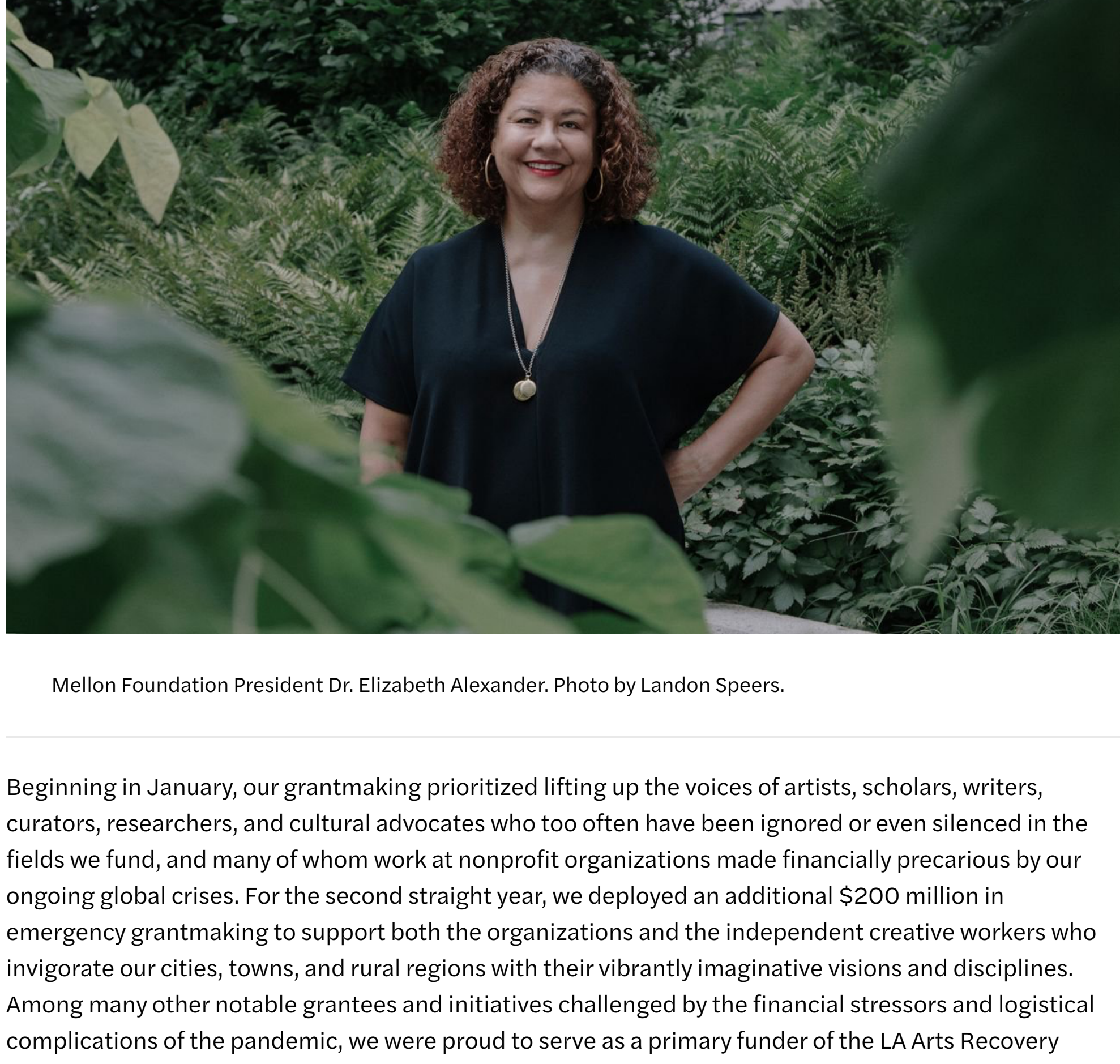




2021 ANNUAL REPORT

## President's Letter

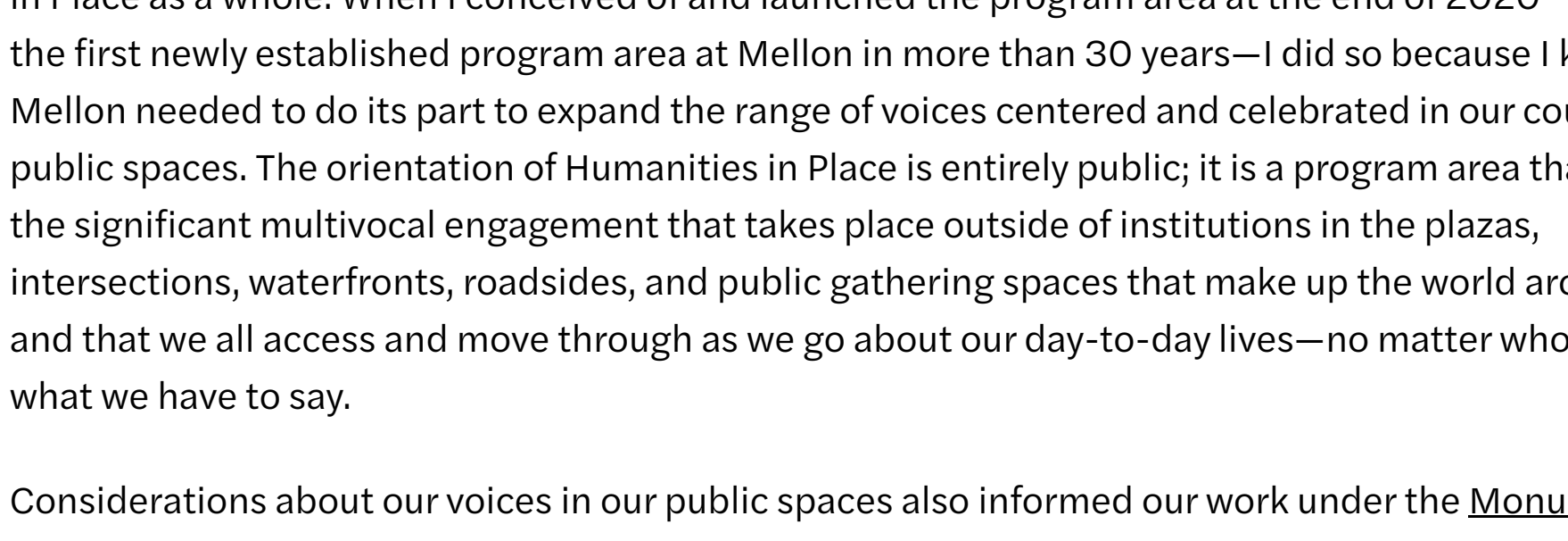


Mellon Foundation President Dr. Elizabeth Alexander. Photo by Landon Speers.

Beginning in January, our grantmaking prioritized lifting up the voices of artists, scholars, writers, curators, researchers, and cultural advocates who too often have been ignored or even silenced in the fields we fund, and many of whom work at nonprofit organizations made financially precarious by our ongoing global crises. For the second straight year, we deployed an additional \$200 million in emergency grantmaking to support both the organizations and the independent creative workers who invigorate our cities, towns, and rural regions with their vibrantly imaginative visions and disciplines. Among many other notable grantees and initiatives challenged by the financial stressors and logistical complications of the pandemic, we were proud to serve as a primary funder of the LA Arts Recovery Fund, to support dance companies from New York to San Francisco for bubble residencies, and to help launch the Latinx Artist Fellowship—a new multiyear initiative that recognizes remarkable Latinx visual artists with unrestricted annual funding to pursue their craft.

It was the collective voice of New York artists that galvanized us to launch our most innovative program in 2021: [Creatives Rebuild New York](#) (CRNY). This three-year initiative will provide 300 New York artists with full-time employment and the financial stability to pursue their creative work for two years, as well as monthly income payments to up to 2,400 New York artists experiencing financial need. Learning about and hearing from many of the artists who lost their jobs in the pandemic moved us to envision boldly how we could best support those creative workers who are central to New York's dynamism. CRNY will provide the time, stability, and financial resources essential to artists who are determined to continue their creative practices while living and working in our state.

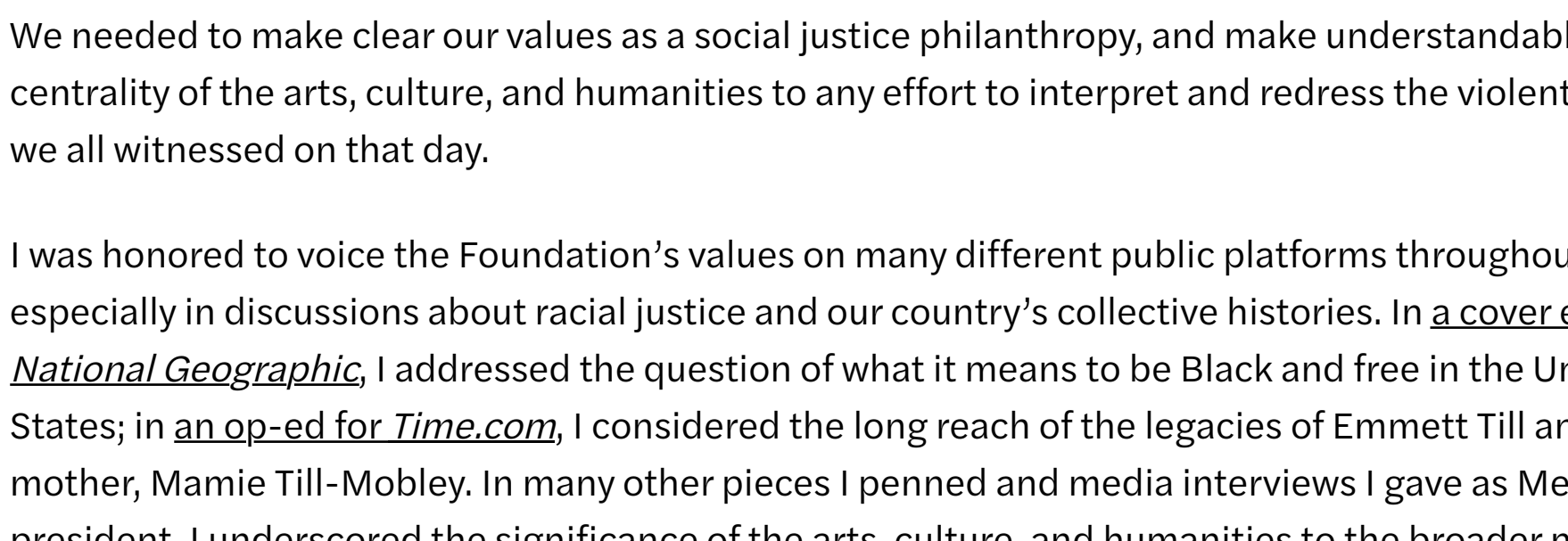
Even as we continued to address the urgent fiscal needs of many of our grantees, so too did we affirm our strategic direction as a social justice philanthropy and further strengthen our long-term commitments under this framework. Our use of the word "future" in much of this work is intentional—from [Disability Futures](#) to [Just Futures](#), we are convening and funding grantees with a strong social justice perspective and listening to their voices as we move forward together. After the launch of Mellon's new strategic direction in 2020, these future-minded collaborations began to come into fruition in 2021, as evidenced by the stimulating engagement at the Disability Futures convening organized with the Ford Foundation in July, and the multidisciplinary work that progressed throughout the year under the leadership of our Just Futures grantees to address racial inequality and help create a socially just future for us all.



The Soapbox Presents—a community-driven initiative that activates performance through "stoop sessions"—is among the inaugural cohort of grantees in the new Humanities in Place program. Photo: Adrian L. Childress/The Soapbox Presents/The Tank, Ltd.

Central to the fulfillment of our social justice mission is our newest program area, [Humanities in Place](#), which marked its first full year in December and which made several transformative grants throughout 2021—ranging from support for digital storytelling engagement at the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay to funding for a new community design center called Civic Arts Church on Chicago's South Side. The depth and breadth of these grants are evocative of our vision for Humanities in Place as a whole. When I conceived of and launched the program area at the end of 2020—making it the first newly established program area at Mellon in more than 30 years—I did so because I knew Mellon needed to do its part to expand the range of voices centered and celebrated in our country's public spaces. The orientation of Humanities in Place is entirely public; it is a program area that honors the significant multivocal engagement that takes place outside of institutions in the plazas, intersections, waterfronts, roadsides, and public gathering spaces that make up the world around us, and that we all access and move through as we go about our day-to-day lives—no matter who we are or what we have to say.

Considerations about our voices in our public spaces also informed our work under the [Monuments Project](#), which completed its first full year as a Mellon initiative in October 2021. This quarter-of-a-billion-dollar commitment to better reflect the range and complexity of American stories in our monuments, to ensure multivocal participation in the shaping of our national commemorative landscape, and to deepen public engagement with this effort is now well underway. Grants made under the auspices of the Monuments Project this past year include those to the North Carolina Freedom Monument Project, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation for the Williamsburg Bray School, and the Trust for the National Mall to support the Temporary Commemoration Pilot program.



The Trust for the National Mall helped bring artist Suzanne Firstenberg's temporary, monumental installation "In America: Remember" to fruition; each flag represented a life lost to the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo: Robert Nickels/Getty Images.

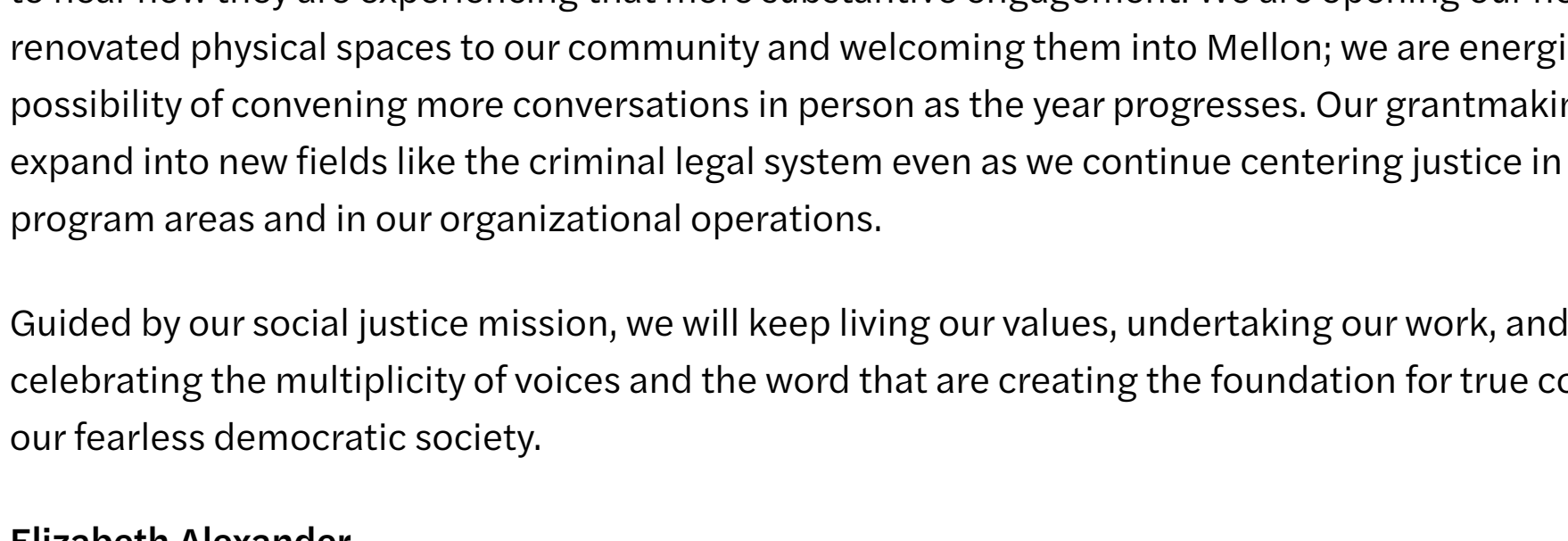
Significantly, in September, the nonprofit public art and history studio Monument Lab in Philadelphia released its audit of monuments in the United States, which it conducted as the sponsored project of CultureTrust Greater Philadelphia—the first grantee of the Monuments Project. This audit is notable both for the data compiled and for the trends identified—both of which are crucial to the work that will take place under the Monuments Project over the next four years. Among other key findings in Monument Lab's analysis, we now have numbers that confirm the extent of the profound absence of different voices represented in American monuments and memorials.

On January 6, 2021, I found myself in deep reflection on why multivocality matters—and what happens when too many voices are missing in public discourse on, and representations of, our complex history—when violent extremists attempted an insurrection at the US Capitol. This disturbing and anti-democratic act not only illustrated the extraordinary division that currently exists in our country; it also underscored why Mellon needed to assert its voice and amplify the voices of those whom we support. We needed to make clear our values as a social justice philanthropy, and make understandable the centrality of the arts, culture, and humanities to any effort to interpret and redress the violent division we all witnessed on that day.

I was honored to voice the Foundation's values on many different public platforms throughout 2021, especially in discussions about racial justice and our country's collective histories. In a [cover essay for \*National Geographic\*](#), I addressed the question of what it means to be Black and free in the United States; in an [op-ed for \*Time.com\*](#), I considered the long reach of the legacies of Emmett Till and his mother, Mamie Till-Mobley. In many other pieces I penned and media interviews I gave as Mellon's president, I underscored the significance of the arts, culture, and humanities to the broader national conversation about how we can make sense of what we experienced in such a turbulent year—and how to envision new ways forward from our current moment.

I also joined my own voice with those of humanities scholars, artists, archivists, and researchers in five public virtual Mellon events that took place from February through October. In richly generative discussions that encompassed the role of libraries and archives in storytelling for justice, the significance of Creatives Rebuild New York, the imperative to commemorate Emmett Till, the key takeaways from Monument Lab's national audit, and the need for the arts and humanities to help save humanity from crises like climate change and the pandemic, our events engaged thousands of attendees as the year progressed.

The remarkable geographical representation and reach of these listeners and viewers demonstrated Mellon's new role as a convener of national and even international voices. Crucially, all the events served as spaces for substantive dialogue—robust audience chat augmented each discussion and sparked recommendations for books, articles, and further opportunities for learning alongside stimulating questions for both the speakers and fellow audience members. In 2022, as we return to more hybrid and in-person operations and programming, we are excited to continue evolving our events to bring more voices into conversation with those whose work we lift up and whose fields we fund.



College graduates in a program for incarcerated learners. Photo courtesy of California State University, Los Angeles.

The power of those voices—of any voice—depends on the power of the word. Without the word, we cannot know who we are, nor can we know one another. Conviction in this truth runs deep at Mellon and spurs us to augment the power of the word by supporting writers, poets, and creative language traditions in myriad genres and communities. We are leaders in funding the literary arts with determined intention. We are proud to partner with the Academy of American Poets, the National Book Foundation, and the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses to support small presses and literary organizations through the renewal of the Literary Arts Emergency Fund; we are honored to fund PEN America's Prison and Justice Writing Program; we are gratified to have served as the first champion of Freedom Reads (formerly the Million Book Project), and moved by the imaginative and dignity-affirming reach of its vision.

When we launched the Letras Boricuas Fellowship with the Flamboyant Foundation in May, we did so because we believe in recognizing Puerto Rican writers across the archipelago and diaspora who affirm the vital significance of the word through their work. We have upheld this belief by supporting many of these writers with unrestricted \$25,000 grants to pursue their creative practice—building upon our multiyear commitment to Puerto Rico with nearly 26 grants totaling more than \$23 million to date.

When we funded community-based archives in December—from those based in Arizona and Texas to others in Tennessee and Michigan—we did so because we believe in documenting and celebrating the stories of marginalized communities and honoring the words that verbalize those stories for generations to come.

When we committed support for the Furious Flower Poetry Center at James Madison University at the end of 2021, we did so because we believe that the broader public ought to have more opportunity to discover and access the words preserved by the nation's oldest academic center dedicated to Black poetry.

In the 1990s, the poet, professor, and activist June Jordan wrote *Poetry for the People*, her poetry collective's instructional blueprint for how to honor, teach, and convey the power of the word through the crafting of poems. As her text underscores, Jordan believes that precision in language—clarity in speaking and in listening—holds a societal purpose, not just an individual one:

Poetry means taking control of the language of your life.... I would hope that folks throughout the U.S.A. would consider the creation of poems as a foundation for true community: a fearless democratic society.<sup>1</sup>

When read in the aftermath of 2021, the power of her words is revelatory. There is no justice if it is not carried in the word.

As we at Mellon move into a new year, we recognize that to do justice work, we must be a just organization. In every way and at every turn, from our hiring practices to our internal policies, we are always working to make Mellon a more just, thriving philanthropy. We are assessing how better to engage with our grantees, to bring even more of their voices into our discussions at the Foundation, and to hear how they are experiencing that more substantive engagement. We are opening our newly renovated physical spaces to our community and welcoming them into Mellon; we are energized by the possibility of convening more conversations in person as the year progresses. Our grantmaking will expand into new fields like the criminal legal system even as we continue centering justice in our core program areas and in our organizational operations.

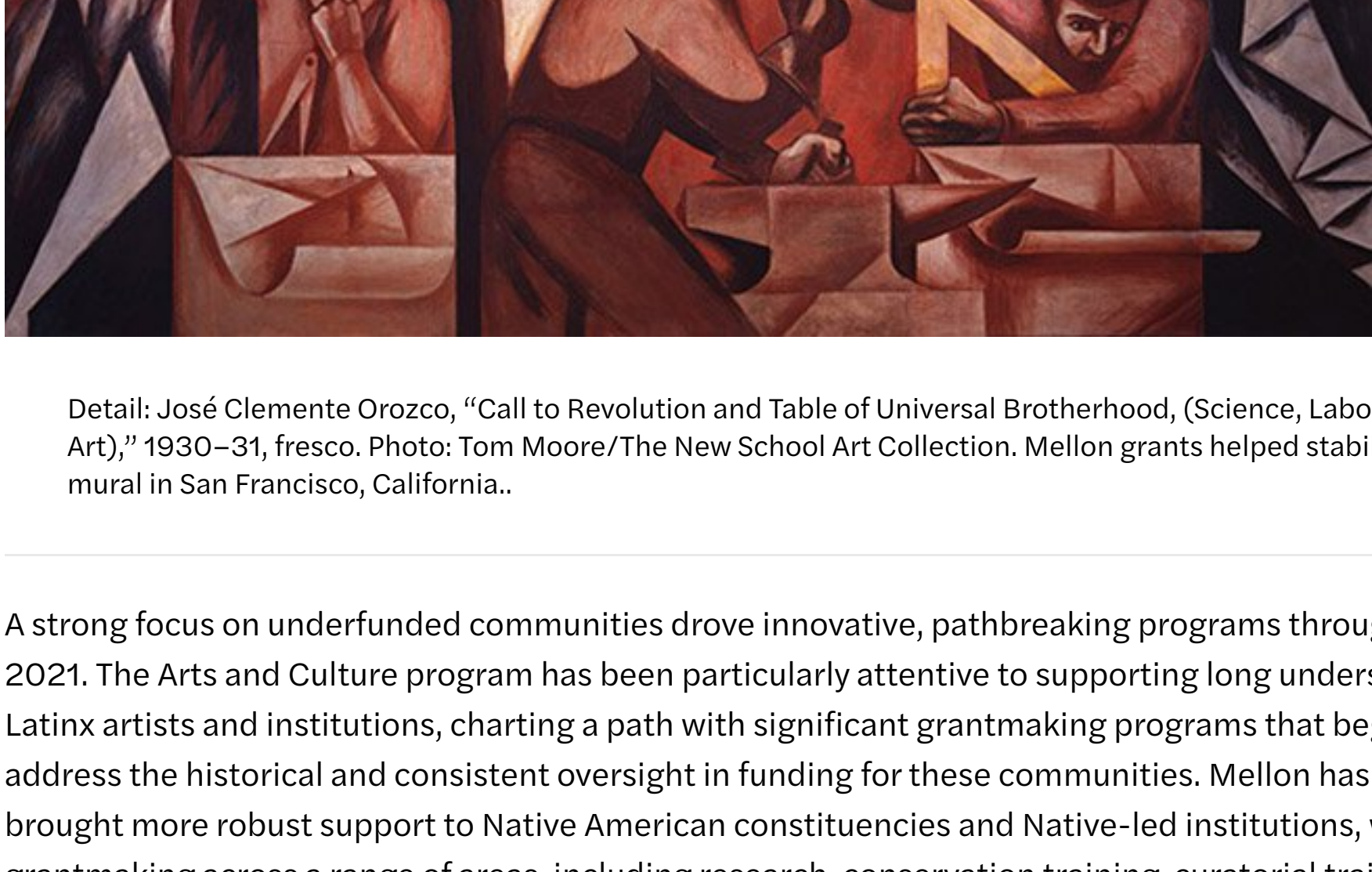
Guided by our social justice mission, we will keep living our values, undertaking our work, and celebrating the multiplicity of voices and the word that are creating the foundation for true community—our fearless democratic society.

Elizabeth Alexander  
February 2022



## OUR GRANTMAKING AREAS

### Arts and Culture



Detail: José Clemente Orozco, "Call to Revolution and Table of Universal Brotherhood, (Science, Labor, and Art)," 1930–31, fresco. Photo: Tom Moore/The New School Art Collection. Mellon grants helped stabilize this mural in San Francisco, California.

A strong focus on underfunded communities drove innovative, pathbreaking programs throughout 2021. The Arts and Culture program has been particularly attentive to supporting long underserved Latinx artists and institutions, charting a path with significant grantmaking programs that begin to address the historical and consistent oversight in funding for these communities. Mellon has also brought more robust support to Native American constituencies and Native-led institutions, with grantmaking across a range of areas, including research, conservation training, curatorial training, performance opportunities, and more. In conservation, which has historically been an important sector of Mellon's grantmaking, our programs are prioritizing more equitable preventive conservation, so far focusing on collections built by Black visionaries and educators, as well as stabilizing two significant Mexican murals in the United States.

Additionally, in 2021 the Arts and Culture program moved even more deeply into its attestation of the value of artists as a critically important class of workers—as creative professionals and legacy archivists—with the potential to lead societal change. In March, Deana Haggag, renowned arts advocate and former president and CEO of United States Artists, joined the Arts and Culture team as a program officer. With Deana's leadership, Mellon is positioning artists as a vital workforce—as individuals, a constituency, or citizens fighting on behalf of all segments of our labor force. With the COVID-19 pandemic not yet behind us, major grants were intended to aid with resiliency and reopening strategies. Finally, in 2021, Mellon also remained committed to building dedicated communities of artistic practice through Arts and Culture grantmaking.

### Noteworthy Grants of 2021

#### **Creatives Rebuild New York**

**\$115,000,000**

Launched as part of COVID-19 recovery, this Presidential Initiative is also part of a state-led recovery plan for New York. CRRNY is a two-part workforce initiative that will provide artists with either full-time employment opportunities or guaranteed income. A version of this program in Puerto Rico (to be launched in 2022) and the national expansion of Artists at Work, also demonstrate this new strategy and emphasis.

#### **Los Angeles Emergency Response (LA Arts Recovery Fund)**

**\$10,000,000**

Mellon partnered with regional and national funders, including the J. Paul Getty Trust, to support the California Community Foundation in an emergency response fund for arts and cultural organizations—the largest-ever pooled private investment for the arts in Los Angeles County.

#### **The Chrysalis Project**

**\$5,000,000**

Support in 2021 to the service organization Fractured Atlas is intended to envision a newly reconstituted national organization that, through potential consolidation or strategic partnerships, could be scaled to serve a larger population of artists.

#### **The Silk Road**

**\$3,000,000**

To support plans to develop The American Silkroad, this grant, among others awarded in 2021, recognizes artists who are pioneering new ways of working within institutional contexts.

#### **US Latinx Art Visibility Fund: Artist Fellowships**

**\$1,212,500**

#### **The Latinx Dance Institute**

**\$1,000,000**

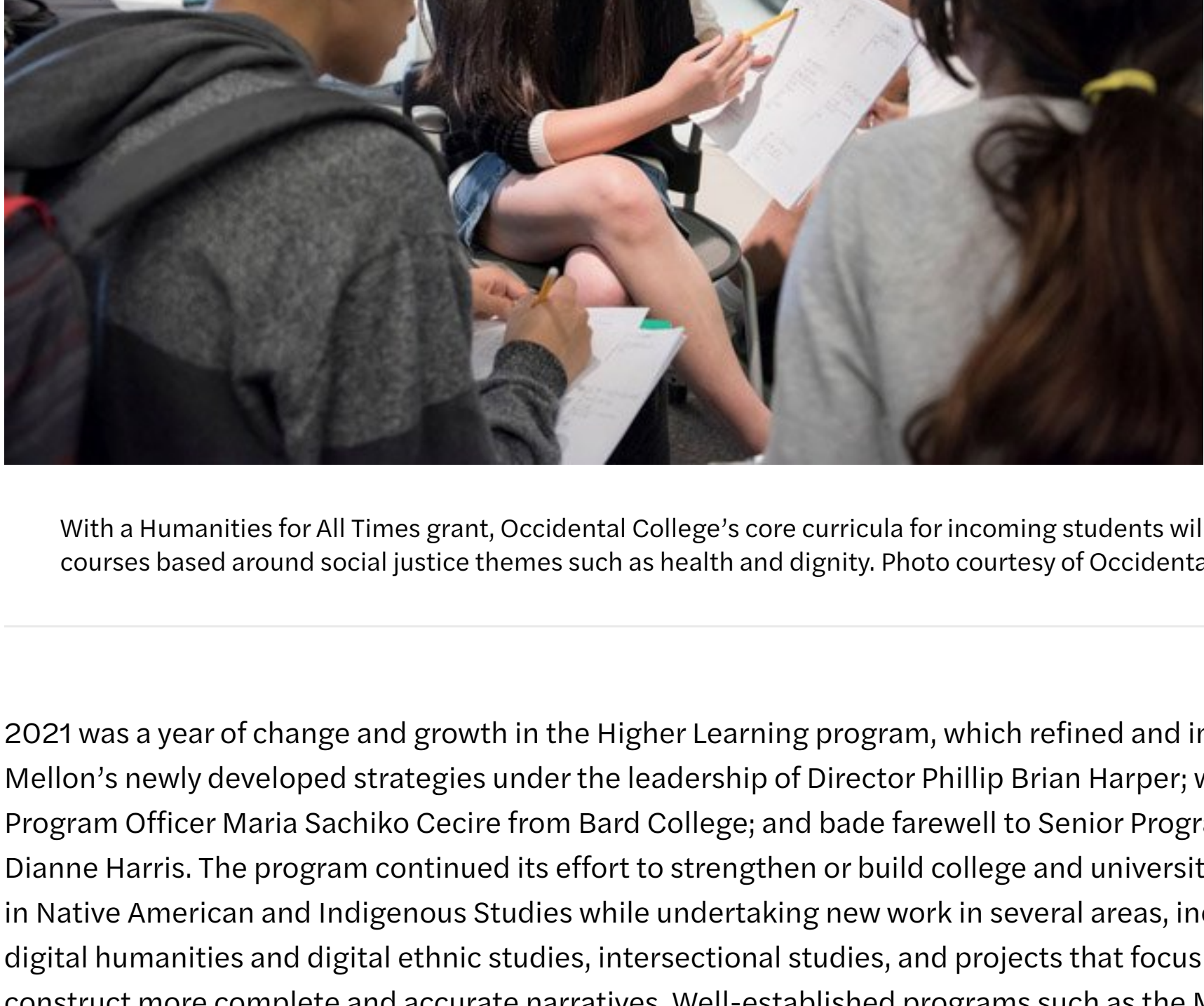
Launched in collaboration with the Ford Foundation and the United States Latinx Art Forum, the Latinx Artists Fellowships offer unrestricted support for visual artists of Latin American or Caribbean descent who live and work in the United States. The Latinx Dance Institute at Ballet Hispanico in New York is envisioned to expand opportunities for personal development for Latinx dancers. Planning is well underway for a national Latinx Theater Initiative inspired by a 2020 grant to establish The Black Seed Initiative on behalf of Black theaters.

#### **Jazz Residencies: Jazz and Gender Justice**

**\$4,250,000**

Paying increased attention to individual jazz artists, a grant to New Music USA for Next Jazz Legacy, which features a new partnership with The Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice and percussionist Terri Lyne Carrington, aims to increase opportunities for historically underrepresented women, trans, and nonbinary musicians.

### Higher Learning



With a Humanities for All Times grant, Occidental College's core curricula for incoming students will include courses based around social justice themes such as health and dignity. Photo courtesy of Occidental College.

2021 was a year of change and growth in the Higher Learning program, which refined and implemented Mellon's newly developed strategies under the leadership of Director Phillip Brian Harper, welcomed Program Officer Maria Sachiko Cecire from Bard College, and bade farewell to Senior Program Officer Dianne Harris. The program continued its effort to strengthen or build college and university programs in Native American and Indigenous Studies while undertaking new work in several areas, including Black digital humanities and digital ethnic studies, intersectional studies, and projects that focus on race to construct more complete and accurate narratives. Well-established programs such as the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship continued to thrive, and Mellon's steadfast support for faculty diversification programs in various sectors remained strong. Special initiatives supporting higher education in prison as well as partnerships between universities and community colleges offering pathways for humanities majors to pursue four-year degrees continued apace and were reaffirmed.

A number of grants were designed to enable networks of like-minded scholars—often spread across multiple institutions with limited access to resources—to pursue exciting work related to social justice. Many grants were made to institutions that were new to Mellon's portfolio as the program sought to support great academic work being done outside of more traditional networks of scholars. Building on the urgent grantmaking exemplified by the Just Futures competition of 2020, Higher Learning oversaw in 2021 a second major grant competition focused on liberal arts colleges. Moving swiftly to respond to the crisis in Afghanistan, the Higher Learning program made emergency grants to Afghan students and scholars who were forced to flee the country.

This range of approaches reflects the program's ongoing commitment to making grants that can quickly address pressing social justice needs while ensuring that the humanities remain central to long-term projects that help ensure more just and equitable futures.

### Noteworthy Grants of 2021

#### **Digital Humanities**

**\$18,300,000**

Seven grants extend and bring renewed social justice focus to Mellon's significant past investment in the digital humanities. Six of these projects put Black and other minoritized communities at the heart of their teaching, research, and network-building, while also utilizing, critiquing, and reimagining digital technologies as part of this work. The seventh supports work that emphasizes racial, gendered, and other forms of less-considered experiences in tech settings.

#### **Humanities for All Times**

**\$16,134,500**

Through this competition, 12 liberal arts colleges received grants of up to \$1.5 million to implement new undergraduate curricula and creative, community-engaged projects that center the key role that humanities knowledge and practices have to play in the ongoing struggle for social justice.

#### **Breaking the M.O.L.D. (Maryland Opportunities for Leadership Development) for Arts and Humanities Faculty**

**\$3,128,000**

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County, in collaboration with Morgan State University and the University of Maryland at College Park, is mounting an initiative to assess and address the institutional obstacles that impede arts and humanities faculty from advancing to leadership positions at research universities while also considering the more specific historical barriers that hinder people of color and women from rising to top leadership at institutions of all types. This cross-institutional and cohort-minded approach to diversifying institutional leadership is one that Higher Learning intends to expand in 2022.

#### **Center for Native American and Indigenous Studies, Syracuse University**

**\$1,500,000**

With the largest population of Native American students at any university in the US Northeast, Syracuse will establish a Center for Global Indigenous Cultures house and expand its current offerings. The support provided to the university in 2021 is emblematic of Higher Learning's work in this area over the past few years and of the NAIS (Native and Indigenous Studies) field-development efforts the program expects to put forward in 2022 and beyond.

### Humanities in Place



The Clayborn Temple in Memphis, Tennessee, where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his final public speech. The Temple was among the inaugural cohort of Humanities in Place grantees. Photo: Steve Jones/National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Humanities in Place seeks to directly engage the charge in Mellon's mission to "build just communities" by leveraging the power of the humanities to inform and shape our shared understandings, experiences, and places—including in the public realm and dialogue. Under the direction of inaugural Program Officer Justin Garrett Moore and in close collaboration with President Elizabeth Alexander and leadership and staff across the Foundation, Humanities in Place brings a new dimension to Mellon's legacy advancing the humanities and social justice by challenging the contexts, content, and communities that the Foundation supports during a challenging yet transformative time.

Through over \$36 million in grants in its inaugural year, the program enabled a broad range of organizations and ideas to meaningfully connect people, places, and cultures through research and knowledge-sharing, public experiences, and the resource-intensive work of conserving and creating built environments. Nearly half of our 2021 grants support building or capital projects such as new buildings and landscapes, historic preservation and adaptive reuse, or public space and artist installations. The majority of the program's grants are to BIPOC-led organizations, with more than half of our grantees having principal investigators or project leads who are women of color. With this purposeful starting point, Humanities in Place will look to support an even greater diversity of leaders and organizations doing innovative and impactful place-based and cultural heritage work while providing resources for compelling programs and initiatives. In time, Mellon seeks to better value and elevate the historically underrepresented people, places, and stories that help move us collectively toward the justice and beauty humanity deserves.

### Noteworthy Grants of 2021

#### **Viahoke**

**\$3,500,000**

Ektivn Yefolecvlke [*ee-gun yee-full-lee-juh*] supports the reclamation and reimagining of place by returning Indigenous Maskoke people, language, and culture to their original home in what is now known as Alabama.

#### **Angel Island Immigration Station**

**\$1,000,000**

#### **City of Socorro Community Initiative**

**\$750,000**

#### **Lower East Side Tenement Museum**

**\$650,000**

Projects at the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay, the Rio Vista Farm in Socorro, Texas, and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City help to unearth and amplify the histories and experiences of Asian, Mexican, Black, and global migrants in the United States, and highlight the contributions that migrants and immigrants have made to our nation.

#### **National Trust for Historic Preservation HBCU Cultural Heritage Stewardship Initiative**

**\$1,150,000**

#### **August Wilson House**

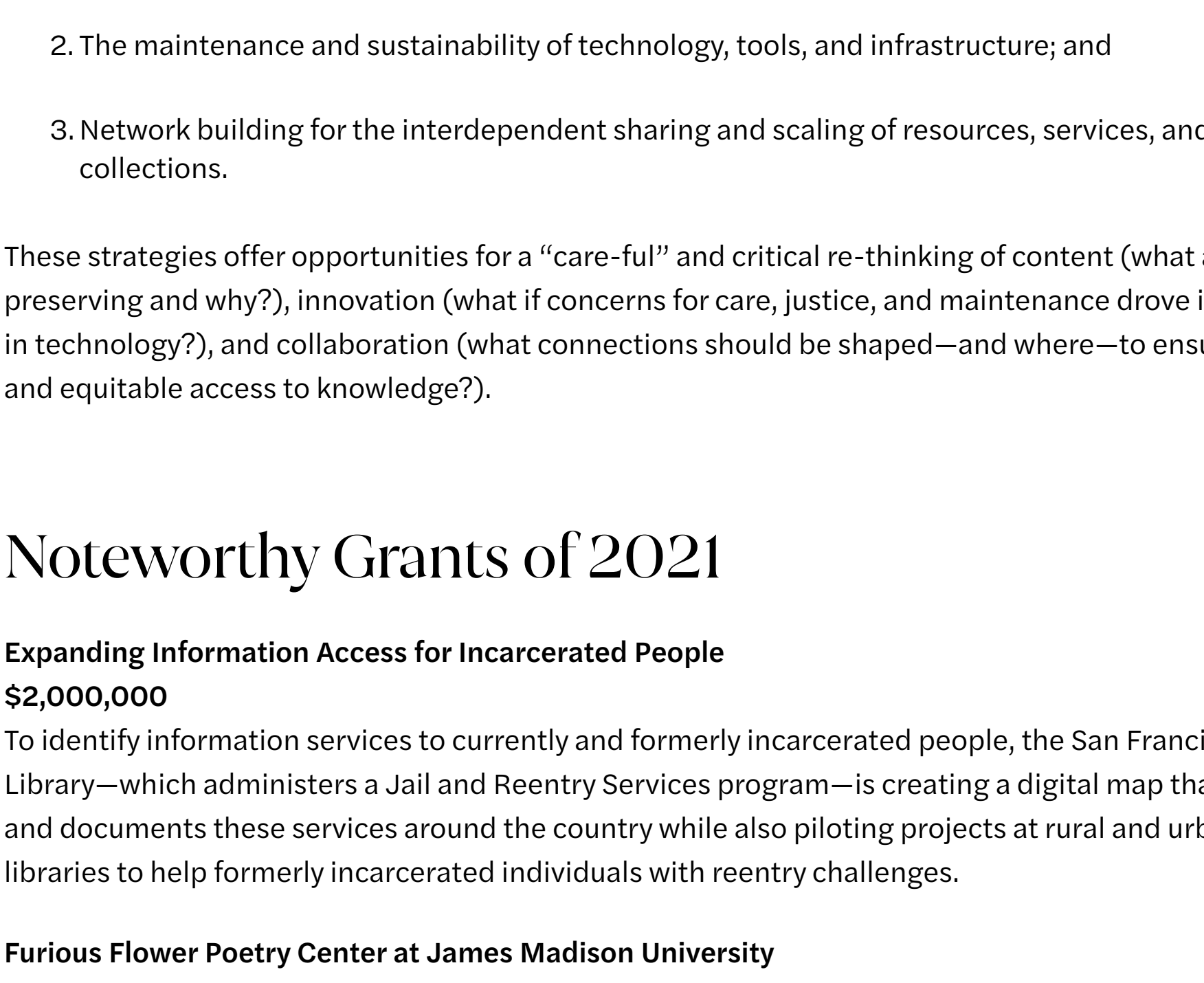
**\$750,000**

#### **African American and Civil Rights Heritage and Preservation Programs**

**\$750,000**

Continued Mellon support for the National Trust for Historic Preservation's African American and Civil Rights Heritage and Preservation Programs and related projects directed much-needed resources to significant cultural heritage sites such as the August Wilson House and to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), including Tuskegee University, to support long under-resourced historic preservation and heritage conservation efforts.

### Public Knowledge



Ephemera collected by the Beck Cultural Archives, which received a grant as part of Mellon's ongoing support for the community archives. Photo courtesy of the center.

The need to infuse our grantmaking with care and compassion—on human, infrastructure, and organizational levels—has become even more pivotal to our priorities in the Public Knowledge program. What would it mean to show structural care in our support to libraries, archives, and presses—to help them break down systems of oppression and build up systems of liberation, as Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor write in "Revisiting a Feminist Ethics of Care in Archives: An Introductory Note?" In 2021, the Public Knowledge program, led by Program Officer Patricia Hsive, sought to address these and related questions through a strategic framework forged from three pillars:

1. The preservation of original source materials in all formats;
2. The maintenance and sustainability of technology, tools, and infrastructure; and
3. Network building for the interdependent sharing and scaling of resources, services, and collections.

These strategies offer opportunities for a "care-ful" and critical re-thinking of content (what are we preserving and why?), innovation (what if concerns for care, justice, and maintenance drove innovation in technology?), and collaboration (what connections should be shaped—and where—to ensure broad and equitable access to knowledge?).

### Noteworthy Grants of 2021

#### **Expanding Information Access for Incarcerated People**

**\$2,000,000**

To identify information services to currently and formerly incarcerated people, the San Francisco Public Library—which administers a Jail and Reentry Services program—is creating a digital map that tracks and documents these services around the country while also piloting projects at rural and urban libraries to help formerly incarcerated individuals with reentry challenges.

#### **Furious Flower Poetry Center at James Madison University**

**\$2,000,000**

James Madison University is demonstrating structural care by advancing the digital, programmatic, and archival work of the Furious Flower Poetry Center, the oldest academic center in the United States devoted solely to Black poetry, for sustainability purposes—to celebrate its past and inform its future.

#### **FRAME: Phase II at University of Virginia**

**\$1,175,000**

In continuing to address the problem of equitable access to educational content, the University of Virginia is expanding its network of digital text repositories, libraries, university presses, and disability services to enable the scalable production and sharing of remediated content.

#### **Building Financial Resilience in the Digital Humanities: South Asian American Digital Archive**

**\$1,000,000**

#### **Building Financial Resilience in the Digital Humanities: HBCU Library Alliance**

**\$1,000,000**

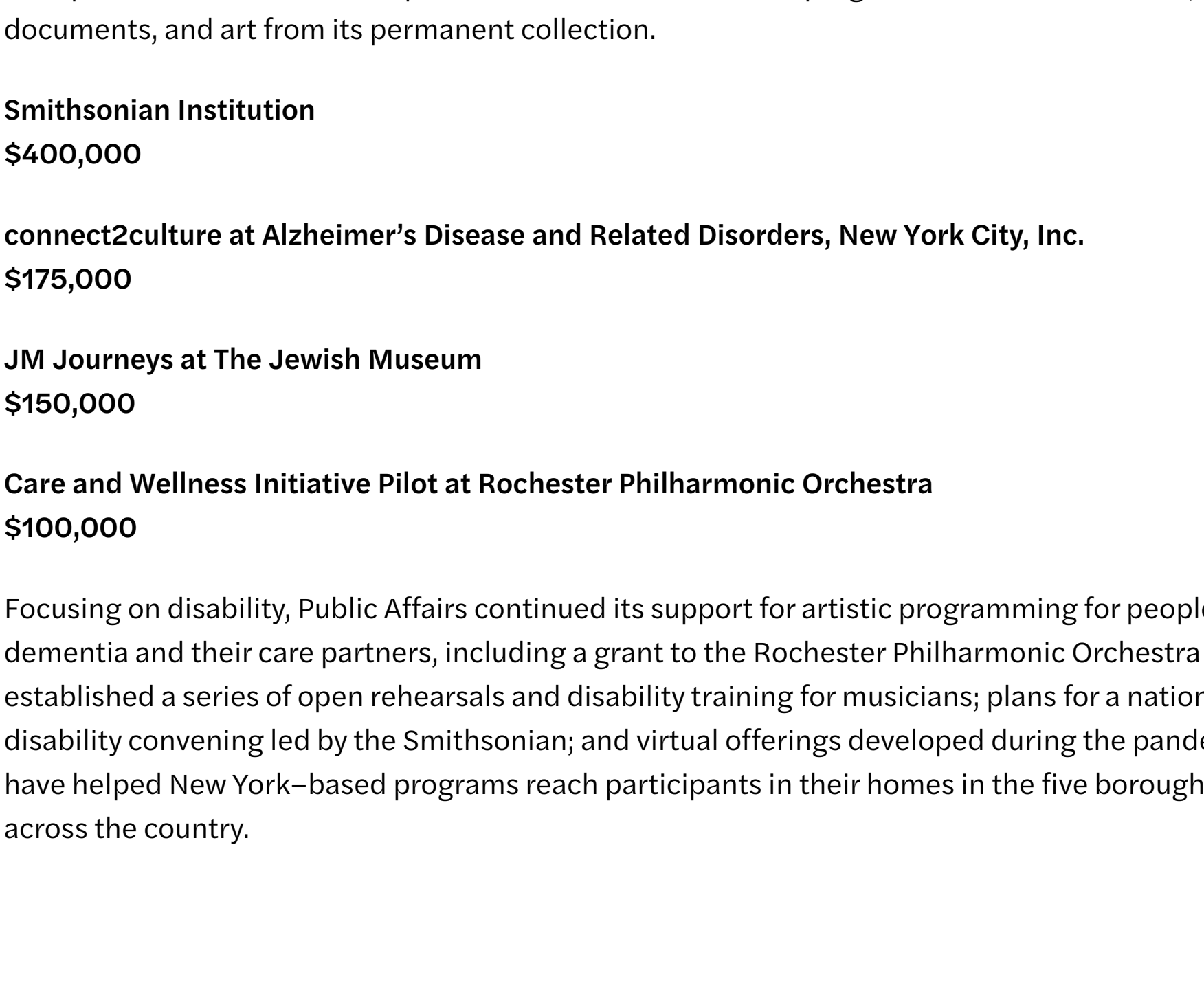
Sustainability is also at the core of grants to a cluster of organizations, including the South Asian American Digital Archive and the HBCU Library Alliance, for change capital funding. Assisted by the Nonprofit Finance Fund, these grantees are rejuvenating their business models to ensure continuing relevance to their communities.

#### **Myaamia Center at Miami University**

**\$510,000**

The Ohio-based institution will expand an apprenticeship program for community language archivists to deepen their expertise in Indigenous languages and promote the continued use of them.

### Other Giving: Public Affairs



The Jewish Museum pivoted its art-based enrichment programs for older adults with dementia from in-person sessions (like the one shown above) to online programs during the pandemic. Photo courtesy of the museum.

### Noteworthy Grants of 2021

#### **Archives Project at NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund**

**\$3,000,000**

Support from Mellon will advance the Fund's project to digitize, preserve, and provide access to its rich archives of civil rights history.

#### **Citizenship Project at New-York Historical Society**

**\$450,000**

To expand access for citizenship seekers to civics education program that utilizes artifacts, documents, and art from its permanent collection.

#### **Smithsonian Institution**

**\$400,000**

#### **connect2culture at Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders, New York City, Inc.**

**\$175,000**

#### **JM Journeys at The Jewish Museum**

**\$150,000**

#### **Care and Wellness Initiative Pilot at Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra**

**\$100,000**

Focusing on disability, Public Affairs continued its support for artistic programming for people with dementia and their care partners, including a grant to the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra that established a series of open rehearsals and disability training for musicians; plans for a national disability convening led by the Smithsonian; and virtual offerings developed during the pandemic that have helped New York–based programs reach participants in their homes in the five boroughs and across the country.