

Live Arts Boston

Creativity, Entrepreneurship and
Equity in the Performing Arts



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The Boston Foundation, Greater Boston's community foundation, seeks to bring the collective power of our region's people and resources together to drive real change. Established in 1915, it is one of the largest community foundations in the nation—with net assets of \$1.3 billion. In 2019, the Foundation received \$151 million in contributions and the Foundation and its donors paid \$153 million in grants to nonprofit organizations. The Foundation has many partners, including its donors, who have established more than 1,000 separate charitable funds for the general benefit of the community or for special purposes. With support from the Annual Campaign for Civic Leadership, the Foundation also facilitates public discourse and action, commissions research into the most critical issues of our time and advocates for public policy that advances opportunity for everyone. The Philanthropic Initiative (TPI), a consulting unit of the Foundation, designs and implements customized philanthropic strategies for families, foundations and corporations around the globe. To learn more about the Foundation and its work, visit TBF.org.

The Barr Foundation's mission is to invest in human, natural, and creative potential, serving as thoughtful stewards and catalysts. Based in Boston, Barr focuses regionally, and selectively engages nationally, working in partnership with nonprofits, foundations, the public sector, and civic and business leaders to elevate the arts, advance solutions for climate change, and connect all students to success in high school and beyond. Founded in 1997, Barr now has assets of \$2 billion, and has contributed more than \$1 billion to charitable causes. For more information, visit barrfoundation.org or follow @BarrFdn.

Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, brings national visibility to arts for change work, builds knowledge about quality practices, and creates useful resources. Over the last 20 years, Animating Democracy has conducted national research, documented and supported a wide range of artists and cultural organizations doing compelling civic engagement work, developed seminal field resources and publications, delivered training for capacity building and influenced policy and funding support for arts for change work. We build on Americans for the Arts' strengths in research, policy, professional development and advocacy to advance and elevate arts for change work on field, cross-sector and national levels and strive to make artists and the arts an integral and effective part of solutions to the challenges of communities and toward ensuring a healthy democracy. www.AnimatingDemocracy.org.

Special thanks to Allyson Esposito for her vision in creating LAB; the Wagner Family Foundation and an anonymous donor for their support of the program in its pilot phase; and the grantees and other collaborators who took part in focus groups and interviews and contributed invaluable insights to the research process that culminated in this report.

By Barbara Schaffer Bacon and Pam Korza
Co-Directors

Animating Democracy / Americans for the Arts

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The Boston Foundation

Designed by Melissa Hines

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The Boston Foundation

Dear Reader,

This report explores the program design, process and impacts of the first three years (2017–19) of Live Arts Boston. A partnership between the Boston Foundation and the Barr Foundation, Live Arts Boston (LAB) has used a participatory approach to grantmaking—engaging members of the local arts community in its decision-making process—to support nearly 200 performing arts projects created, presented or produced by individual artists, groups of artists, and small arts organizations from the Greater Boston area. These artists comprise a remarkable diversity of races and ethnicities, backgrounds and stages in their careers. Their work spans a breathtaking variety of disciplines and genres. Since its inception, the LAB program has grown and evolved, providing artists not only with grant dollars, but also with a range of supports to elevate their practice, professional profile and organizational health.

To produce this report, consultants Barbara Schaffer Bacon and Pam Korza from Animating Democracy (a program of Americans for the Arts) undertook a deep assessment of LAB. Through surveys, interviews and focus groups with LAB grantees and analysis of final grantee reports, the research team documented and reflected on the ways in which the program has shifted and changed over its pilot phase, as well as the impacts the program has already had on grantees, the local performing arts ecosystem and the broader Boston-area community.

LAB was a direct response to two major developments in 2016. The first was a study commissioned by the Boston Foundation, which showed that the vast majority of funding for arts in Greater Boston—from individual donors and from institutional philanthropy—went to a few large arts organizations. This has made it enormously challenging for individual artists and small arts organizations to survive and to commit to Boston as their creative home. The second development was *Boston Creates*, the city’s first-ever cultural plan. Among its overarching goals was to create “fertile ground for a vibrant and sustainable arts and culture ecosystem,” including redressing this imbalance in local arts funding.

In June 2020, amid a global pandemic, a profound economic downturn and widespread uprisings for racial justice, we announced the newest class of LAB grantees. While these world events have deeply affected the entire arts sector, and especially individual artists, they have also made it clear how much people and communities need creativity and cultural expression.

Already, in response to this moment, LAB artists are creating new work that we know will help us to find meaning, to heal, to imagine a more just future, and to feel inspired, hopeful and emboldened to bring that future into being. Guided by all that we’ve learned in these first few years, we hope that LAB can help fuel these Greater Boston artists and their work as culture-bearers, innovators and community leaders for years to come.

Eva Rosenberg
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The Boston Foundation

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Director of Arts & Creativity
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Table of Contents

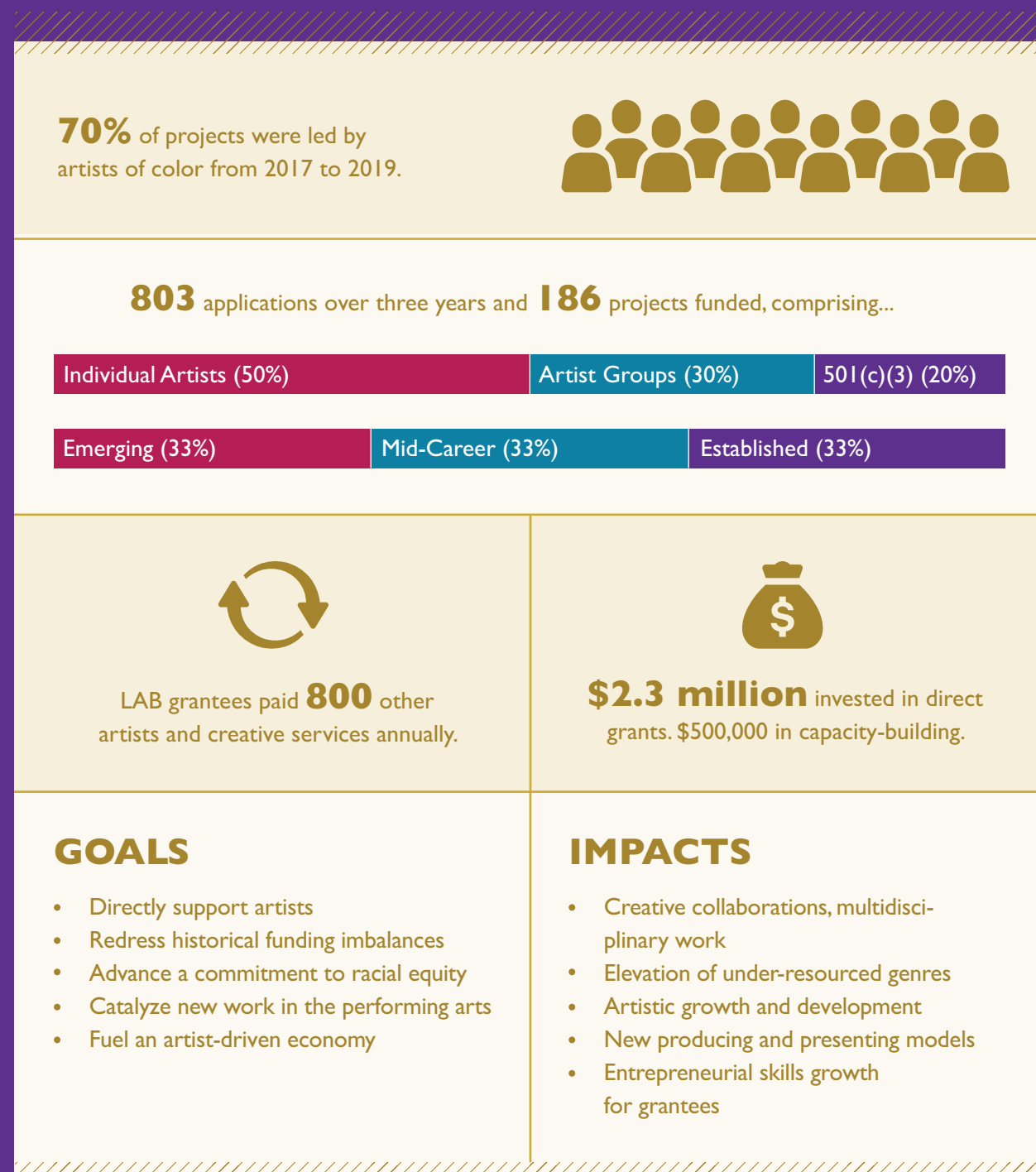
LAB at a Glance	6
Program Design	7
Grants	7
Holistic Support Services	8
Who LAB Supported	10
What LAB Supported	11
Making a Difference	13
Impact on Artists	13
Impact on the Arts Ecosystem	15
Elements That Drive Impact	18
Recommendations	21
LAB Artists 2017-2020	24



“The 2019 LAB grant was a game changer for me as an artist. It was quite literally the ladder that helped me climb back onto the horse of musical artistic expression. It helped me reconnect to the power of song for change, be it personal or social. Getting back to being a full-on recording artist has been a journey filled with growing pains, but one that I desperately needed. I think I’m a better artist, and a healthier person because of it.” — Juma Inniss

LAB at a Glance

LAB's First Years: Pilot Program 2017-2019



At the time of this report's data analysis, full data only for 2017 and 2018 was available; 2019 was incoming and considered and added as it became available.

Program Design

Live Arts Boston (LAB) was conceived in response to *Boston Creates*, the City's first-ever cultural plan, and a Boston Foundation study showing that philanthropic support for Boston's performing arts sector lagged peer cities. Support was especially scant at the lower-budget end of the ecosystem, including for contemporary, experimental, risk-taking work, and for ethnically and racially diverse performing groups and cultural traditions. LAB aimed to address that lack of resources and enable performing artists, groups and small arts organizations to create, present and produce new work in Greater Boston.

Between 2017 and 2019, the Arts & Culture impact area at the Boston Foundation, with support from the Barr Foundation and additional funding from the Wagner Family Foundation and an anonymous donor, implemented a pilot of Live Arts Boston to give flexible, project-specific grants to performing artists and groups at all career stages and to producing and presenting organizations that historically have been under-resourced. The program initially focused on small 501(c)(3) organizations but included individual artists and informal collectives and bands to span the range of "grassroots" arts activity. Beginning in year two, the program prioritized support for artists of color and artists who are immigrants or new Americans. Grants have boosted the creation of new work fundamental to artistic growth and to a thriving arts ecosystem. Wraparound supports—professional development workshops, mentorship and advisory services, project documentation help and networking opportunities—augment funding and help grantees grow administratively and artistically.

Grants

Live Arts Boston awards project grants of up to \$15,000 directly to individual performing artists, artist groups and collectives, artist-run businesses, small performing arts organizations and presenting and producing nonprofits (with budgets under \$250,000) to create, produce or present new work for local audiences. LAB embraces work in all performing arts disciplines, and the requirements of the grant are intentionally few: A public showing of the funded project within Greater Boston before the end of the grant period—either as finished form or in-progress—stimulates productivity and process for artists and increases visibility and opportunity for audiences to engage with new work. LAB also requires that all participating artists in a funded project be paid. Funds are delivered up front, with no requirements to match funds nor expectation of receipts or other proof of expenditures.

LAB's participatory grantmaking approach involves past LAB grantees and other local and national, racially and artistically diverse artists, presenters and producers, thus sharing decision-making power with individuals reflective of the communities the program aims to serve. The specific review processes evolved over the pilot period; now, in a first round, 30 to 35 regional and national reviewers provide online review and scoring to

make an initial cut. Then in a second round, approximately 15 local reviewers read expanded materials from 100 to 120 finalists and make funding recommendations.

Holistic Support Services

For artists with limited or no grants experience or who have felt shut out by funders, LAB has committed to vigorous outreach by staff along with application support including feedback, one-on-one advising and budget workshops.

During LAB's first year, Boston Foundation staff learned that grantees needed other project supports as well as career development and administrative skill-building, especially in marketing, financial management, technical production and networking opportunities. In response, the LAB team identified partners and providers to offer workshops, advisory support and mentorship, and experimented and iterated with offerings over the pilot years. For example:

Artist business skill-building workshops. In 2019, the LAB team engaged with consultants to provide 11 in-person workshops led mostly by artists of color (including several grantees) and focused on a wide range of topics, such as audience/patron development for emerging artists, marketing, and financial and tax concerns.

Advisory support by staff, mentors and project advisors. LAB has provided one-on-one office hours, with the help of a consultant, to respond to applicant grant-writing, project and career questions, and has run a mentor program, matching local and national performing arts "luminaries" with grantees one-on-one and in small cohorts for tailored assistance, emphasizing creation of work and artistry. In 2019, LAB recruited a diverse, external team of five local artists and administrators with experience in various performing arts disciplines, artistic production and business administration, to be available to grantees on a request basis for approximately five hours of advisory support per grantee.

Cohort convenings. Each year, LAB initiated cohort gatherings and social events for that year's grantees as a way to celebrate them and their work and foster connections. In 2019,



LAB at Work: Grant Enables Presenter to Support More Artists

All Together Now

In 2016, musician Anna Rae launched *All Together Now (ATN)*, a series in which she presents artists from a wide range of performance disciplines. A feature article in *The ARTery* describes Rae's intention as "ambitious from the start... to connect people across difference; specifically, she wanted to incorporate a range of artistic genres, center marginalized identities, and facilitate cross-pollination between Boston and New York City."

A 2017 LAB grant enabled Rae to build upon her presenting model with five more shows. Her choices respond to what she observes as the predictable sameness of the typical Boston rock show, aiming instead for an experience that brings surprise and also accesses more of the senses. Any given show might include some combination of different musical genres, magic, dance, drag performance, hip hop or experimental film. Rae seeks out and presents artists of all identities—women, people of color, queer performers, cis-straight, and other affinities—guided by her value of co-existence.

Rae credits LAB as "a critical component in my ability to run the series in the last couple of years," particularly enabling concentrated energy and resources on marketing the series. The results of this focus and Rae's devotion to supporting artists to get their work presented yields what *The ARTery* called full-house and fully engaged audiences. *ATN* participant and puppeteer Veronica Barron said, "With *All Together Now*, Anna is not just presenting your material, she's really presenting you as an artist and creator. The difference is subtle, but powerful. Presenting the work says, 'Come and see this 10 to 15 minutes of material, it's great!' Presenting the artist says, 'Come and witness this artist. She has a body of work and a point of view that's worth engaging with.'"

grantees were encouraged to self-convene around interests they defined with peers in the cohort, with a small fund available to support the gatherings.

Videography documentation. To help artists improve their work samples, LAB has provided access to professional services by individual videographers in 2018, and in 2019 by the Loop Lab, a Cambridge-based creative workforce development nonprofit led by and serving people of color, for documentation of a full-length performance of funded work and creation of a highlights reel.



“The LAB grant allowed me to dive deeper into my composition skills by purchasing equipment and instruments, making it possible to rehearse in my home studio. I was also given the opportunity to fully communicate my musical ideas working with a seven-piece ensemble and a total of 13 collaborators with expertise in conducting, cinematography, graphic design and instrumentation! It was truly a dream come true.” — Billy Dean Thomas

Who LAB Supported

Live Arts Boston received 803 proposals over the three-year pilot and supported 186 projects, about 60 per year. Eighty percent of LAB grants went to individual artists and groups or collectives of artists. Individual artists alone represented 46 percent of applicants and 50 percent of grantees over the three years. LAB significantly reached and served immigrants, new Americans and artists, presenters and producers of color, helping to address profound historical inequities in funding to the arts and culture domain in Greater Boston.

Proactive networking and outreach increased the overall submissions and the numbers of artists of color and immigrants who both applied for and received grants over time. More than 70 percent of LAB-funded projects from 2017 to 2019 were led by artists of color. Artists’ comments in their final reports indicate that direct language addressing racial equity and prioritizing artists of color in the guidelines—as well as hearing from peers who won grants—encouraged them to apply. Supported projects largely represented new work (with that as a requirement in year three), and LAB grantees included emerging, mid-career and established artists in balanced proportion, with about a third in each category. A third of LAB grantees had never applied for a grant of any kind before. Former Boston Foundation Senior Director of Arts and Culture Allyson Esposito commented, “Most applicants and grantees were not previously known to the Boston Foundation or to other philanthropies, arts leaders and policymakers in the region—in fact, they were participating in an almost entirely separate arts ecosystem. And, significantly, much of the work created by these artists has showcased different-for-Boston, contemporary perspectives and voices that had been overlooked.”

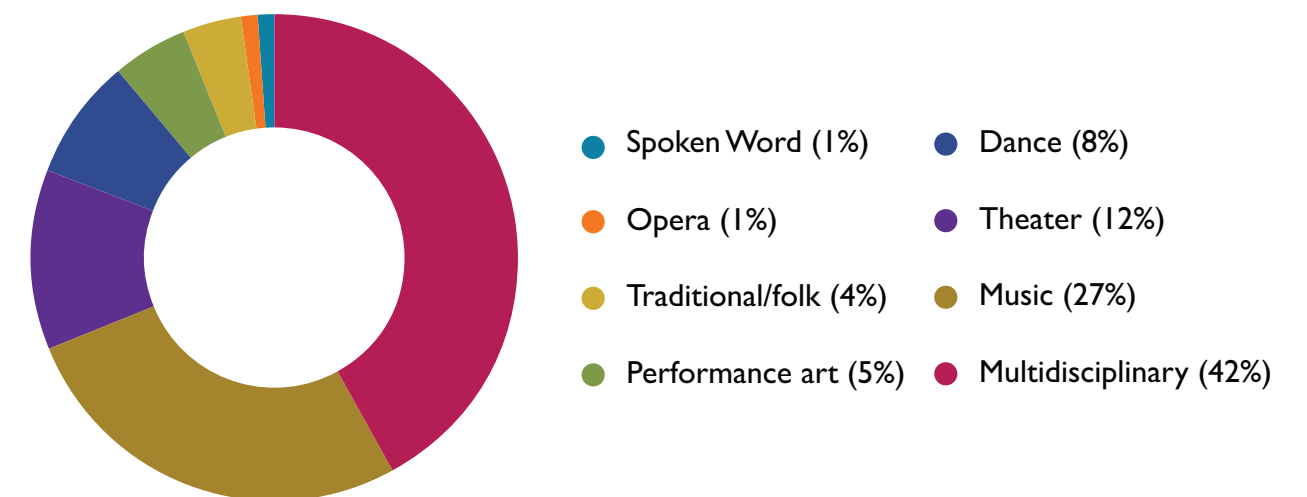
What LAB Supported

Over the three years of the pilot phase of the program, one thousand performances of completed and in-progress works were shared publicly in a range of formal performance spaces, ad-hoc venues and in the public realm—the equivalent of one performance per day. And that total does not include video and audio recordings that doubtless reached an even larger audience. More than half of these performances were free to the public.

Artists and small-scale producers curated and produced projects and events that covered the gamut from folk tradition to avant-garde, and elevated particular performing arts genres—especially hip hop. LAB support and recognition has made a step toward redressing historic gatekeeping by local venues and promoters and the lack of serious attention by the Boston media, arts community and funders to this growing scene fueled by talented artists.

LAB projects also created immersive visual, aural and performative fusions and up-close and intimate experiences for audiences to intensify the experience of the work, provoke emotional response or simply to perform the work at its intended small scale.

Figure 1. LAB-Funded Projects by Discipline, 2017–2018



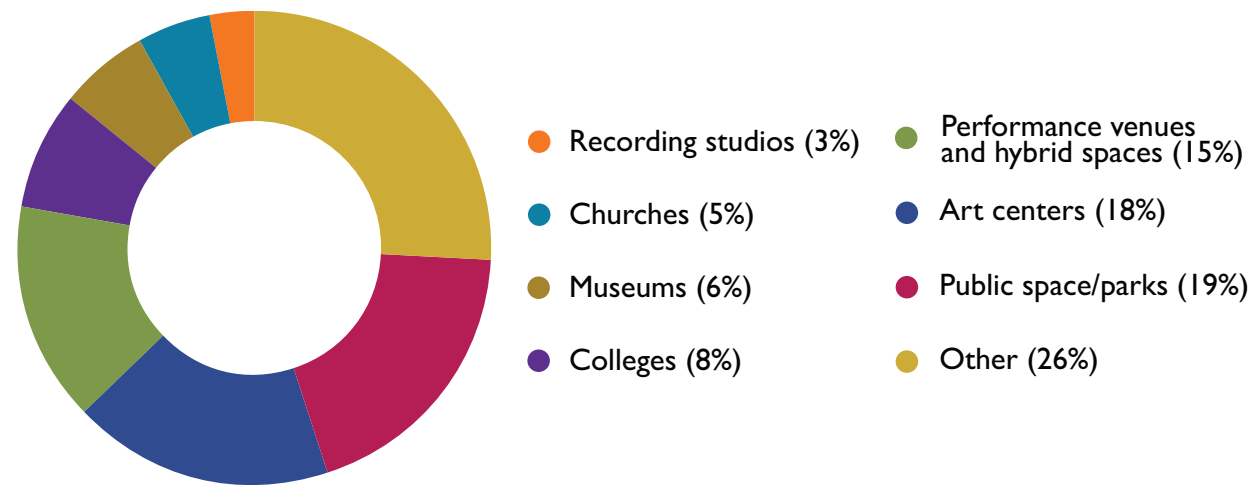
The distribution of performance forms among grantees closely reflects the distribution among applicants.

LAB artists embraced Boston spaces both traditional and fresh, gave voice to the city’s social concerns and examined the intersections of race, culture, economics, ability, gender and sexuality, challenging biased narratives that persist in Boston and across the country. They built issue awareness and prompted audience dialogue and reflection on issues of police-youth relations, the opioid crisis, the Black experience and disability, among others.

Bringing art into the public realm animated public spaces and brought wide visibility to unfamiliar artistic genres. And bringing performances to new venues and community

spaces—including venues unconventional for the arts—brought people and attention to those spaces too. Indeed, LAB grantees are attracting audiences to festivals and events that sustain cultural grounding and take place in neighborhoods and spaces they find welcoming, in turn creating collective experiences and meaning for neighborhoods and cultural communities.

Figure 2. Types of Venues Used for Performance, 2017–2018



“Other” comprised galleries and artist studios; community centers (recovery center, emergency shelter, teen center); commercial businesses (hotel, brewing company); schools; Boston Children’s Hospital; and even a cemetery.

Artists leveraged LAB dollars to secure additional new funds for their work through a combination of public and private funders, ticket sales and individual donations including crowdsourcing. In-kind support was frequently cited but not often quantified.

LAB at Work: Grant Prompts Artistic Experimentation

Ngoc-Tran Vu

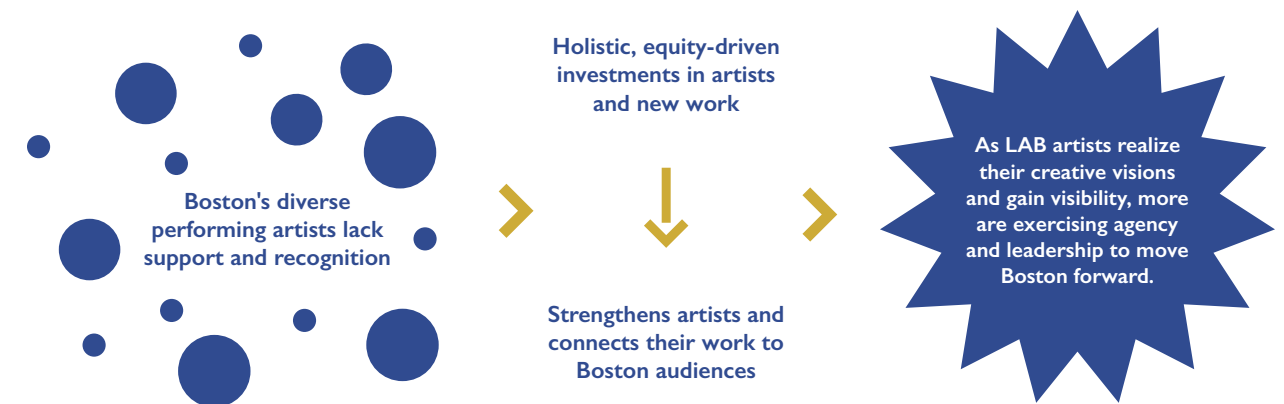
Ngoc-Tran Vu, self-described storyteller and interdisciplinary artist and community organizer, used the “risk capital” of her LAB grant to experiment artistically in performance and also to work with other artists to build upon a critical, bilingual, community-based project embedded in the Vietnamese-American community in Dorchester.



“BAMS’ LAB grant was at the time we were just building our series of events, really tackling the issues of activating spaces and making sure artists of color had a platform that showcased their quality work... The grant validated all the sweat equity and sacrifices that my volunteer team and I made for the last five years... and validated the importance of how our events and consistency built the trust of our constituents, our audience members, anyone that’s ever funded us.”
— Catherine T. Morris, BAMS Fest, Inc.

Making a Difference

LAB investments provide holistic support that encourages Boston’s diverse performing artists to take risks and create new work. As today’s cadre of performing artists strengthens and gains visibility, artists become partners with LAB in creating a richly diverse cultural ecosystem and a city that is innovative, entrepreneurial, culturally vibrant and equitable. (See How Lab Works for Change, p. 17.)



LAB’s Impact on Artists

Given the risk capital that a LAB grant represents, artists developed projects at a depth, scope, scale or artistic ambition not previously possible. LAB funds and recognition empowered them to “imagine bigger,” in one artist’s words, and experiment in new directions. Artists gained confidence to pursue their artistic ideas and shifted their own self-perception. Artists exercised artistic rigor and achieved new levels of craftsmanship and sophistication in final products. Many emerged with creative work that was stronger and more compelling and received positive audience and critical response as a result.

LAB at Work: New Connections Yield Co-Productions with Established Theaters

Front Porch Arts Collective

LAB funding advanced a co-producing model that Front Porch Arts Collective has been developing. The model capitalizes on complementary interests and goals with established theaters. Front Porch is a Black-led theater company committed to advancing racial equity in Boston through theater. Among its goals is “to retain diverse talent by increasing representation onstage, backstage, in the office and in the boardroom.” Front Porch saw its LAB-funded project, the *God’s Closet* reading series, as an opportunity to show strong work by Black artists and to court established theater companies as co-producers. Thus far, it has partnered with Central Square Theater, the Greater Boston Stage Company and the Lyric Stage on full productions. Productions done with SpeakEasy Stage have garnered coverage in the *Boston Globe* and the *New York Times*.

“The idea from the beginning was, we’ve got the house, the infrastructure, the ticketing capacity, the marketing capacity. Don’t force a brand-new company that’s already got so many challenges to try and build all those capacities for itself. While the motivation is obviously about wanting to support a new theater company and their mission of social justice, it’s also a business venture. We want all parties to succeed. We don’t deserve anybody’s thanks. Front Porch is a good business partner and I think the relationship is healthier when viewed through that prism.” — Matt Chapuran, Lyric Stage Company of Boston

“We have had two years of pretty significant impact being able to showcase work like this and get other established theater companies interested in us. Working in this co-production model allows us to produce like a million-dollar company and in the last two years we have made significant impact showcasing the stories of the African diaspora and helping to cultivate a taste for those narratives in our city.” — Dawn Simmons, Front Porch Arts Collective



Artists also seized the chance to collaborate, enhancing creativity and production quality and promoting new and deeper working relationships. With 80 to 90 percent of grantees in the first two funding cycles having formed new collaborations, this is one of LAB’s most catalytic effects. The result is a high degree of multi-disciplinary exploration and inventive hybrid forms that are being newly recognized within and outside of Boston.

Artists, producers and presenters gained entrepreneurial skills as they created, presented and recorded new work. Many grantees reported learning for the first time how to self-produce or to work effectively with producers. They gained logistical experience in scaling up their work and benefited from working in venues that could help realize their artistic vision. Artists used LAB resources to work with professional studios and engineers to make quality recordings as merchandise and calling cards and lay the groundwork for subsequent work.

Small producers and presenters have been strengthened to meet the needs of artists of color in their networks. These include individual artists who are presenting and producing fellow artists as well as artist groups and nonprofits. They have used LAB resources to support programming featuring Boston artists and to experiment on collaborative ventures. They have built relationships with Boston venues and spaces to present artists to new and larger audiences.

LAB artists have gained attention from established institutional presenters. LAB artists have performed and brought their audiences to spaces and series such as the Institute of Contemporary Art, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, OBERON at the American Repertory Theater, the Boston Center for the Arts, the Museum of Fine Arts, Global Arts Live, and Celebrity Series of Boston (through its Neighborhoods program), among others.

LAB’s Impact on the Boston-Area Arts Ecosystem

LAB is addressing and making inroads on historical imbalances in funding to the performing arts, including along racial lines. LAB grantee demographics and the types of projects funded represent a high level of racial and cultural diversity as well as significant support for immigrant and new American artists. LAB is bringing visibility and awareness and making a critical contribution to understanding this segment of the region’s arts scene. LAB artists are

diverse across many categories and a good proportion are both younger and emerging in their careers, and through them LAB is cultivating an important leadership pipeline in Boston’s cultural ecosystem. Beyond its inclusive grantmaking strategies, LAB’s staff share power with LAB artists through their participation on grant panels and as thought partners providing critical feedback on program design.

LAB is producing compound impact: A dollar invested in a LAB artist has a multiplying effect in supporting artists in their creative work and fueling the economy of their own new arts environment. Importantly, because money is flowing to and through artists rather than through organizations, artists themselves are driving that economy, empowered to make decisions rather than try to fit into a top-down system of support. While LAB grants do support production, venue rental and marketing costs, grants to individual artists are not going toward institutional overheads.

LAB is helping to shift the culture around paying artists. LAB artists invested their grant dollars substantially to pay other artists and creatives who participate in and support their work, such as recording engineers, audio and lighting technicians, costume designers and stylists, videographers, and visual and graphic artists. Over half the funds granted in 2017 and 2018 (\$914,050) were paid out to other artists for commissions, collaborations and rehearsal and performance compensation.

Since LAB’s primary focus was on new work creation, the program did not emphasize audience development or require grantees to collect audience data. Yet between 80 and 90 percent of grantees in years one and two reported “reaching new audiences.” The range of venues LAB artists used is impressive. (See Figure 2.) But there is unrealized potential for established presenters and producers to present the kinds of artists recognized by LAB.

LAB artists and the work they create drive a compelling new narrative for Boston. LAB is advancing the qualities of racial equity, artistic innovation and entrepreneurship that can help to redefine the city’s image and expand opportunities to attract and retain a gen-



“We’re ecstatic that the growth of our vision is showing through our work and partnerships. That speaks a lot to how we have developed over time. This is all pretty true to form with our relationship with OBERON. We’re always learning from each other, and this grant has allowed us the opportunity to scale our initiative out and grow as a team while nurturing our partnership with OBERON. Each year, our communication gets stronger, strengthening the foundation of our team and amplifying our vision.” — Yo Soy LOLA

eration of young leaders, workers and creatives. LAB is playing a pivotal role in uplifting arts and culture as an essential contributor to Boston’s present-day cultural vitality.

The Live Arts Boston pilot, not incidentally, has had a powerful impact on the Boston Foundation itself. By investing in individual artists through LAB, the Foundation—a longstanding supporter of the arts in Boston—is acting on its belief in the role of artists in creating a healthy and vital city and society. And emphatically, LAB is advancing the Boston Foundation’s own institutional commitment to racial equity by addressing historical imbalances in arts funding. The program has allowed the Boston Foundation to experiment with power sharing in program design and execution as well as decision making, and to dive into directly funding artists without requiring fiscal intermediaries (either as individuals or LLCs). It implicitly trusts artists to know what they want, need and can do with that funding, thus supporting self-determination.

How LAB Works for Change

With racial equity as its driving principle, LAB makes holistic investments to directly support Boston-area performing artists, groups and small arts organizations to create, present and produce new work.

- Open, flexible guidelines paired with trust-based, upfront funding
- Risk-capital to artists who have had less access to funding
- Professional development and networking to help grantees succeed
- Grantee involvement/empowerment as advisors, mentors, reviewers and thought partners

The synergy of these investments strengthens artists and connects their work to Boston audiences and beyond. The results:

- Artistic growth and development
- Increased quantity, quality and diversity of creative production
- Entrepreneurial skill development and professional growth
- Creative collaborations, multidisciplinary work, and new producing and presenting models
- Diverse work shared throughout Boston to a range of local audiences

As LAB artists realize their creative visions and gain visibility, they exercise agency and leadership independently and with the Boston Foundation to move Boston forward as an innovative, entrepreneurial, culturally vibrant and equitable city.

Elements That Drive Impact

In looking back at the program's first years, nine qualities of the program in particular have yielded observable positive outcomes for the arts community.

- 1. Following artists' lead.** Artists appreciate LAB's open, flexible boundaries of discipline, genre and form, i.e., the full range of new work in the performing arts and explicit openness to multidisciplinary projects. LAB also honors how artists are operating by funding them as they are organized—as individual artists, groups of artists, hybrid businesses and nonprofit organizations.
- 2. Valuing creative process.** Foregrounding experimentation and process acknowledges the value of risk-taking in creating imaginative, innovative work and invigorates the performing arts landscape beyond Boston's existing traditions.
- 3. Leading with racial equity.** Racial equity is a driving value that influences everything about LAB, from development of program guidelines to applicant outreach to hiring a racially diverse team of Project Advisors. By engaging grantees in grant review and decision making, and by incorporating their insights and feedback on the program itself, LAB is providing visibility and a platform for vital voices in the region's arts ecosystem, and following their lead by designing a responsive program.
- 4. Meaningful grant amounts and up-front money.** Grants of up to \$15,000 have been large enough to propel projects forward in important ways. Funds are available at the outset of the grant period to be used for project costs, rather than on a reimbursement basis, which can burden artists without risk capital already on hand. Additionally, LAB grants do not require matching funds, which can be prohibitive to artists without access to existing networks of wealth or prior institutional support.
- 5. Number of annual grants.** Supporting an average of more than 60 artists, groups and organizations each year, LAB is having a critical mass effect in strengthening the local arts ecosystem. The large number of grants increases the odds that an individual artist will know someone receiving a grant in any given year, indicating that funding is attainable. LAB is en-



LAB at Work: Holistic Support Helps Musician Reach the Next Level

Anjimile

Anjimile is a queer and trans singer/songwriter based in Boston. Inspired by faith, addiction and Anjimile's own transition, their newest record *Giver Taker* tells a small story in each song that encompasses a larger voyage of self-discovery. Because aspects of his faith and his own trans identity can clash, he uses this album as a way to explore these dichotomies.

"The LAB grant is directly responsible for my record deal with Father/Daughter Records. Without the grant, I wouldn't have had the funds to record with highly skilled producers and engineers, or to hire additional instrumentalists. Because of the LAB grant and subsequent record deal, I am several giant steps closer to achieving my goal of kickstarting my music career on a national scale.

The Nuts & Bolts workshop taught me how to budget expenses, weigh the financial pros and cons of playing shows, understand the monetary value of my work, and negotiate higher rates for performances and services. The Nuts & Bolts workshop changed my life.

The completion of my LAB 2019 project has been the most rewarding professional experience of my life. It was incredibly validating to receive such a substantial financial reward for the purpose of creating music. I know that I am a talented, skilled, unique artist. LAB helped improve my confidence exponentially as an artist. I now recognize that I can actually achieve my goals. That I AM achieving my goals. It's beautiful. Thank you."

abling more work to be created at the same time, and that work is reflective of the breadth and diversity of this segment of Boston’s performing artists. Through the sheer density of LAB-supported projects, the ecosystem shifts, and media and other key stakeholders are taking notice.

6. **LAB as effective hybrid.** LAB combines aspects of artist fellowships (i.e., hands-off support for creative work) with project support that is both stimulating artistic and career growth and fueling more diverse public programming in Boston.
7. **LAB as accelerator.** Without structured program requirements or a rigid timeline, the construct of LAB creates a self-directed accelerator opportunity. Artists are developing skills, strategies and networks necessary to advance and produce their work and leveraging additional resources and opportunities.
8. **LAB as connector.** In addition to funding, LAB is connecting artists to each other and others in the ecosystem. As LAB has gained visibility, staff frequently have served as connectors and facilitators between grantee performing artists and opportunities with large festivals, regional entities, higher education institutions and mid-to-large sized cultural organizations.
9. **Proactive and responsive LAB team.** LAB staff’s vigorous outreach to performing artists, capacity to listen, and responsiveness have been noted over and over by grantees. The LAB team has sought to understand grant recipients’ needs and interests through surveys and one-on-one conversations in order to devise the most useful support services.



“The LAB grant allowed us to take our time developing our idea, coming together to vision and move into our site-specific work with greater focus. For example, we were able to connect with the National Park Service in Boston over the course of a year to discuss meaningful approaches to site-specific work that went beyond turning sites into traditional proscenium spaces. We were also able to grow our team to include collaborators from different disciplines and begin a larger project of connecting historic sites in artistic ways.”
— Ilya Vidrin, Reciprocity Collaborative

Recommendations

The recommendations highlighted here call out opportunities for strategic work and investments by the Boston and Barr Foundations, with funder and donor partners, toward removing barriers in the ecosystem for artists—especially artists of color—who are trying to make a living in Greater Boston, and magnifying the city’s reputation as diverse, vibrant and innovative.

1. Continue LAB as a core program of the Boston Foundation’s Arts & Culture portfolio.

Maintain or increase investment to achieve sustained systems change as artists build capacity to develop high-quality work. While LAB is making a transformative contribution to Boston’s cultural ecosystem, time is needed for the seeds that LAB has planted to blossom. Artists whose experience and confidence have grown through LAB support will develop new projects that aim higher, take their work further, and experiment more. Ongoing grantmaking will further stimulate the creative economy that artists are fueling through their own spending and continue fostering future generations of thriving local artists.

2. Foster expanded professional development opportunity for artists in Boston.

Partner with arts service providers—in coalition with public, private and nonprofit partners—to devise year-round, culturally-responsive offerings for individual artists. Attention to artistic development in addition to business skill and career development should be amplified.

Strengthen networks that connect and cultivate artists of color and communities of practice in LAB’s scope of interest. It is essential to have viable, independent hubs and networks led by artists of color that provide connectivity and platforms for local artists to network, collaborate, reach new audiences and garner greater press coverage. Within LAB, several individuals and groups are providing such a role. With investment, these leaders of color can strengthen their own organizations and continue to support artists in their networks.

3. Use the assets that naturally result from LAB grantmaking to illuminate and drive action on conditions and trends for this sector and to power change in the arts ecosystem.

Track, analyze and regularly report on data on this part of the performing arts sector, as collected through LAB applications and grantee reports. Construct qualitative reports and trend assessments based on the content of project proposals and reports augmented by facilitated convenings.

Establish a metrics framework to monitor progress over time on LAB outcomes and impacts. Engage stakeholders to explore and create solutions to ecosystem challenges, such as rehearsal space and performance venue cost and availability challenges for grantees.

4. Augment LAB’s grantmaking with active and deliberate communication strategies to propel the envisioned philanthropic investment and the perception of Boston as a truly vibrant and inclusive city.

Create and use strong visual assets. Share those assets as appropriate with artists and help prepare active strategies to link their grant-funded work to LAB and the Boston Foundation. This can give artists some caché while also promoting the LAB program’s values, qualities and impact as a leading example of the Foundation’s work.

Grow grantee capacity. Train, coach and help LAB artists to develop systems to cultivate and manage their interested publics and audiences as assets and deploy cost-effective public relations and marketing strategies across multiple platforms.

Build LAB’s online presence. Develop opportunities on the Boston Foundation website and through other platforms to provide more information highlighting LAB and LAB grantees and their projects to the public and for media reference. Engage advisors who are effective on social media and new media platforms to develop and test new digital strategies and tactics with LAB artists to reach and attract broader audiences.

Raise LAB’s profile nationally. With cultural, academic, commercial and media partners, curate events and showcases that establish the quality of Boston artists with venues, critics/reviewers, bookers, presenters and broad publics and put Boston talent on the map around the nation and across the world.

5. Cultivate new philanthropic investors and champions for this vibrant community of creatives.

Pursue the goal of expanding resources available to Boston’s creative performing artists through a proactive strategy that lifts up the unique qualities of the LAB program and LAB artists. As the Foundation exemplifies an approach to supporting artists, its story can also inform and inspire donors, peer community foundations and others in Boston, the Commonwealth and beyond.



“We were able to bring together the Bharata Natyam dance form and the topic of environmental conservation in a unique evening-length production entitled “Through Fish Eyes,” which incorporated ancient Tamil poetry, an original musical score, novel costumes and props, and innovative visual design... We were really excited to be able to premiere our production at the Kennedy Center.” — Madhvi Venkatesh, Prakriti Dance

Conclusion

Every pilot program hopes to establish proof of concept—evidence that a design is viable, feasible and likely to succeed. This learning assessment fully confirms proof of concept for Live Arts Boston.

Through LAB, the Boston and Barr Foundations are creating positive disruptions in grantmaking and in Boston’s cultural ecosystem. Directing resources to individual artists and small arts producers is spurring the creation and presentation of new work and new opportunities for Boston audiences. It is fueling the economy of creatives and the creative services they rely on. Having racial equity as a driving goal in the program’s every operation is changing who and what gets funded and who benefits. The artists recognized and supported by LAB are gaining agency and visibility in the city. By crossing racial, geographic, social, economic and cultural boundaries, LAB artists are helping to shape a new narrative for Boston.

LAB Artists 2017-2020

3nity
Abilities Dance Boston
AfroDeisaCity
Aine Minogue
Alexander Davis Dance
ALFii
All Together Now
Alley Cat Theater
Allysa Jones
Ana Masacote
Andrea Charalambous
ANIKAYA|Wendy Jehlen
Anjimile
Anna Myer|beheard.world
Anthony Romero
Arlekin Players Theatre
Artists Theater of Boston
Ashton Lites|StiggityStackz Worldwide Inc.
Asian American Playwright Collective (AAPC)
Baindu Conte-Coomber
Beantown Lockers
Ben Levin
Big Trouble Ensemble
Billy Dean Thomas
Boston Art & Music Soul (BAMS) Fest
Boston Theater Company
Brain Arts Organization
Brandie Blaze
Breyer/Cardone/Chapman/MacArthur |
Interdisciplinary Collaboration
Castle of our Skins
Catherine Siller
CEMI-Creosphere Experiential Media Initiative
Ceren Turkmengolu
Charlestown Working Theater
Chavi Bansal|Vimoksha
Chhandika
Chinese Historical Society of New England
Chorus pro Musica, Inc.
Christiane Karam
Christina R. Chan

Claudio Ragazzi
Cliff Notez
Cliff Odle
Continuum Dance Project
Cornell Coley
Cornell Coley, Kenny Kozol, and Sandra "Sasi"
Marcelino|Kecosa Collective
Crystal Bi Wegner and Lily Xie
D. Farai Williams
Dan VanHassel
Danielle Abrams and Mary Ellen Strom
David McMullin
Deborah Lake Fortson
Dev Blair
Donna Folan
Dutch ReBelle
Elizabeth Addison
Emily Beattie
Emily Beattie, Cari Ann Shim Sham, Mary Hale,
and Eric Gunther
Erini
Evan Northrup
Fabiola Méndez
Faith in a City
Faye Dupras
Feminine Empowerment Movement Slam
Flat Earth Theatre
Fort Point Theatre Channel
Franklin Park Coalition, Elma Lewis Playhouse
in the Park
Fred Woodard
Fresh Ink Theatre Company
FUKUDANCE
Gabriela Martina
George Abraham and Jess Rizkallah (with the
Radius of Arab American Writers)
Giuseppe Paradiso & Meridian 71
Greg Cook
Guy Mendilow Ensemble
Guy Mendilow Ensemble &
Sand Artist Kseniya Simonova

HairStory Project
Heather Stewart
HipStory
Hoopla Productions (formerly Jamaica Plain
Porchfest, Inc.)
Humano Multicultural Project
Ifé Franklin
Ilya Vidrin|Reciprocity Collaborative
Isaac de los Reyes
Jabari Asim
Jacqui Parker
Jade Sylvan
Jane Park
Jared Price (aka JPRiZM/Koma Toast LLC) and
Juma Innis/The Message Inc.
Jean Appolon Expressions
Jeraul Mackey
Jesse Erin Posner and Maia Dolphin-Krute
Jessie Jeanne & Dancers
Joel LaRue Smith
John Kordalewski | The Makanda Project
Jorge Perez-Albela
Jose Bernardo Hernandez
Josie Bray
Julie Ann Otis
JUMA
Jussi Reijonen
Juventas New Music Ensemble
KAIROS Dance Theater
Kaovanny
Karen Young | Older and Bolder
Keith Mascoll
Kera Washington | Zili Misik
Kimberleigh A. Holman | Luminarium Dance
Lakai Dance Theatre
Lani Asuncion
Latrell James
Laurie Dowd | 617Sessions
Leo Eguchi
Liars & Believers
Lily Xie

Lion's Jaw Festival
Madhvi Venkatesh
Maggie Cee and J. Michael Winward |
Dancing Queerly
Make Music Boston, a program of Kadence
Arts, Inc.
Marc Auguste | Disciple (D.I.)
Maria Finkelmeier
Marilyn Arsem
Marjorie Gere | Around Hear
Mark Redmond | Mandorla Music
Marsha Parrilla | danza/organica
Marshall "Gripp" Gillson and Porsha Olayiwola
MASARY Studios
MassOpera
Mazumal
Mehmet Ali Sanlikol
Michael Figueroa | Ruckus Dance
Milkshaw Benedict
Mobius Artists Group
Moe Pope
Morgan Middleton
Naseem Alatrash
Nedelka F. Prescod
Ngoc-Tran Vu
Non-Event
NorthStar Duo
Oliver Burns IV
Omar Najmi
Oompa
Palaver Strings
patchtax
People of Rhythm Productions
Perpetual Anastasia Adjwoa Baiswa Hayfron
Porsha Olayiwola
Prakriti Dance
Prometheus Dance
Quartet Kalos
Queen Mab, Inc.
Queer Soup Theater
Quisol

Rachel Sumner
Rafart
Ralph Peterson
Regie Gibson and Benjamin Evett
Rising Step
Roxbury Cultural District
Ruby Rose Fox
Ryan Edwards
Sandeep Das
Sandrine Schaefer
Schooltree
Seraah
Shaw Pong Liu
Shelter Music Boston
Simona Minns
Sissy Castrogiovanni
STL GLD
Sumati Ram-Mohan
Tamisha Francois
TC Squared Theatre Company

The Flavor Continues
The Front Porch Arts Collective
The Genki Spark
Tiandra Ray, Edmar Colón, Peter Godart,
Daniel Joseph | Space for Action Team
Tim Hall
Transient Canvas
Triveni Ensemble
UnBound Bodies Collective
Unitas Ensemble
Veronica Robles
Voci Angelica Trio
Wee the People
Yara Liceaga-Rojas
Yo Soy LOLA
Yvette Janine Jackson
Zahili Gonzalez Zamora, Gerson Lazo
Quiroga, Takafumi Nikaido | MIXCLA
Zakiyyah Sutton
Zayra Pola



“LAB connected me with a mentor who helped me see the contradictions within my own work and become clearer and more focused as an artist. Without that guidance, I would have continued on an unfruitful path.... It made me realize Boston has a supportive creative community I was unaware of.” — Tamisha Francois

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