

# Creative Community Fellows

New England

2026

Meet Cohort Lilac

**NAS**

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# Meet the Fellows



**Nabila Anandira**  
Somerville, MA



**Chris Battaglia**  
Belfast, ME



**Vanessa Brewster**  
Greenfield, MA



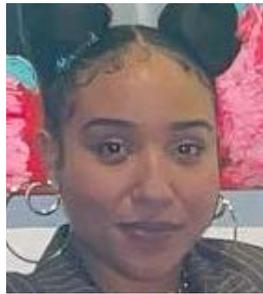
**Erdene Clark**  
Boston, MA



**Joshua Collier**  
Brandon, VT



**Julia Cseko**  
Somerville, MA



**Jalix Delacruz**  
Boston, MA



**Sumi Dey**  
Medford, MA



**Yex Diaz**  
New Haven, CT



**Luis Luna**  
New Haven, CT



**Jay Mankita**  
Amherst, MA



**Bridget Matros**  
Belfast, ME



**Eli Nixon**  
Pawtucket, RI



**Chief Peterson**  
New Britain, CT



**Diana Popa**  
Burlington, VT



**Jason Raymond**  
Burlington, VT



**Safarzadeh Safarzadeh**  
Auburn, NH



**Avi Salloway**  
Burlington, VT



**Jen Volansky**  
Stowe, VT



**Matt Wilhelm**  
Manchester, NH

# Meet the Fellows



## Nabila Anandira

Somerville, MA

they/she

Nabila Anandira (they/she) was born in Indonesia and grew up in Somerville, MA, where they are currently studying Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning as a REPP fellow at Tufts University. Nabila probes into the pockets where art meets health, centering around building meaningful and reciprocal relationships. They are driven by the desire to imagine and create new pathways for collective healing and liberation, rooted in care and co-evolution!

As an interdisciplinary artist, their practice navigates through complex emotions around being uprooted and creating new ways of belonging. They collect fragments of memory, tenderness, and dreams and weave them into new forms.

Through layering materials and narratives, Nabila explores how

to transform personal and collective histories into spaces of connection. Their work is a devotion to honoring the people, places, and values that raised her.

Their participation in this fellowship is an ongoing commitment to exploring how art can move our wonder into action. As an art maker, they want to help people see they can do the same—to see themselves as creators, storytellers, and change-makers.

### About Creative by Nature

Creative by Nature expands access to nature and the arts for Somerville teenagers through free, immersive retreats, and leadership development programs. 100% free, and led by local community members, you'll find us sparking connection through hiking, photography, cooking over a campfire, mural making, and more. Together, we explore spaces as close as the bike path, and as far as Mount Washington.

# Meet the Fellows



## Chris Battaglia

Belfast, ME

he/him

Chris Battaglia is a multimedia producer and social practice artist working in film/video, photography, and audio. He founded and co-leads Torchlight, a community media studio in downtown Belfast, Maine. Along with a group of volunteer advisors, Battaglia helped launch the Belfast Teen Center, serves on its first Board of Directors, and represents Torchlight in the newly-established coalition, Waldo Alliance for Mentorship, a new organization devoted to building a community of practice for people involved in mentorship work. Prior to Torchlight, Battaglia co-facilitated and co-produced one-on-one conversations and radio media for Storycorps' One Small Step program, through radio station partner WERU Community Radio. In 2019 Battaglia mounted the Village Canoe in 2019, a multi-disciplinary artist project that uses

the vessel of the canoe, the structure of an expedition, and the institution of the artist residency to explore craft, community, and collaboration. In 2017 he was a crewmember on a 2-month canoe expedition, paddling down the Mississippi River as documentarian and filmmaker, producing a feature-length film, beginning his journey as a community-engaged storyteller.

### About Torchlight

Torchlight is a community-based multimedia arts and production studio, whose core programs are youth mentorship, creative production services, and public engagement. The organization's goals are to foster civic engagement, positive youth development, and community storytelling. From our downtown storefront headquarters, we primarily serve lower-income and intergenerational rural populations; educators and adults seeking skill-building resources and equipment; and organizations seeking to connect meaningfully as a path towards cultural and community development.

# Meet the Fellows



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## Vanessa Brewster

Greenfield, MA

she/her

Vanessa Brewster is a writer, musician, educator, and community organizer based in Greenfield, Massachusetts. She is the Vice President of Looky Here, a community arts nonprofit. Her work centers on publishing experimental and collaborative art books, teaching creative writing and Risograph printing workshops, and organizing festivals, concerts, and community events. Vanessa recently released her debut collection of short fiction, *No Such Thing as Fiction*, and is currently working on issue four of *Looky Here Magazine*.

### **About Looky Here Press**

Looky Here Press is a community-oriented Risograph printing press based in Greenfield, MA that supports artists, writers, and community members through affordable, experimental, and collaborative print production. We publish art books, zines, posters, and *Looky Here Magazine*, creating accessible platforms for creative expression and documentation. Originating within Looky Here, a nonprofit arts space, the Press combines hands-on education with collaborative publishing through workshops, memberships, and partnerships. Our goal is to expand access to printmaking tools, uplift diverse voices, and build a shared cultural archive rooted in community creativity.

# Meet the Fellows



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## Erdene Clark

Boston, MA

she/her

Erdene Clark (she/her) is a Boston-based activist (artist + activist) currently working as a Radical Welcomer with Ds4Si, as the Co-Director of Wisdom with Arts Connect International, and as a member of the Taiko ensemble, Older and Bolder. Erdene came into her arts activism once she retired from Tufts Medical Center and often proclaimed that she truly found her place among the Boston arts community. She is known as Mama Erdene to many of the local QTDBIPOC artists and is well known for being the last to leave any dance floor. She brings her wisdom, creativity, and vibrance to every community she touches. When she's not at community arts events you can catch her at the Roxbury Library, visiting with neighbors, shaking it at Zumba class, and reading and watching sports with her dog, Prince. Mama Erdene is seventy-five years young and has dedicated this chapter of her life to supporting community by showing all of us what it means to live life to the fullest, with balance, and with love.

### **About Mama's Sauna**

Intergenerational sauna for inner city community. Educational benefits of the sauna.

# Meet the Fellows



## Joshua Collier

Brandon, VT

he/him

American Tenor, Joshua Collier, known for "brimming with passion and sensuality" and having "delivered brilliant high notes as well as heart-wrenching tenderness" was hailed as "the quintessential Italianate tenor" and "the real thing" for a production of Puccini's Tosca in 2024.

A graduate of The University of North Carolina School of the Arts (BM - Vocal Performance) and The New England Conservatory (MM - Vocal Performance), he has performed throughout New England and beyond in many of the romantic tenor roles in the operatic repertoire. However, performing was not the only avenue for Collier's artistic expression.

In 2013, he founded "Opera Brittenica" championing the works of British composer Benjamin Britten. Over the next 4 years, he

produced rarely produced works of Britten, and became deeply interested in the production and direction element of the operatic medium.

After honing skills as a producer for 4 years, Collier relocated to Brandon, Vermont, and subsequently founded BARN OPERA, which was a project under the Compass Music and Arts Foundation for 3 years, where it produced 3 seasons of 4 full operatic productions annually, all conceived and directed by Collier.

Mr. Collier's directorial philosophy does not encourage or support recreating the wheel for simple novelty, but rather to try glean meaning and perspective from the masterworks of the operatic tradition, and to say something about these works that have not been said. Collier's staging has been referred to as "Innovative and witty;" "Comical and heartbreaking;" and most importantly, "Painfully true."

Without the trappings of massive theatrical trappings, Collier seeks to distill the essence of the story and the music by stripping away the superficial, leaving the theatrical treatment of the ultimate truth.

### About Opera Vermont

Opera Vermont turns what it is to be a state opera company on its head by bringing all of opera to all of Vermont - not just the most populous area. By sharing powerful live performances in venues across the state (especially in rural and small-town communities,) and presenting extraordinary singers and musicians with a welcoming, down-to-earth experience that makes newcomers feel at home, Opera Vermont seeks to prove that this art form is for everyone regardless of identity or socio-economic background. The operatic medium tells timeless and archetypal human stories of love, heartache, and everything in between, with unamplified voices that reach straight into the heart of humanity. With no dress code and no insider expectations, Opera Vermont invites everyone to come as they are, feel, be moved, and join the Opera Vermont family.

# Meet the Fellows



## Julia Csekö

she/they

Somerville, MA

Julia Csekö is a visual artist whose practice bridges art, activism, and community engagement. Born in Colorado to Brazilian parents in self-exile during Brazil's military dictatorship, she was raised in Rio de Janeiro, an experience that continues to shape her interdisciplinary work as an artist, educator, and cultural advocate.

Csekö has received numerous awards and residencies, including the Our Energy Future Grant, ALAANA Creative County Grant, SMFA Traveling Fellowship, Collective Futures Grant, and Be The Change Award. In 2026, she will join the inaugural Mosesian Center for the Arts Artist-in-Residence cohort, and in 2025 she returned to the Studios at MassMoCA as an Alumni Artist-in-Residence. She recently completed a three-

year residency at the Boston Center for the Arts and an eight-month Salem Public Artist Residency, and has participated in programs such as Sculpture Space and MASSCreative's Create the Vote Fellowship.

Her work includes public art commissions and is held in collections including Tufts University, Emerson College, the Museum of Modern Art in Rio (MAM Rio), Centro Cultural São Paulo, and private collections worldwide.

Csekö's commitment to arts advocacy began during her BFA at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, where she contributed to national cultural policy efforts. Now based in North America, she continues to champion arts funding, accessibility, and community-centered cultural work.

### **About A Home for Our Future Generations**

I am collaborating with Brazilian artist Raquel Fornasaro to lead A Home for Our Future Generations, a participatory public art initiative advancing community-driven sustainability education in Framingham and Natick. Supported by the sponsors of Mass Save through a Community Education Grant, the municipalities invited us to design two complementary public art installations. Through a series of community workshops, participants will co-create the shingle mosaic exteriors of these structures, depicting an energy-conservation journey, while interior murals highlight practical pathways for collectively lowering carbon emissions. An augmented-reality component further connects audiences to local resources and next-step guidance. By centering collaboration, creativity, and shared knowledge, the project strengthens community agency around collective climate action and energy equity.

# Meet the Fellows



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## Jalix Delacruz

Boston, MA

she/her

Jalix Delacruz is a multidisciplinary artist exploring her craft by sharing her knowledge with her community. She is a Dominican-American born and raised in Dorchester. Her mother with little knowledge in the arts, had always made it her mission to surround Jalix with as many opportunities as possible. At the age of 8 years old Jalix painted her very first mural in a play room at her moms daycare and that created a spark. The canvas is the world around us and the brush strokes, our experiences. Now at 34 Jalix is a portrait artist, who paints her subjects in a grey scale while surrounding them in bold colors and prints. A statement on how people tend to place themselves in boxes but in reality we are all so multi layered. She is currently teaching 5-12 year olds expression through art and color - Focusing on emotion and understanding a project. She hopes to build confidence and character through the willingness to learn than just the ability to complete a project.

### **About Genius Giants**

Genius Giants helps children under 12 build confidence and emotional expression through guided and open-ended art experiences. The program creates space for kids to explore imagination, develop their voice, and think creatively beyond screens and daily pressures.

# Meet the Fellows



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## Sumi Dey

she/they

Medford, MA

Sumi (she/they) is a socially-engaged designer, artist, and community organizer based in Boston, MA. Their work is rooted in the belief that art and design are powerful catalysts for joy, social change, and community building. Drawing from their sociology and civic design backgrounds, Sumi is passionate about creating immersive digital and physical experiences that encourage interactivity, play, and unexpected connections. She is the founder of Coloring Club, a monthly creative meetup for people to gather, connect, and decompress over mindful coloring and conversations.

### **About Coloring Club**

Coloring Club is a monthly community-building event in the Greater Boston area that invites people to slow down, connect, and decompress through mindful coloring and meaningful conversation. Created as an inclusive, low-pressure third space, it strengthens a sense of belonging while supporting mental well-being. Since launching in 2024, Coloring Club has grown into a vibrant monthly gathering with regular attendees building friendships, newcomers feeling instantly welcomed, and everyone engaging in accessible art-making. Our meetups are welcoming to people of all backgrounds, abilities, and social comfort levels, and have been a powerful source of community connection and joy!

# Meet the Fellows



## Yex Diaz

New Haven, CT

she/her/ella

Yexandra “Yex” Diaz is an Afro-Borikén interdisciplinary storytelling artist, arts administrator and cultural strategist whose work lives at the intersection of creativity, equity and community empowerment. As a spoken word poet, cultural dancer, and arts educator, Yex uses narrative as a tool for radical connection to uplift histories, heal generational wounds and amplify marginalized voices across Connecticut.

For nearly a decade, she has served communities as a teaching artist and facilitator, working with institutions such as UConn, Trinity College and Common Ground High School. As a certified AIR Collaborative Facilitator with the CT Office of the Arts and current Development Manager with the Arts Council of Greater New Haven, she supports artists and local creative economies

build sustainable models for growth and visibility.

Yex now serves as the Artistic Director of The Word, a statewide literary arts organization dedicated to amplifying youth voice through poetry, performance and publication. The Word leads in school workshops, oversees the City of New Haven Youth Poet Laureate Program, manages the Connecticut Youth Slam Team through their journey to Brave New Voices and facilitates an annual youth anthology. The Word has also recently assumed stewardship of the Connecticut State Youth Poet Laureate Program and Poetry Out Loud in collaboration with the CT Office of the Arts.

Yex is New Haven’s newly appointed Poet Laureate, the 2026 Grand Slam Champion and a member of CT’s Adult Slam Team, currently ranked #1 in the nation. Supporting thriving creative economies and stewarding poetry as a tool for liberation is her passion and purpose.

### About 3 Degrees

3 Degrees is an interdisciplinary youth arts project that explores the idea of separation and connection through poetry, painting and dance. High school students from New Haven collaborate across disciplines where poets inspire painters, painters inspire dancers to creating a living chain of shared storytelling. The project’s purpose is to foster cultural exchange, creative skill building, and collective healing while breaking down geographic and artistic silos. 3 Degrees is for young artists from underserved communities and for the wider public, who are invited to witness how stories travel, transform and connect us all.

# Meet the Fellows



## Luis Luna

he/him

New Haven, CT

Luis Luna is a healthcare advocate, creative, storyteller, and radio producer based in New Haven, Connecticut. For over 15 years, he has championed immigrant rights, working at the intersection of policy, grassroots organizing, and narrative change.

He most recently served as Coalition Manager for HUSKY 4 Immigrants, leading a multi-year campaign that secured Medicaid coverage for undocumented children and pregnant people in Connecticut. Previously, he was a Senior Organizer with the Connecticut Working Families Party, advancing progressive policy and electoral victories, including Paid Family and Medical Leave.

As a storyteller and cultural worker, Luis uses media to amplify voices too often unheard. He hosts *Módulo Lunar* on WPKN 89.5 FM and co-produces *Melting the ICE* and *Abolition Transmission*, radio programs centering incarcerated and undocumented communities.

He serves on the board of Fair Haven Community Health Care and on the Connecticut Health Foundation's Community Advisory Committee. In 2023, he received the Amistad Award for his contributions to social justice.

### **About CT Immigrant Storytelling Radio Project**

My project uses community radio as a platform to share the stories and lived experiences of immigrant communities in Connecticut. Through my radio show *Módulo Lunar* I bring together community members, artists, and people directly impacted by immigration and incarceration to create and share stories in their own voices. The purpose is to make radio a space where people feel seen, heard, and connected.

# Meet the Fellows



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## Jay Mankita

Amherst, MA

he/him

Jay Mankita, a toy-hacker and maker space educator, helps kids and adults make extraordinary kinetic art from ordinary materials, with his small team at Playful Engineers, now in its 10th year. Before he discovered a fascination for engineering, Jay toured for 25 years as a performing songwriter for kids and adults. Before that, he worked as an environmental fundraiser and canvas director, a photographer, and an occasional labor union song leader. He converted and drove a vegetable oil van for 7 years, but now squeezes everything into the back of a Prius... Jay was a kid in New York City, and became an adult in the Hudson Valley. Now 65, he enjoys being a newbie elder, living with his family in Amherst, MA.

### **About Playful Engineers Traveling Maker Space**

Playful Engineers is a hands-on, play and exploratory learning-based maker-education business founded by Jay Mankita in 2015. We've presented over a thousand programs at schools, libraries, camps, and community centers throughout New England, and beyond, with our Traveling Maker Space - creating learning environments where kids, families, and adults explore everyday physics, solving problems through open-ended activities. Our workshops make engineering accessible, fun, and rooted in social engagement, through the making of kinetic art. We are now working to scale Playful Engineers so we can reach more communities, employ more presenters, and deepen the impact of our work.

# Meet the Fellows



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## Bridget Matros

Belfast, ME

she/her

Bridget Matros has been painting smiles for 25 years, applying her social psychology chops and background in education to design creative experiences for every kind of person. Ten years at Boston Children’s Museum turned her into an advocate for early intervention for creative development - she’s a public speaker, published author, teacher-trainer and parents’ advisor on the subject. Over twelve years at a community art center in Maine, Bridget engaged thousands in one-of-a-kind public events, family workshops, kids’ camps, afterschool programs, gallery experiences, mobile outreach and more. Ms. Matros is starting a new chapter as an independent teaching artist, finding fits between community needs and what she has to offer.

### **About Seeding kids’ “Creativity Clubs”**

I want to take what I and others have done successfully and create accessible resources and trainings so rural communities can sustain their own programs. Specifically, art meet-ups for seniors informed by best practices in creative aging and neuroaesthetics data. Think: free, preventative health care in the form of grange hall quilting clubs and church basement drawing classes that follow a template for facilitation, evaluation, and success. Maine is the perfect place for social prescribing, especially arts interventions: loads of isolated seniors, tons of artists and arts orgs, all in a healthcare desert. Can’t wait to contribute to this movement!

# Meet the Fellows



## Eli Nixon

they/them

Pawtucket, RI

Eli Nixon concocts low-tech public spectaculah. They are a settler-descended transqueer clown, a cardboard constructionist, and a maker of plays, puppets, pageants, parades, drawings, suitcase theaters, and primordial interventions in modern human time.

Eli collaborates with artists, activists, schools, mental health and recovery centers, libraries and the more-than-human world to expand imaginative capacity and build muscles for collective liberation. Eli is proposing a new holiday in homage to horseshoe crabs- everyone is invited! This ancient and emergent holiday offers a smorgasbord of ways to festively engage with movements for abolition, reparations, multispecies justice. Eli was part of the 2025 Providence Commemoration Lab through

which they amplified urban coastal access and air quality hazards of the Public St Right-of-Way via thatched shade structure and windsock installation, clay sparrow and gargoyle building, and other invitations to enjoy and preserve this vital (gorgeous/ contaminated) vista and lift up its ecological history and potential. Eli believes in the transformative power of “free time”, friendship, cardboard, costumes and snacks.

### About BLOODTIDE

BLOODTIDE is a new holiday in homage to horseshoe crabs. In 2021, Eli Nixon’s illustrated manual for celebrating this holiday was published; it’s been spawning dozens of creative interventions centered on uplifting more-than-human organisms since then. Meanwhile, South Providence has been plagued by decades of environmental racism and is in a battle to protect their public right-of-way to the water and improve air quality along the port. Since 2017, Eli (and their cardboard horseshoe crab costume) have been supporting neighborhood residents (now organized as ‘The People’s Port Authority’) in advocating for climate justice. Over the last two summers, BLOODTIDE bike rides brought hundreds of celebrants to Public St. for teach-in/dance parties. Next, we organize to use the holiday to amplify and strategically sustain protection of this coastal access point and tend to the ecological well-being of this vital public foothold.

# Meet the Fellows



## Chief Peterson

New Britain, CT

he/him

Michael “Chief” Peterson marries social consciousness with mellow poetic verses. Born and raised in New Britain, CT, he declares himself a man dedicated to his family and focused on helping our youth. Chief not only speaks about social inequities and individual struggle, but he acts to change the cycle.

Chief is the playwright of and actor in his one-man show, *I Wish Life Had Training Wheels*. He was recently appointed as the first ever Poet Laureate of his hometown, New Britain Connecticut. He appeared on Seasons 4, 5, & 6 of the TvOne hit series, *Lexus’ Verses* and *Flow*. He is a 3x Connecticut Spoken Word Grand Slam Champion as well as a coach for the CT youth and adult poetry slam teams. Chief was featured at the Kallio Block Party in Helsinki, Finland. He also performed at the 2012 London

Olympics. He has also performed alongside Brian Mcknight, Music SoulChild and Ginuwine during the Love, Heart and Soul Tour. Chief recently released his 2nd Spoken Word Poetry Album ‘Poetic Therapy’ which has been submitted to the Recording Academy to be placed in consideration for the Best Spoken-Word Poetry Album Grammy. He has also curated and co-hosts the All Black Men Need Therapy Podcast.

From the high school where he works, to the stages where he performs, this poet on the rise turns his art into action while inspiring people to do the same. Chief is no stranger to the injustice he speaks out about. This is a performer who literally practices what he preaches.

### **About ABMNT Community Wellness Tour & Mobile Studio Initiative**

All Black Men Need Therapy’s mission is to create a safe space for black men to engage in conversation surrounding their mental health. It’s a non-traditional therapeutic atmosphere where men take an easier approach towards the exposition of vulnerability and begin to dissect those inner traumas that typically go unspoken.

# Meet the Fellows



## Diana Popa

she/her

Burlington, VT

Diana E. Popa is a linguist, semiotician, and Senior Lecturer at the University of Vermont whose work bridges multimodal communication, cultural heritage, biosemiotics, and ecological storytelling. For more than two decades, she has worked across international and community contexts to help learners understand communication as a deeply relational and multisensory process that connects people with environments, histories, and one another.

Her recent research centers on New England's ecological and cultural heritage, with a particular focus on the narratives embedded in Vermont's maple syrup traditions. She draws on fieldwork, narrative ecology, and semiotic theory to explore how place-based practices shape identity, belonging, and shared

meaning across generations. This work informs both her teaching and her public-facing projects, where she encourages the use of visual, sonic, embodied, and digital storytelling to express lived experience and environmental connection.

Diana is passionate about designing arts-based, community-centered programs that invite young people and families to rediscover the landscapes and heritage around them. Her work seeks to make creative expression accessible, immersive, and transformative, and she is committed to fostering spaces where imagination, nature, and culture come together in vibrant and inclusive ways.

### **About Storying Maple: Youth, Heritage, and Multimodal Nature Art**

The Maple Heritage project is a community-centered initiative grounded in Vermont's maple tradition. It brings together local residents, educators, and cultural partners to explore how maple sugaring practices reflect shared histories, values, and relationships to place. Using accessible storytelling tools, the project helps communities document and share their knowledge in ways that feel authentic and meaningful. The goal is to support long-term cultural awareness and care rooted in place.

# Meet the Fellows



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## Jason Raymond

Burlington, VT

he/they

I've been teaching creative media for twenty years..but I have also led many, many other lives, including as a jackhammer operator, dental assistant, pizza manager, data entry specialist, concert promoter, documentary film festival programmer, and hockey player. Each of these prior experiences influences my outlook in working with young adults to make fashion photography, films, and audio production. I am eager to continue evolving my career, finding ways of blending together the experiences and interests of my students into new, innovative ideas and media products.

### **About MAKE NOISE CLUB**

My program is focused on empowering young people to harness existing and emerging regional cultural institutions, channels, and tools to produce media arts that are meaningful to them and their communities. My goal is to build networks between regional arts, education, business, entertainment and culture to foster vertically integrated collaborations that seek to strengthen creative innovations and empower young people to make informed decisions about their futures, and the development of their communities.

# Meet the Fellows



## Safarzadeh Safarzadeh

Auburn, NH

she/her

Yasamin Safarzadeh is an Angelino, Iranian American and transplant to New England. She celebrates the intersections of cultural identities and strives to create safe spaces where an individual's sense of self can be discovered both ethically and intentionally. Culture is a rich and complex term and can incorporate an individual's sexual identity, socio-economic experiences, heritage and physical and cognitive abilities. Her work often encapsulates an absurd and ecstatic celebration of bodies, awkward spaces, anxious burdens and the global impacts of imperialism when confronted with hope and defiance. Yasamin has secured her MBA, MFA and BFA while working and learning in California, Ohio, Malawi, Spain, Iran and New Hampshire. These various spaces allow for a deeper understanding of the breadth of American identity as well as

the global impact of colonization. Through her programs and exhibitions, she curates peer learning models in order to ensure younger generations and adults with physical and developmental disabilities can forego the gatekeeping involved in accessing platforms and compensation for their creative endeavors. Yasamin's curatorial feats push traditional narratives and ensure visibility for vulnerable populations, not only through physical exhibitions, but through publications and social media engagements, often cultivated by mentees of her programs.

### **About Annual Programming and Correlating Curations Utilizing Community Partnerships**

I have been privileged to work with exceptional culture keepers, emerging and mid career artists and organizations throughout NH and sovereign Indigenous Nations. With these exhibitions and programs, a burgeoning arts movement is taking place which centers and amplifies marginalized voices. Year long residency models have been incorporated within youth shelters, alternative incarceration sites and day programs engaging adults with disabilities. Each residency and internship arising from these remote spaces yields, not only professional skills development for all those involved, but also formal curatorial exhibitions engaging the general public in decolonized and antiracist modalities. My mentees are now leading these residencies and internship. I am looking at the next logical stage of growing the creative economy for our people within the scope of decolonization and anti-racism. Specifically looking at how as an artist in exile- I can position myself to create enrichment environments for others who feel marginalized and isolated. Identifying and cultivating markets and spaces for these now engaged creatives to begin fostering a more vibrant and healthy creative economy in a state which has liquidated any fiscal support to working class people- especially those of color within the arts and humanities.

# Meet the Fellows



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## Avi Salloway

Burlington, VT

he/him

Avi Salloway is an acclaimed musician, activist, and educator based in Burlington, VT. He grew up learning music from folk legends, Pete and John Seeger, and from an early age was exposed to the power of music to bring people together. Over the last 20 years he has collaborated with musicians all over the globe. He has toured with Bombino, the Tuareg guitar hero from Niger, lived in the Middle East working with Palestinian and Israeli youth musicians to transform conflict, and joined the resistance at Standing Rock. Salloway is the bandleader of Billy Wylder and has recorded on 15 albums and performed over 1,500 concerts across six continents from Coachella to Carnegie Hall, Rio de Janeiro to Sydney. He has collaborated and performed with Jack Johnson, The Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Tinariwen, David Longstreth (Dirty Projectors), Mike Gordon

(Phish), The Low Anthem, Celia Woodsmith, and Pete Seeger.

Salloway is the founder and musical director of All the Rivers, a global ensemble of over 20 international musicians who now call Vermont home. Singing in six languages and weaving musical traditions from around the globe, the ensemble amplifies immigrant voices, offering spaces for understanding and solidarity through performances and educational workshops.

### **About All the Rivers**

All the Rivers is a global ensemble featuring over 20 international musicians from 10 countries who now call Vermont home. Founded in 2024 by musical director Avi Salloway (Billy Wylder / Bombino), the group emerged in response to rising political, environmental, and social pressures facing immigrant communities worldwide. Singing in six languages and weaving musical traditions from across the globe, the ensemble creates powerful experiences of story and connection—amplifying immigrant voices through performances and educational workshops, shaping public narrative, and building pathways toward enduring cultural change.

# Meet the Fellows



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## Jen Volansky

Stowe vt, VT

she/her

Jen Volansky is a Vermont-based community artist, educator, and creative coach who blends art and wellness to build connection and belonging. With more than thirty years of experience teaching art to people of all ages, she creates playful, welcoming spaces where creativity becomes a source of confidence, reflection, and joy.

Jen partners with organizations such as Catamount Arts in St. Johnsbury and River Arts in Morrisville to bring art into everyday community settings. Her projects include Art Happens Here, the Kindness Project, and Mountain River School Community Peace Day, each designed to lower barriers and invite people to see themselves as makers. By weaving coaching principles together with decades of teaching experience, she

helps participants notice, reflect, and carry creativity into their daily lives.

Her current project, Art Happens Here, focuses on sustainability by building partnerships with local organizations and schools so creativity becomes an ongoing practice rather than a one-time event. The project creates simple systems that can be carried forward by others and fosters spaces of connection and belonging where art becomes part of everyday experience.

Through Creative Community Fellows: New England, Jen hopes to strengthen the sustainability of her work and continue building community through creativity, connection, and wellness.

### **About Art Happens Here**

Art Happens Here is a pop-up that brings unexpected art moments into the everyday places people already are, like laundromats, hospital lobbies, trailheads, and break rooms. It's simple and portable, making creativity feel accessible to everyone. In rural towns especially, these little pop-ups spark stories, connection, and a sense of belonging.

# Meet the Fellows



## Matt Wilhelm

Manchester, NH

he/him

Matt Wilhelm is a civic leader and social entrepreneur with a passion for harnessing the power of live music to build community and drive meaningful change.

First elected to the NH House of Representatives in 2018, he served as Minority Leader from 2022 to 2024 and currently chairs the House Democratic Caucus. Matt began his career in public service as an AmeriCorps team leader with City Year NH, guiding diverse young Americans through a demanding year of full-time national service in under-resourced public schools. Following his service, he spent two years building bipartisan grassroots support to expand AmeriCorps — helping lay early groundwork for the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, signed into law by President Obama in 2009.

Before elected office, Matt spent a decade working in the music industry, lighting up stages across the United States and around the world. Along the way, he helped mobilize touring musicians and their fans to give back — organizing hands-on service projects, fundraising events, and advocacy campaigns that translate the energy of live music into real world impact.

A graduate of the UNH's Carsey School of Public Policy, Matt is the proud dad of Ben (13), Rosie (10), and Hope (their pandemic pup).

### **About Levitt AMP Manchester Music Series**

I'm organizing the new Levitt AMP Manchester Music Series -- a free, outdoor concert series bringing diverse, original live music to Veterans Memorial Park in downtown Manchester every Thursday evening from July 4 through Labor Day. Our mission is to curate a safe, high-energy, intergenerational, and cross-cultural third place where neighbors from across our community can come together to celebrate a new summer tradition in the Queen City. At the Levitt AMP Manchester Music Series, everyone belongs.

**NAS**

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