



Press Release – Interview and photo opportunity

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## **BANF ANNOUNCES 'HOUSTON CULTURAL TREASURES': 11 LOCAL ARTS ORGANIZATIONS AWARDED \$5 MILLION IN FUNDING**

Houston, TX – November 3, 2023 – In a meaningful ceremony, [The Black, Indigenous, People of Color \(BIPOC\) Arts Network and Fund \(BANF\)](#) named 11 organizations as 'Houston Cultural Treasures.' BANF selected the cohort of under-recognized BIPOC anchor art organizations and will invest more than \$5 million across two years (2024-2025), providing vital multi-year operational and technical support grants.

The newly designated Houston Cultural Treasures are [Arte Publico Press](#), [Buffalo Soldiers National Museum](#), [Community Artists' Collective](#), [Community Music Center of Houston](#), [Houston Museum of African American Culture](#), [Indo-American Association](#), [Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts](#), [Nia Cultural Center](#), [Nuestra Palabra](#), [SHAPE Community Center](#), and [Silambam Houston](#). Visit [houstonbanf.org](http://houstonbanf.org) for more details about each organization.

“In a 30-year history, we have tried to explain our existence, and now, with the bestowing of this award as one of Houston's Cultural Treasures, we look forward to nourishing our collective roots,” said Sheetal Bedi, Executive Director of Indo-American Association of Houston, one of the longest-serving organizations in North America focused on preserving Indian performing arts.

To be designated a Houston Cultural Treasure, organizations had to demonstrate leadership through cultural production, community advocacy, and a history of community connectivity that uplifted and inspired Houston's communities of color. These organizations have consistently demonstrated a commitment to fortify and elevate the BIPOC arts ecosystem in our city. By investing in these remarkable organizations, BANF is building a more equitable and inclusive arts and culture system that truly represents the diversity and talent that thrives in Houston. Each Houston Cultural Treasure will receive a multi-year general operating grant ranging from \$100,000 to \$500,000, depending on their size and needs. BANF also created a two-year Learning Cohort that will provide opportunities for experimentation and capacity-building for the organizations.

“The BIPOC Arts Network and Fund's recognition and support of Houston Cultural Treasures is essential to address the history of under-recognition and under-resourcing for these organizations. They've had a transformative impact on generations of artists, Houstonians, and audiences beyond Texas, and it's an opportunity for us to amplify

## BIPOC Arts Network & Fund

their work so they can move from crisis-existence into a thriving future,” said Sixto Wagan, Project Director of BANF.

The Houston Cultural Treasures is a visionary endeavor aligned with a broader national effort led by the Ford Foundation, which aims to recognize and celebrate the diverse tapestry of artistic expression and excellence nationwide and support historically underfunded arts organizations. In 2020, the Ford Foundation responded to the devastating economic impact of COVID-19 on BIPOC arts communities across the country by forming the Ford Foundation’s Americas Cultural Treasures Initiative. This initiative was also a response to the racial reckoning following the murder of George Floyd, to underscore that the arts could help us find our way toward healing together. Ford Foundation, along with a coalition of national funders, committed \$156 million to support BIPOC arts communities across the country and asked local philanthropic partners to match funding for their geographic area. Locally, Ford Foundation partnered with Houston Endowment, The Brown Foundation Inc., The Cullen Foundation, Kinder Foundation and The Powell Foundation to create a \$12.4 million fund that provides philanthropic support for BANF.

BANF, in 2022, invested \$2 million into BIPOC-founded and led organizations that needed urgent support in the face of the pandemic and other compounding crises. In early 2023, BANF celebrated its first Artist Award initiative by funding 25 artists. Each artist received \$20,000 in 2023; another Artist Award round will open in 2024.

As part of the Cultural Treasures announcement, BANF hosted a panel discussion featuring representatives from the Network’s philanthropic supporters and BIPOC arts organizations and artists. Panelists included:

- Armando Silva, Executive Director, MECA
- Eepi Chaad, 2023 Artist Awardee
- Patra Brannon-Isaac, Director of Education and Community Projects, Kinder Foundation

These individuals provided their unique perspectives and experiences with BANF and provided context to the data and learnings from BANF’s year-long study and landscape assessment. They highlighted challenges faced by the BIPOC arts community and the early successes of BANF’s framework designed to catalyze a new era of equity in Houston-area arts and culture.

Armando Silva, Executive Director of MECA stated, “Acknowledging that this type of support from major funding institutions for the arts communities of color is long overdue, I must state that the unprecedented work of BANF has been an invaluable gift for us. It provided the flexibility that allowed us to do what was necessary and right for our organizations when needed and without justification.”

## **BIPOC Arts Network & Fund**

These initiatives mark a significant step toward fostering our city's more inclusive, vibrant, and diverse arts ecosystem. It is a testament to the resilience, creativity, and unwavering spirit of the BIPOC arts community in Houston.

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### **About BIPOC Arts Network & Fund (BANF)**

The BIPOC Arts Network & Fund (BANF) is a multi-year initiative that builds a revolutionary arts ecosystem that empowers BIPOC artists, organizations, and communities in the Greater Houston Area with transformative opportunities to dream, connect, collaborate, and create.

Established in 2021 as a collaborative community effort, BANF is guided by the very artists, nonprofit organizations, and local leaders it seeks to serve. It revolutionizes the local funding landscape, breaks down silos within the arts ecosystem, and welcomes everyone to support and learn from BIPOC arts communities. BANF was created in a time of crisis to provide resources and networks that support the vibrant Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and other communities of color of Greater Houston in fully displaying their power, values, and traditions.