Center for Cultural Innovation

LOS ANGELES
244 S. San Pedro St
Suite 401
Los Angeles, CA 90012
P: 213.687.8577

BAY AREA
1446 Market St
San Francisco, CA 94102
P: 415.288.0530

CCIARTS.ORG | R2I-LAB.ORG | AMBITIO-US.ORG

Press Release

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Contact: Lauren Bailey
213.687.8577
info@cciarts.org
www.cciarts.org

Center for Cultural Innovation in Partnership with Zoo Labs Announce the 2026 Fund Recipients

San Francisco Bay Area – The Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI) today announced the 2026 Zoo Labs: FUND grant recipients. Fourteen grants ranging from $5,000 - $50,000 were awarded to Bay Area culturally rooted artist teams with a music business. In addition to receiving a cash award, grantees will have access to a suite of mentorship resources offered by Zoo Labs: LEARN, including on-demand artist-tailored entrepreneurial courses and a curated pairing with a business mentor.

A total of 108 eligible applications were received across the four award tiers. Of these, the fourteen business recipients and the Bay Area counties they represent are:

Yeah Art Limited – dba, Yeah, Art! (Alameda, Contra Costa), $50,000: To support the fair compensation of the core team, expand paid opportunities for Bay Area teaching artists, and strengthen equipment and business infrastructure.

ANYxMEANS (Alameda), $25,000: To support the FLUID Artist Cohort, VibeMuzik musicians, project leaders, an audio engineer and producer, and other creative contractors to produce The FLUID Sessions EP and culminating showcase.

Audiopharmacy (Alameda, Santa Clara), $25,000: To support Audiopharmacy Prescriptions, BAMBU Pharm, and the Solutions to Artist Sustainability Initiative through Affordable Artist Housing, Cultural Community Artist Teaching Residencies, and BAMBU Sessions.

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Women's Audio Mission (Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo), $25,000: To support recording services, artist residencies, music production training, mentorship, and performance programs in San Francisco.

Black American Sound System (Alameda, San Francisco), $15,000: To support the development and premiere of the final installment of Soul, Sonics, and Soundsystems.

Her DJ Club (Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo), $15,000: To support costs associated with space rental, rental equipment, staff salaries, marketing, and brand merchandising.

New Krma Media (Alameda, San Francisco), $15,000: To support the growth of a community-supported music membership model that uses digital marketing, original content, and live experiences to build recurring revenue and create paid opportunities for system-impacted artists.

Parallax Concerts (Alameda, San Francisco), $15,000: To support costs associated with contracting, operational expenses, live audio-visual recording, and parts/score acquisition for three chamber performances in Parallax Concerts '26-'27 season.

PINAY VLTRN (Alameda, San Francisco), $15,000: To support marketing, administrative, and infrastructure building activities related to new collaborations, visuals, and business growth.

Clave Collective (San Francisco), $5,000: To support eight community music events at the garden and Radio Habana, covering a portable power station, microphones, and fair compensation to event producers, musicians, and contractors.

Hidden Jewels Unleashed (Alameda), $5,000: To support professional recording and production of an album and expand Hidden Jewels Unleashed's music business infrastructure.

Indigenous Sound Archive – aka, ISA Records (San Francisco, Solano), $5,000: To support the launch of ISA Records by covering production costs, including mixing and mastering, studio rentals, artist compensation, website development, and guidance on legal, licensing, and contract setup.

The Room We Needed (San Mateo), $5,000: To support community showcases, songwriting camps, and educational events, as well as costs associated with venue rentals and travel scholarships.

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ThinkInSound (Alameda, San Mateo), $5,000: To support the design, fabrication, and installation of the Living Drum Machine, funds will cover hardware (sensors, mics, triggers, enclosure materials), fabrication labor, and gallery installation costs.

Zoo Labs: FUND is a grant and investment program designed to support Bay Area entrepreneurs who are building businesses that center music. By providing funding, mentorship, and educational resources, the FUND helps creative business owners in the Bay Area begin or scale their ventures in ways that contribute to cultural enrichment, economic empowerment, and community benefit. Grants were awarded to teams based on the potential for funding to have both a short- and long-term impact, such as seeding the launch of a business, accelerating a business's growth, or investing in the untapped potential of an established business.

"Every year, we're reminded of the incredible depth of talent and creativity that exists across the Bay," said Zoo Labs founders Vinitha and David Watson. "We're honored to play a part in supporting the continued growth of these music businesses and their ability to impact the communities they represent."

CCI's Director of Artist Possibility Funds, Stephanie Imah, reflected, "As we come to the end of this sixth and final cycle of this program, we're reminded, through this work and this year's incredible cohort of grantees, of how important direct financial investment is in supporting artists to stay rooted in the places where they live and work and in supporting their economic self-determination."

Two, three-member panels were invited by CCI to review Zoo Labs: FUND applications and make grantee recommendations. For the $5,000 and $15,000 award tiers, panelists included **Ellie Stokes** (Booking Coordinator at Another Planet Entertainment and founder of Big Leap Collective), **Mayowa Tomori** (award-winning, Nigerian-American, multimedia artist), and **Tshego Letsoalo** (Music Director at KALW Public Media). For the $25,000 and $50,000 award tiers, panelists included **Jason Ragonton** (co-founder and creative director of SMARTBOMB), **Saba Teklu** (Community Engagement Manager at Stern Grove Festival), and **Zoë Latzer** (Curator and Director of Public Programs at ICA San Jose).

The 2026 cycle of Zoo Labs: FUND awarded $225,000 in grants. The program was made possible by Vinitha and David Watson, in addition to the support of individual donors.

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About Zoo Labs
Since 2013, Zoo Labs has been building an ecosystem that values art, ideas, and people. Their programming helps empower artists to own and amplify their creations, breaking down the roadblocks between art and business. Complementing Zoo Labs: FUND is Zoo Labs: LEARN, a suite of free, artist-tailored entrepreneurship courses. The curriculum taught in these self-paced online courses is tried and true - tested over Zoo Labs' decade of serving an extensive alumni community and helping them level up their artistic business practices. For more information about Zoo Labs and Zoo Labs: LEARN, please visit www.zoolabs.org.

About the Center for Cultural Innovation
The Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI) was founded in 2001 as a California 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. Our mission is to shift cultural paradigms to catalyze better alternative solutions for creatives, culture bearers, creative entrepreneurs, and their communities. For more information about CCI, please visit www.cciarts.org.

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