

Artists' Adaptability Circles

The Artists' Adaptability Circles (AAC) is a community-created and artist-led program designed to put Bay Area artists and arts workers back to work, creatively addressing issues arising in their lives and communities.

The program was developed out of deep, sustained conversation among artists, arts workers and grantmakers over the course of 10 months (June 2020–April 2021) with the primary goal of providing structure and funding to historically under-resourced communities (including Black, Indigenous and People of Color, LGBTQIA+ people, and people with disabilities).

Individuals participating in these conversations (right) became members of the advisory circle for our beta round and continue to guide the initiative.

Using a distributed leadership and funding model (below), the program provides grassroots leaders and their collaborators with monetary stipends to meet independently, attend cross-circle gatherings, receive leadership development training (provided by EAP), and utilize \$10,000 in flexible funding to implement their plans.

This philanthropic model was created to support artists and arts workers amidst the COVID pandemic. We believe, however, that AAC has the ability to shift how funders engage with and support individual artists. By building upon our established relationships, we can empower historically disadvantaged communities to collaboratively discuss and address their own issues, reaching and supporting artist-initiated projects that fall outside of traditional grant programs and funding priorities.

In its 8-month beta round (June 2021 - January 2022) AAC distributed \$100,000 to five circles of 22 diverse artists and arts workers addressing self-identified issues within their own communities. Below are the individual stories of the six artists leading circles in this beta round.

Esailama G. Artry-Diouf, Ph.D., San Francisco Foundation

Tara Dalbo, La Peña Cultural Center

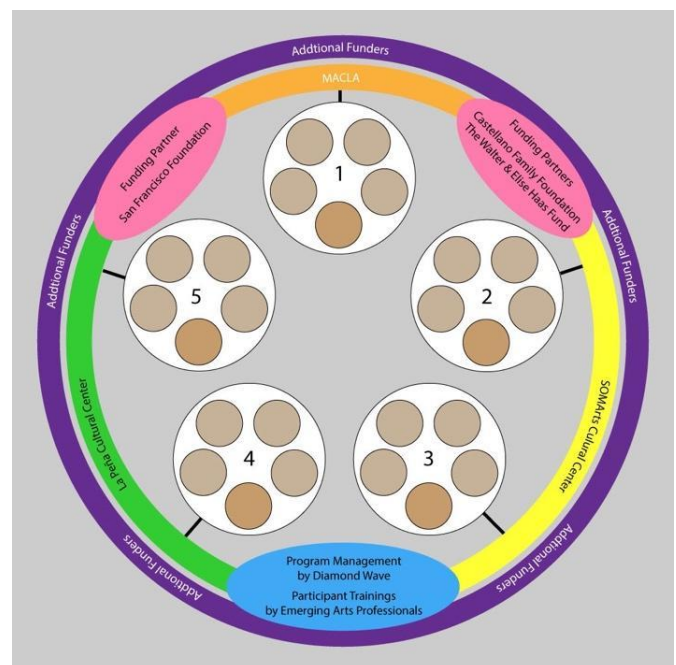
Rhiannon Evans MacFadyen, Emerging Arts Professionals San Francisco Bay Area (EAP)

Anjee Helstrup-Alvarez and Maryela Perez, Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana (MACLA)

Maria Jenson and Carolina Quintanilla, SOMArts Cultural Center

Frances Phillips and subsequently Faiza Bukhari, Walter & Elise Haas Fund

Kevin Seaman and Stephan McLeroy, Diamond Wave



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Chris Evans is a musician, dancer, body worker, and business owner of a Pilates studio in north Oakland. She's also a part of Deep Waters Dance Theater's [House/Full of Black Women](#), a site specific ritual performance project that focuses on the health and well being of Black girls and women in Oakland. During COVID, Chris continued grappling with obstacles that stood in the way to Black women's healing and self care. As a lead artist, Chris posed the question "What would Black women create if they were rested and healed and living thriving lives?" As a result of participating in AAC, she and her circle have created the [Black Women's Self-Care Reparations Project](#).

"[AAC] provided a structure for me to rethink and to deepen how I was thinking of this idea of self care reparations, to bring other women that I've worked with for many years together to think about these questions of "What is self care for Black women?" "How do we practice self care in a very oppressive society that does not really value the care of Black women's bodies and spirits and minds and hearts?"



As this round's only co-leads, artists and educators **Tricia Rainwater-Tutwiler** and **Alma Leppla** focused on securing physical space and resources for queer BIPOC femme & gender-expansive artists. Although they were not able to book physical space to exhibit, they did host informal meetups as well as professional development workshops. Their circle, under the moniker [Queer Rain](#), also founded a new publication that showcased the work of 20 Bay Area artists in its first issue and attracted 75 LGBTQIA2S+ people and their allies to the publication launch event.

Queer Rain is currently seeking fiscal sponsorship to secure ongoing funding while planning an event with the Institute of Contemporary Art San Francisco and the release of their second publication.

"Through the support of the AAC we have really seen our informal group grow in these exciting ways that I didn't even know were possible"

"We learned so much... We've created and held space for workshops and [are] shifting dramatically... [to] really make space where there has not been [space]. We're hopeful that we can continue on this path."



Héctor Lugo is a music educator with 30+ years of experience in the East Bay education system. For most of that time he has struggled to find a way to integrate institutionalized music education with living traditions. With the support of AAC, Héctor's circle founded **ALMA (Afro-Latin Music Alliance/ALianza de Musica Afro-Latina)** and conducted a three-month, 100-hour residency teaching Afro-Latin music and dance to 300 students (K - 4th grade) at Manzanita SEED elementary school in Oakland, CA. This circle also hosted two community jams; successfully connecting students with community artists that keep these traditions alive in their shared neighborhoods.

Going forward, ALMA plans to seek fiscal sponsorship and work with additional Afro-Latin musical and cultural communities to implement similar educational projects within the Bay Area.



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"...The flexibility [of AAC] has allowed us to develop a project that integrates teaching, performance and community action... to protest, to celebrate holidays, to simply come together and commune. So music becomes part of building a community."

Thomas "Tommy" Aguilar is a working artist in San Jose who creates multimedia events centering creatives of color under the brand [Universal Grammar](#). For AAC, Tommy's circle wanted to create space for young people of color to center their creative expressions and lead cultural events in San Jose, despite the lack of professional venues willing to invest in their visions. They successfully hosted several events in San Jose featuring emerging artists of color, giving financial support to attendees in pursuing their creative practices.

This circle has formed a group named **Desbloqueo** under the Universal Grammar brand and intends to continue hosting events for young creatives in San Jose.

"I've always looked to book, promote and perform music that is for emerging ears and our city has not yet developed venues or spaces to support younger folks... So I reached out my hands to [younger folks] and brought them on board... [We've] come together and created spaces for ourselves... to use [AAC] as a platform to create awareness [and], hopefully, create a new movement."



Choreographer and arts worker **Zackary Forcum** focused on transformative healing for queer, trans and Black, Indigenous and People of Color movement artists. This circle chose to increase the participation stipends for all artists involved to ensure that its members' basic needs could be met, providing a structure for each of the artists to apply their funding to their daily lives and/or artistic practices.

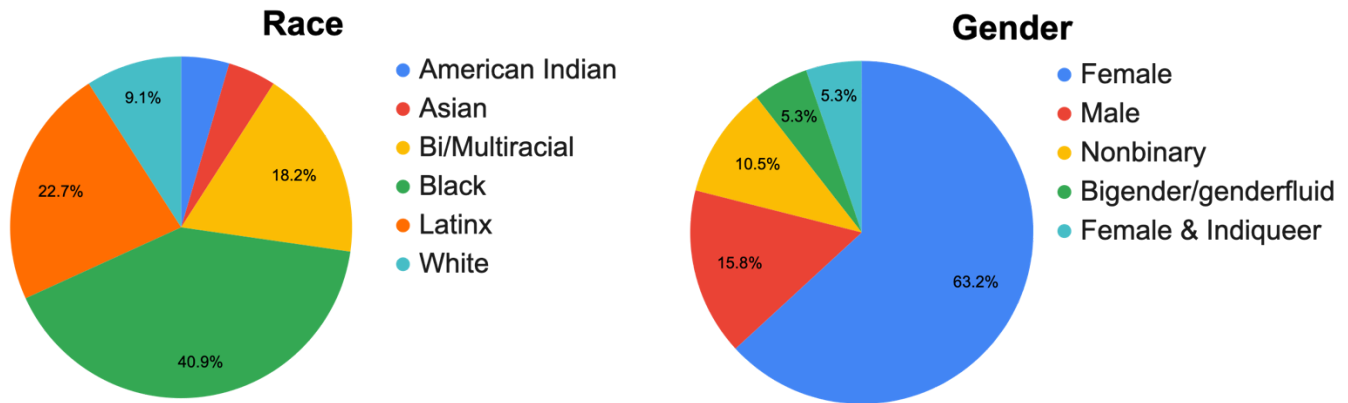
This informal group of colleagues will continue to support each others' transformational healing with individual members paying for living expenses, conducting individual creative retreats, and supporting the presentation of new work in collaboration with organizations like Shawl-Anderson Dance Center and CounterPulse.



"Often times when we describe recovering from depression or from something traumatic, like putting on your clothes is a success in and of itself... But we have to show up and we have to prove ourselves, and it was really impactful to be able to say 'I see you, I think you're great, I think we can work toward something together and here's the money... It's yours.'"

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Demographic Information: Demographic information collected for beta round participants demonstrates that the program directly impacts its target demographics of Black, Indigenous and People of Color, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities, and other historically under-resourced communities.



Additionally, participants varied from age 27 to 70, with 45.5% identifying as LGBTQIA2S+ and 28.6% identifying as a person with a disability.

Geographic representation consisted of the following: 68.2% from Alameda, 13.6% from Santa Clara, 13.6% from San Francisco, and 4.5% from Contra Costa.