



Landscape Study of Community-Based Youth Arts Programs with Workforce Development Components

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
PROPOSALS DUE: July 18, 2025

Up to \$1,000,000

Time period: January 1, 2026-December 31, 2027

Contact: ArtsResearch@wallacefoundation.org

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Research has documented the important ways that community-based youth arts programs can support youth, including older adolescents. In addition to developing young people’s interests and skills in various artistic mediums, programs have been shown to develop important 21st century work skills, such as creativity, collaboration, and communication skills (Acosta et al., 2025; Halverson & Sawyer, 2022). Moreover, research has documented how such programs provide powerful sites for the development of relationships and bonding capital for young people (Osai et al., 2025; Pepler et al., 2022). Collaborative art making, whether on a stage or in a studio or community setting, provides a context for both vulnerability and self-expression that may make it especially powerful for development of identity, belonging, and connection. Indeed, a recent retrospective longitudinal study has found that strong relational bonds and friendships are one of [the most enduring aspects of participation](#) in youth arts programs (Nelligan et al., 2025).

Bonding capital—close supportive relationships—is essential to youth well-being and social and emotional development (NASEM, 2025). Bridging capital—connections with individuals from different social sectors (professional, interest-based, economic, and others) who can provide valuable informational and resource support—has been shown to positively link to long term life outcomes (Chetty et al., 2022). All young people need both bonding and bridging relationships or capital, but bridging capital has been found to be unevenly distributed across social groups. Young people from high-poverty communities have less bridging capital than their peers as well as fewer opportunities to develop it (Benzow, 2024; Lukasiwicz et al., 2019).

Based on our review of the research in youth development and youth arts, The Wallace Foundation is interested in learning more about community-based youth arts programs that emphasize developing young people's bridging and bonding social capital, in particular through programs that (a) center the arts to support the positive developmental and worklife skills

described in the research and (b) broker workplace opportunities where young people can develop new relationships, new skills, and new career interests and directions. We conjecture that supporting this combination of bridging and bonding capital could be a powerful way to support young people in creating and finding their future, by broadening and/or deepening their interests, expanding their social networks, and shedding light on academic and career pathways for pursuing them.

To deepen our understanding of what this looks like in the field, Wallace is seeking a research team to conduct a two-year study that will characterize the field of community-based youth arts programs with a paid work component. We intend to use the results of this study to design a future five-year youth arts initiative.

We define **community-based youth arts programs with a paid work component** as programs that (1) provide arts-based opportunities for learning and development, for developing a sense of belonging and community, building arts interests and skills, including skills such as creativity and communication, and forging strong connections *and* (2) also offer older youth opportunities for paid employment, internships, or apprenticeships in a wide variety of workplace settings. Workplace/internship settings could include arts organizations, businesses, academic contexts and others.

We anticipate that programs will, at a minimum, be working with high-school aged youth, and will offer paid work opportunities to older high school-aged youth. (Some programs may also work with youth both younger and older.)

2.0 SCOPE OF WORK

We ask researchers to propose plans for answering the following questions:

- Program Designs. What strategies, structures, and approaches characterize community-based youth arts programs with a paid work component?
 - How are teaching artists selected and supported and what is their role in program implementation?
- Program Impacts. What kinds of impacts have such programs had on youth (spanning well-being outcomes, arts outcomes, and education and work related outcomes), and how do they achieve and document these impacts?
 - How, specifically, do the programs help young people develop bridging as well as bonding social capital?
 - What is the role of teaching artists in achieving these outcomes?
 - How does the artform (e.g., theater, writing, visual arts) afford particular opportunities and youth outcomes?
- Organizational Developmental. What kinds of relationships, partnerships, funding and business models, professional preparation, and other supports are critical for youth arts programs to build paid work components in their programmatic offerings?

- Funding. How are programs funded or financed?
- Policy Considerations. What kinds of youth workforce and other policies are shaping or impacting the programs?

We anticipate a two-phased, two-year project, beginning in January 2026.

Phase 1 will involve a landscape analysis to characterize the existing field of community-based youth arts programs that include a paid workforce/internship/apprenticeship component. Phase 1 will produce an internally-focused report to Wallace that identifies different types of program designs and strategies that characterize the field.

Phase 2 will involve the identification of a set of 6-8 exemplar community-based youth arts programs with a workforce component, based on insights from the Phase 1 landscape analysis. Researchers will collaborate with the Wallace arts team to identify these organizations, which will serve as subjects of case studies exploring the structures, processes, challenges, and opportunities driving programmatic goals and outcomes.

At the end of Phase 2, the team will produce a public report for the field that will identify the types of approaches, strategies, outcomes, and opportunities of these programs. In addition to informing the broader youth workforce and youth arts sectors, the report will directly shape the direction of the forthcoming youth arts initiative planned to launch upon the completion of Phase 2.

Study deliverables should include:

- Semi-annual analytic memos sharing emerging findings
- Phase 1 internal report characterizing the field, including recommendations and rationale for the selection of a cohort of exemplary programs for Phase 2 case studies.
- Phase 2 public report, characterizing the field and identifying research gaps and important questions that further research could address.

Wallace seeks to learn from and with researchers in order to ensure that our new youth arts initiative's program/granting approaches are evidence-based. Thus, we ask you to budget for the following meetings with Wallace:

- Monthly one hour meetings with the Arts Research Officer
- Monthly 90-minute meetings with the full arts team at Wallace
- Quarterly 90-minute advisory group meetings with field leaders selected by Wallace
- Semi-annual 90-minute meetings with the full arts strategy team at Wallace
- During Phase 2, all of the above plus participation in up to three 3-day convenings with the cohort of exemplar programs.

3.0 PROPOSALS

Proposals are due by July 18, 2025. Proposals must be no more than 10 single-spaced pages in 12 pt font. The proposal narrative should address:

1. **Your understanding of the goal and benefit** of the study. This section should demonstrate your understanding of and experience with the guiding research questions and purpose of this study. It should summarize what is commonly known and not known in the field, and how such a landscape study with case studies could advance positive outcomes for youth as well as the arts organizations that serve them.
2. **A detailed research plan** (this should be the bulk of your proposal)
 - a. What research questions and sub-questions will your study address? (Feel free to tweak and elaborate on the research questions provided in this RFP.)
 - b. What kinds of data will you collect, how, and from where?
 - c. What theoretical lenses and analytic frameworks will you use to make meaning of the data you collect?
 - d. What are the limitations of your proposed design/process and any mitigants that might address such limitations.
 - e. Please include a table that links research questions, data sources, analytical approach, and project deliverables.
3. **Deliverables.** What deliverables will your study produce?
4. **Qualifications of your team** to complete this study. Please include descriptions of similar landscape studies you have previously conducted.
5. **Bibliographic references**, which do not count towards the page limit.

Proposal attachments should include:

6. **Project timeline**
7. **Bio sketches of senior personnel**
8. **Links to 1-2 examples of a prior report you have produced** of a similar nature
9. **Excel budget** and budget explanation
 - a. Please budget for copyediting and graphic layout of the public report.
 - b. Please budget funds for the preparation and travel of at least one person to the Wallace office in NYC to present findings in the final report, although we may mutually elect to meet by zoom.
 - c. Please budget any necessary research incentive costs.

If you have any questions about the RFP please contact ArtsResearch@wallacefoundation.org.

4.0 ABOUT THE WALLACE FOUNDATION

Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is the philanthropic legacy of DeWitt and Lila Wallace, founders of the Reader's Digest. Wallace is one of the nation's 60 largest independent, charitable foundations. We are a national foundation, supporting work across the United States without a focus on any one community or region. We do not fund internationally.

The mission of The Wallace Foundation is to help all communities build a more vibrant and just

future by fostering advances in the arts, education leadership, and youth development. The Wallace Foundation takes an unusual approach for a private foundation. Most of our work is carried out through large-scale, multi-year initiatives designed to accomplish dual goals. The first is to support our grantees (such as school districts) to create value for those they serve by developing and strengthening their work at the local level. Our second goal 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 and evidence as a lever to help institutions, beyond those we fund directly, enrich and enhance their work.

4.1 Research and Equity

Wallace is committed to supporting research that is designed and conducted with and for equity. To inform strategies for change, research proposals should use strength-based approaches and be designed to shed light on 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 experience. Where relevant, theoretical frameworks should be informed by a recognition of systemic forms of exclusion or marginalization. Research methods, from data collection to analysis, should clearly articulate how the use of such frameworks will lead to new insights and understanding at both a practical and conceptual level, what the limitations of the methods are, and how they can support the development of strength-based change strategies. Recognition, in forms appropriate to the work, should be provided for all research participants.

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