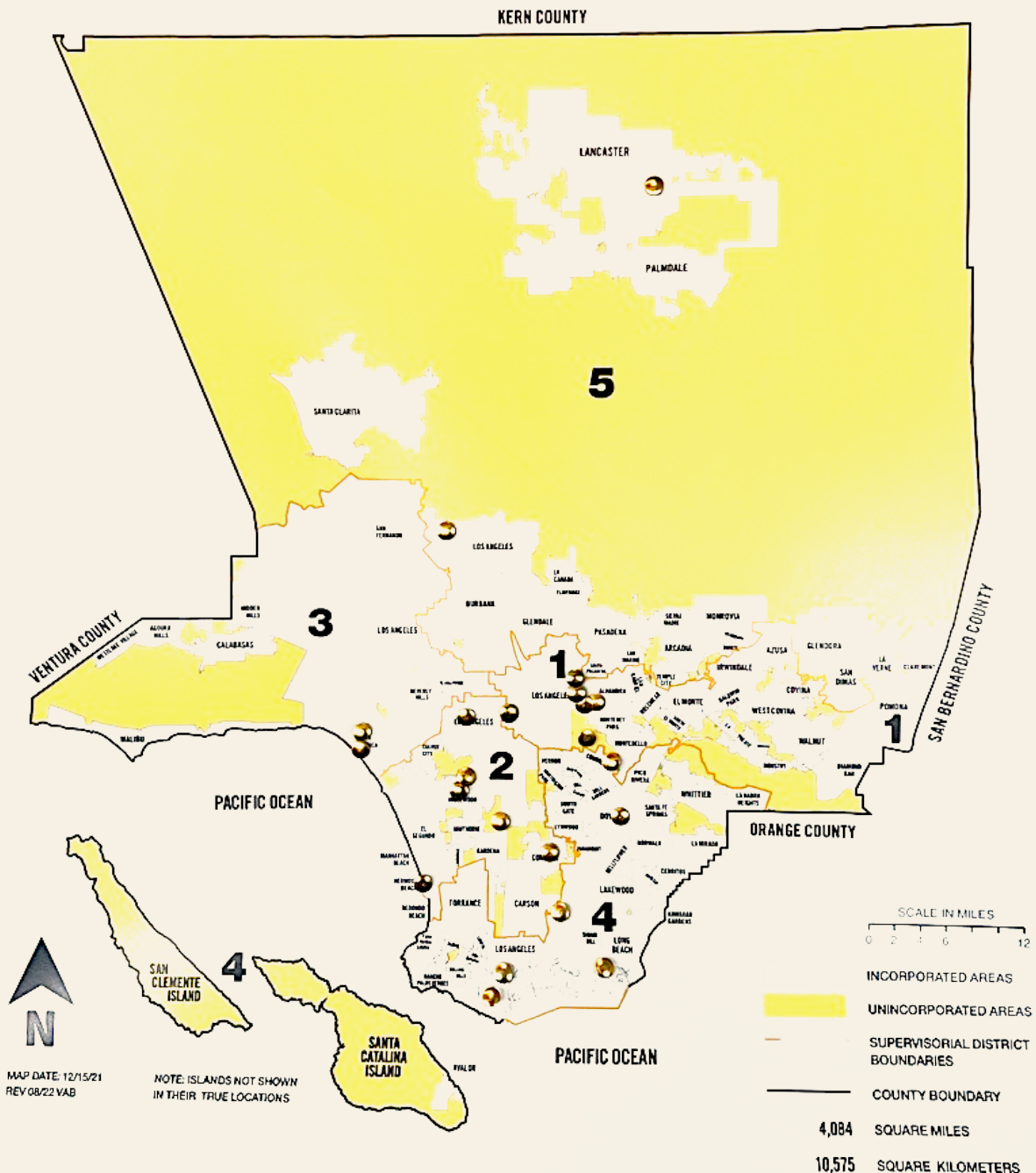


# ARTS-BASED HEALING-CENTERED ENGAGEMENT

Wisdom from Artists, Creatives, Educators, and Community Members in Los Angeles County



Summer 2024

This is a project of the LA County Arts Education Collective, developed and implemented by the Flourish Agenda in partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture.

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# Countywide Land Acknowledgment

The County of Los Angeles recognizes that we occupy land originally and still inhabited and cared for by the Tongva, Tataviam, Serrano, Kizh, and Chumash Peoples. We honor and pay respect to their elders and descendants – past, present, and emerging – as they continue their stewardship of these lands and waters. We acknowledge that settler colonization resulted in land seizure, disease, subjugation, slavery, relocation, broken promises, genocide, and multigenerational trauma. This acknowledgment demonstrates our responsibility and commitment to truth, healing, and reconciliation and to elevating the stories, culture, and community of the original inhabitants of Los Angeles County. We are grateful to have the opportunity to live and work on these ancestral lands. We are dedicated to growing and sustaining relationships with Native peoples and local tribal governments, including (in no particular order) the

Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians  
Gabrielino Tongva Indians of California Tribal Council  
Gabrieleno/Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians  
Gabrieleño Band of Mission Indians – Kizh Nation  
San Manuel Band of Mission Indians  
San Fernando Band of Mission Indians

To learn more about the First Peoples of Los Angeles County, please visit the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission website at [lanaic.lacounty.gov](http://lanaic.lacounty.gov).

# Background and Context

Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture (Arts and Culture) has engaged with and supported arts-based, healing-centered approaches in different iterations since joining a cross-agency workgroup tasked with supporting justice-involved youth in 2014.

These approaches were fostered alongside and with the leadership of a cohort of community-based arts organizations, including the Arts for Healing and Justice Network (AHJN) and Spirit Awakening Foundation. With the growing recognition of the importance of healing-centered practices over the years, Arts and Culture has worked to understand the theoretical foundations and practical applications of arts-based, healing-centered work in Los Angeles County (LA County). Beginning in 2020, Arts and Culture and AHJN aligned their programmatic model with the Healing-Centered Engagement (HCE) framework, developed by Dr. Shawn Ginwright and Nedra Ginwright, co-founders of Flourish Agenda, Inc. (Flourish Agenda). In the pivot toward HCE, Arts and Culture recognized the framework's potential to broaden equity and access to arts education for all young people, in all schools, and in all communities through coordinated and holistic approaches that support the wellbeing of community, members, and stakeholders.

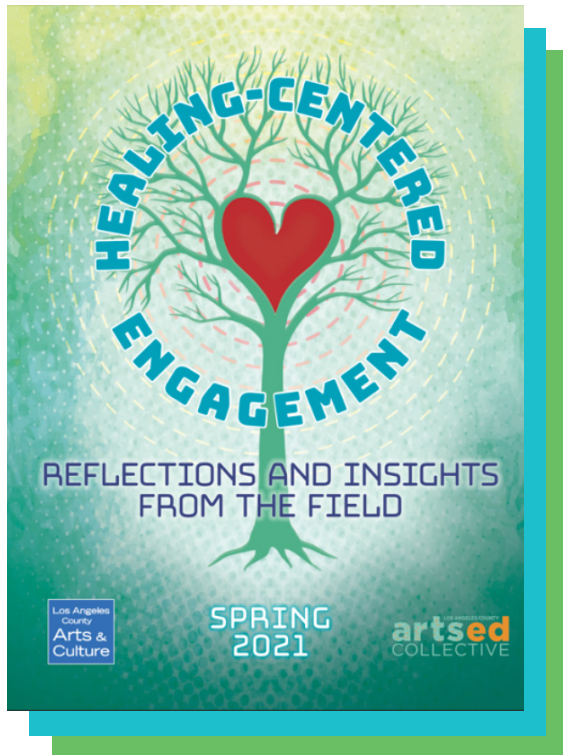
Arts and Culture's interest in Arts-Based Healing-Centered Engagement (aka Healing-Centered Arts Engagement) led to a multi-year consulting agreement with Flourish Agenda that began in 2021 with the intention to:

1. Provide a more comprehensive understanding of the HCE framework, developed using the wisdom and insights from 30+ years of working with Black youth, communities, and families in San Diego and the San Francisco Bay Area; and
2. Cultivate a learning journey and experience with teaching artists, arts practitioners, and creatives from across LA County to create shared understanding and ownership of an arts-based, healing-centered framework ("Arts-Based HCE") that will build a foundation for scaling a holistic, care-first approach for supporting systems-impacted LA County youth.

This document captures the journey, process, and wisdom that has emerged through the course of this project.

# Guiding Questions

from “Healing-Centered Engagement - Reflections and Insights from the Field” by Victoria Perera Rojas and Raquel Trinidad



Prior to working with Flourish Agenda, Arts and Culture published a zine, titled Healing-Centered Engagement-Reflections and Insights from the Field, written by Victoria Perera Rojas and Raquel Trinidad. The zine documents a six month process that included an academic literature review and interviews with research-practitioners and youth (ages 15-22), and serves as a guide to understanding key concepts and ideas that could advance arts-based healing practices in LA County.

In considering what is needed for HCE, such as adults needing to do their own healing work, cultivating self-awareness, and building capacity to support culturally grounded identity formation, Rojas and Trinidad pointed out the need to be intentional about setting the proper conditions for bringing the framework to scale.

# Guiding Questions

The following guiding questions from the zine have been central to the process of building and expanding the Arts-Based HCE framework for LA County. These questions sparked meaningful dialogue throughout the process though not every question posed resulted in a clear-cut answer.

- What is healing? We need to define it.
  - What are the variables we need to consider when it comes to healing?
- How is HCE for the LA County region defined?
- How will the approach account for geography/demographics/diverse audiences?
  - How is this operationalized?
- How do we conceptualize scale in the HCE framework?
  - What is the “right” scale?
  - What is the relationship between scale and geography/demographics/diversity of LA County?
- What are complementary approaches that can support this approach?
- What role do the arts play in HCE?

# Grounding

This document is structured through a lens of storytelling, which we believe is one of the most promising portals to healing and collective wellbeing for ourselves, our young people, and our communities at large. Contributors of this Wisdom Guide include community members that represent crucial pockets of the arts, community wellness, youth development, and juvenile justice spaces in LA County.

This Wisdom Guide is the authors' best attempt at surfacing key learnings, core values, and promising practices of Arts-Based HCE for readers to reflect on and make meaningful and/or actionable for themselves in their lives and work. The guide is not intended to be exhaustive or conclusive. Rather, it is offered as inspiration and conversation starters.

We invite you to take note of what resonates, and connect with others about what a possible future for individuals, communities, and systems in LA County might look like with Arts-Based HCE in action.

# What is Arts-Based Healing-Centered Engagement?

The following working definition of Arts-Based Healing-Centered Engagement (Arts-Based HCE) emerged from a multi-year process of context building and shared meaning making with artists, creatives, teaching artists, and community members from LA County.

Community members engaged in this work loosely defined Arts-Based HCE along two primary domains: doing and being.

## Arts-Based HCE is...

- the intentional practice of self-expression that centers healing by validating the innate creativity of every individual.
- an accessible engagement process of art/artistic mediums that centers healing through the empowerment of each individual's innate creativity to authentically express themselves.
- an invitation for artists to facilitate healing through their art by uplifting agency, community, decolonization, intentionality, and relationships.



Based on this definition, authors of this Wisdom Guide define Arts-Based HCE as a non-clinical, strengths-based process of making or becoming whole again through the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination found in all artistic mediums and modalities.



# Our Journey

The consulting agreement between Flourish Agenda and Arts and Culture began in 2021 to build a more robust understanding of the profound impact the arts can have on healing and wellbeing within communities and systems, including the youth justice system in LA County.

This project was marked by two distinct phases: Phase 1 focused on co-creating a shared Arts-Based HCE framework and Phase 2 focused on contextualizing Arts-Based HCE in LA County.

## PHASE 1: DEFINING ARTS-BASED HCE

January 2022 – January 2023

The roadmap below illustrates the process used to co-create a shared Arts-Based HCE framework and definition.

### HCE Foundations Workshop Series



### Arts-Based HCE Working Group

## HCE Foundations Workshop Series

Phase 1 began with a free, public workshop series that enabled 355 LA County and community stakeholders to root themselves in the core principles and practices of Flourish Agenda's HCE framework, which emphasizes a holistic, strengths-based approach to supporting individual and collective healing and provides a crucial foundation for uncovering how the arts can be leveraged as a powerful tool in this process. This Healing-Centered Engagement Foundations Series kicked off with a keynote and youth panel conversation facilitated by Dr. Shawn Ginwright and was followed by a series of five interactive workshops that introduced a core tenet of HCE through an arts lens: the CARMA principles (culture, agency, relationships, meaning, and aspirations).

**Flourish Agenda**

Los Angeles County Arts & Culture **artsed COLLECTIVE**

# HEALING CENTERED ENGAGEMENT FOUNDATIONS SERIES

- February 15, 2022:**  
**ARTS EDUCATION FORUM KICKOFF**  
A keynote delivered by Dr. Shawn Ginwright, co-founder of nationally renowned, Oakland-based Flourish Agenda, the creators of Healing Centered Engagement.
- March 4, 2022:**  
**CULTURE: A LOVE LETTER TO L.A. COUNTY**  
Integrating the versatility of the arts to dive into the healing model of CARMA to explore self and love for one's own cultural and geographical identity.
- April 1, 2022:**  
**AGENCY: MISSION COMMUNITY UPLIFT**  
Spotlighting how a healing centered mindset captures the voices of young people to cultivate the healthy environment towards healing themselves and their communities.
- May 6, 2022:**  
**RELATIONSHIPS: MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS**  
Unpacking the power of human connections with the arts by pivoting from transactional relationships to transformational change.
- June 2, 2022:**  
**MEANING: WHO AM I?**  
Leaning into art expression through drawing, writing, painting, and verbalizing, to reflect on how we think the world sees us, how we actually see ourselves, and how the answers to those questions set us on our healing journey.
- July 8, 2022:**  
**ASPIRATIONS: DREAMS NOT DEFERRED**  
Exploring how to aspire towards a world where our collective goals and dreams create the conditions that allow young people and their families to flourish.

For workshop resources visit: [lacountyartsedcollective.org/HCE](https://lacountyartsedcollective.org/HCE)

This is a project of the LA County Arts Education Collective, developed and implemented by Flourish Agenda in partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture.

Throughout the series, participants were prompted to remember what they love about LA County so they could dive deeper into advocacy and transformative relationship building. The series left participants with a new view of their “why” and what gives their “why” meaning, so they can better collaborate to build possibilities for healing and wellness for young people in LA County. This engagement laid a foundation for the possibilities of arts-based healing for youth, particularly systems-impacted youth.

The HCE Foundations Series went beyond mere instruction – it created a dynamic, collaborative environment where a diverse cohort of artists, activists, and art educators could come together to begin shaping the Arts-Based HCE framework. The creativity, expertise, and lived experiences of this cohort laid the groundwork for developing innovative, holistic approaches to leveraging the arts as a catalyst for individual and community healing.

**Flourish Agenda, with the guidance of Arts and Culture, formed a working group called the Arts-Based HCE Working Group (Working Group), which met over an eight month period to unpack and articulate the relationship between the arts and healing.**

The Working Group met monthly for story-sharing, mirror work around individual and collective values and beliefs, and reflection and dialogue to get at the heart of what arts-based healing truly means. By the end of the eight months, Working Group members surfaced that core values of agency, community, decolonization, intentionality, and relationships can serve as the underpinnings of the Arts-Based HCE framework.



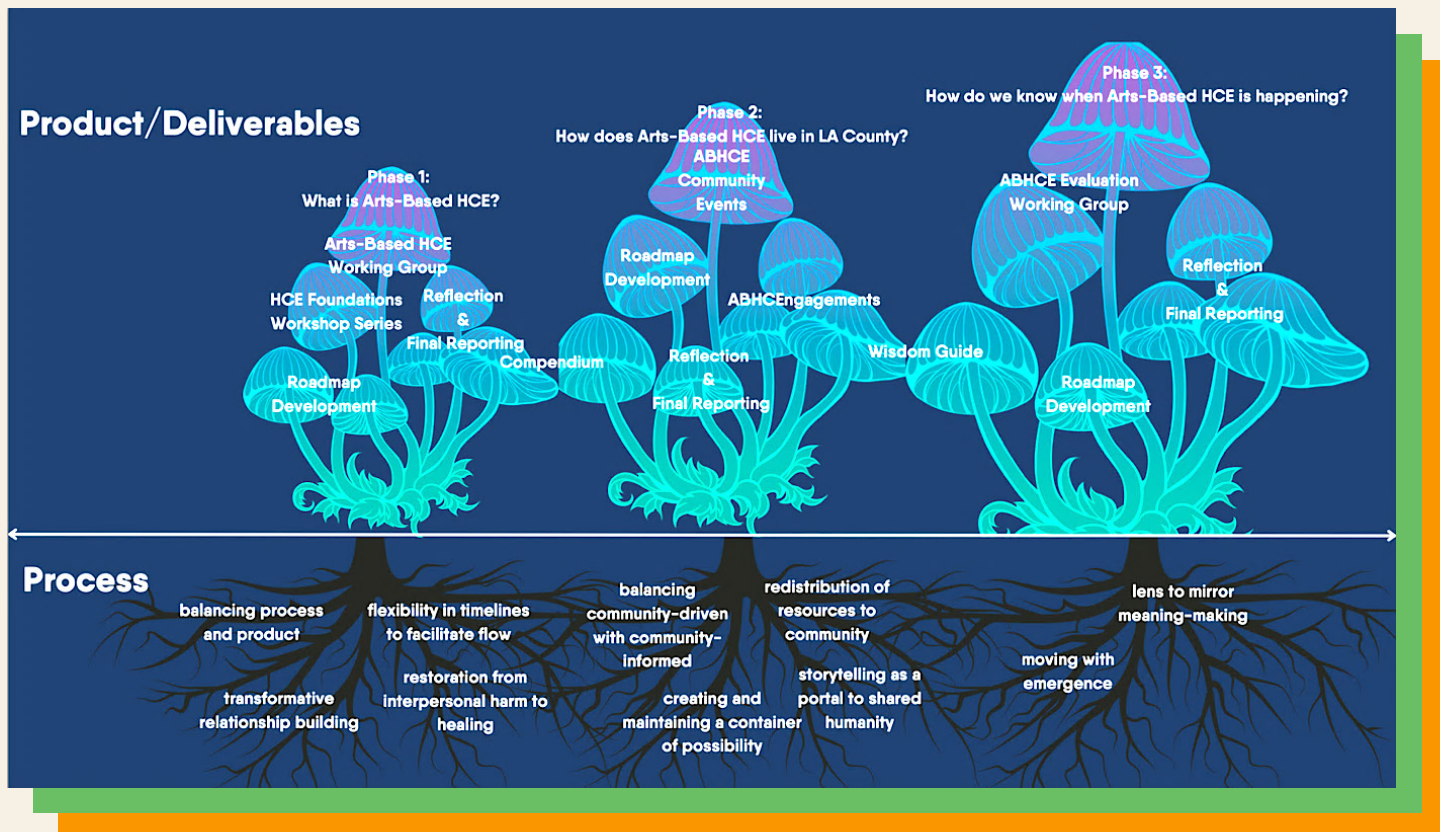


## PHASE 2: CONTEXTUALIZING ARTS-BASED HCE IN LA COUNTY

February 2023 – June 2024

On the surface of the soil, mushrooms sprout out of the ground as close yet distinct clusters of bulbs. Beneath the soil, these seemingly disparate bundles of mushrooms are connected through interwoven and indistinguishable roots that form an ever-expanding network called mycelium. Phase 1 of this journey revealed that, like mushrooms, observable activities and deliverables only tell one half of the bigger picture of Arts-Based HCE in LA County; the remaining half of this work lives beneath the surface.

The roadmap below depicts the nature of the work in Phase 2 to contextualize and expand the Arts-Based HCE framework.

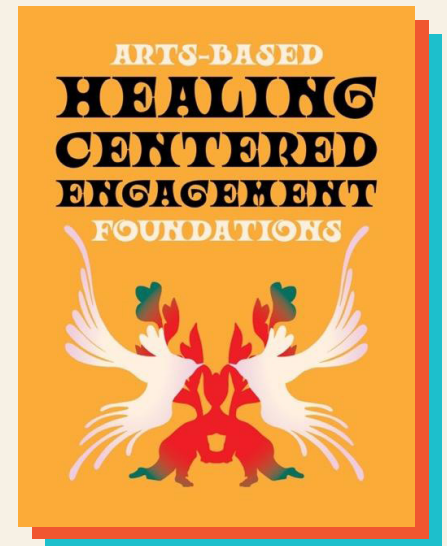


## Storyteller Group & Compendium Building

Four members from the Working Group set out to highlight the story of arts and healing from the perspective of LA County artists. These Working Group members, who are artists themselves, interviewed 15 fellow local creatives over the course of four months. Through these interviews, the Working Group members gathered firsthand accounts of how Indigenous practices, culture, community voice, healing, joy, and creativity came to drive their arts and healing practice and experience. These stories were compiled into a document titled “Arts-Based Healing-Centered Engagement Foundations” (see Appendix).

The interview framework was rooted in a focus-group approach with three primary processes: 1) identifying artists who didn’t have a big platform; 2) creating space for artists to share their viewpoint with fidelity; and 3) holding space for the future and what the possibilities of art and healing could become. The members thought it would be important to meet interview subjects in their field of practice, to model an Arts-Based HCE values approach of intentionality in centering culture. Interviews were 30-60 minutes and included an opportunity for the artists to display their work and share their own connections to art and healing.

At the culmination of this project, the four artists shared their process of building the “Arts-Based Healing-Centered Engagement Foundations” document at Legacy LA, a youth development nonprofit located in East Los Angeles. The event brought the stories of arts and healing to life and provided a celebration of Phase 1 and marked the transition to Phase 2.



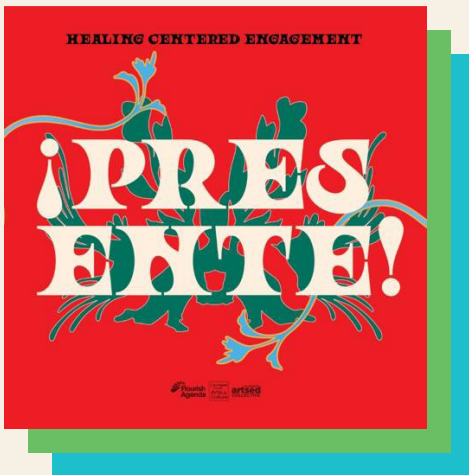
*Compendium Cover Page  
designed by Tzasná Espinosa Perez*



*Storyteller Group, left to right: Tzasná Espinosa Perez, Gustavo Alberto Garcia Vaca, Barbara Fant, Jane Lee, Joel Garcia, Daniel Bisuano*



## Host Group & ¡Presente! Community Event Series



*¡Presente! Event Series collateral  
designed by Tzsná Espinosa Perez*

A group of four artists from the Working Group formed a collective called the Host Group to publicly demonstrate the principles of arts-based healing through a series of community events. The Host Group focused on showcasing local artists who embody the shared values of healing, art, and community—fundamental tenets of Arts-Based HCE. They organized an event series with the goal of engaging and reflecting the diverse population of LA County. To pay tribute to the rich artistic and cultural heritage of the Spanish-speaking and Indigenous communities in the area, they aptly named the event series ¡Presente!, which translates to “present” in Spanish. The Host Group spent approximately four months organizing in-person events, with input from community members.

## ¡Presente! Coalition Building through Storytelling and Shared Healing Practices

The inaugural ¡Presente! event also took place at Legacy L.A. The space welcomed more than 40 skilled creatives and highly engaged participants. The atmosphere was charged with energy and a sense of community as local artists united to inspire and elevate one another through their artistic talents.

¡Presente! offered diverse avenues for engagement through connection and art, and included an opening panel and breakout workshops.



The second ¡Presente! event took place in Long Beach, with another display of artistic talent and community restoration for a group of 25 people. The Host Group intentionally engaged artists from across LA County to address a need expressed by community members for a decentralized approach to amplify artistic voices. To accommodate artists from all walks of life and financial capabilities, the Host Group prioritized a location with ample parking and easy access to public transportation.

The second ¡Presente! event emphasized experiential art-based healing practices, including musical movement therapy, advocacy in higher education, and traditional art.



The concluding event of the ¡Presente! series highlighted the vibrant performance art landscape of the region. The event featured six artists with a vibrant array of artistic expressions, ranging from hip hop rhythms to the fusion of artificial intelligence and visual arts. This gathering fostered a profound sense of healing and renewal from participant feedback, as the different art forms came together to provide the community with essential catharsis and inspiration. It culminated in an engaging panel discussion, where the six featured artists offered insights into their creative journeys and the influences shaping their work and shared how art has played a pivotal role in their personal and communal healing. Host Group, emphasizing arts-based healing initiatives while honoring the communities that have shaped Los Angeles' rich creative environment.



¡Presente! marked the end of a two-year collaboration among 40 artists dedicated to enhancing the connection between art and healing and demonstrated that an intentional effort to bring local creatives together in this way is possible when a process is community driven, planning is adaptable, and the needs of stakeholders (accessibility, financial, etc.) are considered.

The blend of art and healing catalyzed transformation in individuals and communities. The artists involved developed a deeper understanding of each other, collaborated to elevate their artistry beyond the ¡Presente! series (below), and integrated deeper healing into their creative practices.

## ABHCEngagement Initiative

In addition to story-sharing and spirited dialogue, Arts-Based HCE is also contextualized in praxis, which Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* defines as “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed.” This notion of praxis inspired the launch of the ABHCEngagement Initiative which strived to decentralize the approach to scaling Arts-Based HCE by tapping into the agency of local artists and creatives from the Working Group to host spaces that affirm the culture and respond to the needs for healing in their own communities.

With the support of stipends to cover the cost of hosting, the ABHCEngagements Initiative had a sizeable reach in both geography and diversity of audience: engagements spanned from Santa Monica and Malibu to Long Beach and East LA, and involved participants of varying ages, roles, and walks of life.

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## Beat the Odds Youth Empowerment Project

*Hosted by Ping Ho and the Arts & Healing Initiative (Spring 2023 – Spring 2024)*

The Beat the Odds Youth Empowerment Project was a long-term ABHCEngagement hosted by Ping Ho and her team, the Arts & Healing Initiative. For this ABHCEngagement, 7th graders were trained to facilitate drum circles for 5th graders to build youth’s agency, leadership, self-esteem, connection, validation, and social-emotional skills in an inclusive and culturally responsive context free of mental health stigmas. This ABHCEngagement took place across two school districts over one year and engaged more than 250 students and educators:



- Phase 1 – Spring 2023: Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD Family Resource Center & Dooley Elementary School)
- Phase 2 – Fall 2023: Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (John Adams Middle School & Will Rogers Learning Community)
- Phase 3 – Spring 2024: Long Beach Unified School District (district admin)

The Beat the Odds Youth Empowerment Project demonstrated how culturally responsive forms of art, such as drum circles, have the potential to yield transformation and healing in the lives of young people. Below are a handful of testimonials from participating youth:

*At first, Jasmine is invisible. She hardly speaks and, when she does, it’s barely a whisper. She does not volunteer, although she is willing to participate when invited. In the second month of the weekly Beat the Odds Youth Empowerment Project, her hand is the first one up whenever we ask for volunteers, and she proactively asserts which speaking roles she wants. After her most recent experience delivering activities to fifth graders, she says: “This is the most confident I have ever felt. I said to myself, ‘I’m really owning this!’”*

*When you’re drumming and you’re sitting in a circle ... you’re literally seeing each other. And when you mirror each other, and you do the same thing, or somebody plays something and you play it back, it’s like a metaphor for empathy. It’s saying, “I see you, I hear you, I validate you.”*

*We have discovered that YEP [Youth Empowerment Project] indeed attracts diverse students, one in three of whom are interested in participation. We believe the Youth Empowerment Project, and its focus on process over product, has the potential to transform the lives of many youth, creatively.*



## LACMA Afro-Atlantic Histories Exhibit: “Exploring Identity and Healing through Art”

*Hosted by Ping Ho and the Arts & Healing Initiative (August 2023)*

On August 29, 2023, Ping Ho and her team at the Arts & Healing Initiative hosted another ABHCEngagement focused on Exploring Identity and Healing through Art at the Afro-Atlantic Histories exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). This powerful workshop brought 50 participants on a journey that delicately balanced joyful African culture and the inhumanity of enslavement depicted in the exhibit.



*Video review created by Jason Jenn at LA Art Documents*

One participant noted that *“the integration of art forms proved to be a powerful way to engage participants meaningfully in the Afro-Atlantic Histories exhibition. The way the event unfolded was magical and effective. It moved us beyond the typical two-dimensional tour and workshop. And it built in room for group reflection and emotional recovery.”* This ABHCEngagement demonstrated how blending different art forms with spaces that affirm culture and identity can strengthen relationships and foster healing in communities.

## Mindfulness through Watercolors Workshop

*Hosted by the Carlos Eduardo Gacharná (February 2024)*

In February 2024, artist activist Carlos Eduardo Gacharná hosted a Mindfulness through Watercolors ABHCEngagement workshop that aimed to hold space for Arts-Based HCE practitioners and community leaders in the Long Beach/Compton/Southeast LA area to collectively engage in watercolor artmaking and identify opportunities to collaborate on fostering healing for young people in LA County through the arts.

The workshop produced an unexpected insight: Carlos found that many of the same intentional strategies he uses to promote youth agency in programs he runs also supported the agency of adult practitioners:



*One person stated that they were hoping for more instruction towards the end. I explained that I intentionally leave the back part of the workshop open because elementary school youth and incarcerated youth almost never get to make any decisions. They’re simply told what to do. Giving an open prompt allows for unique final projects and allows students to model agency, a-la HCE.*

*When we transitioned to the conversation portion, I noticed that folks got a little shy. I wasn't expecting that considering almost everybody participating is in art administration. I shared how I use sticky notes with my continuation high school students to lower the stakes for participating. In hindsight, I should have brought sticky notes so the adults could benefit from lower-stakes participation. Just another note reinforcing my beliefs that the tools and strategies used to make education accessible to 9-year-olds, to continuation high school students, really work for everybody.*

## **Best Practices in Social Emotional Arts Workshop Series**

*Hosted by Ping Ho and the Arts & Healing Initiative (January – March 2024)*

The workshop produced an unexpected insight: Carlos found that many of the same intentional strategies he uses to promote youth agency in programs he runs also supported the agency of adult practitioners.

This virtual workshop series was open to the public at no cost, and engaged 162 LA County participants across three sessions:

- Session 1: Invisible Travel Bag: A Journey of Resilience
- Session 2: Revolutionizing Motherhood through Self-Regulation and Self-Care
- Session 3: Building an Unshakeable Foundation with Self

Participants' feedback noted that holding space to pause, reflect, create community, and share stories can have significant impacts for individual and collective healing:



*[...] the community creation and sharing is so impactful. I really appreciate the creation of this space. Thank you.*

*I really liked the traveling metaphor, reminding us that we carry our memories with us and that we can beautifully lay them out as a means to heal.*

## RelajaTÉ: A day of self-care & community for women/Latinx organizational leaders

*Hosted by Elida Ledesma, Evonne Gallardo, and Felicia Montes (June 2024)*

In June 2024, Elida Ledesma, Executive Director of the Arts for Healing and Justice Network (AHJN), collaborated with fellow Latina Executive Directors Evonne Gallardo and Felicia Montes to host a community and wellness space for eight Latinx, female-identifying organizational leaders. With the understanding that intersecting identities face unique challenges that oftentimes result in burnout, this mini retreat created a space for Latinx, female-identifying organizational leaders to slow down, relax (relajate) and build community as a salve against grind culture.

Reflecting values of agency, intentionality, and community, this mini retreat ABHCEngagement demonstrated how spaces that affirm culture and identity can have rippling impacts on individual and collective healing: when adults invest in their own healing, they are better able to support the healing of young people they support.

The praxis involved in the delivery of the ABHCEngagement Initiative surfaced new insights and ways of understanding Arts-Based Healing-Centered Engagement. The ABHCEngagements in this initiative underscored how community reflection, culturally responsive art forms, identity-affirming spaces, and intentional strategies for promoting agency are integral to fostering healing for young people, the adults that support them, and their communities at large.



## Community Dialogue Sessions

Dialogue has been a vital portal through which many aspects of this multi-year consulting agreement and process have emerged. To further unpack shared definitions of art and healing and underscore the relationship they play to advance the transformation of youth justice in LA County, Flourish Agenda hosted a sequence of Community Dialogue Sessions.

### “What is Art?”

Defining art when there is artificial intelligence (AI) and technology-based enhancements is not a simple answer. Participants learned that the question “What is Art?” prompts a challenging yet necessary conversation that explores the spectrum of art and role. Throughout this community dialogue session, seven community artists learned that art is self, learning, being, and emotion in motion. AI can be used as a tool, though its usage is a double-edged sword. This engagement allowed for levity as participants explored the reality of art as it grows and expands.



### “The Relationship & Future of Arts and Healing in LA County”

Unpacking the relationship and future of art and healing, Dr. Lee Porscha Moore led 20 Lunch and Learn participants on a provocative discussion to re-define Arts-Based HCE while highlighting success in art and healing with incarcerated populations and the need for a future of art that listens to young people. Participants learned that the future of Arts-Based HCE is filled with possibilities and requires the centering of art and healing as the core of educational and prison reform. This engagement allowed for rich discussion and celebration of current successes of art and healing, and laid a foundation for participants to engage in critical inquiry and imagine Arts-Based HCE in 5, 15, and 30 years.





## The CARMA Chronicles Podcast: Arts-Based HCE Miniseries

Flourish Agenda hosted a mini-series of guests from the Working Group on their CARMA Chronicles podcast. The podcast guests shared their own journey of healing, highlighted their most valuable projects, and shared what the future of art and healing holds for LA County moving forward.

From poets who use writing as therapy to visual artists who channel difficult emotions into their work, the guests illuminated how engaging with the arts can be profoundly cathartic and empowering. They recounted deeply personal tales of overcoming adversity through artistic expression.

The guests also spotlighted impactful community arts initiatives across LA County that are facilitating healing, from youth music programs helping at-risk teens to mosaic workshops for survivors of abuse. As the series culminated, their message was clear: art is medicine, and we must continue nurturing this vital source of comfort, growth, and resilience.

Podcast  
**The CARMA Chronicles**  
Flourish Agenda

Follow

Barbara Fant

Gustavo Alberto Garcia Vaca

Stacie Aamon Yeldell

**ARTS-BASED HCE  
MINISERIES**

[www.flourishagenda.com/podcast/](http://www.flourishagenda.com/podcast/)

# Community Wisdom & Key Learnings

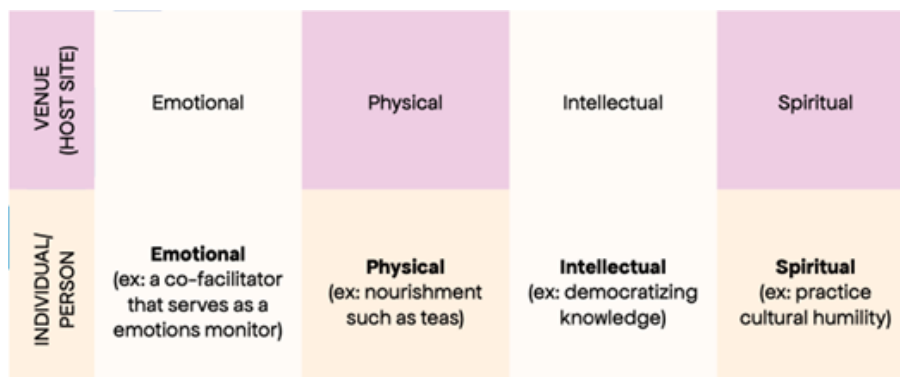
Capturing the voices of artists focused on healing work is an impactful and meaningful endeavor, as their perspectives and experiences can provide invaluable insights into the transformative power of art. What better way to do this than to have artists themselves engage in dialogue and share their stories? This question served as the root of the methodology behind the creation of the Arts-Based HCE Foundations document (see Appendix). The Foundations document represents a thoughtfully curated collection of information and reflections centered around the intersection of art and healing.

## VALUES

### Defining Arts-Based HCE

*Excerpt from “Arts-Based Healing-Centered Engagement Foundations” by Joel Garcia, Barbara Fant, Gustavo Alberto Garcia Vaca, and Daniel Bisuano:*

This simple chart is a useful guide to reflect on if and how your work supports a healthy and supportive ecosystem for any program or project. Consider how your work resources each of these components for the individual participant and the host site/venue.



Much like the journey of healing itself, the artistic process is rarely clean or linear – it ebbs and flows, surges and retreats, with moments of struggle and breakthrough intertwined. And, just as the realities of trauma manifest in complex and nonlinear ways, impacting us on individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels, so too can the restorative powers of art and creativity emerge organically through diverse mediums and modalities.

Phase 1 focused on defining an Arts-Based HCE framework by articulating its core values. Rather than viewing the arts as a supplement to traditional healing modalities, this work hoped to elevate the arts as a central, integral component. As the process of story sharing and iterative dialogue continued to unfold throughout Phase 1, we witnessed first hand the nonlinear dynamics between trauma, healing, and the artistic process.

While a majority of the participants could dream up a future world with agency, community, decolonization, intentionality, relationships, and other core values, they grappled with the limitations of their material reality-- such as a scarcity of resources and disconnection from others doing similar work--that inhibited their capacity to bring those dreams to life.

The activities and conversations in Phase 1 emphasized that an Arts-Based HCE framework move beyond a short list of best practices and implementation strategies. The framework calls all those invested in advancing healing and community transformation through the arts to embody the values of Arts-Based HCE, engage in community-led processes, and provide the necessary resources. As we learned from the Working Group, relationship and community building requires substantial time. While adequate for surfacing the values inherent in Arts-Based HCE, additional in-community time would have enhanced collective framework building.

## ALCHEMIZING FACTORS

*Excerpt from “Arts-Based Healing-Centered Engagement Foundations” by Joel Garcia, Barbara Fant, Gustavo Alberto Garcia Vaca and Daniel Bisuano:*

“Alchemizing Factors” [...] model how to operationalize values and values systems through implementation.

To ensure that we accurately measure the impacts of our intentions and mitigate harms, it is equally important to ground these practices in sustainable ways, and we see the following “alchemizing factors” as playing the biggest role in building trust, authentic relationships, balancing power, flattening hierarchies, and reducing barriers that allow for healing opportunities to take place within programs and projects that center HCE:

- Care Taking
- Consistency
- Relationships

As we delved deeper into contextualizing Arts-Based HCE in Phase 2, we uncovered that providing paid pathways for engaging in and advancing this work served as a form of care taking that acknowledges that people are able to more meaningfully engage when their basic needs are met. While this form of care taking is essential to operationalizing Arts-Based HCE, it is only one of many alchemizing factors needed to advance healing through the centering of arts.

Investment in transformative relationship building and consistency in holding culture- and identity-affirming spaces for reciprocal dialogue are also necessary core factors. The parallel experiences of the Working Group and the ¡Presente! event series illustrated that investment in relationship building can result in processes of community creation that create new channels of possibility and bring ideas to life. Similarly, the Community Dialogue sessions reinforced that consistently holding space for ongoing conversations and remaining responsive to needs as they emerge enable a framework like Arts-Based HCE to scale sustainably.

Lastly, as the ABHCEngagement Initiative demonstrated, taking a trust-based, decentralized approach enables Arts-Based HCE to expand its reach. When community members with lived and proximal experiences within the systems we seek to transform can drive the reimagination of those systems, healing through the centering of arts turns from a vision to reality.



## Flourish Agenda



Flourish Agenda is an innovative social justice nonprofit organization that works with schools, youth serving organizations, foundations, and local governments to build and implement strategies that allow young people of color to flourish. We are the providers of the Healing-Centered Engagement approach, tools, and research. We build the strategies that are necessary to reimagine how systems shift the way they support young people of color and the adults who serve them.

At Flourish Agenda we believe that our community’s collective passion, dedication, and shared vision of healing is what transcends our work into a lifestyle. We have a saying amongst our team, “Together We Flourish,” a joyous affirmation that our collective healing cultivates the transformation that people, and institutions are longing for.

### Core Team Members

- Chris Nguon
- Jane Lee\*
- Dr. Shawn Ginwright
- Diana Quintana
- Dr. Lee Porscha Moore

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## Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture



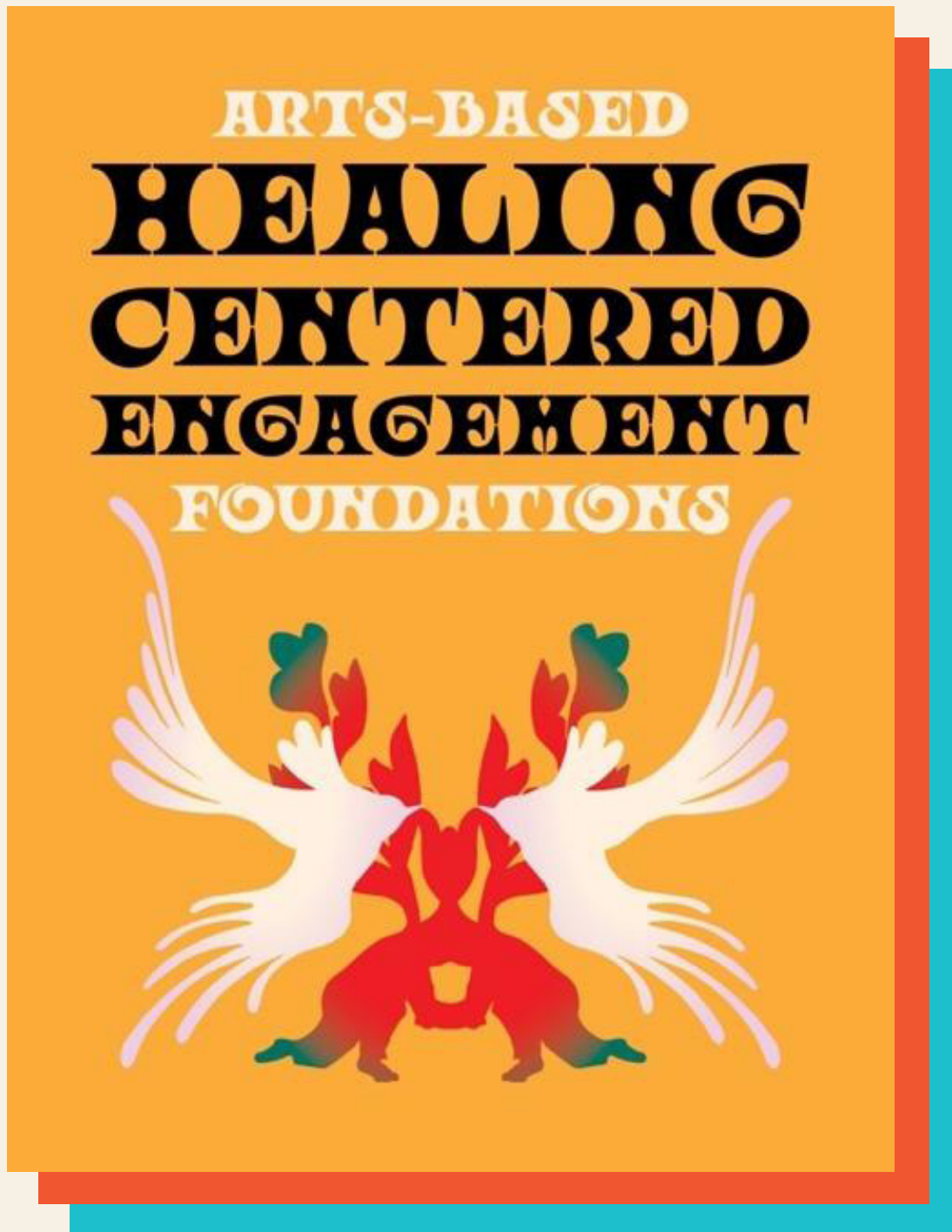
Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture’s mission is to advance arts, culture, and creativity throughout LA County. We provide leadership, services, and support in areas including grants and technical assistance for nonprofit organizations, countywide arts education initiatives, commissioning and care for civic art collections, research and evaluation, access to creative pathways, professional development, free community programs, and cross sector creative strategies that address civic issues. All of this work is framed by our longstanding commitment to fostering access to the arts, and the County’s Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative.

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## LA County Arts Ed Collective



The LA County Arts Education Collective (Arts Ed Collective) is the regional initiative dedicated to making the arts a core part of every child’s growth and development. Established by the Board of Supervisors in 2002, the Arts Ed Collective is coordinated by the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture.



## INTENTION

We have been here. Artists. Storytellers. Healers. Wordsmiths. Culture Carriers. History Bearers. We have always been here.

This is a living archive. A collection of stories. Voices that have paved the way, that have been carrying the power of how we heal. This document centers the work of arts-based healing centered engagement (ABHCE) and those doing the work.

This compendium serves as a diverse collection of narratives, voices, reflections, experiences, and personal stories of those who have been immersed in this work in LA County over time.

We carry the work of so many healers in LA County who have been doing this work before our land carried this name. We were here. We overcome by the power of telling our stories.

Our lives and experiences, including the work we are doing, are not without trauma. It is through this work that we are striving to undo the harm that we have experienced, including generational trauma.

We hope this document serves as a guide for LA County as they are planning to embark on this work of expanding HCE, and also a way to acknowledge, honor, and uplift the voices of the healers, practitioners, culture bearers, culture carriers, artists, activists, teachers, ancestors, elders, and peers who are immersed in this work and who have been holding this work for years.

We hope this also serves as a reflection. More of a space to find your own voice, your own face within the crevices of these narratives. May you find hope, joy, and healing in the resilience of these practices and journeys.

No one owns the harness of healing. We are the healing. No one owns the art. We are the art.

Here is where we honor the healing.

We celebrate the living and honor all the ancestors.

It is through our work, where we keep the voices of the ancestors alive.

This is where and how we celebrate life.

This is how we heal, center, and engage in and through the art.

Here we are. Being who we have always been and who we will continue to be.

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In the Spring of 2023, Flourish Agenda brought together several different artists in LA County to interview individuals in Los Angeles who have been sharing in the work of arts-based healing centered engagement (ABHCE), to develop this compendium. A series of written and video interviews were conducted that display the range of experiences of the practitioners in our communities.

## **Within...**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

**OFFERING**

**VALUES**

**TESTIMONIALS ON VALUES**

**TO CONSIDER**

**IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS, STRATEGIES & FRAMEWORKS**

**ALCHEMIZING FACTORS**

**TESTIMONIALS ON ALCHEMIZING FACTORS**

**FUTURITY / HOPE**

**TESTIMONIALS ON FUTURITY**

**THE STORYTELLERS OF THIS COMPENDIUM**

**BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

**COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This compendium is rooted in Tovaangar<sup>1</sup>, the Los Angeles Basin, homelands to the Tongva<sup>2</sup>, Tataviam<sup>3</sup>, Chumash<sup>4</sup> and Acjachemen<sup>5</sup> Tribal Nations and other California Indians. This magical place that currently hosts one of the largest creative economies on the planet has been stewarded by the First Peoples and their descendants. It is no surprise that the Tongva community's membership is filled with artists, creatives, and educators who have helped shape this creative sector and intersects with the Indigenous cultural practices that can afford us healing opportunities.

The contributions by Tongva Elder, Ms Julia Bogany (July 16, 1948 – March 28, 2021) to the creative sector are too long to list and her endless work to raise the visibility of her community are like a beautiful oak tree, her teachings branch off into a cultural lineage of artists that transcends Indigenous communities.

In Los Angeles County, one cannot talk about work with plant relatives without mentioning Tongva Elder, Barbara Drake (February 2, 1940 – November 18, 2020) and the immense amount of knowledge she shared with young folks, museums, and institutions alike. Her work, like the mycorrhizal networks of oak tree and fungi root systems, connects across this county and continues to provide care for us today.

The Carceral System as we know it has a root here in Los Angeles with the first mass incarceration being of First Peoples. Similarly, the first houseless encampment/community on this land was of displaced First Peoples from what is now known as Catalina Island (Pimu) who also faced criminalization and incarceration. Tongva/Acjachemen Elder Uncle Jimi Castillo (October, 14, 1943 – April, 21, 2023) dedicated much of his life to working with individuals that this society discarded and supported their reintegration into communities.

These three new ancestors did much of this work unpaid, for non-tribal members and many times without recognition when their time and energy could have been spent exclusively with the tribal community and family. They've helped shape this ecosystem of healing in LA County.

“With respect and gratitude for the Tongva people who still consider themselves the caretakers of this land of which we occupy. It is through their examples that we are reminded of our greater responsibility to take care of Mother Earth and to take care of each other.” (written by Jimi Castillo)

We end this acknowledgment by asking practitioners and leaders to reflect on how they do their work and shift their approaches to act as guests, not unwilling/willing settlers or occupiers. Being a guest in

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<sup>1</sup> Pronounced To-VAA-ngar

<sup>2</sup> Pronounced TONG-və, TONG-v (vie) ə (comma)

<sup>3</sup> Pronounced t (tie) ɑ: (palm) t (tie) ɑ: (palm) v (vie) əm (rhythm)

<sup>4</sup> Pronounced 'chü-, mash

<sup>5</sup> Pronounced ɑ: 'xɑ:tʃəməm, ɑ: (palm) x (Chanukah) ɑ: t (tie) ʃ (shy) ə (comma) m (my) əm (rhythm)

someone else's homelands requires us to be in kinship with both human and non-human relatives of this place.

## OFFERING

This compendium is segmented in three forms: values, tools, and alchemizing factors. We propose a set of values to hold practitioners and organizations together in an interdependent network as well as some key implementation tools and strategies. Both components on their own can do a lot to provide programming that intends to offer spaces with healing opportunities. Included are practitioner and participant interview summaries that highlight "alchemizing factors" that model how to operationalize values and values systems through implementation.

The following is a series of collective reflections and experiences by community members who are currently working or aspiring artists, practitioners, or cultural workers in Los Angeles County. At least one practitioner declined to participate because they did not trust Los Angeles County entities due to their personal experience that has negatively impacted them through various LA County Arts-led initiatives. A few others loaned their experience to this compendium anonymously because of fear of retaliation and/or loss of work. This underscores the imbalanced power dynamics that disempowers creative people.

We have witnessed...

youth being shut down by organization leaders when youth have asked to talk about systemic issues on a day someone was shot by police.

a white woman enter a high school in East Los Angeles carrying a makeshift "talking stick" trying to "run council" or rather a talking circle for POC students.

our Indigenous cultural practices being appropriated, diluted, and then used against Elders, excluding them from opportunities because they lack "certification."

a legacy community event canceled by a county department because county staff failed to fully articulate the requirements to use a county facility.

an art instructor, threatened with being "written up" for attempting to implement healing-centered strategies that differed from the trauma-informed approaches that organizations implement because they've been certified, and the artist is not.

trauma-informed approaches teeter towards toxic positivity, crippling the ability for youth to fully engage and have their whole selves be supported.

the high turnover in artist retention due to poor pay and a lack of culturally aware and competent administrative staff, which triggers community members' experiences with inconsistencies at home and within family.

artists and facilitators carry the burden of supporting community members through difficult moments and tensions but witness no systems in place (a lack of wellness resources for artistic staff) to support these individuals with the heaviness of the work.

a lack of consideration of space, the built environment where folks are expected to gather and be vulnerable

## VALUES

This compendium acknowledges that there has been harm and damage incurred to communities and community members as well as practitioners by projects and initiatives connected to the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, but there have also been a variety of beautifully led healing centered work that exists on its own and we would consider the following to be values for healing centered engagement here in LA County:

1. Centers First Peoples (Gabrielino, Gabrieleno/Tongva, Chumash, Tataviam and Acjachemen) and other California Indians, an important aspect of acknowledging land, water, culture, ceremony, and many other forms of labor produced by these communities that informs the variety of healing modalities artists might and have employed.
2. That an understanding or definition of "healing" be intrinsically connected to the land and that our healing, as guests or unwilling settlers here is not at the expense of First Peoples, meaning that:
  - a. We respect their requests to not appropriate traditions or misuse plant relatives such as white sage. <https://www.cnps.org/conservation/white-sage>
  - b. We do not create tools, for example this compendium, that disempowers their efforts to uplift their knowledge systems and expertise such as plant knowledge connected to California Native plants.
  - c. We avoid unintentional gatekeeping that might result from initiatives such as these and do our best to include First Peoples in these efforts.
3. Protocols connected to practices and items that carry sacred and important significance such as feathers, drums, altars, and smudging are honored and informed by elders and tribal leaders. That these protocols are always available to participants.
4. That Indigenous cultural bearers are regarded as equally as knowledgeable as anyone with a Ph.D. or other institutional marker of accreditation. Equally important to not position one Indigenous cultural bearer in opposition of another and that we always center First Peoples'

cultural bearers and elders prioritizing their concerns, advice, and ideas.

5. Projects with Indigenous themes and frameworks are led by Indigenous artists and cultural bearers connected to local communities from start to finish, not after the fact, nor after someone raised a concern, or to check off a box and most importantly that they benefit from the creative and social capital of such projects.
6. Avoid the following (short list):
  - a. Inviting another Indigenous person after the first person you engaged required or suggested ideas you or your organization overlooked or felt difficult to implement.
  - b. Centering an Indigenous person from another community over a member of a First Peoples community, such as inviting an Indigenous artists from outside the area, city, state to avoid doing the labor required to work with local Indigenous artists and cultural bearers.
7. Be survivor centered, do not make a spectacle of people's traumas such as asking people to recount the harms they've experienced as a way to add context to programs or projects.
8. Use the preferred language that marginalized and targeted peoples have developed to articulate their experiences.
9. Build in care systems that empower and support youth in engaging, developing, and implementing HCE focused programs and projects.
10. Learn to develop programming that offers fluidity, assisting the many ways in which people learn and experience building knowledge and art together.
11. Learn to center process-based approaches that create space for participants to co-design outcomes.
12. Practice transparency both from organizations to practitioners and practitioners towards participants about program/project details that include budgets, timing & scheduling, outcomes, and any other factors that might have been predetermined prior to any individual being asked to consent to participate.

These values should be used alongside other frameworks that center pro-Black approaches, anti-racist efforts, and strategies that work to undo white cis-heteronormative capitalist settler-colonialist worldviews.



## TESTIMONIALS ON VALUES



**Dani** (they/them), age 23, is a queer neurodivergent multimedia artist who resides in Houtnga (El Monte, CA), homeland of the Tongva community. Dani was raised by matriarch women from Tampico, Tamaulipas, Mexico, and their paternal side is from Jalpatagua, Guatemala. Dani supports youth with higher needs fulltime and aims to uplift the work and wellbeing of underrepresented communities through anticolonial approaches. Dani is currently working on a podcast for survivors of violence and those impacted by the carceral system. Dani envisions HCE practitioners and organizations who are implementing this work to learn how to incorporate strategies to support individuals like them who live with additional needs. Programming structures with a lot of rigidity or white centered forms of instruction can be inaccessible as folks learn at different paces, but programs with strong structures and fluidity can be widely accessible to everyone.

**Isidro “ISHI” Sesmas II** (They/Them) is an interdisciplinary artist, cultural worker, educator, model, organizer, musician, and creative in several art forms. Through their work, Ishi intertwines entrepreneurship with community, art, and culture. They are currently building an Indigenous Model of Commerce (IMC) project to examine how Indigenous youth and art programs can provide the tools and knowledge to venture into early entrepreneurship and career building such as “nontraditional” forms of education. Ishi values transparency and as a participant has had to struggle navigating power dynamics at institutions, community spaces and other gathering spaces that promote inclusivity but actually reinforce heteronormative perspectives through language and hierarchies. Ishi believes that transparency with intention, funding, outcomes, goals and other components that build social and creative capital can support and create deeper engagement with participants and mitigates a program or project being extractive.



**Raúl Flores** is Director of Community Partnerships at artworxLA, an arts education organization that combats the high school dropout rate in LA County with a healing centered arts practice. He forges partnerships and fosters dialogue with museums, creative businesses, cultural and civic institutions to identify the intersections between youth voice and relevant content. Raúl states directly that we are so much more than any traumas we may have experienced. And the arts bring us together in ways we weren't before, or ways we might have lost. The arts build reconnections to our elders and ancestors. This arts-based HCE work is



intergenerational – we join in this together. The arts can be restorative and can act as a catalyst for enacting compassion in all relationships.

**Kimiko Warner-Turner** is an arts educator with over thirty years of experience in designing and teaching theatre arts education. She currently works with secondary schools, colleges, and community



organizations, fusing Liberation Arts and Social Justice theatre-based techniques, with movement, visual art, writing and speaking skills. For Kimiko, healing happens when there’s ruptures. Healing-centered work allows us to move forward and survive the ruptures, not to stay in the ruptures – we can find ways to improve and resist staying in the same place. Healing also creates allies – through shared beliefs or by supporting each other in the journey. In community work, healing unearths unsolved situations – once seen by the community, the community can intervene and come up with solutions on their own. Participation in healing creates empathy.

## TO CONSIDER

This simple chart is a useful guide to reflect on if and how your work supports a healthy and supportive ecosystem for any program or project. Consider how your work resources each of these components for the individual participant and the host site/venue.

Individual/Person	Venue (Host Site)
Emotional (e.g., a co-facilitator that serves as an emotions monitor)	Emotional
Physical (e.g., nourishment such as teas)	Physical
Intellectual (e.g., democratizing knowledge)	Intellectual
Spiritual (e.g., practice cultural humility)	Spiritual

Resources offer healing. It is important to underscore that the funding of programs and projects by Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color that have historically been underfunded. Although there has been an increase in the number of funded organizations serving severely marginalized and targeted populations there has not been an increase in the total amount each organization receives. Within the context of Los Angeles County, this level of inequity has increased over the years despite efforts to close the funding gap.

This compendium offers a perspective that views the resourcing of programs and projects to offer healing opportunities for participants from dealing with scarcity, producing creatively with restrictions due to limited access to resources such as art supplies and materials, people power, etc. We encourage facilitators and organizations to plan and practice for abundance.

## **IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS, STRATEGIES & FRAMEWORKS**

The following information provides useful frameworks, strategies and tools for practitioners and organizations to incorporate into their planning and development of programs. This list of resources is intended to center the most marginalized and targeted of our community members, asking us to consider how our positionalities (and or intersectional identities) shift when addressing issues of class, nationhood, citizenship, access to institutional knowledge and accreditation, gender-based perspectives, generational wealth, etc.

### **Current Social Frameworks:**

#### **1. Settler Colonialism:**

Settler colonialism is a form of colonialism that seeks to replace the original population of a colonized territory with a new society of settlers. There are three key elements to understanding the settler colonial process.

- a. What: land
- b. How: white supremacy, chattel slavery, and genocide
- c. When: an ongoing and ceaseless process

[A Report on Harms](#)

#### **2. Settler Privilege:**

People who do not have ancestral connections to Native communities are all either settlers or immigrants. All of today's settlers and immigrants are in one way or another beneficiaries of genocide and land theft, even if they are simultaneously themselves victims of other forms of oppression. This is why centering a critique of settler colonialism, as well as land acknowledgment and decolonial practices are so very crucial to our social justice movements.

#### **3. Land-based Knowledges:**

Land-based knowledge building centers the caretaking and relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the natural world to teach and create in alignment with values that protect and nurture life and Indigenous Futurity.

#### 4. **Indigeneity:**

“Indigenous peoples, also known in some regions as First peoples, First Nations, Aboriginal peoples, Native peoples or autochthonous peoples, are communities who are the original or earliest known inhabitants of an area, in contrast to groups that have settled, occupied or colonized the area more recently.” -- *Wikipedia*

### **Strategies:**

#### 1. **Land Acknowledgment:**

A Land Acknowledgment is a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of a specific area and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories.

#### 2. **Indigenous LA:**

Always center and prioritize First Peoples as we live on their land.

- a. The Indigenous Peoples of the LA Basin area, First Peoples (Tongva, Tataviam, Chumash, Acjachemen)
- b. Relocated and Displaced US Indian Peoples/Alaskan Natives/Hawaiians (Mvskoke, Navajo, Lakota, etc.)
- c. Diasporic Indigenous Peoples of the Continent (Huichol, Chicanos, Tainos, Zapotec, etc.)
- d. Diasporic Indigenous Peoples of the World (Hmong, Maori, etc)

#### 3. **Land Back:**

The movement to return land to First Peoples has been a decentralized effort across North America to reestablish Indigenous sovereignty, with political and economic control of their ancestral lands. These same efforts have also been replicated in New Zealand and Fiji.

There has been one completed Land Back effort in Los Angeles County. In October 2022, a parcel of land was returned to the newly established The Tongva Taraxat Paxaavxa (pronounced Tar-a-haht pah-hava) Conservancy. [www.tongva.land](http://www.tongva.land)

#### 4. [@protectwhitesage](#):

A campaign to prevent overharvesting and misappropriation of white sage. Metric tons of white sage (*Salvia apiana*) are poached to supply an international demand. This plant is deeply rooted in the cultures and lifeways of the Indigenous communities of Southern California and northern Baja, the only region where white sage naturally occurs in the world. The devastating theft and the appropriated trend that it fuels stand in sharp contrast with the values and traditional practices of regional native communities.

## Tools:

### 1. **Facilitation:**

“A process of guiding a group to identify and move towards shared goals. Arts-based facilitation uses creative expression as part of the process. When we facilitate, our leadership can amplify our strengths and our struggles because we are immersed in a world full of biases, it is impossible to not absorb them ourselves. Understanding how our identities and experiences shape us can help us expand our ability to lead or guide others. Our fears and defenses tend to surface more when we are stressed. It’s both healing and useful to build our own practices of self-reflection. I have relied on practices of shared listening and story circles for years to build my own capacity to listen across difference.” Excerpt from [Healing Through Story – A Toolkit on Grassroots Approaches](#) by Anu Yadav

### 2. **Decolonizing Non-Violent Communication:**

[Decolonizing Non-Violent Communication](#) (DNVC) is a workbook stocked with activities, exercises, and ideas to explore our relationship to communication, our bodies, and each other. Using a trauma-informed approach, this workbook encourages readers to deepen our emotional vocabularies so that we can work towards a more enlivened, healthy interdependence. “Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is an approach to communication based on principles of nonviolence. It is not a technique to end disagreements, but rather a method designed to increase empathy and improve the quality of life of those who utilize the method and the people around them.”

### 3. **Harm Reduction:**

[Harm reduction](#) is an evidence-based public health approach that aims to reduce the negative consequences associated with substance use. Harm reduction focuses on:

- a. “Meeting people where they are.”
- b. Recognizes that many people are not willing or able to stop using substances.
- c. Focuses on decreasing the negative consequences associated with drug use.

### 4. **Transformative & Restorative Justice:**

Transformative & Restorative Justice explores an alternative to crime and punishment.

“Restorative Justice may seem like a new idea—it is such a radical departure from the current system. But in reality, it is ancient. The concept has origins with Indigenous Peoples around the world, including Native American and Canadian First Nations civilizations. In New Zealand, where all juvenile crimes except murder go through a restorative process and adult crimes are automatically referred for similar consideration, the genesis lies in Maori traditions. In Africa, the philosophy that undergirds restorative justice is ubuntu, a complex term that translates roughly as ‘A human being is a human being because of other human beings.’ When South Africa embarked on its reconciliation process after apartheid, ubuntu provided the ethical framework.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2021/07/features-restorative-justice>

**Restorative<sup>7</sup>:**

The incident is a violation of people and relationships. It creates obligations to make things right. Resolution involves looking at the harm caused by the incident: harm to the person(s) who were victimized, harm to the instigator/aggressor(s), and harm to the larger community and asks, “How can this harm be repaired?”

- a. Who has been hurt and what are their needs?
- b. Whose obligation is it to address these needs?
- c. Who has a “stake” in this situation and what is the process to involve them in making things right and preventing future occurrences?

**Transformative:**

The incident may have occurred as a result, in part, of unhealthy relationships and social systems. It creates obligations to build new or better relationships. This must happen not only at an individual level but at the level of social structures and institutional policies. Resolution involves changing wider social systems in ways that help to prevent the occurrence and re-occurrence of harmful incidents.

- d. What social circumstances promoted the harmful behavior?
- e. What structural similarities exist between this incident and others like it?
- f. What measures could prevent future occurrences?

[What is Transformative Justice?](#)

[Honoring the Global Indigenous Roots of Restorative Justice](#)

**5. Trauma-Informed Care**

[Trauma-informed care](#) is an approach that asks, “*What happened to you?*” rather than “*What is wrong with you?*” This shifts the tone from victim-blaming to recognizing the person as a survivor. Trauma-informed practices are not a specific or technique-heavy modality, rather it includes a set of guiding principles that recognizes that trauma has significant effects on people and is often under-recognized, under-reported and addressed.

**6. Survivor Centered Approaches**

A [survivor-centered](#) approach means establishing a relationship with the survivor that promotes their emotional and physical safety, builds trust and helps them to restore some control over their life.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://emu.edu/now/restorative-justice/2011/03/10/restorative-or-transformative-justice/>



## ALCHEMIZING FACTORS

We understand that intentions can be big factors in initiating cultural shifts such as moving into HCE, and that having the right tools can play a large role in successfully implementing programs and projects. To ensure that we accurately measure the impacts of our intentions and mitigate harms, it is equally important to ground these practices in sustainable ways, and we see the following “alchemizing factors” as playing the biggest role in building trust, authentic relationships, balancing power, flattening hierarchies, and reducing barriers that allow for healing opportunities to take place within programs and projects that center HCE.

## TESTIMONIALS ON ALCHEMIZING FACTORS

### CARE TAKING

The term care-systems became popular through the pandemic, but phone trees, crisis response text groups, neighborhood fundraisers, etc., have been tools that gang interventionists have used to mend the wounds of violence in our communities. Murals serve as painted altars to loved ones lost to the streets, backyard punk shows serve as training grounds for community organizers, and community-led gatherings as spaces where accountability and transparency is possible.

**Amanda Perez** (Yaqui/Xicana) is a great-grandmother, long time cultural worker, formerly incarcerated survivor of violence and the many impacts one faces in communities like East LA and carries four generations of family members with her work. She has dedicated her life to ceremony and supporting



community members including incarcerated folks and women who have survived domestic violence. Amanda believes that supporting neighborhood grown projects first, before attempting to develop new ones, can be huge in nurturing the existing pool of practitioners in our communities. Amanda has been a lead organizer for the Old Timers of Southern California, a collective of folks who have been incarcerated, impacted by drugs and street violence. These gatherings have served as convenings where grudges have been squashed, falling outs have been mended and reparative work takes place. Amanda has been a bridge between spiritual circles and the streets.

### CONSISTENCY

For those who don't live in the communities they work in, “presence” and “showing up” to community driven events or gatherings are critical forms of praxis in providing community members with something that is lacking in the lives of many. Being present without strings attached, transactional expectations and other extractive mechanisms offers community members peace of mind that space is there for them when they need it.



**Amir Whitaker** is the founder and director of Project Knucklehead and is a Senior Policy Attorney with the ACLU of Southern California. Amir is a poet, musician, designer, and visual artist. He also is a community healer. He relates art to justice and has coined the term “arts justice.” Arts justice means two things: 1.) using the arts for social justice for a voice so that people can tell their own stories and not just have their lives be told to them from people, and 2.) arts access and education as a civil right. He also believes that art has always been a critical part of our healing ancestrally, and that we must do what we need to heal. He understands his work in the world as an intergenerational

healer and believes that it is the way back to our healing. Every third Wednesday of the month, Amir is there present, with the drums, the heartbeat of mother earth, holding space for Black folks to come and sync hearts in rhythm.

**Man One** is a world renowned artist, born and raised in Los Angeles as Alejandro Poli Jr. Socially conscious and community focused, he has painted large-scale murals and led graffiti art and mural-



making workshops internationally: his life work is about putting the power of art in the hands, hearts and minds of people all over the world. For Man One, healing comes in different ways and times: personal [when making the art], in community [when the community responds to his murals of individual community members] and in what he does not see [when his murals live on in the community]. The healing process is one of trust-building. Authenticity, openness, and being real are all crucial. Man One creates to have a relation to and impact in the community. There are specific issues he addresses in his work – homelessness, gentrification; and just people of specific communities being seen. He strives for his murals to work on a spiritual level – for the murals to be forms of healing in themselves.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Knowing your block is one of the most important things any practitioner will need. Not doing so will mostly always unintentionally create difficulty and harm for community members and at times you will not even know it because community members will not trust you enough to raise the issue with you. Community Organizing 101 is rooted in;

- Knowing and understanding a vulnerable community, its root problem(s), and how the existing social system has created the problem(s)
- Understanding the shared solutions (and narratives) for how the address the community's problem(s)



- Co-creating an action plan to achieve the desired solution by winning collective power - often through the political system
- Building relationships, bringing people together, and knowledge building on how collectively a plan can be carried out
- Guiding the plan forward toward its intended goal through trainings, actions, media relations, regenerative support, building solidarity and coalitions, and other movement strategies

This fragile balance between empowering community members or creating unhealthy dependencies & hierarchies are where informed and humble practitioners can create generative work.

**Anonymous Practitioner 1** (Boyle Heights & East LA) is single-mother, musician and organizer whose work is rooted in counter-culture circles that uplift feminism, self-sufficiency, decolonial practices and Native perspectives among other anti-colonial frameworks. AP1 has played a significant role in the development of collective efforts in Boyle Heights as well as network building across states. As an artist who is not institutionally recognized she has faced many challenges in being seen as an expert in the methodologies that make community-focused work like social practice, trauma-informed approaches and healing centered engagement successful, and she has excelled at these. AP1 is a living asset map of the community and community resources and has offered this lived experience to support a number of critical initiatives to address issues of violence, displacement and class-based issues through creative efforts. AP1 has developed solid relationships that when she reaches out for support, people show up, and this is only possible because she has gone door to door to know and understand folks.

**Anonymous Elder 1** (East Los Angeles & San Fernando Valley) is an artist, theater performer and spirit relative to many. Them along with Amanda Perez are part of many folks who had supported incarcerated folks with arts-based programming and in other ways who were pushed out by the professionalizing of these roles by both the County and State. They did this for decades without pay and are part of the network of folks who continue to be excluded from paid opportunities. They continue to support the most marginalized and annually contribute to holding space for the many unclaimed cremated bodies that are interned in a mass grave.

## **ECOSYSTEM-BASED**

An ecosystem-based or interdependent (never in isolation) network of resources is vital to the longevity of programs and projects and reduces the impact on the environment. Shared resources across programs and projects can alleviate budgetary stresses supporting the ability to better pay practitioners.

**Anonymous Practitioner 2** (Boyle Heights) is a single-parent, artist, and entrepreneur and currently works for one of LA County's leading Arts Education organizations. Having lived in Boyle Heights their entire life they have developed a large network of people and entities that have supported their creative efforts. Although they do not hold any degrees in art or arts management they have excelled and have led high profile art projects for a number of LA County arts organizations they have struggled to secure any management level position because of the lack of degree. Part of their success in producing projects has been their commitment to not being wasteful with resources and have repurposed supplies and

materials from other art projects and efforts. They believe that an HCE ecosystem of shared resources should be sourced by funders and organizations to ensure a nurturing environment and that this ecosystem includes mentors and advisors who are available to anyone implementing HCE based programs and projects.

**Danny Caballero** is a DJ and music producer of Detroit Techno group Underground Resistance and has thrived under the guise of DJ Dex aka Nomadico. He performs across the U.S., Latin America, Europe, and Asia throwing down eclectic sets of gritty, moody, funk fueled and hard-hitting electronic music. For



Danny, art is a journey of self-discovery which can help us grow as people. This process takes meditation and self-reflection. Art is a way to open up our consciousness and emotions – specifically, music can do this through tempo/time. The Underground Resistance philosophy is to equally share new sounds/ideas, especially with those who don't have the access. Techno music is for the alternative minded, the other, those who don't belong in this mainstream reality. This music is for those who feel their life is letting them down and they are reaching for something else. Our creativity outputs, our culture, our people, are the power. Techno music from Detroit has created a vibrant, cross-cultural and international ecosystem of DJs, producers, promoters, artists, dancers and fans that continues to thrive and build upon Techno's futurist concepts.

## **FUTURITY / HOPE**

Futurity is a component inherent to the healing process. There is hope that the work being done today will create a tomorrow that is more just and compassionate. By understanding the past and by manifesting material changes today, we can create new possibilities in the future.

The approaches that Meztli Projects practices are informed by ceremonial frameworks that center systems of care, connected to land-based protocols, in consultation with Tribal leaders and Elders, and work to be in alignment with the priorities of First Peoples, in short, a slower more fluid process that county systems currently in place do not nurture nor allow. Meztli Projects says, "we might not always get it right but we've committed to keep trying."

Meztli Projects is an Indigenous based arts & culture collaborative centering Indigeneity into the creative practice of Los Angeles by using arts-based strategies to support, advocate for, and organize to highlight Native and Indigenous Artists and systems-impacted youth.

Some of the practitioners interviewed for this compendium insist that any Healing Centered Engagement initiative by Los Angeles County and the Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture

maintain a level of accountability and transparency that currently doesn't exist, meaning that to begin with:

1. A council of some form guide this work
2. That there are measures in place to hold organizations accountable by community members as well as by funders
3. That contact info, budgets and all administrative information be open and accessible to participants and sub-contracted artists
4. That the council has the ability to rescind a grant if necessary
5. That county funding is granted through a hyper-local third party administrator to ensure that targeted communities and their efforts are the primary recipients of these funds and beneficiaries of programming
6. That existing hyper-local artists/practitioners are prioritized and those wanting to step into these roles are offered stipends to work and learn from individuals who have been recognized by their communities as Elders and Cultural Bearers
7. That practices of transferring knowledge from one generation to another are imbedded in all programs such as mentorships and apprenticeships
8. A percentage of awarded grants are reserved for the care of practitioners and support staff.

## TESTIMONIALS ON FUTURITY

**Julian Harris** is the youth leadership director with the Arts for Healing and Justice Network and a musician and videographer. He believes that you have to give people purpose and a reason to do better in life. He talked about the power of having a mentor in his life who was really important, who motivated him and who showed him who he could be. He now wants to be that for someone else. He talked about trust and about building true authentic relationship with young people. He also talked about authenticity and consistency and about always just consistently showing up for young people. He also believes that trust is the vehicle for change and that art is the tool that is used.



**Kruti Parekh** is a coach for healing and justice and a transformative justice practitioner. She currently works independently and also at the Chuco's Justice Center community. She deeply believes that people need people and that we have to show up for people. Music, art, along with the medicine wheel, are guides for her. She understands her role on Earth is as a guide for young people to help lead them back to where home is for them. For her, mentoring does not end, it continues on. She believes that we are accountable for our own healing, and that we can also help others learn to be responsible for their own healing.



**Shelby Williams-Gonzalez** is an artist, educator, and leader pushing for social change. As the CEO + President of Inner-City Arts, Shelby is dedicated to creatively educating LA's youth with sustained arts exposure and immersion. She believes that investing human and financial resources around our young people is necessary for LA's youth to grow as unique individuals and flourish as creative adults. Her most recent work with the dance company Viver Brasil explores the intersection of traditional Orixá (Afro-Brazilian Deities) dance and current racial and social inequities resulting in over-policed communities and mass killings of black bodies both in the United States and Brazil. For Shelby, arts based

HCE is a process that is about intentionality. Having the access to space and time to create [both physical and mental space and time] is where the healing comes in. To know that we all have power and influence [which is often discounted and not mainstream] is key. Black joy is a form of resistance to racism. As in joy - in healing, everybody is on their own journey.



**Eduardo Aparicio** is a young formerly incarcerated father trying to find his way. He expresses himself through his art and poetry and hopes to give his son a better life than he had. Eduardo continues to strive to be the best father he can by being an example in his community and in his work. Eduardo currently works at Homeboy Industries as a youth navigator and continues to empower his community through his work.

## THE STORYTELLERS OF THIS COMPENDIUM



**Barbara Fant** is a poet, author, facilitator, and healer. She has been writing and performing for over 15 years. She has competed in 9 National Poetry Slam competitions and is a World Poetry Slam finalist. She is the author of two poetry collections, *Paint, Inside Out* (2010) and *Mouths of Garden* (2022). Her work has been featured in the *Academy of American Poets*, *Electric Literature*, *McNeese Review*, *The Ohio State University Press*, *Button Poetry*, and *Def Poetry Jam*, amongst others. She has received residencies in Havana, Cuba and Senegal, West Africa. For over 12 years, she had led healing-informed poetry workshops for both youth and adults who are incarcerated, those in community, adults in recovery, and survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence. She is certified as a Healing Centered Engagement specialist and holds both an MFA in Poetry and a Master of Theology. She is the founder of the



*Black Women Rise Poetry Collective* and the *Bloom Life Foundation*, and co-founder of *The Senghor Project*, West African International Artist Residency. She currently manages programming for a film and prison abolition organization in New York City, JustMedia, and serves as an Arts Navigator for Los Angeles County through the Arts for Healing and Justice Network.

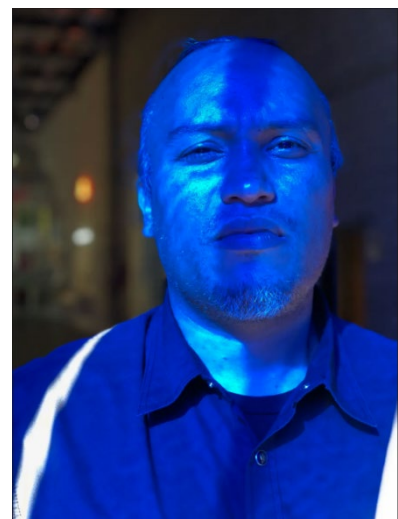


**Daniel Bisuano** is an actor, writer, poet, and advocate. He continues to pursue his dream and goals to pursue his creative goals well also empowering his community through his advocacy work. Daniel has been an advocate for ten plus years and has worked with and been a part of organizations like Homeboys Industries, Anti-Recidivism Coalition, California Justice leaders, Youth Commission and Inside out writers. Daniel continues to strive to not only better himself but also his community around him. Having spent seven years in the justice system as a youth he has a strong passion for the empowerment and advocacy of the formerly incarcerated community. Living as a former foster youth Daniel believes that many different communities intertwine and has a strong passion for creating awareness and change amongst each one. Currently Daniel is on the board and committees of different community advocacy organizations like

Reproductive Health and Equity Project for Foster youth, ACLU serving on the Arts Justice Council served as a Youth Commissioner for District 3. As well as his different engagements with advocacy Daniel is a part time student at Los Angeles Trade Technical Community College majoring in English. Daniel continues to explore different ways to help the community through his work as well as different ways to share the stories of people impacted by the various barriers associated with being involved within the system.

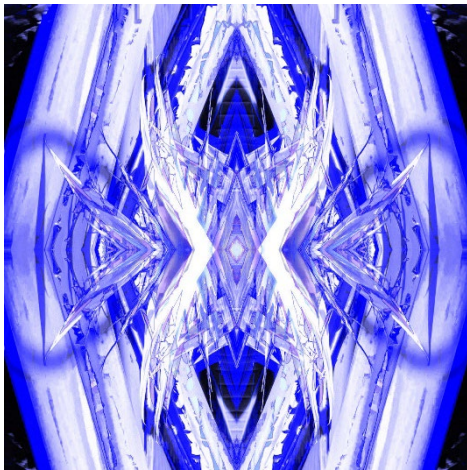
**Joel Garcia** (Huichol) is an Indigenous artist, cultural organizer, co-founder, and Director of Meztli Projects, an Indigenous-based arts & culture collaborative centering Indigeneity into the creative practice of Los Angeles. In various roles, he has worked with Indigenous communities locally and across borders in support of issues of land, access, and self-determination. His work explores healing and reconciliation, as well as memory and has been a critical component of LA's reckoning regarding monuments, memorials, public space, and a more authentic city narrative.

Joel previously served as Co-Director at Self Help Graphics & Art a nationally acclaimed arts organization and is the co-founder of Meztli Projects, an Indigenous-based arts & culture collaborative.



He's a current Stanton Fellow and former fellow of Monument Lab, and co-facilitator of the Intercultural Leadership Institute which proposes to hold space for cultural production outside of white supremacist frameworks.

*"Supporting the development of this compendium was conflicting. On one hand, you want to be able to provide your community with all the tools you know and have access to but on the other, I'm fearful of co-optation and appropriation and how quickly these tools can become weapons. Because they have, and County Arts have been complicit in this. I am a firm believer in open-sourcing all these technologies and we offer these tools here as a way to democratize this knowledge with a compass that leads back to you and your own reflection on this work."*



**Gustavo Alberto Garcia Vaca** is an interdisciplinary visual artist/writer and arts educator. His artwork is in the Collections of MoMA New York, LACMA and the Bibliotheque Nationale de France. As an Arts Educator, Gustavo creates art experiences in the public sphere for museums and arts organizations including LACMA, MOCA, the California African American Museum, Self Help Graphics and artworxLA. Gustavo's website is: <http://www.chamanvision.com>

*"This experience has been enlightening. The arts as a force to heal, unify and uplift was made clear to me by the interviewees. I am grateful to all involved for sharing this experience!"*

## **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture (Arts and Culture) has engaged with and adopted arts-based, healing-centered approaches in different iterations since the establishment of the Arts for Healing and Justice Network (AHJN) in 2014, which formed with the intention of examining the way arts might support positive outcomes for system-impacted youth and reimagining youth justice with a focus on alternatives to incarceration. Beginning in 2020, Arts and Culture and AHJN aligned their programmatic model with the emerging context of the Healing Centered Engagement (HCE) framework, developed by Dr. Shawn Ginwright and Nedra Ginwright, co-founders of Flourish Agenda, Inc. In the pivot toward Healing Centered Engagement, Arts & Culture recognized the framework's potential in broadening equity and access to arts education for all young people, in all schools, and in all communities of Los Angeles County through providing coordinated and holistic approaches that support the wellbeing of community members and stakeholders. This increased investment and interest in HCE led to the emergence of *Arts-Based* Healing Centered Engagement (aka Healing-Centered Arts Engagement).

Arts and Culture recognized a need for a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of HCE in order to broaden the reach and impact of Arts-Based Healing Centered Engagement across the county. At the end of 2021, Arts and Culture commenced a multi-year partnership with Flourish Agenda, Inc. with the intention to:

1. introduce our frame of Healing Centered Engagement (HCE), developed based on the wisdom and insights from 30+ years of working with Black youth, communities, and families in various youth development programs including Akili Camps and Freedom Schools in San Diego and the San Francisco Bay Area; and
2. cultivate a learning journey and experience that convenes teaching artists, arts practitioners, and creatives from across Los Angeles County to develop shared meaning and understanding of *Arts-Based* HCE.

## **COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS**

### **Flourish Agenda**

[Flourish Agenda](#) is an innovative social justice non-profit organization that works with schools, youth serving organizations, foundations, and local governments to build and implement strategies that allow young people of color to flourish. We are the providers of the Healing Centered Engagement approach, tools, and research. We build the strategies that are necessary to reimagine how systems shift the way they support young people of color and the adults who serve them.

At Flourish Agenda we believe that our community's collective passion, dedication, and shared vision of healing is what transcends our work into a lifestyle. We have a saying amongst our team, "Together We Flourish," a joyous affirmation that our collective healing cultivates the transformation that people, and institutions are longing for.

### **Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture**

The mission of the [Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture](#) is to advance arts, culture, and creativity throughout LA County. We provide leadership, services, and support in areas including grants and technical assistance for nonprofit organizations, countywide arts education initiatives, commissioning and care for civic art collections, research and evaluation, access to creative pathways, professional development, free community programs, and cross sector creative strategies that address civic issues. All of this work is framed by our longstanding commitment to fostering access to the arts, and the County's Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative.

### **Los Angeles County Arts Ed Collective**

The Department of Arts and Culture coordinates the [Los Angeles County Arts Education Collective](#), that envisions positive child and youth development that addresses large-scale societal inequities, fosters social-emotional development, promotes healing, builds cohesion and cultural identity, and uplifts communities through the arts.

