

**Georgia Council for the Arts
Project Grant
FY25 Grant Panelist Biographies**

Project Grant - Panel 1

Kate DeLong

Executive Director

Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association

Blue Ridge, GA

Kate DeLong is Executive Director for the Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association. In 2016, Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association was featured by Georgia Council for the Arts (GCA) and the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) in a case study report listing Blue Ridge, Georgia as one of the Top 5 Art Towns in Georgia.

Annie Moye

Chair

Pasaquan Preservation Society

Buena Vista, GA

A rural southwest Georgia native, Annie Moye holds a master's degree in American Studies and has served as chair of the Pasaquan Preservation Society, a small nonprofit dedicated to the stewardship and preservation of St. EOM's psychedelic art environment, since 2016. She is a freelance art critic and grant writer in the metro Atlanta area.

Celia Bostwick

President

Blakely-Early County Chamber of Commerce

Blakely, GA

Celia Bostwick is associated with the Blakely-Early County Chamber of Commerce. She serves as the President of the chamber, overseeing its operations and initiatives.

Claire Fox Hillard, D.M.A.

Music Director and Conductor

Albany Symphony Orchestra

Albany, GA

Music Director and Conductor of the Albany Symphony Orchestra also serves as an Associate Professor at Albany State University. He currently serves as President of the International Conductors Guild. Hillard previously served as Music Director of the St. Joseph Symphony (MO), the Missouri Western Philharmonia, the Meridian Symphony Orchestras (MS), and was a Music Advisor to the Cobb Symphony

Orchestra. He has also served on the faculty at Indiana State University and Missouri Western State University.

Darius Williams

*Professional Learning Specialist
Atlanta, GA*

Darius J. Williams is a native of Warrenton, GA, where he graduated from Warren County Schools in 2011. There, he discovered his love of the arts as a proud captain of the Marching Band and organizer of the community's HOPE and PRIDE Gospel Explosion, which brought together members of the CSRA community annually. Darius's thirst for knowledge led him to Morehouse College, where he sang in the world-renowned Morehouse College Glee Club as he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education. He then pursued a Master of Education in Learning, Design, and Technology from the University of Georgia.

Elan Buchen

*Roswell Arts Fund
Roswell, GA*

Elan comes from the public art, festival, and experiential worlds. For the last 15 years, he has been building art experiences for guests in both the public and private realms. He has seen, firsthand, the effect public art can have on economic development, quality of life, and culture. He believes Roswell is home to some of the most beautiful natural landscapes, trails, and history, and is eager to see public art connect these great assets in the coming years.

In his prior roles, Elan has helped design and implement work with attractions, museums, galleries, tradeshow, film, and gaming. His projects of note include Hamilton the Exhibition and the creation of the public art and festival program for the Atlanta BeltLine. His clients include Stone Mountain Park, Sotheby's, Disney, Google, Adult Swim, and more.

Elan holds a Master of Fine Arts from the Savannah College of Art & Design in Sculpture. When not working with artists, Elan draws and sculpts out of his studio in Atlanta Georgia, living with his wife and their menagerie of animals.

Project Grant - Panel 2

Esohe Galbreath

*Founder and Principal
Sohé Solutions
Atlanta, GA*

Esohe Galbreath is the founder and principal of Sohé Solutions, where she supports small businesses and creatives of accounting, finance, and organization. Esohe completed her collegiate studies in Electrical Engineering at the University of Kentucky. In 2004, she began her career at UPS and held

management roles in Distribution Solutions, Implementations, Operations, Engineering, and Transportation Solutions, and in her free time assisted small businesses with planning, financial documentation, and tax preparation. In 2012, Esohe merged her corporate experience with her passion for the arts and working with creatives to form Sohé Solutions – Boutique Small Business Consulting.

James Franklin Williamson

*Board Member
Griffin Ballet Theatre
Griffin, GA*

Franklin Williamson is a board member for the Griffin Ballet Theatre. The Griffin Ballet Theatre is a non-profit arts organization dedicated to enriching the cultural life of the community by developing a deeper appreciation of ballet and other forms of dance.

Ashley Miller

*Executive Director
Ashburn Turner County Chamber of Commerce
Ashburn, GA*

Ashley Miller is an accomplished professional serving as the Executive Director of the Ashburn-Turner County Chamber of Commerce in Ashburn, GA. She has an Institute for Organization Management certification from the US Chamber of Commerce. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Mass Communications from Georgia College & State University and an Associates of Arts in Public Speaking from Albany State University (formerly Darton College). Ashley brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to her role. She is deeply passionate about small business, marketing, and community support, and works tirelessly to promote economic growth and development in the region.

David Tahere

*Assistant Professor of Music
John Hamm Performing Arts Series at Covenant College
Lookout Mountain, GA*

David Tahere has been on the Music Faculty at Covenant College since 2012. His areas of interest include vocal pedagogy, vocal literature, directing, and Māori instruments. He has performed with the Indiana University Opera Theatre, Chattanooga Symphony, Opera Tennessee, and Delaware Valley Opera Company. He was a finalist in the Joy in Singing International Art Song Competition. He has a BM from Lee University, MM from Temple University, and DM from Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.

Grace Cox

*Spruill Center for the Arts
Dunwoody, GA*

Grace Cox is an Atlanta based artist and educator who has been working in art-related nonprofits for over 13 years. Her favorite medium is oil painting, but she also enjoys paper mache, ceramics, and mixed media. Her artwork has been exhibited at the Fort Lauderdale Art Museum, Gallery 216, Storks, Local Three, Spruill Center for the Arts, and others. She worked as a freelance graphic designer for a while and taught adobe suite as an adjunct instructor at the AutoNation Academy of Art and Design. Grace's first entry into the world of nonprofit arts administration was as a curatorial assistant at the Fort Lauderdale Art Museum. She moved around within the museum, working with the education department, marketing department, and fundraising and development department, before eventually moving back to her hometown of Atlanta, Ga.

Jennifer Durham

Director

Franklin Memorial Library

Swainsboro, GA

Jennifer Durham is the Director of the Franklin Memorial Library. While attending Valdosta State University, Durham worked in the university library, and then enrolled for a Master's program in Library Science at Florida State University.

Project Grant - Panel 3

Juan Ramirez

Founder and Artistic Director

The Atlanta Virtuosi Foundation INC

Atlanta, GA

A central figure in the Atlanta musical community for decades, the violinist, composer and conductor Juan R. Ramírez-Hernández began his musical education in Mexico, later moving to the United States to study with Joseph Silverstein at the New England Conservatory. His studies with Henryk Szeryng began at the age of fourteen, and continued as he became his principal mentor in Mexico, the U.S. and Europe. Under the tutelage of conductor Leon Barzin, Ramírez was the recipient of both the Serge Koussevitzky and Leonard Bernstein awards at the Tanglewood Music Festival.

Mr. Ramírez has performed and conducted in numerous countries throughout Europe and Asia, as well as in Israel and Mexico. The distinguished composer-conductor Gunther Schuller stated his "unqualified faith in Mr. Ramírez as a violinist and a musical leader of great artistic integrity" and noted that "whatever he undertakes is touched by quality."

He has won numerous awards and honors along the way, including Lexus Leader of the Arts by WABE Public Radio of Atlanta and WPBA Television for "his outstanding contributions, his pursuit of excellence in music and for his initiating and serving several community music organizations in the arts community", the Loidans Arts Award, and the Governor's Award in the Humanities.

Known throughout the state as a music advocator and educator, Mr. Ramírez founded Music for Success! - an educational program under the auspices of the Atlanta Virtuosi Foundation in partnership

with metro Atlanta educational institutions, providing string training by professional musicians to young elementary and middle school children of many backgrounds.

Mr. Ramírez has been a member of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra since 1974 and is the founder and artistic director of the Atlanta Virtuosi Foundation, Buckhead Youth Orchestra, Casa de la Cultura-Atlanta, and is music director and conductor emeritus of the Atlanta Community Symphony Orchestra. Many of his commissioned compositions have been world premiered in Atlanta, New York, Budapest, Collonges sous Salève, Geneva and Monaco. His recent Elegy for violin, cello, piano and soprano, composed for the pancreatic cancer research fundraiser ART-CAN, was choreographed and performed with members of the Atlanta Ballet.

Julia Curiel

*Averitt Center for the Arts
Statesboro, GA*

Julia Curiel has over a decade of administration leadership experience and education to date, serving the community through administrative roles at leading organizations in which she has worked to develop pilot programs, and plan and manage large-scale projects, including nationally recognized art fairs, education workshops and outreach programming. She is currently a Recovery Coach at Freedom Through Recovery in Statesboro, GA, and serves to combat stigma for those living with mental health and substance use disorders, as well as spearheading visual art programs in partnership with Averitt Center for the Arts to make art accessible for everyone. Having graduated cum laude with a B.A. in Arts Administration from University of Kentucky in 2006, she has worked for non-profits and the Commonwealth of Kentucky to produce conferences, festivals, galas, trade shows and other events with her capable and highly productive team members. She believes the arts to be catalysts for positive social change, and is very grateful for the personal impact they have had on her life as a constant source of comfort, inspiration and strength.

Amy Royals

*Director of Development
Marcus Jewish Community Center
Dunwoody, GA*

Amy Royals is a lifelong creator, fueled by curiosity and a passion for the arts. After graduating from Kennesaw State University with a B.F.A in Painting and Drawing and a Minor in Art History, she dove into the world of visual art and nonprofit management at The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia. Her influential years at The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia honed diverse skills including program and event planning, exhibition curation and production, and fundraising. During this time, she had the honor of serving as panelist for esteemed institutions such as Emory University, C4 Atlanta, and the City of Atlanta Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs. Additionally, she contributed as a grant review panelist for Fulton County Arts and Culture. It was at the museum that Amy uncovered a passion for nonprofit development, particularly in communications, grant writing, advancement, and campaign management. In 2018, she embarked on a new adventure at the Marcus JCC of Atlanta, where she continues to make a difference today as the Director of Development. Beyond her professional pursuits, Amy infuses her family life with the same creativity and dedication that defines her professional endeavors. She

epitomizes the spirit of artistic exploration and community stewardship, leaving an indelible mark on both the cultural landscape and the lives she touches.

Kathleen Venable

*STEAM Lab Teacher and Instructional Coach
West Jackson Elementary School
Hoschton, GA*

Kathleen is a STEAM Lab teacher and Instructional Coach with twenty-five years of multi-age teaching experience. Her passion as a teacher is creating a classroom environment that stimulates curiosity and encourages students to solve problems at our school, in the community, and in the world. As an Instructional Coach, she collaboratively plans PBL arts-integrated units with classroom teachers and provides support within their classrooms, so that all students develop the skills that will help them be successful in the twenty-first century. She has been fortunate to collaborate with many organizations that provide arts-integration education including the UGA Museum of Art, The High Museum of Art, and The Alliance Theater.

Laura Nipper

*Manager
Homerville Main Street
Homerville, GA*

Laura Nipper has served as the Homerville Main Street Manager since July 2020. She has extensive experience with small business development, marketing, relationship-building, and creative problem-solving. In the three years of serving Downtown Homerville, Laura has been a part of building rapid collaboration and goal achievement, even during a pandemic. These collaborations have led to successes for the City of Homerville including obtaining an RSVP Master Plan, receiving Rural Zone Tax Credit Designation, establishing a volunteer-based community clean-up day, raising \$250,000 in private funds for projects, and the completion of five public art projects in Downtown Homerville. Laura and her family are proud to live where she serves and can honestly say, "There's No Place Like Homerville."

Linda Parish

*Lexington Downtown Development Authority
Lexington, GA*

Linda Parish is an entrepreneur and member of the Lexington Downtown Development Authority. She is a full-service interior designer specializing in custom window treatments and custom furniture. She has installed hundreds of jobs locally, nationally, and internationally. Linda has been a member of the International Furnishings and Design Association since 1969 and has been an active part of the Georgia Chapter, as well as the national level. She has held numerous board positions both locally and nationally, serving as National Vice President for one year, and President of the Georgia Chapter for five years.

Project Grant - Panel 4

Marsha Barsky

*Chair and Professor of Dance
Kennesaw State University
Kennesaw, GA*

Marsha Barsky is Chair and Professor of Dance at KSU with over 20 years of experience fostering and implementing creative and educational programs for both the public and private sectors. Marsha has taught at numerous venues, festivals, and conferences throughout the US, Canada, France, Switzerland, and Spain. In 2017, she was named Foreign Expert in Dance at Chengdu University, China. In May 2020, she was a visiting scholar at the Kroeger College of Public Affairs at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. Her scholarly contributions include publications in the Journal of Dance Education, and she co-authored a chapter, "Modern Dance and the Body's Unmediated Presence," with her husband, published in Understanding Bakhtin, Understanding Modernism by Bloomsbury Press. As a dancer, she has performed with the Desert Dance Theatre and Shelter Repertory Dance Theatre. From 2008-2018, she served as director and choreographer for Nashville-based Company Rose.

Michelle Dean

*Executive Director and Founder
Popes Museum Preservation INC
Ochlocknee, GA*

Michelle Dean, Executive Director and Founder of Popes Museum Preservation is inspired daily by what she sees in both people and places. As a literature teacher and public speaker, she knows that every person and place tells a story and that stories motivate people to dream grander, reach higher, and strive longer. Popes Museum is no exception. Using Popes Museum and its stories in a way that strengthens the relationships and the economy of South Georgia is what keeps her focused.

N.K. Condua

*Founder and Artistic Director
The Adinkra Project
East Point, GA*

N.K. Condua is Founder and Artistic Director of The Adinkra Project, a dance company based in Atlanta that blends traditional African and contemporary styles of dance to illustrate, celebrate, and critique the cultures of all those who are part of the African diaspora. Condua is an American born of Ghanaian parents. The company name reflects his heritage: Adinkra is an alphabet of symbols used by the Akan people of Ghana to mark fabrics, pottery and other surfaces. Their company is dedicated to showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the Black diaspora through captivating performances and artistic expressions. Their talented team of performers, musicians, and dancers bring to life the diverse traditions and stories of the Black diaspora.

Regina Clontz

Director

Mars Theatre

Springfield, GA

As the Director of the Historic Mars Theatre, Regina Clontz has tapped into her passion: community. With many years of experience in the non-profit sector, Regina's core values are inclusion, inspiration, and collaboration. As a Program Director for the YMCA, Regina oversaw scholarship awards and was the branch's outward-facing advocate in the rural Effingham community. She spearheaded increased education regarding safety around water and senior wellness programs. As the Mars Director, Regina is continuing the job of bringing inspiration, entertainment, and awareness about the historic venue to the county and beyond. Regina has a proven track record of grant writing and, to date, has been consistently awarded her asks. She is responsible for every facet of day-to-day management, marketing, and operations for the Mars Theatre. Her newest projects include youth fine arts programs and senior events.

Robert Hendricks

Director, Telfair Center for the Arts

President, Pioneer Historical Society

McRae-Helena, GA

Robert B. Hendricks was born in 1950, in Washington, GA. He graduated in 1968 from Washington-Wilkes High School. He serves as President of the Pioneer Historical Society and is the current Director of Telfair Center for the Arts, both in McRae-Helena. Robert is a retired Telfair County High School Science Instructor, where he taught from 1975-2008. He has a BS in Zoology from the University of Georgia and MS in Vertebrate Biology from Stephen F. Austin State University. He is a former Environmental Specialist with Georgia Department of Health, and former 4-H Program Assistant with University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service. He has been married to Kathy Hendricks since 1980.

Susanne Reynolds

Director

Development Authority of Early County

Blakely, GA

Susanne Reynolds of Colquitt has served as the Director for the Development Authority of Early County and the Blakely Downtown Development Authority since 2023. She previously served Decatur, Seminole, Miller, and Early Counties as the Director for Economic Development on Southern Regional Technical College (SRTC)'s Bainbridge Campus. Since 2004, Reynolds has been a volunteer with Swamp Gravy, Georgia's Official Folklife Play; and the Colquitt-Miller Arts Council Youth Theater. In 2016, she served as co-playwright for the 25th Anniversary Swamp Gravy.

Project Grant - Panel 5

Josie Williams

CEO

CJE Foundation INC

Sparta, GA

CJE Foundation, Inc. is co-founded by Connie and Josie Williams, natives of Hancock County. Connie and Josie serve on the board of directors for CJE Foundation. Josie serves as the CEO. Josie has over 30 years of service as a federal employee. As a result of living, traveling, and working all over the world, including Germany, Indiana, Maryland, Virginia, Florida, they wanted their hometown to share some of these exposures and experiences. They formed Connie & Josie Enterprise (CJE) Foundation which is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization based in the Devereux community of Hancock County.

CJE Foundation, Inc. (CJEF) organizes and promotes socially responsible family-oriented events to provide opportunities for a better tomorrow. Events offer exposure for performing artists, uplift spirits through family appropriate entertainment, provide extra income through vending opportunities, employ students, adults, entrepreneurs and other part-time employment. Financial assistance is offered to needy Hancock County citizens. CJEF is an advocate for unifying the community. CJEF collaborates with governmental agencies, religious, social, and civic organizations.

Taylor Smith

Economic Development Director

City of Thomaston

Thomaston, GA

Taylor Smith, a native of Thomaston, has been serving as the Economic Development Director for his hometown since June of 2021. After volunteering with the local Thomaston Main Street Program in High School, Taylor found his passions lied in the ability to impact people's lives through positive change and growth. Upon graduating high school, Taylor attended Gordon State College and worked in the private sector for several years. Taylor returned to school in 2015 and earned a B.B.A. in Management & Marketing from the University of West Georgia in 2018. In 2021, Taylor completed his Masters in Public Administration (MPA), from his Alma Mater West Georgia. After serving with the Department of Planning and Urban Development in Monroe, Louisiana, Taylor had the opportunity to return to Thomaston and serve the community that served him throughout his youth. In his capacity, Taylor directs the Thomaston Main Street Program, Downtown Development Authority, Historic Preservation Commission, and all City of Thomaston Events. Taylor also oversees national chain recruitment, neighborhood revitalization, and housing within the city. Taylor serves on the Board of Directors for the Georgia Downtown Association and University of West Georgia Alumni Association. He lives in Silvertown with his fiance, Jennifer Nguyen and their three dogs.

Amy Mutarelli

Director of Dance, Assistant Professor of Dance

Columbus State University

Columbus, GA

Amy Mutarelli began dancing in Ocala, Florida, where she studied ballet and various forms of dance. She earned her Bachelor of Science from Auburn University, and a Master of Fine Arts in Dance from the Florida State University. She works with the Auburn University Marching Band Tiger Eyes as the Danceline Instructor, and has been the Director of Dance/Assistant Professor of Dance at Columbus State University since Fall 2018.

Madia Cooper-Ashirifi

*Chair and Associate Professor of Dance
Brenau University
Gainesville, GA*

Madia Cooper-Ashirifi is a Liberian dance educator, West African and performing artist, choreographer, and scholar. She received her Ed.D from Vanderbilt University and a Master of Fine Arts in Dance Performance and Choreography from The College at Brockport and a B.F.A. in Dance Education from Brenau University. Currently, she serves as the Chair and Associate Professor of Dance at Brenau University. As a Liberian-American, Madia shares her culture and knowledge of West African and social dances to all ages at various venues. She is a performer of the Ghanaian dance company Mawre African Dance and Drum, which travels throughout the Southeast performing and conducting residencies. Madia's other company credits include the Bill Evans Dance Company and Sankofa African Dance Ensemble.

In addition, she has collaborated with various musicians, visual artists, and singers to produce multi-artistic works and performance art in the U.S. Her choreographic works and teaching credits include a variety of dance disciplines in genres of the African Diaspora, modern, afro-modern, West African, Afro-funk, and jazz. Additional teaching and choreographic credits include the American College Dance Association, University of Alabama, Darton College, Middle Tennessee State University, Amherst College, Dean College, The University of the South, The Atlanta Ballet Centre of Dance Education, The Dancers' Studio, Vanderbilt Summer Dance Intensive, New York Summer School of the Arts, and the Gainesville Ballet Summer Intensive Residency as well as others. In addition to teaching, she has had the opportunity to work and perform works of Kofi Mawuko, Robert Battle, Carolyn Adams, Donald McKayle, Cleo Parker Robinson, Dianne McIntyre, Chet Walker, Darwin Prioleau, Habib Iddrisu, Bill Evans, Larry Keigwin, Telly Fowler, and Sherry Zunker.

Leslie Shelley

*Georgia Storytelling Network
Ball Ground, GA*

Leslie Shelley grew up in the midst of a large rural family on a farm in the foothills of North Georgia. Stories wove in and around life and work on the farm. A lot of wisdom snuck in the stories, sometimes hidden amongst the tears and laughter as well as tales of ancestors who still linger; "ghosties and haunts."

Leslie found herself sharing stories and tales routinely which led to the wonderful world of storytelling. Faith based, fairy tales, ghost stories, Appalachian adventures are just some of her favorite stories. Leslie

strongly believes in the power of stories to bring hope, encouragement, and healing. Her mission has become to share, not just tell, but share stories with the hope of helping others share their story too.

Leslie retired from the Cherokee County School District in Canton, Georgia and is currently a board member of the Cherokee County Retired Educators Association. She is also a board member of the Georgia Storytelling Network, formerly the Southern Order of Storytellers. She has participated in the Rome Big Fibber's Festival, the Georgia Mountain Storytelling Festival, the Dillard's Heritage Days Festival, John C. Campbell Folk School Appalachian Stories, SOS Winter Festival, The Bear on the Square in Dahlonega, Cobb County Telebration, Acworth Cultural Arts Festival, Peacock Performing Arts Appalachian Music and Tales, Blue Ridge Haunts and Harvest Festival, and the Chattooga Library Annual Royal Ball, Cherokee County Arts Council, and Stone Soup Storytelling Halloween Stories.

Oshun Layne

Executive Director

Dashboard

Atlanta, GA

Oshun was named Dashboard's Executive Director at the beginning of 2022. Oshun has been with Dashboard since 2017, starting as a guest curator and quickly moving up to a full-time managing director. Oshun has a passion for visual arts and its ability to communicate a sense of inclusiveness across cultures, genders, and generations. Over the fifteen years, she has developed and nurtured an extensive career in arts leadership that includes institutional, gallery, and non-profit project management experiences. Merging cultural studies, art, and policy, she seeks to create innovative pathways to bridge gaps between urban communities and private interests, focusing on arts awareness, cultural competency, and community partnerships.