



## **Request for Qualifications for a Managing Research Partner in a Cross-Project Arts Study**

**Up to \$3,500,000  
January 2024-December 2027**

Responses due by: September 7, 2023  
ArtsResearch@wallacefoundation.org

The Wallace Foundation is funding a cohort of [18 arts organizations](#) founded by, with, and for communities of color to participate in an initiative intended to gain insights on how such organizations define and advance their organizational well-being and that of the communities they serve, and how these approaches vary by history, culture, and context. The organizations are located in nine states and in Puerto Rico, and focus on a wide array of arts disciplines, including dance, theater, music, visual arts, film, and multi-arts.

The four-year projects they are undertaking as a part of their initiative participation vary widely, but generally involve a blend of activities related to the interaction between internal organizational development (e.g., strategic planning or leadership transition planning) and deepening community engagement. Because of the diversity of the cohort, its geographic dispersion, and a shared history with research as an extractive process, it will be crucial for researchers to approach the cross-project study in true partnership and with deep understanding.

The breadth and diversity of the cohort and the need to build deep relational trust—in the context of the unique opportunity the initiative poses to produce important research in the arts— has led the foundation to propose to hire a Managing Research Partner who will (a) oversee the study design, implementation, analysis, and publishing and (b) identify, contract, and manage local/regional researchers, or other staff, who possess deep understanding of and experience with the communities served by the cohort organizations, and who can build relational trust with the arts organizations.

### **Cross-Project Study Opportunity**

The foundation seeks a research firm who will partner with us and the cohort to design and manage a study that—through the prism of their four-year projects and in the distinct historical and geographic contexts in which they have been founded—can answer the question:

*How do arts organizations founded by, with, and for communities of color align their mission, organizational structures, and community engagement efforts in ways that enhance their own organizational well-being and that of the communities they serve? How and why do these efforts vary,*

*by organizational history, purpose, geography, community served, and other factors? What strengths and assets do organizations draw on in their work and what systemic structural factors and impediments must they navigate to achieve their goals?*

Our collective goal is that the study will document:

- The joy, energy, and creativity that guide and emerge from the intersection of the arts and community that these organizations represent and advance.
- The broad range of assets, networks of assistance, and organizational structures that the organizations draw upon to do their work.
- The different ways that organizations define what organizational well-being is and means to them, and why.
- The vision, purpose, and strategy, of their projects, and how they seek to enhance both their own organizational well-being and that of the communities they serve; along with the structural barriers and opportunities that they navigate as they implement, refine, and revise their projects over the four years.

This study is intended to produce documentation that can:

- *Challenge orthodoxies* about what arts organizational well-being looks like, in ways that can inform expectations and guidelines by funders, board members, and other stakeholders, including other organizational leaders.
- *Illuminate the deep mutual relationship* between the well-being of arts organizations founded by, with, and for communities of color and that of their community, including the many aspects of how they contribute to community well-being, in ways that can inform municipal, county, and other stakeholders, including other arts leaders, who are invested in community well-being.
- *Document decisions, actions, and challenges* involved in developing values-aligned financial, operational, and programmatic decisions, in ways that can provide insights for other arts organization leaders and their funders.

Additionally, the research is meant to address gaps in the knowledge base, in particular the lack of representation of arts organizations founded by, with, and for communities of color in much of the research on arts organizations<sup>1</sup>. Finally, The Wallace Foundation itself seeks to learn if there are particular goals and strategies, in particular contexts, that prove promising and could warrant a future initiative to more rigorously explore if and how such strategies lead to organizational and community well-being.

### **Role of the Managing Research Partner**

Each of the cohort members is receiving between \$1 and 4 million dollars (depending on their size) from Wallace, along with technical assistance and peer engagement opportunities, to support their design and implementation of a four-year project that addresses organizational needs (by providing funds for staffing, planning, technical assistance, etc.) that they see as critical for positioning themselves to best

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<sup>1</sup> NB: In 2021, the foundation commissioned the Social Science Research Council to manage a [Fellowship program](#) for 18 early career scholars, each of whom was assigned to work with one of the cohort organizations to capture important dimensions of its unique history and story. The current RFQ is for a study of the [Wallace-funded projects](#) the organizations are undertaking over the next four years, in ways that account for local history and culture. It seeks to identify patterns, themes, and commonalities as well as contextual differences.

serve their communities. Most projects include a combination of a focus on (a) leadership and staff development/transitions, (b) local place-making and place-keeping, and (c) working with local artists.

The Managing Research Partner will join a team of people from Wallace and other participating technical assistance providers (National Arts Strategies, FMA BDO, Social Science Research Council, and others) who collectively are taking responsibility for the initiative's success. In addition, the Managing Research Partner will exercise leadership for the following:

- Developing relational trust with each of the cohort members
- Developing and managing the research design and plan, including all data collection, analysis, meaning-making, and publishing activities
- Creating formal ways for gathering input and participation from the arts organization grantees, and initiative partners, for the research design, implementation approaches, and data analysis and write-up
- Identifying, contracting with, and managing additional researchers who can be assigned to serve as the dedicated data collection liaison with one or more arts organizations in the cohort
- Participating in monthly planning meetings with initiative partners (Wallace, technical assistance providers, learning community designers, and others) as well as monthly check-in calls with the research unit at Wallace, which may be more frequent at start up
- Attending periodic peer learning communities designed for the cohort (two annual in-person meetings, numerous virtual meetings)
- Producing field-facing deliverables during and after grantee project implementation

Note, that field-facing deliverables would be expected to go through a Wallace editorial review process that is designed to provide suggestions to make the products more accessible to the broad range of stakeholders that typically seek insights from the Wallace website and dissemination partners. This process reviews documents for clarity, organization, evidence supporting claims, acknowledgement of limitations, and non-partisanship of framing and language in the interest of reaching the broadest possible community for your work. We also expect that researchers will produce manuscripts for peer-reviewed journals.

If you have any questions about the study, role or this RFQ, we encourage you to schedule a conversation with us by [booking a 30-minute meeting](#) where we can try to clarify any questions.

### **Additional Research Partners**

Although some research firms responding to this RFQ may have the research capacity and staff to manage and implement the entirety of the research activities, the 18 arts organizations in the cohort have emphasized the importance, for trust-building and for the validity and relevance of the research, of working with researchers deeply familiar with communities like theirs and with organizations like theirs. We propose, therefore, that after the Managing Research Partner is selected, we will organize a series of conversations between the successful applicant, the 18 arts organizations, and Wallace, in order to build understanding of the research needs so that the Managing Research Partner can then identify additional researchers who can come on as partners or augmented staff to conduct local data collection. We are open to different ways of approaching this as long as the relational trust concerns expressed in this RFQ are addressed through the final research staffing plan. This means that applying Managing Research Partner firms should ensure that a good portion of the available funds are set aside for on-the-ground researchers who are yet to be identified, whether through partnerships or additional staffing. Other

considerations that the cohort members have raised for selecting on-the-ground research team members include:

- **The importance of working with researchers with deep knowledge and aligned values.** This was described as being sensitive to the history of extractive research in communities of color, first-hand knowledge/experience working with non-profit community-based arts organizations, a commitment to deeply listening and being in community with the organizations, and the ability to accurately tell the story of the organizations. There were concerns raised about the ability of large research firms to meet these criteria but openness to exploring options involving partnerships with local researchers or other solutions that address the challenge described here.
- **The importance of capturing both similarities *and* differences across organizations.** Many of the arts organizations acknowledged the importance of the research telling the story of what is similar across the 18 organizations but they also wanted to ensure that the research would elevate what is unique and different about each organization and how their unique histories and contexts influence operational decisions and their impact.
- **The importance of considering organizational bandwidth.** All cohort members are required, as a part of their Wallace grants, to participate in the research. However, many are stretched thin. In response to their expressed concerns, we draw a distinction between (a) participating in the research, which is required, and (b) participating in CBPR or PAR-like activities, which would be optional. In other words they are required to contribute project and organizational information (through site observations, interviews, focus groups and the like) to inform the research analysis, but they have the option to participate in research design elements, such as selecting the researcher, reviewing proposed research plans, and reviewing draft reports as they are ready. No matter what the research activities, cohort members need advance timelines, lead time, and clear guidance to support their participation in all research activities.

## **Timeline**

We seek to commission a Managing Research Partner before Fall 2023, and expect the study to last four years. The cohort's projects will be active April 2023-March 2027. We hope that research will start in early 2024, allowing for just over three years of project data collection. We would expect reporting deliverables to be finalized during the remainder of 2027. We are open to discussing and adjusting this timeline.

## **Managing Research Partner Qualifications**

Please respond to this request if your firm meets the following criteria:

1. Has a history of conducting research with community-based organizations, including non-profit community-based arts organizations
2. Has a demonstrated deep knowledge of, and relational trust with, the kinds of cultural organizations and communities that are involved in this initiative
3. Has a demonstrated knowledge of the U.S. arts ecosystem (organizations, stakeholders, etc.)
4. Has a demonstrated history of using highly collaborative and reciprocal, strengths-based approaches to research
5. Has experience conducting multi-site research, as well as managing or collaborating with other research partners
6. Has a demonstrated history of working in complex collaborations

7. Has a history of publishing research relevant to this call

### **Budget**

Up to \$3,500,000 for four or more years, including funds for sub-contracts to partnering researchers or research organizations.

### **Application**

To respond to this RFQ, please submit, by September 7, 2023, the following materials:

- A <5-page letter describing:
  - Why you are interested in the project.
  - How you see the research being of use to the arts and culture field—what you would propose could be learned through this study.
  - Your qualifications to lead the project.
  - How you envision working, or starting to work, with the 18 organizations and the to-be-determined research partners described in this RFQ.
    - You are welcome to name the kinds of additional researchers you might reach out to, and your prior experience working with them, but we discourage you from reaching out to them until after conversations with the 18 organizations have happened.
  - The kinds of deliverables you would expect to produce and who would use them and for what purposes.
- As an attachment to your letter, a list of relevant research projects/past experience, including for each entry, who from your team worked on the project, location, dates, and a 2-3 sentence description of the work.
- Resumes of key members of your team.
- A 1-page statement of your organization's capacity—what kinds of individuals, resources/expertise, systems, and procedures you have in place that can support the activities envisioned as part of this project.
- Two sample research publications (or links to them), relevant to the work of this initiative.

We will respond to qualified applicants to set up an interview to discuss the project further.

### **Equity at Wallace**

Wallace views equity as embedding fairness in the formal and informal systems, structures, and practices of our society, giving all people the opportunities and supports necessary to reach their full potential as human beings. The principles that guide us in our equity journey include:

- Our work foregrounds racial equity but is not limited to it. We are concerned with the marginalization of people based on any element of their identity.
- We believe achieving equity requires constructively addressing historical, structural, and systemic causes of racial and other forms of inequity and why they exist.
- Specific definitions of equity will vary from one context to another. As a funder, we are careful to avoid imposing a single definition on grantees.

Wallace is committed to supporting research that is designed and conducted with and for equity. To inform strategies for change, researchers should use strength-based approaches and account for

structures, systems, processes, or practices that produce or reproduce inequities or overcome them. Research itself should be equity-centered—including partnerships, processes, and methods that center the voices and perspectives of communities that would stand to use or benefit from the research. Research teams should include principal investigators and other senior intellectual contributors with relevant lived experiences.

### **Wallace Initiatives**

Most of The Wallace Foundation’s work is carried out through large-scale, multi-year initiatives designed to accomplish dual goals. The first is to support our grantees (such as arts organizations) to create value for those they serve by developing and strengthening their work at the local level. The second is to add value to the field as a whole by designing initiatives that address important unanswered policy and practice questions, commissioning researchers to document and analyze what is learned by Wallace grantees as they participate in the initiative, and then sharing these findings with practitioners, policymakers, and influencers in order to catalyze improvements more broadly. In this way, we aim to use the development of research-based insights as a lever to help institutions, beyond those we fund directly, enrich and enhance their work. Initiatives are designed as model development (exploratory), model testing (confirmatory), and accelerated take-up (scale-up). The arts initiative described in this RFQ is a model development or exploratory study. We seek to support research that can begin to describe and specify the broader problem space, identifying possible specific avenues of inquiry where particular approaches towards particular ends appear to be promising and worthy of greater exploration or even confirmatory studies that can document positive outcomes across a range of contexts.

Questions about this RFQ should be sent to [artsresearch@wallacefoundation.org](mailto:artsresearch@wallacefoundation.org). Schedule a 30-minute call to discuss the RFQ [here](#).