



Memorandum

TO: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

FROM: Kerry Adams Hapner

**SUBJECT: CREATIVE AMBASSADOR
SELECTION**

DATE: 10/29/2024

RECOMMENDATION

Review and accept the panel's recommendation of the following five 2025 Creative Ambassadorships: Julie Cardenes, Steven Rubalcaba, Jessica Gutierrez, the SJ Shooters collective, and the More Mas Marami collective.

BACKGROUND

The role of the Creative Ambassadors is to champion the power of creative expression and engage members of the public in finding their creative voice. First started in FY 2018-2019, the Creative Ambassadors is a program of the San José Creates and Connects initiative launched by the Office of Cultural Affairs ("OCA") to connect residents across communities and within neighborhoods through creative, participatory experiences.

Creative Ambassadors serve a one-year term and are selected on a competitive basis to complete a scope of work that includes a creative expression project, which engages the public as active, creative participants. Ambassadors are also expected to promote the importance of creative expression in everyday life by utilizing social media, participating in interviews and the WeCreate408 challenge, and promoting public expression at public events as relevant.

In June 2023, OCA also received notification of a \$30,000 grant award from the National Endowment for the Arts ("NEA"), ensuring support for the 2024 and 2025 rounds of Creative Ambassadors. Support from the Packard Foundation and the NEA also enabled OCA to increase the number of potential Ambassadors from four to five with an award of \$9,500 each.

ANALYSIS

Guidelines for the 2025 Creative Ambassadors were released on July 29, 2024, with applications due on September 29, 2024. A total of 35 eligible applications were received. A panel consisting of one Arts Commissioner, one Creative Ambassador Alumni, and two members of the San José creative community reviewed the applications on October 16, 2024, via Zoom. Interviews with the

top seven (7) finalists, were held via Zoom on October 22, 2024. The review panel included the following:

- **Suhita Shirodkar**, 2023 Creative Ambassador
- **Tachiya Bryant**, Marketing Manager at institute of Contemporary Art San Jose
- **Laura Chmielewski**, VP of Marketing and Communications, Team San José
- **Analyn Bones**, San José Arts Commissioner and artist

Applications were reviewed according to the following published criteria:

- **Artistic Track Record (15%)**, including work samples, public presentation history, and professional achievement.
- **Community Engagement Track Record (15%)**, including a demonstrated initiative in directly launching and coordinating creative projects involving the community and responding to the cultural diversity of San José.
- **Communication Experience (15%)** with demonstrated ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing, including in public.
- **Professionalism (15%)** reflecting the values of the City of San José, including a commitment to honor diverse views and backgrounds.
- **Creative Expression Project Plan (40%)** including the philosophical approach to community engagement, innovation of proposed creative strategies, and understanding of the project's target cultural communities.

After careful deliberation, the panel recommended the highest-scoring scoring applicants to serve as 2025 Creative Ambassadors. The five selected applicants are:

Julie Cardenas is a painter, comic book artist, and art educator. With a background in English literature and a focus on arts integration, she uses her first-generation Mexican-Peruvian American heritage to inform her memoir-based work. She has exhibited at the DeYoung Open, Palo Alto Art Center, and Children's Discovery Museum. The creative expression project *Stories from Our Neighborhood* offers zine-making workshops in San Jose Public Libraries, encouraging community members of all ages to share personal stories using various materials. Participants create zines on themes like food, memory, or neighborhood, with options to share them publicly online. Workshops promote creativity and connection within the community.

Steven "Nizzotes" Rubalcaba reimagines discarded technology into serene, geometrically infused creations that reflect the cycle of life. With roots in hip-hop and graffiti, his sustainable art uses mostly reused materials, honoring the past and future of objects while reducing environmental impact. Raised in San José, his work celebrates community and creativity. His creative expression project, *Voices of the Community*, engages seniors at San Jose community and senior centers in creating collaborative collages using repurposed materials. The initiative promotes sustainability, personal expression, and collective storytelling while fostering community pride. The resulting mural reflects diverse voices and celebrates inclusivity.

Jessica Gutierrez is an educator, artist, designer, arts curator, community connector, and mother. She believes that everyone should have access to creative expression through art. Jessica actively seeks opportunities to engage people in meaningful artistic experiences and to build bridges across communities through curation, workshops, and collaborations with local creatives and organizations. The creative expression project *For the Mamas* is a series of free community art workshops in San Jose, designed for mothers and their children. The project promotes creativity, inclusivity, and family bonding, culminating in an art showcase at Noble Gallery. Monthly workshops feature various media, childcare support, and aim to foster a welcoming creative space.

SJ Shooters (Collective), led by **Miguel Ozuna**, Associate Director of Photography & Digital Asset Manager, is a photography collective born from a passion for documenting the everyday beauty of San José. Open to all skill levels, the group captures and curates the city's vibrant stories, fostering a creative, inclusive community. The creative expression project, *A Look Thru Your Lens*, is a community-driven project that brings the art of 35mm film photography to life in San Jose. Participants receive a film camera to capture the beauty of the city, encouraging thoughtful, deliberate photography. Over four years, the project produced 75 Instagram posts and culminated in a group photography exhibition. With future plans to involve at least 75 new photographers, the project aims to continue showcasing the unique perspectives of San Jose's residents through film.

More Más Marami Arts (Collective), led by **Matt Casey**, began with the realization that all one needs to create theatre is the desire and the community to do so. Formed in 2019, this collective of artists is united by a shared belief in the transformative power of theatre to bring people together. They produce innovative productions, script readings, open mics, educational workshops, and provide opportunities for underserved communities in San Jose and the South Bay Area. *The Bay Area Story Archive (BASA)* creative expression project is an online, community-based audio archive preserving stories from the South Bay Area. In 2025, More Más Marami will gather these stories through interviews and storytelling sessions. *BASA* aims to connect San José residents by showcasing personal experiences and exploring local neighborhoods. The project outcome will share stories shared on the website, through social media, and QR code posters in physical locations.

Each Creative Ambassador will receive a stipend of \$9,500 to produce a creative expression project and promote creative expression through their networks. A final proposal for the Ambassador's creative project must be presented to OCA for approval before implementation, and all projects must comply with City and County regulations.

At the end of their residency, Creative Ambassadors will be required to submit a final report with documentation of project activities. The success of the Creative Ambassador program will be measured by the strength of the creative projects, the level of engagement of San José residents, the quality and placement of featured articles, and the traction of the creative expression messaging on social media related to the Ambassadors' projects.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Creative License Ambassador guidelines were posted on the City’s website on July 29, 2024, and disseminated through the Office of Cultural Affairs distribution lists, partner sites such as the California Arts Council’s Opportunities, SV Creates, City Council District Offices, multiple San José Facebook groups, and local cultural partner email lists. Creative Ambassador promotional videos and blogs were posted on the SJ Economy social media and distributed widely. A public information session for potential applicants was held via Zoom on August 14, 2024, and drop-in office hours were held August 19 – 26, 2024 via Zoom.

/s/

KERRY ADAMS HAPNER
Director of Cultural Affairs