



2023-24 Artist Opportunity Grant

Panelist Bios

Desirae “The Silent Poet” Hosley (Panel Chair) is a spoken word artist and community organizer dedicated to creating spaces that help people speak their truth. During her time with AmeriCorps Volunteers of America, she worked with the Urban Appalachian Council (now known as the Urban Appalachian Community Coalition) in Lower Price Hill, which sparked a love for the nonprofit world. Since then, she has collaborated with Community Matters, helped to bring Louder Than a Bomb Poetry Teen Slam to Cincinnati, and founded SlamCatz, The University of Cincinnati’s spoken word poetry slam and dialogue team. As a performer, she’s taken the stage at the University of Cincinnati, Fringe Festival Cincinnati, Poetry Museum without Walls, the Aronoff Center, and many other venues. Most recently, she has created Social Therapy 2020, a virtual community where young adults and adults come together to bridge the social gap in this new pandemic world through writing and storytelling. Desirae served as an Artist Opportunity Grant panelist from 2020–2022.

Originally from Twin Cities, Minnesota, **DeMarcus Akeem Suggs** is a dance artist, educator, and arts administrator. A graduate of Belhaven University’s dance program (BFA), his professional experience includes performing with Dayton Contemporary Dance Company (DCDC), Dayton Ballet, Neos Dance Theatre, Verb Ballets, as well as collaborating with various project-based choreographers. His passion for building and sustaining a vibrant, equitable, and artist-centric culture sector has developed over the course of his 10 years serving in various leadership roles such as Program Director at The Victory Project; Development Director for Alternate ROOTS; Coordinator of Education & Engagement at Victoria Theatre Association; as well as Director of Education & Outreach for Neos Dance Theatre. He has also served as a panelist for Ohio Arts Council and Dance/USA and was selected for Dance/USA’s 2018 Institute for Leadership Training.

Gregory Changa Freeman is a writer, playwright, essayist, poet, and photographer who has a passion for depicting stories of extraordinary people during their daily life through creative writing and visual art forms. He frequently collaborates with individuals and organizations to present and promote educational projects and creative ventures. He has written scripts for media broadcasts and advertising. He serves as the President of the African American Visual Artists Guild Board of Trustees.

Dr. Diane Conrad Merchant is a Professor of Theatre at Cedarville University, where she teaches Arts Administration, Theatre History, Dramaturgy, Theatre for Young People, and Directing. One of her main focal areas is The Arts and Social Change, and she partners with a Psychology Professor at Cedarville to provide role-playing practical experiences for students preparing to become family therapists.

Janet Cooper retired from Dublin Arts Council this year, where she managed marketing communications and audience engagement efforts for 18 years. She has recently relocated to Arizona, where she was involved in the marketing of a number of arts organizations, including the Scottsdale Arts Festival, the Arizona Indian Arts Alliance, the McDowell Mountain Music Festival and the Scottsdale Gallery Association. Her corporate and agency experiences include Director of Media & Public Relations / Investor Relations for U-Haul International, Inc., and Public Relations Director / Account Manager for R&R Partners, the Las Vegas-based agency responsible for the “What Happens in Vegas, Stays in Vegas” campaign. Janet is the recipient of a Rocky Mountain Emmy Award for public affairs programming and has lectured internationally on topics of mission-based programming and the gamification of public art.

Dr. Jenny Cruz is a Professor of Piano and Chair of the Fine & Performing Arts department at Central State University, an HBCU in Wilberforce, OH. In addition to performing and teaching, her creative outlets have expanded to writing. The process of observing, writing, and revering has been a transformational practice for her, and she now co-facilitates writing circles for women both in-person and on Zoom. She takes great pride in calling Dayton home and lives downtown with her husband, 2 kids, and their 7 fish.

Kate Kennedy is Chief Operating Officer at ArtsWave, the engine for Greater Cincinnati’s arts. Through gifts from tens of thousands of individuals and companies each year, ArtsWave funds and supports organizations and artists each year that create thousands of concerts, shows, exhibitions, school-based arts, public art, festivals and events like BLINK®. Kate provides the leadership, management, and vision necessary to ensure that the organization has the proper operational controls, administrative and reporting procedures, and people in place to effectively grow the organization.

Angela Meleca is an expert in arts advocacy and creative economy. She has dedicated her prolific career to the creative workforce and has successfully reframed the conversation around the arts. Between 2020 and 2023, Angela secured over \$160

million in public funding for Ohio nonprofit arts organizations using new strategic advocacy. Her achievements have set a new standard for effective advocacy in the arts sector.

Polly Sutton is a retired dancer. She has her MFA in ballet from the University of Utah and is certified in the ABT teaching curriculum and Balanced Body Pilates. Polly is currently a teaching artist and Pilates instructor in the Dayton area.

Belinda Wright is a House Manager for Dayton Live. She is also a contributor to *The Dayton Anthology*, edited by Shannon Shelton Miller (2020). Belinda enjoys writing, reading, attending live theater productions, and traveling to quiet, out-of-the-way destinations for reflection and relaxation.