The Center for Cultural Power

Every moment of major social change requires a collective leap of imagination. Political transformation must be accompanied not just by spontaneous and organized expressions of unrest and risk, but by an explosion of mass creativity.
- Jeff Chang

Social change happens when people’s beliefs shift. People’s beliefs shift when the culture that defines and reflects their beliefs shifts.
- Ploughshares Fund Cultural Strategy Report

Culture is power - it shapes who we are as a people, sets the terms of the world we live in, and informs how we perceive issues, stories, and each other. Culture is also dynamic, and can drive the social change these times urgently demand.

Artists and storytellers can spark cultural surges that permanently transform paradigms and ways we interact with each other on a daily basis. The #MeToo and #TimesUp movements shared stories that brought truth to light and catalyzed the knowledge that change is not only necessary, but inevitable. As Jeff Chang says, “politics and policy are where some people are some of the time, but culture is where most people are most of the time.”

Stories also create aspirational narratives that allow people to imagine what it would look like for freedom, pluralism, diversity, and justice to take hold. Ryan Coogler brought forth a utopian world in *Black Panther*, in which colonialism’s destruction never occurred. The writer Ntozake Shange created *For Colored Girls* in a community-arts based cultural landscape, and eventually hit major arts institutions,
played to large audiences, and inspired thousands of new writers, artists, audiences, and conversations over four decades. Both are examples of how art can ignite the imagination and dream a just future into existence.

“Stories and narratives change how people perceive themselves and their role in the world. When activated and brought together by the new ideas and the common spaces of stories and narratives, people have the power to change cultural norms, policies and systems through their life choices, including, though not exclusively, as voters and consumers.” - A Conversation about Cultural Strategy

We live in a contentious period defined by a clash of grand narratives: on the one hand, a narrative of fear and national decline, and on the other, a narrative of hope and national becoming. What is at stake in this current iteration of culture wars are opposing visions that describe how we will learn to—or refuse to—live together. The narrative of fear and national decline is largely perpetuated by think tanks, media conglomerates, corporate interests, and other top-down institutions interested in maintaining their power. But those of us who believe in justice and liberation have just as much ability to impact culture and corresponding social behavior if we turn our attention to it, investing in cultural strategy as a real field.

Our nation urgently needs the infrastructure, pedagogy, practices, ideas and frameworks for a sustained and vibrant cultural transformation. Artists and storytellers can lead the way.

The Center for Cultural Power

The Center for Cultural Power is an artist-of-color-led organization building the infrastructure and cultural assets to support artists and storytellers for social change. We activate new narratives and amplify stories that permanently shift culture and push for structural change. Our work resides at the intersection of urgent issues of migration, climate chaos, and gender, racial and cultural justice. However, our primary strategy is to invest directly in artists who work on a range of diverse and emergent issues linked up with their passions and the current moment in culture.

The Center for Cultural Power is an evolution of the programmatic work of CultureStrike which launched in 2011 with a groundbreaking artist delegation to the Arizona border surrounding the anti-immigrant law, SB1070. The delegation engaged artists like dream hampton (Executive Producer of “Surviving R Kelly”), Kamau Bell (United Shades of America) and Alex Rivera (2019 Sundance Winner). Powerful results years later include dream hampton working to mobilize John Legend to do a musical event at the border in 2017; Kamau Bell producing a show about the border and featuring Favianna Rodriguez (United Shades of America, CNN) in 2018; and Alex Rivera ideating a documentary which won two awards at Sundance 2019 (The Infiltrators; CultureStrike was a first funder).

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1 A Conversation about Cultural Strategy, by Jeff Chang, Liz Manne and Erin Potts
Over the last decade, CultureStrike proved that engaging artists from communities most impacted by exclusionary policy before they break into the mainstream and creating opportunities for them to learn increases both the number and the depth of storylines in our culture. We think of these stories as individual stars and when many stars coalesce around similar themes, the stories form a narrative constellation that can disrupt business as usual by providing many different viewpoints on an aspect of the status quo.

Investing in a network of artists by supporting their craft and political understanding is a generative act that continues to return impact for decades after an intervention, bringing new stories and voices to the public that, taken collectively, build political will for policy change. Our strength as an organization is as a facilitator between directly impacted communities, cultural influencers, and emergent artists.

At The Center for Cultural Power, all of our work supports artists and culture-makers whose voices are most needed to transform the status quo to a more just, healthy, and inclusive future. This includes artists of color, immigrant and undocumented artists, disabled artists, transgender artists, indigenous artists, and women artists. With support, these artists contribute to new narratives and help the public understand systemic issues through the culture they consume.

The buildout of the Center expands upon CultureStrike’s learning about what it takes for artists and culture-makers across genres to have social impact through their chosen medium. Over the next three years, the Center will become an anchor to the field of cultural organizing under the leadership of Favianna Rodriguez, one of the foremost experts on cultural strategy and an award-winning professional artist herself.

To achieve a thriving, inclusive, and safe cultural sector that will disrupt the status quo, the Center for Cultural Power focuses on four strategies:

- **Incubate** artists, leaders, projects, and ideas.
- **Activate** artists and storytellers to engage in social movements.
- **Organize** artists to build power and transform inequitable cultural institutions.
- **Amplify** artists, artworks, and ideas.

**Artists at the Center**

Artists and storytellers move people intellectually, emotionally, and bodily. Cultural strategy that disrupts oppressive power dynamics can bring the “yes” to organizing and advocacy tactics often framed in terms of resistance, struggle, and fights - reframing things from what we are against to what is possible. Artists breathe life and hope into social movements. We invest in storytellers, particularly those who have lived the direct experience of how damaging the current narrative and structures are to people and planet.
Building on the expertise of CultureStrike, the Center is the only organization positioned to bring together frontline activists, emergent artists, and cultural influencers, with a unique focus on artists at varied levels of their careers:

**Emerging & Grassroots Artists** work at the frontlines, serving - and often from - directly impacted communities. They have stories to share and their digital nativity often means they know how to share them, but their roles in social movements are usually circumscribed to traditional organizing, door knocking, messaging campaigns, and entertainment, if they are looped in at all. Emerging artists naturally engage their peers - young, diverse people who usher in the new cultural norms we seek. Engaging young people through culture, especially culture created by artists in their own communities is an underused tactic that could lead to a much more participatory civic culture nationwide.

The Center works extensively with emerging artists across the country, including commissioning and supporting young poets and playwrights, helping undocumented artists launch their careers, and training young Black and Brown artists in the Midwest through our incubated project the Midwest Culture Lab. We create mentorship opportunities, trainings, and pathways for young artists to enter the mainstream, recognizing that these voices are missing links in our culture.

**Mid-Career Artists:** There is a key point in many artists’ development: when they have found a voice and the beginnings of a following, but have not yet reached a professional peak. Artists at this level across the country are creating work that is already upending the status quo, but are doing so too often in isolation and within systems of oppression.

The Center engages mid-career artists by bringing them to immersive experiences like our Border Visions convening or our Climate Justice gatherings which deepen artists’ understanding of the systemic nature of issues like immigration policy and climate chaos. Our experiential learning opportunities are an onramp for artists to join an active network that learns together, amplifies each other’s work, and connects to social movement expertise.

**Professional Artists, Cultural Influencers, & the Entertainment Industry:** Hollywood shapes American culture, and has recently been disrupted to the point where business as usual is no longer viable. Inclusion is now a focus, with organized efforts happening across major studios, and among artists and talent agencies. With the skyrocketing number of distribution channels, the industry is feeling a scarcity that encourages risk-taking, creates new opportunities for young creators, and advances the leadership of socially-engaged entrepreneurs. The Center has found that even those with power, financial success, and influence express feeling isolated, with few opportunities to exchange strategy with peers.

The Center holds powerful relationships with culture makers in entertainment from high-profile actors and directors to animators, show writers, showrunners,
impact producers, and professional musicians. Through our incubated project 5050 by 2020 and several other partnerships, the Center is meeting culture makers’ demand for exposure to artist activist strategy, training, community and the fundamentals of organizing to take on the inequitable structures that determine what stories the public consumes.

The Center’s expertise includes nurturing artists of color, immigrant and undocumented artists, disabled artists, transgender artists, indigenous artists, and women artists at all levels of their career. This creates an intergenerational and intersectional network of artists who can model for each other what impactful work looks like and amplify each other’s work. As an artist-led organization, the Center’s support and approach is organized around artists’ particular superpowers: platform, product, and leadership. Artist platforms are their fanbases; highly engaged and attentive factions of the general public receptive to the messages embedded in their work. Their product is their art, and the Center helps them think about impact during the act of creation. Their leadership includes the ability to organize their peers and to access the powerful institutions that define our culture.

An Equitable Ecosystem

Though their potential as change makers is profound, too many artists and storytellers are isolated, silenced, and held back by unjust embedded power structures throughout their careers. White men hold too much power throughout the cultural ecosystem, while rampant sexual harassment, gender, racial, and socioeconomic inequality persist. 58% of all arts funding supports larger institutions that serve the artistic interests and pursuits of the wealthiest among us. Less than 4% of national arts funding is “allocated to groups whose primary mission is to serve communities of color”, and rural and low-income communities receive even less. And, as the Times Up branch of the #MeToo movement shows, inequities throughout cultural industries threaten our larger goals of a just society.

In their recent Cultural Strategy Primer (which draws on CultureStrike’s experience and learning), Art/Work Practice and Power California state, “Cultural strategists understand the holistic ecosystem that supports broad and scalable change, and must work in concert with their allies in the fields of organizing, media, direct action, policy, education, electoral action, narrative change, pop culture, social entrepreneurship, coalition building, and elsewhere.”

The Center for Cultural Power resides at the intersection of all of these fields, allowing it to anchor a stable infrastructure that is just, inclusive, safe and explicitly advocates for participation of marginalized populations and future artists. We build partnerships in the sector, support established and emerging voices, and create pathways for a new generation to claim their place as actively enfranchised participants in a thriving democratic culture. Just as the organizing and advocacy wings of our movement have developed an interconnected web of support, the cultural ecosystem needs to knit together disparate sectors to support culture creation with an equity lens. Much of this ecosystem is in place, but it is insufficiently connected and not being leveraged for cultural power.

With experience in the most impactful ways to support artists to pull varied levers of change, the Center for Cultural Power organizes its work around the following four strategies.

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2 Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy, a report by Helicon Collaborative, 2017
3 Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy, a report by Helicon Collaborative, 2017
Strategy 1: Incubate Artists, Leaders, Projects, and Ideas.

Incubation is the heart of the Center’s work, recognizing that new leaders, projects, and ideas are needed if a strong cultural sector is to thrive.

**Incubate a Network of Artists:** A deep and sustained investment is required to support artists and storytellers who may not have had access to art school, film school, writing programs or other traditional pathways into the cultural sector. In return, the artists we incubate invest their cultural capital and time to uplift other artists and build the programmatic depth of the Center. Our incubation strategies are culturally competent because of our team’s lived experience as working artists of color, and they currently focus on these core elements:

- **Cohorts and Fellowships:** The Center is nurturing or launching five cohorts that provide wrap-around support for a specific group of artists. Each is made up of 5-8 Fellows who receive a stipend, professional development, mentorship, systemic education, time to create, and opportunities to learn from each other. All cohorts receive baseline training from an extensive artist-activist curriculum, ensuring common frameworks are established for all artists in our network. However each cohort is individualized and specific, allowing stipended Fellows to co-create the support that will best fit their needs. Cohorts launching in 2019/2020 include:

  1. Undocumented and formerly undocumented immigrant screenwriters ready to break into the mainstream
  2. Emerging Black and Brown artists in the Midwest in partnership with Midwest Culture Lab
  3. Transmasculine creators of color in entertainment in partnership with 5050 by 2020
  4. Disabled artists in entertainment in partnership with 5050 by 2020
  5. Sex workers in Hollywood in partnership with 5050 by 2020
  6. Emerging Oakland artists, with mentors like Kamau Bell and Chinaka Hodge
  7. Climate justice cohort of artists from frontline climate-impacted communities to help them understand their important role in climate narrative development and audience building

The Center annually evaluates its mix of cohorts, organizing around either *identity, issue, genre/industry/medium, or geography* or a mix of these lenses. Fellowships run from 6 months to 2 years, with artists invited to join our artist network during and after the period. Fellows are selected through an application process overseen by a culturally competent team of practitioners and Center staff to ensure inclusivity and representation. Applicant pools are both invited and curated. Our proven track record and trusted relationships help us reach artists, thinkers, and leaders who lack access to traditional pipelines in the arts and culture sectors, while also supporting established and influential artists poised to have social impact.

- **Artist Network Development:** One of the most valuable assets that CultureStrike brings to the work of the Center is our informal network of more than 200 artists, almost all from directly impacted communities. We create meaningful engagements for artists that range from annual events to consistent reposting on our social media channels (to an engaged digital following of 49k+) to deep personal relationships and coaching. With expanded capacity in 2019, the Center is formalizing these offerings and more into network protocol that support ongoing regular communication from the Center to the artists, while seeding inter-network relationships so that artists can find a community of practice that fuels learning and experimentation. By mid-2020, a smaller subsection of our artist network will be invited
to a rapid response distribution network that can carry messages further to their fans and the public.

- **Convenings:** Each year, the Center hosts experiential convenings organized by issue, identity, and/or geography. For example, this year we will host a second Climate Justice Convening, inviting artists from the entertainment industry who have roots in impacted communities whose fans are less familiar with the urgency of the climate crisis or the possible solutions at hand. We will partner with Harness, BLD PWR, and The Solutions Project to show effective pathways for impacting climate narratives and build a community of practice. We will also continue to host Border Visions delegations that immerse artists, funders, influencers, and thinkers in immigration issues through a cultural experience at the U.S. Mexico border.

- **Commissions and Co-Productions:** The Center invests in limited commissions and productions created by Fellows and aligned artists. We are currently supporting several media projects taking on climate justice, Latinx immigration stories, and the creation of a play focused on the cultural contributions of LGBTQ Asian Pacific Americans.

**Incubate Ideas:** The Center will organize a cultural strategy think tank to develop and nurture new ideas, practices and leaders. This will take the form of residencies where select artists and thinkers will be supported to write, ideate, research, and learn together. Our sector’s knowledge base is substantial, but it is often secondary to practice. Residencies can accelerate the application of cultural strategies in practice. Leaders may occupy roles in cultural institutions or philanthropy, as artists, as social activists, or as culturally engaged community members.

**Incubate Artist-Led Projects:** A thriving cultural sector requires that the most innovative practitioners receive support, space, and networks to manifest their ideas. The Center provides new projects with a community of practice and non-obtrusive infrastructure, accelerating work that can’t find support through traditional philanthropic channels. The Center is currently incubating to two highly innovative cultural strategy projects: 5050 by 2020 and the Midwest Culture Lab. As the Center grows, we will outfit our back-end infrastructure to meet increasing demand for acceleration and fiscal sponsorship of cultural organizing projects.

**Strategy 2: Activate artists and storytellers to engage in social movements.**

Activation breaks down into two primary approaches. **First, we support artists seeking social impact** by inviting them into cohorts and convenings, offering fellowships, and accessing relationships.

Many artists and culture makers prioritize their artistic practice; they make art that is meaningful to them, and afterwards consider (or not) how it will find an audience or have impact. Not only does this prevent them from reaching audiences that might be inspired or mobilized by their work, but it limits their ability to strategically engage on issues that matter to them.

The Center provides support for culture creators to **consider impact as part of the act of creation**. Artists who focus on **migration, gender and racial equity, and climate chaos** - the fields where the Center has years of partnerships and expertise - will be the first brought together to weave connections between
issues and embed them into artist practice and stories. These concepts are being integrated into a first-of-its-kind original Artist Activist Curriculum that details an abundance of ways for artists to have impact and fight for equity within the sector.

**Second, we train movement groups.** We’ve experienced great demand from social movement organizations to understand how best to incorporate arts and culture to make their work more inviting, inspiring, and accessible, but they too often treat the work of artists as a commodity, treat artists themselves as low-paid or unpaid labor, or talk down to artists as if we are incapable of understanding complex communications or legislative strategies. We teach social change organizations how to build mutually beneficial partnerships, including how to fairly compensate artists, how to include them in strategy development, and how to give them creative flexibility while syncing with broader strategy.

Initial artist activation centers around the following core issues for the Center:

**Climate Justice:** We are at a moment of unparalleled urgency in the climate crisis. The damage caused by consumptive practices is evident and growing exponentially, and communities of color disproportionately suffer the effects of climate chaos. Just as our natural resources are extracted, so too has the natural ability of artists from these communities to share their stories been extracted by a society that devalues diverse creative expression. Yet, a new report from the Helicon Collaborative points out that “Artists can help expand support for environmental issues by using language, content, and images that speak to people who don’t think of themselves as environmentalists, or who are even turned off by dominant representations of environmentalism and sustainability. Kate Wolford, president of the McKnight Foundation, notes: ‘Sometimes there is not a lot of trust in ‘environmental’ messengers in rural areas and post-industrial cities. Artists can be powerful influencers because art can cross boundaries and ideological barriers.’” Artists and storytellers from frontline communities will be supported to move hearts and minds, inspiring people to change their behaviors, to deepen their connection to the natural world, and to reexamine how we consume. In order to win on climate solutions, our movements need a substantial scale-up of the use of cultural strategies led by people of color, which in turn will lay the groundwork for political and economic victories into the future.

**Gender and Racial Justice:** The current political climate has moved demands for equity to a new level of urgency and prominence in all sectors, and this wave of cultural moments in the U.S. will dramatically change how we define and experience equity and justice moving forward. The Center is coalescing artists who can share positive representations of gender that challenge cultural norms alongside expressions of body positivity and consent that can redefine how we see each other. All of our work centers racial justice themes and empowers people of color to represent themselves in a society that often makes them invisible.

**Immigration:** The national immigration debate has been framed through fear, racism and xenophobia. We have significant experience reframing immigration narratives - including helping move the normative language from “illegal” to undocumented - while creating a launching pad for immigrant voices to break through to the mainstream. We birthed the seminal butterfly “Migration is Beautiful” imagery, now one of the most popular aspirational symbols associated with immigrant justice - even Pharrel Williams produced a documentary about it in 2012. The Center is a trusted home for undocumented artists and storytellers to help critical voices break through

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2 Farther, Faster, Together: How Arts and Culture Can Accelerate Environmental Progress
6 iamOTHER Voice of Art - Migration Is Beautiful, Pt. 1 of 3, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWE2T8Bx5d8
and add their narratives to the mainstream. We'll support artists to tell stories that complicate the “good immigrant” narrative and present a multiplicity of stories about immigrants in America.

Strategy 3: Organize artists to build power and transform inequitable cultural institutions

Artists and culture workers – from the grassroots to Hollywood, major arts institutions, publishing houses and performance venues – are a workforce like any other, and they need collective power to transform inequity within their sector. When the institutions that hold the lenses through which stories are told shift away from the predominant white male gaze, the narratives that emerge help shape a new paradigm.

Historic and deep inequality in the cultural sector is the norm, with men representing 80% of publishers and 90% of film producers, 85% of art works in museums are by men, and 79% of working artists are white. In this landscape, equitable cultural power is impossible. We train leaders to disrupt the status quo and build an equitable institutional ecosystem that will green light and build demand for new content that is generative, inclusive and inviting, creating a positive spiral of opportunity and creation.

In our first two years, this strategy will weave through the curricula of our Artist Activist Curriculum, our cohorts and convenings. As we grow, we’ll leverage our unique position between the art world and social justice sector to bring organizing tactics to the artists in our network. With tools and movement partners, we can demand that cultural industries become more inclusive, equitable, and welcoming to the plurality of stories that mirror our current and future landscape.

Organizing will include targeted campaigns, trainings, curricula, and convenings, as well as making widely available a suite of tools that artists, cultural workers, and movement groups can access.

Strategy 4: Amplify Artists, Artworks, and Ideas to Disrupt the Status Quo

The Center for Cultural Power is scaling up communications capacity to amplify artists and work that can disrupt dominant narratives and make them more complex and representative of varied viewpoints. The Center, operating as CultureStrike, created its own platform for alternative narratives, with 49,000+ followers on Instagram and regular engagement in the thousands on frequent posts. Our track record in social media and content creation taught us that authentic response and sustained engagement from an audience requires the call itself to be authentic.

Over time, the Center will create our own content, publishing in varying media, and researching and curating content to activate the public imagination. As we scale our in-house production team, we’ll bring the same nuance to content creation and curation that we bring to artist support. By working with researchers, policy experts, movement strategists, and content creators from the moment of conception, we can ensure content not only reflects the storyteller’s unique lived experience, but also accurately portrays the systemic issues that drive the impacts individuals feel.

This direct storytelling aspect of our work will happen in concert with research and evaluation to better understand how to amplify stories for active engagement and civic participation. We regularly invest in three types of content creation and distribution through social media platforms:

1) Commissioned work from artists around specific issues or topics. The artists develop but we give them access to tools for success (money, time, data, feedback, etc.).
2) Curated content that exists already that could have increased impact with amplification.
3) Content we create in-house to fill gaps in a narrative constellation (or series of interrelated narratives).

**What Will It Take: Building The Center for Cultural Power**

The Center for Cultural Power weaves together the teams and expertise of CultureStrike and the Citizen Engagement Lab Education Fund (CELEF), and launches with key cultural strategists and movement partners, allied organizations, and individual supporters. For a decade, CultureStrike launched discrete cultural projects that illustrated the power of culture in social movements and built the case for cultural strategy. The Center is designed to meet a rising appetite by dramatically expanding the number of artists and culture makers who have the skills and relationships to pursue cultural power.

We have a depth of relationships across issues, movements and artistic fields, and have inherited a set of hard-earned lessons from the trenches. Our team brings a richness of lived experience on the issues that our cultural interventions address - the experiences of migrants, first-generation Americans, people of color, women, and gender-non-conforming and LGBTQ people. As poets and wordsmiths, visual artists and filmmakers, organizers, activists, spokespeople, satirists, photographers, and actors, we bring a range and depth of creative, production, and organizational skills and capacity.

Co-Founder and Executive Director Favianna Rodriguez has the reputation and vision to lead a national organization of this scale and ambition, but first she is building an expanded leadership and support team, and a deeper investment in the existing team’s capacity. With this team in place, Favianna is moves into the role of President and strategic lead, removing the charge of day-to-day operations that divert her attention from the vision, relationships, opportunities, partnerships, and thought leadership that will drive this field-building and cultural transformation work forward. Key advisors and collaborators, including James Kass, Jeff Chang, Diane Espaldon, dream hampton, Kamau Bell, Liz Manne, Jill Soloway, America Ferrera, Rosario Dawson, and others bring years of unique cultural strategy experience.

To anchor this build-out, we are raising $5million of growth capital though one-time investments to support our expansion. The Center has a 2019 operating budget of about $4million, and we are also seeking multi-year operational funding to support scaling to a $5-$7million org by 2021. The new Executive Team includes a Deputy Director, Director of Strategic Partnerships & Development, a Senior Program Director, and a Finance Director. The Organizational Plan maps out staffing models, fundraising and earned revenue, a strategic communications plan, board development, and research. The added support and planning adds up to a balanced and strategic team that allows Favianna and other program staff with decades of experience to execute their vision and build this nascent and critical field.

**Measuring Impact - An Emerging Theory of Change**

The Center for Cultural Power seeks to understand the scale of our impact by measuring our influence on the cultural landscape, including but beyond the number of artists invested in, the audiences reached, and the artwork created. We invest in research, evaluation, and assessment from an arts-centered, equity-focused, practitioner design.

In addition to hard numbers, we’ll study the role culture and narrative plays in fostering paradigm shifts, disrupting power dynamics, and influencing regional and national conversations that shape policy and practice. We’ll measure impact by watching changes in inequitable and oppressive structures that we and our network touch, understanding that structures maintain ideas and practices that need disruption.
Our emerging theory of change seeks to understand:

- how artists influence ideas;
- how artists influence practices;
- how artists influence the structures that hold ideas and practices;
- how artists create access, opportunity, agency, and ownership;
- how artists impact the number of new narratives generated, and;
- the collective impact these changes have on people’s lives.

Some of this will translate into quantifiable measurements, such as how much money is invested in new storytellers, what new hiring or curation practices take hold, how many artists are uplifted in new ways, and what structures are launched (or how current structures are reshaped) based in equity and opportunity. Others will relate to how social movements incorporate cultural practices and practitioners into their work, and with what effect. Overall, we will measure success by the larger societal impacts that occur due to the investments we make to build an equitable cultural landscape.

Building Upon a Rich Tradition of Cultural Strategy Work

The work of the Center for Cultural Power comes from a decade of practice at CultureStrike, but also has a direct lineage to thought leadership and creative practice over the last few decades. We tremendously benefit from the work of The Culture Group, Helicon Collaborative, Race Forward, Art & Democracy, Taskforce, Arts in Changing America, The Cultural Policy Working Group, Youth Speaks, The Future Aesthetic Cohort of the Ford Foundation, Revolutions Per Minute, Color of Change, Harness, Define American, The Midwest Culture Lab, Pop Culture Collaborative, SOZE Agency, the john a. powell Haas Institute, First Peoples Fund, Alternate Roots, NALAC, US Department of Arts & Culture, and many other organizations, groups and funders committed to the intersection of arts and socio-cultural change.

This legacy allows for a new institution to emerge; a permanent, resourced one committed to building the community, the power, the pedagogy, the practice, the networks, and the opportunities for a new generation of social-impact oriented artists to thrive. This is the time for an artist-led, people-of-color-led institution to help define the future.

The Center for Cultural Power is set apart within the sector because:

- Art is our center. We are led by working artists of color and have artistic practice as our core. Because organizations reflect the perspectives of their leadership, the fact that we are led by a professional artist and woman of color, and largely staffed by people of color, many of whom are artists, means we will not fall prey to the habitual elevation of wealthy, white and male individuals at the expense of working class people of color.

- We have deep connections and street cred. We have relationships at every level of creator from grassroots artist collectives to deep ties within Hollywood to national arts organizations.
- We cultivate generative relationships with artists. We know artists are usually engaged as spark, shine, or window-dressing for advocacy and social justice. We create programs that center the artists and their creative practice to help them gain traction in popular culture. Others in the sector too often center on what movements or campaigns need from artists which leads to transactional and unsuccessful relationships.

- We take a systemic approach rather than tinkering at the edges. For example, we’re incubating disruptors like Jill Soloway (5050 by 2020) who aims to bring gender parity and overall diversity to Hollywood decision makers. This will help end abuse, but it will also open doors to a new generation of creatives bringing a new wave of storylines to mainstream culture.

**Conclusion**

In a recent report by the Haas Institute and Power California, Nayantara Sen states: “Culture is inextricable from daily living and therefore any large-scale social change starts in and is shaped by culture; leading with and integrating art and culture into social justice work is critical to opening up underrepresented communities to imagine and create change in tangible ways.”

Recognizing the impact of white supremacy and a culture of extraction on our planet and our people, the Center incubates artists to truthfully portray how climate chaos, systemic inequality, and xenophobia impacts our culture. These narratives are critical puzzle pieces that build political will and public desire for change in communities not often activated, paving the way for policy and advocacy campaigns to succeed.

By building cultural equity, cultural justice, and cultural power, we will contribute to dismantling the levers of white supremacy. Our focus is cultural. Our primary constituents are the artists, storytellers, and media makers who offer new stories, stars that form narrative constellations that point our way toward justice.

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7 [Grow Your Vote: Cultural Strategies for Civic Engagement](https://www.haasinstitute.org), Haas Institute and Power California.