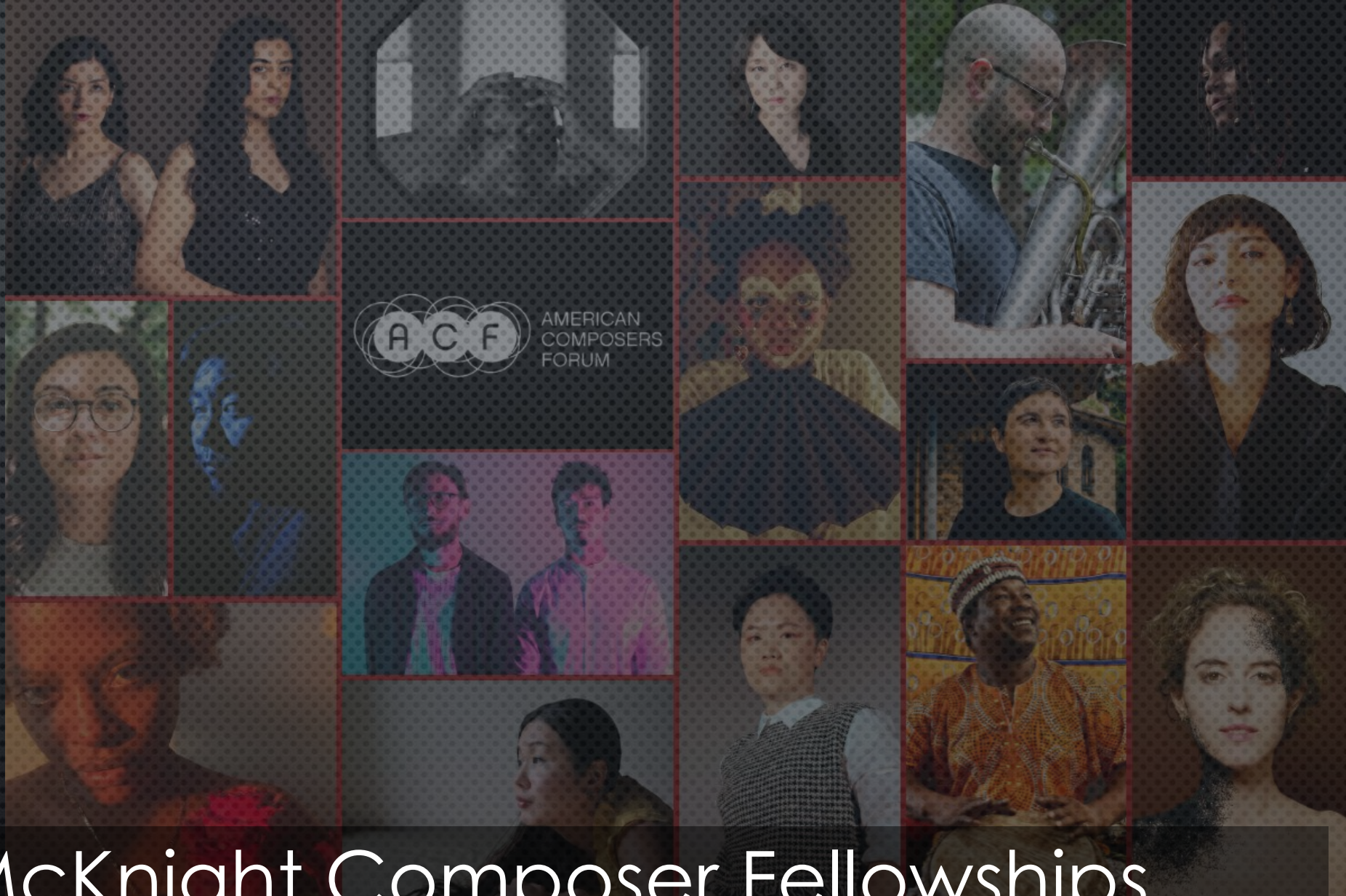


McKNIGHT FOUNDATION



2026 McKnight Composer Fellowships

Information session 1 | Monday, November 10, 2025



Brian Dowdy
Community Director



Dell Paulsen
Advocacy Manager



Questions → Chat



ACF envisions a world where living music creators are celebrated as essential to human culture. We are leading catalysts in an ecosystem that invites generations of composers, artists, advocates, and audiences to pursue this vision with us.

Our Mission is to support and advocate for individuals and groups creating music today by demonstrating the vitality and relevance of their art.

Our Core Values are Leadership, Anti-Racism, Courage, Support, and Curiosity.

We frame our work with a focus on racial equity and include within that scope, but do not limit it to, diverse gender identities, musical approaches and perspectives, religions, ages, (dis)abilities, cultures, backgrounds, sexual orientations, and broad definitions of "American."



The intent of the McKnight Artist and Culture Bearers Fellowship is to recognize and support artists and culture bearers who are beyond emerging and have sustained experience in their area of practice. Fellows demonstrate achievement, commitment, and high-level proficiency in artistic and/or culture bearer practice that contributes to their field and impacts and benefits people in Minnesota.

The addition of culture bearer acknowledges that the McKnight programs support creative leaders in Minnesota from cultures that don't use the word "artist" (such as Native American and Hmong), as well as those who center the transmission and preservation of cultural lifeways.

MINNESOTA
CENTER FOR
BOOK ARTS



PILLSBURY HOUSE
+ THEATRE



INDIGENOUS ROOTS



Fellowship Awards Overview

A. Selection of four Minnesota-based music creators

B. No restrictions on fund usage*

C. Awards:

- Four fellowships of \$25,000
- Financial support of up to \$3,500 to develop works-in-progress
- Opportunity to attend an artist residency program coordinated by the Artist Communities Alliance
- Consultation and resources from ACF and Springboard for the Arts





Eligibility & Application Process

Eligibility Requirements

- ✓ Residency in Minnesota*
- ✓ US Social Security Number or US Tax ID (such as an ITIN)
- ✓ Beyond early practice with sustained experience*
- ✓ Achievement, commitment, and proficiency in music creation
- ✓ Not applying for another McKnight Artist Fellowship this program year*
- ✓ Not received a McKnight Artist Fellowship in the last five award years*
- ✓ Growth and ongoing artistry if a previous McKnight Fellow
- ✓ Not affiliated with the McKnight Foundation or fellowship partners*
- ✓ Not enrolled full-time in an academic program*

Hooray, I'm eligible!
Time to apply!





Key Evaluation Criteria

A. Artistic craft:

1. Strong sense of the creator's voice
2. Technical proficiency necessary to achieve the desired results
3. Quality of work samples*

B. The applicant has clearly reached beyond early practice, as evidenced by the following:

1. Significant body of work
2. Creative achievement
3. Sustained contribution to their artistic field and Minnesota's arts ecosystem

Selection Process:

Prescreening by ACF staff

- Eligibility and completeness
- Panel support and adherence to discussion guidelines
- ACF staff members *do not* contribute to decision-making or selection of awardees

Panel Review

- Four music creators & advocates
- Two phases
 1. Independent Review
 2. Group Review with two rounds

2026 McKnight Composer Fellowship Panelists

Sahba Aminikia



Photo: Ryan Lash

Leyna Marika
Papach



Photo: Masumi Kouakou

D.J. Sparr



Photo: Jennifer Esneault

Andrew Yee



Panel Review Process:

Phase 1: Independent Review:

Each panelist independently assesses applications in a randomized order and scores them based on the six key evaluation criteria

- Panelists will only listen to up to 5 minutes of Work Sample 1 in this phase.
- About 50% of the applications will be passed on to the next phase based on the panelists' *combined* scores and review of the list.

Panel Review Process:

Phase 2 – Panel Group Review:

Panelists listen to forwarded applicants' music together in two rounds, having conversations in which they will make comparative judgments about each applicant.

- Round 1: Panelists adjust scores on the key evaluation criteria as needed and select between ten and fifteen applications to proceed to the next round.
 - Panelists may revisit Work Sample 1, this time collectively.
 - You can indicate alternative cue times for this review stage
 - Panelists listen to Work Sample 2 and 3 (if applicable)
- Round 2: Panelists will provide an overall score and select the four awardees, alternates, and honorable mentions.
 - Panelists will revisit all work samples as needed.

In a successful McKnight Fellowship application, I look for...

...artistic clarity, authenticity, and a strong sense of purpose and empathy.

...a sense of honesty

...uniqueness/singularity

...a sense of unity in the application where points connect--can I get a good feel for who this person is, where they are coming from, and how their life connects to their work?

In a successful McKnight Fellowship application, I look for...

...a sense of urgency in why this artist creates music

...a history of consistent creative output

...spark, zip, and an unmistakable sense of drive.

...solid craft and the personality and imagination to make things happen

...the ability to collaborate deeply

...spark, craft, and follow-through

...a mix of vision, skill, and energy that makes an artist impossible to ignore.

Online application via SlideRoom

(SlideRoom is a web-based application platform)

Components of the application:

1. Applicant's personal information
2. Demographic form*
3. Work samples and supporting materials*
4. Artist's statement*
5. Insights into your artistic experiences*
6. A complete works list*
7. Questions regarding social media and how you learned about the opportunity
8. Acknowledgement of McKnight Artist Fellowship Community Values
9. Acknowledgement of Terms and Conditions

Application Deadline:

Wednesday, Dec. 17, 2025 at 11:59pm PST

Grace period:

If you start your application before the deadline, you will have a 24-hour grace period to submit your application. If you do use this grace period, you must submit your application before December 18, 2025 at 11:59pm PST. After this, we will not accept any applications, without exception.



DUNZO!

Notification

- ☐ Panelists' decision in February 2026
- ☐ All applicants notified by email
- ☐ Results on ACF's website, social media, and ICIYL in March 2026
- ☐ Feedback sessions available*



Work Samples & Supporting Materials

WORK SAMPLES

General Guidelines

- Provide 2 or 3 audio and/or video samples of your original music.*
- At least one of your work samples should be of a work you created in the past five years.
- If you have previously received a McKnight Fellowship, concentrate your work samples on the period of time since your last award.

WORK SAMPLES

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graph TD; A[WORK SAMPLES] --> B[Work Sample 1]; A --> C[Work Sample 2 (& optional 3)]; B --> D[• Connect directly to your Artistic Statement]; B --> E[• Demonstrate the significance of each sample with a written description*]; B --> F[• Supporting materials (scores*, lyrics, etc)]; C --> G[• Choose a sample that, in combination with other samples, demonstrates the depth and/or breadth of your artistic practice];
```

Work Sample 1

Makes the most critical impression on the panelists & should represent your most distinctive and compelling musical example

- Connect directly to your Artistic Statement
- Demonstrate the significance of each sample with a written description*
- Supporting materials (scores*, lyrics, etc)

Work Sample 2 (& optional 3)

Complements the previous work samples

- Choose a sample that, in combination with other samples, demonstrates the depth and/or breadth of your artistic practice

WORK SAMPLES

The technical stuff

- *Always* include start and end times
- If notated scores or other instructive materials are part of your creative process, provide PDFs corresponding to your samples.
- Applicants whose work samples involve lyrics are encouraged to provide lyric sheets.
- We are open to receiving many types of sonic representation for the review process, including video, spectrogram, waveform, graphics, etc.
- Please note that *panelists cannot access music notation or specialized software directly.*

Supporting Documentation

- Your Artistic Statement may take any of several directions at your discretion. Craft a statement that provides the most compelling context for your work samples, such as information about your background, the development of your work, your interests as an artist or your aesthetic position, your future artistic direction, your career status, self-assessment, etc.
- Enhance your artistic statement by sharing information about and insights into your artistic experiences.*
- Give a broader scope of your work with a complete works list.*

Reminders and recommendations:

- Save as you go, return as needed.
- Test your links, leave them up until Feb 9.
- Work Samples
 - 5 minute maximums
 - Start/end times
- Artist's statement, insights, and work descriptions matter.
- We're here to help! Email Brian with questions.

Additional Information & Reminders

- ❖ Application Deadline: December 17, 2025 - 11:59 pm PST*
- ❖ Information Session 2 is tomorrow - Tuesday, November 11 at 5:30pm



Queen Drea



Mary Ellen Childs



Mary Prescott



deVon Russell Gray

- ❖ One-on-one assistance for applicants
- ❖ Videos of information sessions will be available on the ACF website

photos by [left to right]:

David Lee Glasgow
Laura Bianchi, courtesy of the Bogliasco Foundation
Bill Phelps
Carrie Thompson



Questions?

Brian Dowdy, Community Director
bdowdy@composersforum.org