



NAF

NEW
AMERICAN
FELLOWS

A PROJECT OF
THE **AMERICAN**
IMMIGRATION
COUNCIL

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OVERVIEW

To be moved by a piece of art is a truly magical experience. At its best, art connects, transcends, and makes the personal, universal. Most importantly, whether you call it art or not, everyone engages with creative expression. It's the surest way to meet people where they are — at the movies, reading a good book, looking at pictures, dancing, or taking in a show.

But not everyone enjoys the same access to art and not everyone's stories are valued equally in our society. We need more diverse perspectives and a myriad of stories that explore how we are all connected on a fundamental level. As an immigration organization that understands the power of culture to shift hearts and minds, we're committed to uplifting a diverse pool of artists and bringing art to places where welcoming immigrants has been a challenge. These projects can provide binding experiences across communities and spark crucial dialogue about how we treat each other and how we experience belonging in America.

The culture change work started at New American Economy (NAE), which included the New American Festival, NAE Film Club, NAE Lit Club, is now expanding that work to also include our newly launched New American Fellows program. Now that NAE has merged with the American Immigration Council, we're investing even more in the transformative power of art, media, and storytelling across all our programs. With a broad portfolio that shows we're more than the sum of our parts, we will begin the work of changing hearts and minds, as well as continue cultivating a fertile environment for policy change.

This year's New American Fellows pilot showcases the individual experiences of immigrants and refugees, empowering them to tell their own story, in their preferred medium. To best serve the community we wanted to reach, we partnered with the Brooklyn Arts Council, who for over 50 years has championed the work of local artists.

With the help of the Brooklyn Arts Council, we chose 6 diverse artists, including a performance artist, Salome Egas, who is focused on the question of citizenship, a sculptural exhibition of tables and chairs by textile artist Hong Wu, and Nari Kye, the Executive Producer of Woori Show, a Korean TV show modeled on Sesame Street. Each selection in our cohort offers us an opportunity to learn from the artist's structure and audience.

Through this first cohort, we'll learn about the ways different mediums and artistic methods create spaces that cultivate an exchange of ideas, encouraging a sense of belonging. By learning which projects do the most work in terms of sparking dialogue and why that is the case, we can replicate their success in future cohorts.



PROGRAM MILESTONES

Our program is fueled by the idea that change happening at the local level will ladder up to a national movement. Below are the milestones that we will focus on over the course of the 18-month fellowship period.

- Convene our core team of consultants, including a conversation facilitator, program architect, racial justice and movement building expert and a member of our first artist cohort.
- Identify a local arts organization to partner with, helping us open the call for artists, regardless of documentation status
- Identify our cohort of 6 artists per locality. Each artist will receive a \$5000 grant.
- Hold quarterly facilitated meetings with artists and community members on topics like racial equity, belonging, what it means to be American, the power of art to move policy, etc.
- Hold monthly healing sessions for our artists where they can feel free to explore their feelings and celebrate their stories as an act of radical joy.
- Host a final showcase of all 6 projects at an outdoor site to remove barriers like cost and institutional gatekeepers, expanding the tent of immigration advocates and champions.

By surveying our artists we'll be able to document the effectiveness of our fellowship and impart the learnings towards our next cohort. Our hope is that this program will impact how artists approach other areas of their lives. We want our participants to be actively thinking about how to create community – entering conversations not to win, but to understand. This understanding creates crucial conditions for sustainable movement building.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS & PROJECTS



Salome Egas is Ecuadorian and an interdisciplinary performer using dance, theater, film, and textiles to explore her identity. Her piece, *More Than a Petal*, involves a performance and workshop focused on the question of citizenship. In the performance, the audience will follow the journey of an Ecuadorian immigrant disguised as a flower traveling north. The show brings the audience on a journey of self-acceptance, radical self-love, and empowerment of one's immigrant narrative.

The companion piece, a 2-hour workshop designed to center artists' lived experiences. The goal is to create a space where participants can share how they've been impacted by the immigration system. Through *More Than a Petal* we hope to learn more about weaving artist support into the production of the work.

Woori Show, a children's television show created to help families enjoy Korean language and culture. Helmed by a collective of seasoned television producers, the bilingual episodes make space for those without language access. We want to invest in art that blends education and enjoyment and hope to learn more about how to increase language access through art.



Born in Ukraine, artist Katya Grokhovsky presents *Point A*, a mixed-media project, which explores migration, memory, place and origin, via installation, video and performance, focusing on Brooklyn based immigrants from the former USSR. Katya's work exploring identity is central to the question of belonging. We hope her work will illuminate how audiences can interact with their own identity.



To remove barriers like cost and create increased social contact, we chose a creative placemaking project from artist **Hong Wu**. A Chinese immigrant, who worked in the fashion industry for 15 years and was laid off during the Covid pandemic. Hong has channeled her experience into sculptural pieces that encourage empathy and perseverance. For the fellowship she is working on a table and chairs that will interact with each other through various angles and placements, showcasing tension and harmony. Her intended stage is an indoor public place, such as a public school, a transit hub or cultural institution. Through her work we hope to gain an understanding about which spaces can reach the broadest audience and contribute to social cohesion.

Ibi Ibrahim's work is focused on Muslim women in Brooklyn who wear the niqab. A native of Yemen, his photos of the women are presented with a personal narrative. The goal is to promote further understanding of this often-invisible segment of the Muslim community. We're interested in how Ibi's work can promote a deeper understanding of this segment of the population.



Finnish immigrant **Sari Nordman** weaves personal stories with the Council's research to show the connection between the numbers and the people they represent. She's constructed a video installation that highlights interviews with people of diverse backgrounds in their native language. The interviews are then transcribed on a website and presented along with our economic data. We are hoping to see if Sari's method of sharing personal narratives with data will create meaningful conversation.

At the end of this first cycle we'll showcase the artists' work at a celebration on Citizenship Day, September 17, 2022. This event will be a place for artists, activists, and community members to gather and explore what immigration means at the human and personal level.