

The **Ventura County Arts Council** (VCAC) is currently involved in a countywide initiative to broaden the reach of the arts into our county. This concerted effort is part of a new program titled ArtsLIVE in Ventura County in partnership with the Ventura County Community Foundation and funded by the James Irvine Foundation's Communities Advancing the Arts initiative. The goal of the ArtsLIVE initiative is to identify more supporters, donors, and partners for the arts in the county. In order to do that we need to engage people who have not had an encounter with the arts to demonstrate how the arts can address their issues, solve their problems, or help them meet their goals. The VCAC has designed an innovative new grants program for individual artist titled "Artists in Community Partnerships Grants Program." We are asking our artists in all disciplines to partner with non-arts community organizations. We know that artists are innovative thinkers. They will bring leadership and creative problem solving skills to the partnership. Through this program the VCAC intends to demonstrate that the arts are vital to the wellbeing of our county.



The projects for which the artists and their community partners seek funding will focus on helping a community group solve an organizational problem, such as telling their story to the larger community through a video; or the artist who can help an organization work with their clientele, such as helping a group of gay and lesbian seniors tell their life story for the first time; or the artist who can address a community issue with several affected groups. An example is one of our artists proposing to use charcoal picked up from the recent wildfire areas to create artwork that examines the ecological and psychological damage of wildfires. She proposes working with firefighters, ecologists, and victims.

The important story that this grants program is telling is that the arts are not fluff, not extraneous, should not be marginalized because the arts of all kinds have a value to the community far beyond "entertainment" or "leisure time activities." The artists are creative thinkers. They care deeply about their communities. We are certain that the artists will be bringing us proposals that demonstrate innovative approaches and solutions that will prove our contention that "artists change communities."

When the Ventura County Arts Council announced the new grants program, we did not have to say it twice. The artists "got it." In fact, many of them have been doing some partnering work in the community on their own. With the backing and greater visibility of The James Irvine Foundation, the Ventura County Community Foundation, and the Ventura County Arts Council, this larger effort will make more of an impact on the community. The artists will get recognition for their community activities and the arts will be shown to be a valuable tool for making the county more livable. The artists are pleased that there is this opportunity to receive funding for work that they have long wanted to do.

As part of the proposal we are asking the community partners to contribute one-quarter of the total budget of the project. All community organizations are being asked to do more in these challenging times. As artists, we are stepping up to show them we can be effective partners. The ultimate goal of this effort is to show how the arts can interact with other sectors of the community, to their mutual benefit, while at the same time using the inherent powers of the arts experience to expand the view of the arts in new populations. To show the community that artists have the skills that makes them effective partners in solving the challenges that are facing them.

One final important feature of this artist partnership, which separates it from most other grant programs, is that the process the artists and their community partners go through is as important as the resulting artistic product. The discussions they have about the project goals, the discovery of the best way to approach it, the "getting to know you" for the artist about their partner's work in the community, as well as the partner getting to realize how the artist and their skills can work for and with them, is very important to the success of this program.

The VCAC is confident that the projects funded in the first round of grants will serve to imbed the program in the minds of the artists and the greater community, and garner for the arts community new and stronger public and private support.

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