



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / AUG. 7, 2024**

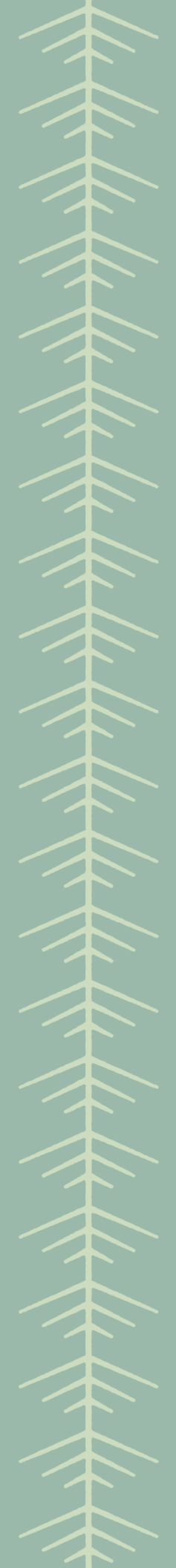
**The Alliance for California Traditional Arts Announces  
Inaugural Taproot Artists and Community Trust  
Fellowship**

*The program is dedicated to honoring and uplifting accomplished traditional artists who serve as community leaders & catalysts for social change across the United States and Territories.*

Fresno, CA, August 7, 2024 – [The Alliance for California Traditional Arts](#) (ACTA) is thrilled to announce the inaugural class of the [Taproot Fellowship](#), a project of ACTA's new Taproot Artists & Community Trust. **This initiative represents the nation's most extensive, dedicated fellowship program for culture bearers.** Taproot Fellows harness generational and ancestral knowledge to uphold shared community values, aesthetics, memory, language, and sacred wisdom. **The program is dedicated to honoring and uplifting accomplished US-based traditional artists who serve as community leaders and catalysts for social change** across the United States and Territories, including Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

ACTA will award 25 individual fellowship grants of **\$50,000** today and another 25 next year. The Fellows include second-generation Palestinian-American musician **Sami Abu Shumays** from New York; Caribbean Moko Jumbie stilt dancer **Willard John** from the U.S. Virgin Islands; and BIPOC disabled hip hop beatmaker and MC **King Khazm** from Washington. View the full list here [taproot.actaonline.org](http://taproot.actaonline.org)

Fellows will also receive an additional \$10,000 to gift to their community, totaling a \$60,000 investment per Fellow. The Taproot Fellowship, a project of ACTA's new Taproot Artists & Community Trust, **is the first cycle of this new national program** and includes artists from Indigenous, immigrant, and other backgrounds.



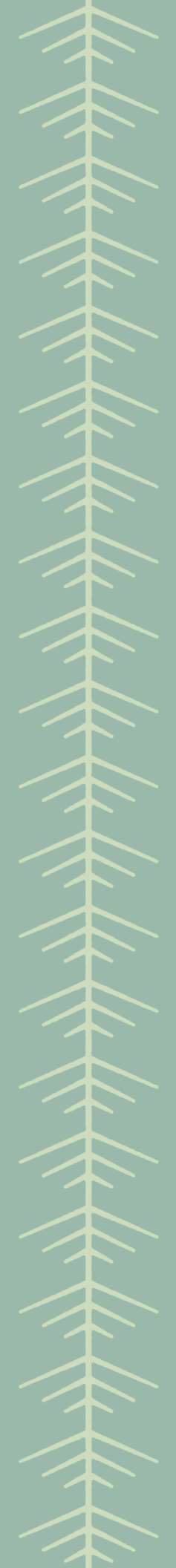
*The Taproot Fellowship is structured around three key strategies to ensure a profound and lasting impact on local arts ecosystems nationwide:*

1. **Direct Support:** Each fellow will receive \$50,000 in unrestricted funding and an additional \$10,000 to allocate for community-focused projects.
2. **Sustainability:** Artists can participate in a cohort designed to increase opportunities and foster a learning environment tailored to their needs. Customized services grounded in cultural context will be provided alongside multiple opportunities for artists to share and learn from one another and experts in the field.
3. **Visibility:** ACTA is committed to uplifting the stories and impacts of traditional artists, elevating their visibility, and advancing a national dialogue about the crucial role of grassroots arts and cultural knowledge in community health and wellness.

The additional \$10,000 dedicated to community-focused projects aims to support initiatives that benefit local communities by fostering cultural transmission and enhancing grassroots health and well-being. The Fellow completely directs these gifts, which might include workshops, performances, community festivals, educational programs, or other culturally significant activities that strengthen the community's fabric.

**Amy Kitchener, Executive Director of ACTA:** "The Taproot Fellows embody the living essence of our cultural heritage, each a beacon of ancestral wisdom and contemporary creativity. This fellowship is an award and a commitment to preserving the rich tapestry of our nation's diverse traditions. By supporting these artists, we are nurturing the roots of our cultural forest, ensuring they thrive and continue to bear fruit for generations to come. The Taproot Artists and Community Trust program and its Fellows seek to show the power of art to heal, inspire, and unite communities. It celebrates the storytellers, the keepers of sacred knowledge, and the innovators who breathe new life into age-old traditions. These artists are the lifeblood of their communities."

**Carolyn Mazloomi, Artist, Curator, Quilter, Ohio, Taproot Fellow:** "Receiving the Taproot Fellowship validates the work I've done in the African American quilt community as meaningful. The funds from the fellowship will allow me to complete works for an exhibition of narrative quilts that focus on racism, class, and gender in America. Since many states have laws prohibiting teaching these subjects, art has become more important than ever. My narrative quilts are a soft way to tell very difficult stories of our nation's history. [My] \$10k community grant will go directly to the Women of Color Quilters Network (WOCQN). It will go toward some of the expenses required to mount a new exhibition, "Where's my 40 Acres and a Mule?" as part of the national "America 250" celebration in 2026, which recognizes the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution."



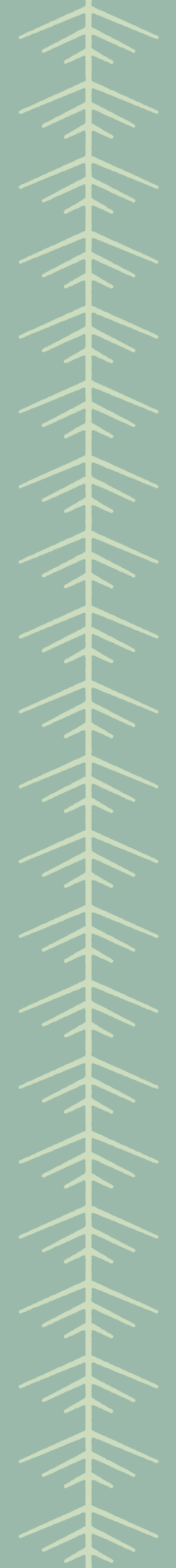
***Gertie Lopez, Arizona, Tohono O'odham Waila Musician, Taproot Fellow:*** “Being a Taproot artist embodies a sacred obligation to nurture cultural and traditional arts that will enrich our communities with enduring health and well-being benefits for generations to come. I am overwhelmed with appreciation and honor to be considered a Taproot artist because it amplifies my passion as a cultural knowledge holder to preserve and advance Tohono O'odham way of life, culture, language, and Waila music through meaningful engagement with my community.”

***Jesus M. Cepeda Brenes, Puerto Rico, Afro-Puerto Rican musician and folklorist, Taproot Fellow:*** “Being a Taproot artist means being deeply rooted in my artistic practice and community. It signifies a connection to the essence of creativity, growth, and authenticity. As a Taproot artist, I see myself as a source of inspiration and nourishment, providing sustenance for both my own artistic journey and the community around me. It's about delving into the core of my creativity, drawing strength from my roots, and branching out to contribute meaningfully to the artistic ecosystem that surrounds me.” *Jesus will make the \$10,000 Community Grant to La Casa de la Plena Tito Matos's La Goyco School, where Dimas Sanchez, a fellow culture bearer, will help shape the musical programming into several workshops for youth and adults in bomba y plena, and other, modern Afro-Puerto Rican musical forms.*

***Anwan “Big G” Glover, Go-Go Musician, Washington DC, Taproot Fellow:*** “Being a Taproot artist is one of the most endearing accomplishments in my career. Besides having the ability to lift my community through music; being a taproot artist bridges the gap to ensure the music sustains. I am truly humbled and grateful to be a part of a community that champions an art that is community-focused. As a taproot artist, it will allow the art to be shown to the world.”

***Adrienne Benjamin | Amikogaabawiikwe, Anishinaabe Jingle Dress Maker, Chiminising, Misizaagaiganing (Minnesota), Taproot Fellow:*** “It is an absolute honor to be a Taproot Fellow. When I think of those who have inspired me and been so vital to the continuation of our cultural life-ways in community, they were elders and knowledge keepers, and people who deeply cared about the survival of our heritage. To be considered for this means that I am continuing the work that those elders entrusted me to do and truly believing in myself the way they believed in me.”

The Taproot Fellows are practitioners of their crafts, guardians of our cultural heritage, and the storytellers of our collective memory. Through their unique artistry, each fellow weaves a tapestry that connects the past to the present, ensuring the continuity of traditions that define our diverse communities. This fellowship recognizes and supports these vital culture bearers, providing them with the resources to sustain their creative practices and ignite social change within their communities. By investing in these artists, ACTA is nurturing the roots of cultural expression, fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of our shared heritage, and creating a ripple effect



that enhances community resilience and cohesion. The Taproot Artists embody the essence of cultural preservation and innovation, and their work, supported by this fellowship, underscores the profound impact that traditional arts have on community health and well-being.

The Taproot Artist & Community Trust is generously supported by the Mellon Foundation.

For more information about the Taproot Artists and Community Trust program and to learn about the inaugural class of Fellows, please visit [taproot.actaonline.org](http://taproot.actaonline.org)

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***About the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA)***

The Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA) promotes and supports ways for cultural traditions to thrive now and into the future by providing advocacy, resources, and connections for folk and traditional artists and their communities. Our partnering artists are tradition-bearers, sustaining expressions reflective of their community's shared values, life experiences, and collective wisdom. Through these collective traditions, practitioners have mobilized and become catalysts for the transformative and restorative value of arts in society.

***About The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation***

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive. Learn more at [mellon.org](http://mellon.org).