# Grantmaking Strategy Spotlight

## Artist-led Pipeline Solutions + Leadership Development

2019

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# Artist-Led Pipeline Solutions + Leadership Development

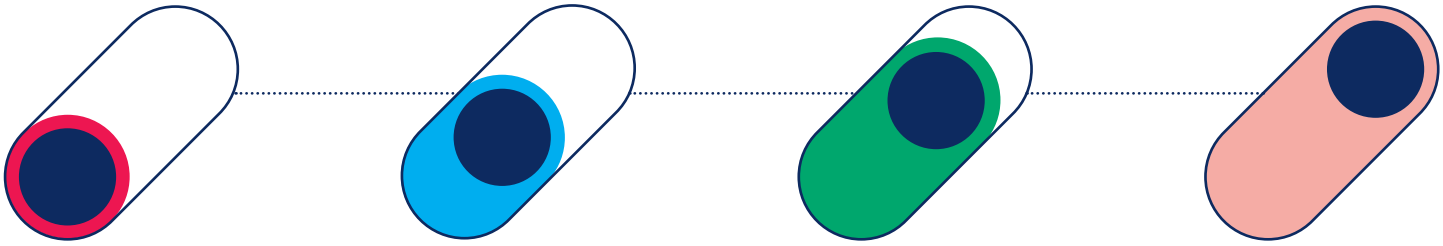
## FROM INCLUSION TO INNOVATION

Yearning for more than the network and studio-designed diversity and inclusion programs of the past, historically excluded artists working in the entertainment industry are channeling their experiences and knowledge into creating new infrastructure, networks, and pipelines for rising and mid-career diverse artists. The goal: to move beyond strategies that primarily strive to increase representation, and identify and support approaches aimed at disrupting or bypassing unjust systems, in order to make seismic change in the industry and in the narratives coming out of it.

The entertainment industry has long been steeped in systemic racism, gender inequality, transphobia, and disability discrimination. Generally, artists, producers, and executives who have struggled and succeeded in the entertainment industry understand what is broken and are passionate about creating sustainable and just infrastructure, policies, practices, and institutions that disrupt entrenched inequality and exclusion. These diverse artists are building power both behind the scenes and in front of the camera—changes that compel the industry not only to recognize their leadership but to incorporate their new pipeline models and pieces of infrastructure into the systems that produce entertainment stories and experiences.

Over the course of two-and-a-half years, through a process of deep listening and strategic grantmaking, the Pop Culture Collaborative has found that centering innovation, advancing from the industry's longtime focus on increased representation, will more reliably lead to the growth of a pop culture storytelling community capable of creating authentic, paradigm-shifting narratives, while also advancing the goal of more visibility for diverse communities in stories themselves.

**PHILANTHROPY CAN FUND** research, experimental pipelines, and artist leadership development/organizing that reimagines the entertainment industry's systems, policies, and narrative development practices, with the understanding that if we change the systems and rules by which storytellers are hired, supported, and treated on the job, more just and authentic pop culture narratives will emerge.



**Why Invest In New Pipeline Development?**
*Hollywood is defined by inclusion.*

**Who Is Building New Pipelines?**
*Artists are leading the way to a more just industry.*

**What Happens When There Is A "New Normal"?**
*Just systems and spaces can be the norm in Hollywood.*

**How Can We Create The Conditions For Systemic Change?**
*Funders can strategically invest in innovation.*

## Why Invest In New Pipeline Development?

*Hollywood is defined by inclusion.*

- 91% of showrunners in comedy and drama series writers' rooms are white and 80% are male (2016-2017 season). Fewer than 14% of all TV writers are people of color; 65% of all writers' rooms had zero Black writers. *Source: "Race In the Writers' Room" (↗) Color of Change**
- 94% of Hollywood film executives are white, 96% of film directors are men, and 95% of disabled characters are played by non-disabled actors. *Source: 5050By2020* (↗)*
- 64% of diverse writers report having experienced bias, discrimination, or harassment; 53% report having their pitch rejected, then the same idea accepted from a non-diverse writer. *Source: "Behind the Scenes: The State of Inclusion in TV Writers' Rooms" (↗) Think Tank for Inclusion and Equity**
- There are barriers to entry and success at every stage of access—familial, social, and school networks often prevent historically excluded artists from rising beyond entry level jobs—creating obstacles in the patterns of hiring, promoting, financing, and networking. *Source: Follow the Pipelines: Barriers and New Interventions for Diverse Creators in Television [Infographic (↗), Pop Culture Collaborative Senior Fellow Maha Chehlaoui*]*
- Artists who have been historically excluded and are underrepresented in the entertainment industry—people of color, immigrant, Muslim, indigenous, women, trans, queer, and disabled people—are not well served by entry-level fellowships or "diversity" programs that may get some through the door, but can also lead to experience with hostile or isolating work environments, and pipelines that abandon mid-career artists and rarely lead to career longevity.

* Pop Culture Collaborative grantee

"Usually [in writers' rooms] there's only one person of color or one woman, and the effects of that are that you feel like an insurance policy, you feel like a spokesperson for your community, you don't get to embrace your creativity. When you break those barriers and allow folks to be fully empowered, they're able to be super efficient as well."

**Sameer Gardezi, Break The Room** (Break The Story, Vol 3, "East of La Brea" Is Changing How Writers Rooms are Formed") (↗)

"After an initial success, writers are often overlooked by industry insiders who create barriers for new artists and their original ideas, a dynamic that disproportionately impacts creatives of color. And this forces a lot of these creatives to bootstrap to a point where it's detrimental to their careers and their projects. People burn out and are forced to take other jobs to make ends meet. Many artists fall by the wayside."

**Mahyad Tousi, BoomGen Studios** (Break The Story, Vol 3, Fixing Existing Pipelines Isn't Enough. It's Time to Make New Ones) (↗)

## Who Is Building New Pipelines?

*Artists are leading the way to a more just industry.*

- Artists who have broken through despite Hollywood's biases and unjust systems are leading as content visionaries and creating networks, pipelines, and organizations that disrupt patterns of oppression and build pathways for opportunity and power in the industry.

- These trailblazers go beyond holding the door open once they have gotten through. They are analyzing the barriers they faced, and introducing solutions that ensure others are not blocked by the same systemic barriers.

- As a result, many new storytellers are coming to TV and film from other media, such as journalism, self-produced web shows, and playwriting, and then creating paths for other underrepresented creatives to enter the industry and advance their careers.

- People of color, immigrant, Muslim, indigenous, women, trans, queer, and disabled artists are advancing a new vision, building power, and connecting with millions of viewers through experimental and award-winning storyworlds that have emerged from more authentic, deomocratic, creative processes that defy business as usual practices in Hollywood.

Portraits from left to right: Camila María Concepción, Jill Soloway, Favianna Rodriguez

"Hollywood has been dominated by cisgender white men from the beginning, giving them absolute power to build a content machine that reflects their own biases, perpetuates their own perspectives, and maintains their dominance.... We need to demand the leadership of those who have been marginalized in order to build new models of power, access, and representation in television and film."

**Co-authors Camila Maria Concepción, Favianna Rodriguez, Jill Soloway, 5050by2020** (Break The Story, Vol 2, "5050by2020: Welcome to the Intersectional Power Movement to Change Entertainment and Build Artist Power") (↗)

## What Happens When There Is A "New Normal"?

*Just systems and spaces can be the norm in Hollywood.*

- When points of entry and access into the industry focus historically marginalized artists having long-term, sustainable careers, there is both a power shift in who is creating content, and improved practices and policies to support emerging artists that are shareable between the creative and executive sides of the industry.
- Power and culture dynamics change in production spaces (writers rooms and on set), moving from tokenism to authentic, equitable creative input and collaboration.
- Equity in pay, power, and positioning is supported by networking in the hiring process and by prioritizing visibility and the talents of underrepresented communities.
- The cultural zeitgeist is defined and led by creatives of color, women, disabled, indigenous, trans and/or gender non-conforming individuals rather than by cis, white, male creatives. This takes place not merely in industry spaces but in fictional storyworlds and characters.
- Many more artists develop their own Intellectual Property (IP) and are able to negotiate and advance their careers in Hollywood with their unique creative vision, not just work on other people's projects.

"There are not a lot of people of color at the showrunner or executive producer or even co-executive producer levels. And so it is about trying to promote those people that we hire internally. On *Insecure*, deserving people get promoted fast. If they go on to another job, they can hold those positions. On other shows, we're promoting people at the producer or the co-executive producer level to showrunner so they can hold those positions and mentor the new people we are shepherding through the door. We want to support career longevity, helping them to reach a point where they have as much experience as possible, and we hope to grow with them as well."

**Issa Rae, Color Creative** (Break The Story, Vol. 3, "Fixing Existing Pipelines Isn't Enough. It's Time to Make New Ones") (↗)

## How Can We Create The Conditions For Systemic Change?

*Funders can strategically invest in innovation, rather than solutions that sporadically increase representation.*

- **Research:**
  Funders can support projects that produce data and documentation that expose systemic discrimination; set baselines for comparative analysis; and support alternative pathways to opportunity and pipelines for success.

- **Convenings+Cohorts+Networks:**
  Funders can support opportunities for artists, activists, and strategists to collaborate and reimagine models of participation and networking, thus expanding access to power, creative processes, and resources.

- **Leadership Development:**
  Funders can support artists to develop collective learnings, shared power analysis, co-designed strategies; and support ongoing networking to encourage strong artist leadership and coordination on systemic change efforts in the entertainment industry.

- **Infrastructure:**
  Funders and impact investors can seed technology and projects that (1) connect and visibilize diverse artists and workers; (2) provide both real work experience that offers ways into the industry and career longevity, such as new writers room models and showrunner trainings; and (3) support accelerators and incubators for diverse artists from television, film, theater, online platforms, comics, and more to secure financial and creative control of their own IP.

"If access is being able to physically get into a party, and inclusion is being invited to the party, then what lies beyond is innovation. You are the one throwing the party—and maybe even reinventing how a party is thrown."

Lawrence Carter-Long, **Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund** (Break The Story, Vol 3, "Breaking Good: A Journey Into the Making and Reimagining of Television") (↗)

# Models that Pop Culture Collaborative Grantees Are Using To Create New Pipelines

01 →

## Curating And Funding Television Writers Rooms

### OPPORTUNITIES

- **Reimagine writers rooms:** Support showrunners to staff a writers room with artists who represent the communities that are the subject of the project or to bring in people with personal experience as creative contributors or consultants.
- **Connect the storytelling fields:** Support education, mentorship, and on-the-job opportunities for writers and storytellers from other fields (e.g., theater, journalism, comics) that provide real world experience in writers rooms.
- **Invest in consulting and collaboration:** Support partnerships among advocacy groups, social change grantmakers, experienced TV writers, corporate media investors, and production companies to enable opportunities for community-connected, vision-aligned content production.

### RESULTS

- New shows come from sustained collaborative work by artists and activists subverting traditional storytelling models and tropes and creating authentic, nuanced, engaging narratives and/or immersive experiences.

### POP CULTURE COLLABORATIVE GRANTEE EXAMPLES

- **Break the Room Media** (↗) is developing a new writers room model focused on bringing writers, often relative newcomers to the industry and from underrepresented communities, together to create episodic television in order to create more authentic content for mass audiences.
- **Unleashing Giants** (↗) is building a pipeline for formerly incarcerated people to train for and enter a variety of creative and production roles on the set of its in-development series *Up North* and two additional in development projects
- **The Barcid Foundation** is developing an experimental all-Native writers room. (↗)

02 →

## Changing Who Gets Hired

### OPPORTUNITIES

- **Build The Infrastructure:** Support networks, project initiatives, and databases specifically designed to increase the hiring and promotion of people of color and others historically marginalized in the entertainment industry.

- **Accelerate Career Pathways:** Support showrunners, artists, and other executives with decision-making status who set recruitment and hiring priorities to bring in significant numbers of typically underrepresented people as writers, directors, cast, and crew. Also support them to move more writers from within into director and showrunner positions.

- **Invest In Industry Research:** Support research and the development of standards for industry practices and results around increased equity.

### RESULTS

- Artists and shows from communities of color are able to work with more supportive production teams.

- Marginalized people in the industry gain job opportunities and mainstream exposure and credits.

### POP CULTURE COLLABORATIVE GRANTEE EXAMPLES

- Databases for hiring diverse talent (↗) such as **ARRAY** (↗) Crew, an upcoming app for hiring women and other people of color for below-the-line film and TV jobs.

- Modeling Issa Rae's approach with *Insecure* and other shows by promoting people quickly to producer and showrunner on TV productions. [Break The Story Vol 3: Reimaging Television, "Fixing Pipelines Isn't Enough. It's Time to Make New Ones".] (↗)

03 →

## Artist Leadership Development:
*Investing in professional power*

### OPPORTUNITIES

- **Create Mentorship Systems:** Support professional training, mentorship, and networks that advance individual artists' leadership and creative growth.
- **Advance Artist Leadership:** Support educating and organizing industry insiders to engage in power analysis, advocate for themselves, and organize others around systemic change within, and outside of, the entertainment industry.

### RESULTS

- Artist leaders able to spawn an ecosystem of projects addressing problems they've seen from the inside, such as networks, production companies, pipeline deals, funds for artists, hiring priorities.
- Organizing efforts against pay gaps and harassment in media industries linking up with movements against racism, sexism, and other injustices in other fields of work, with each strengthening the other.

### POP CULTURE COLLABORATIVE GRANTEE EXAMPLES

- **5050by2020** (↗) pushes media organizations to commit to equity goals, and organizing cohorts of trans masculine and disabled media artists to be activists and advocates for concrete industry changes. 5050by2020 also co-produced the development of the TRANSform Hollywood toolkit to spark fair treatment and portrayal of the trans community.
- Pop Culture Collaborative Senior **Fellow Luis Castro** explored the development of a community of practice (↗) for showrunners who are stepping up as groundbreakers in entertainment.
- **Think Tank for Inclusion and Equity** (↗) is organizing racial and gender diverse TV writers to produce research and open letters, and create pressure on the industry to become more equitable for all.

# 04 →

## Transforming Incubators + Accelerators:
*Jumpstarting media projects*

### OPPORTUNITIES

- **Invest In New Story Development Processes:** Support contests for underrepresented artists to get funding or opportunities to pitch projects. Support artists beyond their first project in the mid-career stage when creators of color are often overlooked.
- **Build Infrastructure For Artists To Own Their Own IP:** Help artists produce works that establish their creative IP to secure financing and production deals with creative control. Provide script development, funding, dealmaking advice.
- **Support Collaborations:** Support partnerships with production and distribution companies and studios to provide opportunities for creatives whose stories are often overlooked or avoided.

### RESULTS

- More projects from marginalized communities and innovative artists get production and distribution deals and access to wider audiences.
- Storytellers have more control over their authentic characters and narratives.

### POP CULTURE COLLABORATIVE GRANTEE EXAMPLES

- **BoomGen Studios** (↗) is developing a program to nurture and fund mid-career creatives of color to build their creative Intellectual Property and projects with strong production and distribution deals.
- **Open TV | OTV** (↗) supports the launch of indie series by Chicago-based based Black, brown, differently abled, and queer artists, and has released more than 40 pilots, shorts, and series. OTV incubates independent POC and queer artists to develop projects from script to release with financing, consultation, referrals, and publicity.
- **Color Creative** (↗) holds contests in partnership with networks and studios, and provides mentors to emerging diverse artists, getting winning scripts to pilot production.

# Barriers And New Interventions For Diverse Creators In Television

Pop Culture Collaborative Senior Fellow Maha Chehlaoui lays out the most common barriers to entry and advancement for television writers from diverse backgrounds, defined to include people of color, women, and LGBTQIA+ and disabled folks. Mapped here are current approaches developed to remake the industry, and new interventions being pioneered by leading artists and social change makers to reimagine it. Diverse writers may hit one or several of these barriers throughout the course of their careers.

**WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AND WHAT'S EMERGING**

Writers of diverse backgrounds start their career

**BARRIER**
## Systemic Racism and Sexism

White male candidates are a "cultural fit" in writers' rooms where 91% of showrunners and 86% of writers are white. 80% of showrunners are men.[1]

New organizations demand accountability; equity and power shift inside the industry.

**EXAMPLES**
5050by2020, Time's Up, Think Tank for Inclusion and Equity, Color of Change.

Organizing within and outside the industry to demand access and parity.

**EXAMPLES**
NAACP Hollywood Bureau, Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment, National Hispanic Media Coalition, Women and Hollywood.

**BARRIER**
## Nepotism and Apprenticeship Model

Elite family, social, and school networks provide access to low/no pay entry level jobs only the privileged few can afford to take.

Industry-created fellowships aimed at identifying, training, and staffing diverse writers.

**EXAMPLES**
NBC Writers on the Verge, Disney ABC Writers Program, FOX Writers' Lab

Independent creators bypass traditional Hollywood financing via grants, crowdfunding and sponsorship. Social video sharing sites allows for direct access to audiences.

**EXAMPLES**
Brown Girls, Dinette, OpenTV

**BARRIER**
## White, Male POV Seen as Universal

White and male dominated rooms built even when underrepresented stories are being centered.

Showrunners and producers build rooms majority staffed and led by diverse writers + writers sourced directly from communities or other non-agency sources.

**EXAMPLES**
Unleashing Giants (Up North), Break the Room (East of La Brea)

Showrunners and producers build rooms led and staffed by mostly diverse writers.

**EXAMPLES**
Vida, Atlanta, Transparent, Insecure, Black-ish, Pose, Fresh Off the Boat.

**BARRIER**
## Diverse Content is Considered a High-Risk Trend

Minority narratives on television pop up as "a trend" about every 20 years.

Organizations and studies track inclusion industry-wide as well as increasing market demand for diverse stories.

**EXAMPLES**
USC: Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, Norman Lear Center; UCLA: Ralph J. Bunche Center; The Geena Davis Institute

Production companies centered on diverse voices gain and share power while serving a long ignored fanbase eager for ongoing engagement.

**EXAMPLES**
ARRAY, ColorCreative, Level Forward, MACRO, MonkeyPaw

**BARRIER**
## Diverse Writers Viewed as Unqualified

Because of systemic barriers, diverse writers staffed atmid- and senior-level are scarce, so white often male showrunners and #2s are hired.

Artist-led orgs run labs and competitions; winners own their own IP and receive mentorship so they may operate at higher levels.

**EXAMPLES**
Script to Screen (Color Creative and BET), The Black List and Women in Film Episodic Lab, Film Independent Episodic Lab.

Collect and centralize names of diverse writers to combat misconstruing exclusion and low visibility for lack of existence.

**EXAMPLES**
CAA Amplify Database, WriteHer List

**N** NEW INTERVENTIONS
**T** TRADITIONAL PIPELINES
**C** CURRENT APPROACHES

[1]. "Race in the Writers' Room Report," Darnell Hunt, 2017 — https://hollywood.colorofchange.org

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