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy by the consulting firm Helicon Collaborative stated that 55 percent of arts funding from philanthropies went to only 2 percent of arts organizations, ones with budgets above \$5 million. Five years later, a follow-up report showed that the top 2 percent of arts organizations had grown their piece of the pie, capturing nearly 60 percent of foundation funding. Arts funding has not only not kept up with the increasing diversity of arts practitioners in America, it has moved in the opposite direction.

While that study did not reference race, combining the budget-size data with research on groups identified by race and ethnicity creates a picture that could be discouraging.

For the 2018 report “What Are the Paradigm Shifts Necessary for the Arts Sector to Nurture Thriving Institutions of Color?” Yancey Consulting surveyed New York City–based arts and culture organizations with budgets over \$200,000 that served African, Latinx, Asian, Arab and Native American (ALAANA) communities. The report noted that one-third of the participating organizations could not pay their staff fair wages.

Locally, in a survey of artists commissioned by the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council, more than 64 percent of Black respondents reported incomes below \$50,000, compared with just over 46 percent of white respondents. Similarly, slightly more than 57 percent of Black respondents said that they saw discrimination as

**“It’s not just about seven or 10 strong Black arts and cultural organizations. How do we begin to create this ecosystem where those organizations begin to mentor and support other Black arts organizations – or where because of their success, because of the risk capital we put into these organizations, it begins to generate the idea that we can be doing this for n organizations?”**

**Mark Lewis**, President and CEO, POISE Foundation



an “extremely/very significant challenge,” compared with around 12 percent of white respondents.

As the violent killings of unarmed Black people—including Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd—triggered a wave of protest last spring and summer that surged across the globe, Black artists helped to lead demonstrations by lending both their art and their presence to efforts expressing both grief and rage. High-profile celebrity artists added their voices, such as Jamie Foxx, who spoke at a rally in San Francisco, and Beyoncé, who took to Instagram to issue a call for justice.

In the Pittsburgh region, artists memorialized the victims on murals, in music and during discussions in online forums. These local artists placed themselves in the lineage of Black creatives who have called for justice throughout history.

The primary thrust of the Cultural Treasures program, said Ms. McDill, could be summarized in words that she heard spoken by the late renowned Pittsburgh playwright August Wilson: “We are here not to protest, but to proclaim.”

“In this instance, we choose to center and celebrate the organizations, not [focus on] the system of oppression itself. This program is not just about protesting what has been done, it’s about proclaiming and saying, ‘We know the history, we know what has taken place, we understand,’” Ms. McDill said. “And here’s also what we’re trying to do: We’re trying to proclaim, and we’re trying to elevate and amplify, and start today by saying, ‘These are treasures that we need to preserve and protect.’”

The desire for long-term impact has led to an approach that may seem counterintuitive.

“Nationally and locally, I think the funding community has been guilty of starving BIPOC [Black/Indigenous/People of Color] organizations by giving project support or one-year operating support,” Ms. Sarbaugh said. “And to survive and thrive and prosper, you need longer-term investments.”

That means not spreading out the money too thin.

“The philosophy is to focus on fewer organizations with more money,” she said. “Which means multiple years of operating support, and multiple years of other kinds of supports that will make them successful.”

### Creating a map

**T**he overall design of the program so far is fairly simple: Members of the public will have the opportunity, via a form on the Endowments’ website, [www.heinz.org](http://www.heinz.org), to nominate organizations and institutions that they consider to be cultural treasures. Those nominations will be included among recommendations from other stakeholders and evaluated by a steering committee comprising local and national cultural workers. The steering committee will assist the Endowments in making decisions on ways to deeply invest in the local arts community as well as in forming a cohort of arts organizations to participate in the program, hopefully by the end of the year.

The nomination process also will help the Pittsburgh’s Cultural Treasures initiative refine its definition of what a “cultural treasure” is and help to amplify the work of a large group of Black-led organizations, even if not all of them receive monetary support through this specific program. The Endowments also has brought on the New York–based, minority/women-owned firm CJAM Consulting to help with coordinating the different moving parts of the local initiative, including creating a digital map of the organizations and institutions identified as cultural treasures that will be an ongoing reference tool long after the initiative officially ends.

Recognizing that all organizations can use support in building their capacity and that Black arts organizations often do not receive the same level of investment as other groups, the Endowments set up the first in a series of roundtables in December with capacity-building professionals from around the nation to figure out how best to turn deferred dreams into plans for supporting regional organizations. Other roundtables that are being organized to be held throughout this year include one focused on Black media,

another that engages the audiences that attend Black art presentations throughout the region, and one with local and national funders that have a history of funding Black-led organizations as their primary mission and scope of work.

The Endowments also struck an agreement with the POISE Foundation to manage Cultural Treasures funds. POISE has managed money for Endowments-funded projects before, but not nearly on such a scale as this one. The \$10 million infusion will nearly double POISE’s assets under management, and the fees for doing so will similarly affect POISE’s revenues.

But perhaps the most important impact for POISE itself will be the boost in awareness of America’s oldest Black community foundation, which could lead to both more assignments with large philanthropies and to more new accounts established by individuals.

Within the arts community, POISE Foundation President and CEO Mark Lewis envisions a ripple effect that extends the benefits of the Cultural Treasures program beyond the grant recipients.

“It’s not just about seven or 10 strong Black arts and cultural organizations,” he said. “How do we begin to create this ecosystem where those organizations begin to mentor and support other Black arts organizations—or where because of their success, because of the risk capital we put into these organizations, it begins to generate the idea that we can be doing this for more organizations? Who is that next group that we’re going to build and nurture and get to that level as well?”

The cooperation between arts organizations that Mr. Lewis envisions would not be without precedent, according to Celeta Hickman, a member of the Pittsburgh’s Cultural Treasures steering committee and co-founder of the Ujamaa Collective, a cooperative wealth-building incubator and artisan boutique. Preferring the term “Africana community” to “African Americans,” she said that historically, “we’ve all worked together ... to support one another.”

For the organizations named as cultural treasures, Ms. Hickman believes the primary

impact of the program will be “to ground and establish them, and stabilize them in the most profound way possible, so that they can contribute to the region and the world.”

Even beyond the arts community, one likely result of strengthening Black arts organizations would be an overall improvement in the local economy, because the arts create jobs, and income, for more than artists. Think of paintbrush and canvas suppliers, or caterers at the openings of art shows, or costumers for theatre companies.

According to a 2017 report produced by the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council and Americans for the Arts, Allegheny County led the nation among similar regions in jobs generated through the arts—32,211—and four out of five of those jobs were outside of the arts. The region also led in arts-generated household income (\$641 million), and tax revenues (\$115 million).

But the report also cautioned that the arts and culture sector needed to work with elected officials and community and business leaders to address issues of racial inequality and unequal access to resources.

Asked what success would look like five years from now, Mr. Walker said, “What that looks like, first and foremost, is a landscape of resilient, vibrant organizations who are receiving robust donations from arts philanthropists who in the past might have appreciated their work but not funded their work.

“What we hope to do is to mobilize and sustain increased investment in these critically important cultural treasures. Success looks like more art and more money going to the arts.”**h**

# marking this moment

A Heinz Endowments initiative supports artists who are using their talents to reflect the impact over the past year of the global health pandemic and protests against racial injustice.

By Elwin Green



Elan Mizrahi

Artist Tara Fay Coleman, center, is using the \$10,000 she received from the Associated Artists of Pittsburgh as part of the Marking this Moment in Time initiative for her the Black Femme Mural Project, which supports Black women artists like Jessica Moss, left, and Jameelah Platt, right, who are painting a mural at 752 Clarissa Street in Pittsburgh's Hill District.

pandemic for a podcast that will become part of a larger “digital performance, immersive media project and ongoing archive of queer care.” Jason Mendez will produce a digital storytelling installation based on interviews of first-generation college students, highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on their college experience.

Both artists' work will be exhibited in the lobby of Kelly Strayhorn Theater in early 2022. The community arts center also granted a fellowship to photographer/videographer Sarah Huny Young, in recognition of her multifaceted work in 2020 that included documenting Black Lives Matter protests and serving Black trans and queer people.

New Hazlett Theater is working with seven artists—Samuel Boateng, Tlaloc Rivas, Kaylin Horgan, Nick Navari, Monteze Freeland, Dr. Hollywood (Dr. Amber Epps) and Jon Quest (Jonathan Brown)—to produce a documentary reflecting their experiences of making new work in a highly restricted performing arts environment. They hope to finish it over the summer and to present it once they can reopen to the public with live audiences.

Silver Eye Center for Photography commissioned photographer and documentary filmmaker Njaimah Njie, who is producing a series of photographs of Pittsburgh neighborhoods that capture signifiers such as “Black Lives Matter” signs in storefront windows. She and Silver Eye are in discussion about gathering the photographs into an artists book to be published in the fall.

YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh's Homewood-Brushton branch houses the Lighthouse Project, a teen arts center that offers training in photography, videography and music production, and is supporting two grant projects.

In “Time in a Tunnel,” teaching artist K. Bey led a 10-week workshop alongside Dmitra Gideon of Write Pittsburgh, a collective that sponsors writing programs through the region. In the workshop, students learned to use their phones to create photo essays that were compiled into a video that now appears on the Lighthouse Project's YouTube channel.

In the second, untitled project, singer-songwriter Danielle Walker, a.k.a. INEZ, is collaborating with other Black artists in a commissioned audiovisual creation to capture the perspectives of Black women as they cope, create and fight against injustice.

And to mark the moment of the initiative's impact on the Pittsburgh region, Endowments staff plan to showcase the work of artists who participated during a culminating event or publication later this year. **h**

Americans were still trying to figure out how to navigate a surging pandemic when the killing of George Floyd, following those of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, triggered an international wave of protests against police brutality and structural racism.

“The moment seemed to be particularly acute” around those issues, said Mac Howison, The Heinz Endowments' program officer for Creative Learning. “Through all of these street protests, artists were best positioned in many ways to reflect on those activities, to document those activities, and to respond to that kind of community pulse.”

To support artists responding to systemic injustice and the impacts of COVID-19, the Endowments launched an initiative last summer called Marking this Moment in Time. The program granted \$10,000 each to seven arts organizations so that they could in turn commission work by individual artists.

Among those receiving funding through the program is City of Asylum, where seven writers living in the international artists community's houses were commissioned to create personal narratives, along with narratives of other non-native-born Pittsburgh residents. They are writing in their native languages for later translation.

The authors, who came to America to escape persecution, are Graciela Bonnet (Argentina), Bewketu Seyoum (Ethiopia), Tuhin Das (Bangladesh), Israel Centeno (Venezuela), Simten Coşar (Turkey), Rosa Iris Diendomi Alvarez (Dominican Republic) and a Sudanese writer who uses the pen name RaMa to protect their identity.

“A pervasive theme in everyone's story is the idea of double isolation,” said City of Asylum Executive Director Andrés Franco, himself a native of Colombia. “Some people had just arrived before the pandemic.”

The Associated Artists of Pittsburgh used its grant to support one of its members, Tara Fay Coleman, on an initiative that she already had underway: the Black Femme Mural Project, which commissions Black women artists to paint spaces throughout Pittsburgh. When AAP Executive Director Madeline Gent learned about Ms. Coleman's project in 2018, the initiative was, Ms. Gent said, “in a bit of a catch-22.” Property owners were reluctant to grant Ms. Coleman access until she had funding, and funders held back from funding the work until a property had been secured.

“I was told ‘no’ a lot,” Ms. Coleman said. Receiving the \$10,000 grant has allowed her to secure an agreement for a mural on a residential property and to begin working with two artists, Jessica Moss and Jameelah Platt, to do a mural there. She expects them to finish it by the end of summer.

“It's frustrating,” she said of the catch-22 predicament. “But I'm grateful nevertheless” for the grant.

Among the other participating organizations are Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation and BOOM Concepts, which have commissioned a cohort of artists, including Thomas Agnew, Julie Mallis, Bekezela Mguni, and D. S. Kinsel, to create a curated time capsule, an interview series, community art making workshops, mixtapes, and a physical and digital ephemeral object collection. The working title for the project is “BOOM's Menagerie.”

Kelly Strayhorn Theater commissioned two artists for separate projects. Lyam B. Gabel will interview members of Pittsburgh's queer and trans community about how they are caring for one another during the