

FUNDER ARTS

The Covid-19 pandemic magnified the pervasive funding disparities within the arts and culture sector, as revealed in a 2017 study, ***Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy***. That study catalyzed an intentional shift in McKnight's approach to arts funding, broadening its portfolio of organizations and projects that work to eliminate deep and persistent cultural, economic, and racial barriers. The Arts program team has advanced equity through some of these steps:

\$12.6 MILLION NEW DOLLARS FOR BLACK, INDIGENOUS, LATINX, AND ASIAN AMERICAN ARTISTS AND CULTURAL LEADERS

McKnight is the lead regional partner in the ***America's Cultural Treasures initiative***, which invests \$12.6 million in significant regional cultural institutions led by Black, Indigenous, and people of color in Minnesota. McKnight matched a \$5 million contribution from the Ford Foundation, and raised \$2.6 million more in additional investments. Ten organizations will receive unrestricted grants of at least \$500,000 over five years.

In the first phase of funding, the Regional Cultural Treasures program honors organizations that have made a significant impact on our cultural landscape over decades, despite historic under-investment. In the second phase, the Seeding Cultural Treasures program will award grants to grow the future of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian American artists and cultural organizations in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and the 23 Native Nations that share the same geography.



MCKNIGHT AWARDED \$720,000 TO THE ALLIANCE OF ARTISTS COMMUNITIES (AAC),

an international association for artist residencies, to design and launch a new consortium program grounded in equity to support McKnight Artist Fellows residencies.



- **The proposed program** will help dismantle the historical and institutional systems that have prohibited certain artists from participating in residencies—systems that include, for example, arts training and academia, funding, and patronage.
- **Alliance of Artists Communities** will convene and train up to 24 host residencies to ensure equity across operations, governance, staff, policies, program design, facilities, and organizational culture.
- **In addition to creating new work** and developing skills, participating artists will diversify their networks and engage in new cultural contexts that may inform their work and help disrupt racist and oppressive mindsets and systems of inequity.

MORE THAN 50% OF THE 2020 MCKNIGHT ARTIST FELLOWS ARE BLACK, INDIGENOUS, OR ARTISTS OF COLOR.



MEET MCKNIGHT'S 2017–2020 DISTINGUISHED ARTIST AWARDEES

In the past four years, the McKnight Distinguished Artist Award winners have been more diverse in race, lived experiences, and artistic disciplines.

Writer Marcie Rendon, an enrolled member of the White Earth Nation whose poems, plays, children's books, and novels explore the resilience and brilliance of Native peoples.



20
19



Painter Jim Denomie, a member of the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Ojibwe whose paintings offer new perspectives on historical and contemporary events in Indigenous and American life.

Wing Young Huie, a street photographer who has documented Minnesota's changing cultural landscape for more than 30 years, focusing on people and places that are often overlooked.



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17



Seitu Ken Jones, a visual artist influenced by the Black Arts Movement who views art as a creative force for civic engagement.

FUNDER INTERNATIONAL

Mcknight's ***Collaborative Crop Research Program (CCRP)*** supports agroecological systems research in 12 countries in Africa and South America that face severe food insecurity. Agroecology is critical to food security and sovereignty, climate mitigation and adaptation, and equitable social structures and economies. Where some may see marginalized communities—women, youth, Indigenous populations and small-shareholder farmers, it envisions more powerful communities and autonomous income streams.

The research program advances farmer research networks—farmer groups that work in partnership with other researchers, other farmer organizations, development organizations, and broader networks. In an example of what is called “cognitive justice”—or equitable knowledge sharing—this highly collaborative approach to research relies on traditional centuries-old farming techniques, values diverse forms of knowledge and cultural needs, produces more responsive and relevant research, and builds more equitable partnerships. It has resulted in farmer research gaining scientific credibility on a global scale.

Other highlights of recent actions include:

Strengthened the role of farmers across CCRP by ensuring every voice is heard at each Community of Practice meeting and delivering leadership training to more than 7,000 farmers, including many in rural areas. Farmer research is gaining scientific credibility because of such capacity-building efforts.

Over the past 20 years, the program has deepened its investments in women. For example, it has significantly increased the number of female students, principal investigators, and project team members. In 2007, the program had 10 female students, and in 2020 it had more than 70 studying that year.

The Andes team made several short videos of work related to cognitive justice, fair economies, and control of resources. Examples include [this video](#) related to economic inclusion, and [this video](#), which highlights cognitive justice.

Advanced support of Global South leadership and students. In 2009, the program supported eight African and 11 Latin American students. Ten years later, in 2019, the program supported 74 African and 43 Latin American students.



AGROECOLOGY IS A SCIENCE, A PRACTICE, AND A SOCIAL MOVEMENT.

- **Science:** As a science, agroecology works with nature, applying ecological principles and processes to agricultural production systems.
- **Practice:** As a practice, agroecology uses sustainable farming methods to improve the performance of agricultural systems.
- **Social Movement:** As a social movement, agroecology emphasizes equity, justice, and inclusion. It strives to heal the environment, improve rural livelihoods, nurture culture and identity, and bolster health.



FUNDER MIDWEST CLIMATE & ENERGY

In 2019, McKnight's board of directors approved a new Midwest Climate & Energy program goal: *take bold action on the climate crisis by dramatically cutting carbon pollution in the Midwest by 2030.* Achieving this ambitious goal, at the necessary speed and scale, requires an inclusive and multiracial democracy, one in which all people have the voice and power to bring about change to the issues affecting their lives and livelihoods. Recognizing this, the Climate program updated its **strategies** to include "Strengthen Democratic Participation" as an essential part of its approach. It will pursue this strategy in close partnership with McKnight's Vibrant & Equitable Communities program, supporting communities in building powerful movements for change.

This means the Climate portfolio in 2021 and beyond will include grants to multi-issue organizations that build durable grassroots power.

Recent examples include the following:

Climate Generation:

A Will Steger Legacy

expands its work supporting youth climate action through Black, Indigenous, and people of color youth mentorship and local campaigns centered on environmental justice.

The 100% Campaign

seeks to enact comprehensive climate solutions at scale and transform Minnesota into a multiracial democracy. It focuses on addressing systemic barriers to a clean energy transition and catalyzing a much more diverse and powerful climate movement.

Fair Representation in Redistricting Initiative

aims to identify and support efforts that center communities and people in the redistricting process in midwestern states to ensure the will of the people, including the desire for bold climate action, is fairly represented.



The Climate program also includes embedding equity in climate solutions, such as HOURCAR's big idea to build an all-electric car-sharing network in underserved areas. In 2018, the McKnight Foundation provided a \$25,000 grant to HOURCAR to develop a business plan for the project, followed by a series of support for the buildout and launch. Investing in a comprehensive, community-driven planning process paid off. The cities came on board, as did the Metropolitan Council and the US Department of Energy, leading to \$12 million in private capital and public investment. Fast-forward to today, and that project has become the ***EV Spot Network***. A collaboration between HOURCAR, Xcel Energy, and the cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, the initiative is launching a fleet of 150 shared electric vehicles and installing 70 EV charging stations on city streets in spring 2021.

[Learn more](#)



MINNEAPOLIS CLIMATE ACTION AND RACIAL EQUITY FUND

The ***Minneapolis Climate Action and Racial Equity Fund*** is a partnership between McKnight, the City of Minneapolis, and the Minneapolis Foundation. It provides grants for place-based community-driven initiatives, projects, and organizations that strive for a demonstrable reduction in local greenhouse gas emissions.

The fund represents a shift toward a more participatory model that moves the decision making to those doing work on the ground. Grantees engage local residents and organizations to increase their sense of ownership of climate solutions and strengthen social connections between individuals and networks. Funded projects also advance Minneapolis's Strategic Racial Equity Action Plan, a four-year effort to embed racial equity principles throughout the city's work.

[Learn about recently awarded grants](#)



FUNDER NEUROSCIENCE

Every sector, including the sciences, can do more to support greater diversity, equity, and inclusion. Few US scientists (less than 8%) come from underrepresented racial backgrounds, a disparity the board of directors and committees for the McKnight Endowment Fund for Neuroscience recognize.

In 2020, the board created the McKnight Pecot Fellowship, which funds neuroscientists to provide mentorship and lab experiences to neuroscience college students from underrepresented communities. The Fellowship is named after Matthew Pecot, PhD, a highly regarded Black neurologist who specialized in memory and olfactory disorders. He was an assistant professor of neurobiology at Harvard Medical School and passed away in 2019. Four neuroscientists received the first fellowships in March 2021 to mentor five students from universities across the country. In addition, the board has created a means of collecting demographic data to better understand the neuroscience applicants who come from underrepresented communities.

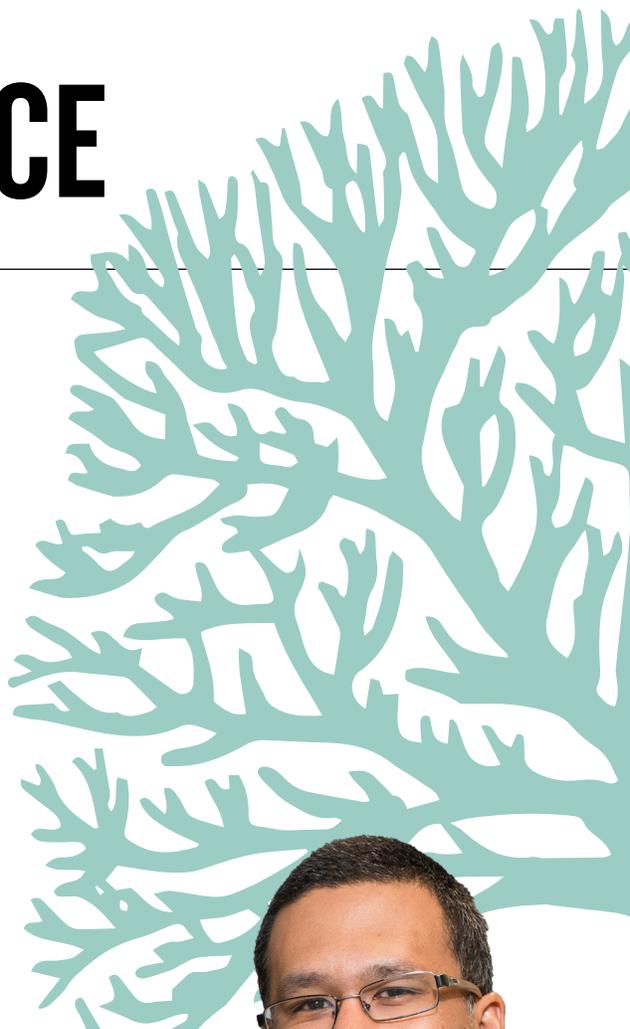


Photo courtesy of Anna Olivella and the Harvard Brain Science Initiative

FUNDER VIBRANT & EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES



In September 2020, McKnight launched its new ***Vibrant & Equitable Communities*** (V&EC) program devoted to equity and inclusion in our state. The program was developed over a year with input from community voices. It is projected to have an annual grantmaking budget of \$32 million or more starting in 2022. With two grantmaking rounds nearly complete, we are still in the early days yet eager to see progress toward our goal: *build a vibrant future for all Minnesotans with shared power, prosperity, and participation.*

Realizing this vision will require changing systems in transformational ways, we are still finding our way, and new questions arise daily. In a conversation with the National Center for Family Philanthropy, program director David Nicholson shared how the program team members are thinking about systems change and what they've learned so far in the process. [Read the interview.](#)

In making grant decisions, the program team is experimenting with more equitable methods—from offering extensive transparency on its process through webinars and FAQ pages to including voices from team members with diverse perspectives. They are thinking in terms of cities and towns in the entire state, and they are building relationships with partners not previously funded by McKnight.

[Learn more about the inaugural slate of grantee organizations](#)

Here are a few examples of grantee organizations funded by the program:

ALL SQUARE

McKnight granted \$300,000 over 24 months to ***All Square***, a nonprofit social enterprise that invests in justice-impacted individuals. In 2021–2022, All Square plans to expand its scope and potential for systems impact by launching a prison-to-law pipeline and establishing an in-house civil rights law firm.

AFRICAN CAREER, EDUCATION, AND RESOURCE INC.

African Career, Education, and Resource develops innovative policy and practice solutions that bolster education, employment, health, housing, and wealth for African immigrants and other Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities. The organization received \$250,000 over 24 months.

RESTAURANT OPPORTUNITIES CENTER OF MINNESOTA

Restaurant Opportunities Center of Minnesota advocates for fair, dignified wages and working conditions across Minnesota. It emerged as a key advocate for personal protective equipment, hazard pay, and other safety issues faced by these essential workers. McKnight awarded \$150,000 over 24 months to this new partner.

“ *The Vibrant & Equitable Communities program has a clear vision of a future in which all Minnesotans—Black, white and brown; Native and newcomer; from the North Side to the North Shore—have shared power, participation, and prosperity.* ”

— **David Nicholson**, Vibrant & Equitable Communities program director

In October 2019, McKnight launched a multifaceted input-gathering process designed to shape and inform the new V&EC program. We gathered input from more than 1,000 stakeholders representing a diverse cross section of people, places, sectors, and organizations in Minnesota and beyond.

Neeraj Mehta, McKnight director of learning who designed the participatory methods, wrote about the experience in the post “What We Learned When We Listened to Community Voices.”

[Learn about about the process](#)

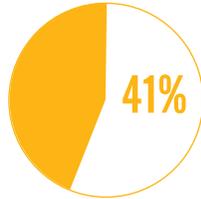


GRANTS & INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

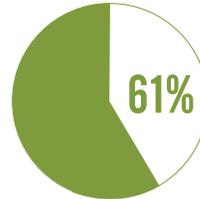
We know that equity in grantmaking is ultimately a matter of respect and trust, and how a funder designs its grantmaking processes and systems is one way to forge a true partnership.

We know that nonprofits have long called for flexible grants that would allow them to identify where to allocate resources and multiyear grants that reduce the frequency of grantseeking.

2018
TO
2020



Approximately 41% of our grants were **general operating grants**.



More than 61% of our grants were **multiyear grants**.

When Covid-19 hit, we worked quickly to offer a flexible response. We offered a streamlined application for Covid-emergency grants; implemented automatic extensions on grant reports or waived reporting requirements altogether; offered grant increases to reduce application steps; and invited grantees to speak to their program staff contact to change grantmaking terms if necessary, including modifying the grant purpose from program/project to general operating.

Our program and grants teams have begun a broader redesign of McKnight's grantmaking process to minimize the burden on grantees, ensuring that the application requirements are proportional to the amount requested.

