

Applicants for the Ad Hoc Arts Council Steering Committee

Name	District	City	Education	Current Employer	Volunteer/Activity/Affiliation	Experience/Interest
Janet Berckefeldt	2	Lafayette	University of Southern California, MA Public Administration; University of Redlands, BA Government	Maybeck Foundation	Board of Trustees, University of Redlands, Redlands, CA; Board of Directors, John Muir Land Trust, Martinez, CA; Board of Directors, Museum of the San Ramon Valley, Danville	My career in non-profit arts and culture organizations has spanned more than 50 years. More than half of that time has been in public-private partnerships for museums, historic preservation, and wildlife conservation organizations. I have served on several theater and museum boards of directors. As a consultant, I have worked with theaters, museums, and other arts and culture organizations. I am a descendant of pioneer ranching families in Danville (Baldwin) and San Ramon (Cox) and am committed to ensuring that Contra Costa County is a vibrant and healthy place to live.
Marija Bleier	2	Danville	UC Santa Cruz BA Art History	Town of Danville Visual Arts Coordinator	SRVUSD (San Ramon Valley Unified School District), Contra Costa Midrasha	I am very interested in helping foster arts in my community, and serving on a steering committee for the Arts for the County would be a positive way to contribute. I have a robust background in the arts and know a lot of artists in Contra Costa and surrounding Bay Area communities. I have served on the arts advisory board in the past (Arts and Culture Commission of Contra Costa County). Additionally, I am a member of NorCalPaan (Northern California Public Art Administrators Network) and work in the arts for the Town of Danville as the Visual Arts Coordinator. I have also volunteered as an arts judge for SRVUSD art competitions.
Kristen Cumings	5	Pittsburg	Wheaton College, Wheaton Illinois, BFA/French Horn performance	Self Employed/Cumings Consulting	I have working with Pittsburg Arts and Community Foundation since 2012 in both volunteer and paid positions, as an instructor, program supervisor, and grant writer. I have also volunteered for other non arts-related organizations such as food banks, schools, and local businesses.	I would like to serve on the steering committee for our county as we work together to develop a cohesive plan for the arts, because I believe the arts are necessary in order for people to experience the full spectrum of human existence, and the more people who have access to the opportunity to participate in the arts on every level, the better all of our lives will be in Contra Costa County. I am a working visual artist who has lived in Contra Costa county for the past 25 years. I started building my art career in 2009 while living in Martinez, as artist in residence for Jelly Belly Candy Company. Since 2009, I've made over 100 large scale works for Jelly Belly at events around the U.S. and the world, as well as numerous private commissions and a large body of work in various other visual media. Since moving to Pittsburg in 2012, I have become involved with Pittsburg Arts and Community Foundation. I am interested in scaling up my own involvement in support of the arts, and I would bring a grassroots experiential perspective of being a working artist in the county for the past 25 years to the committee if selected.

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Nilofar Gardezi	4	Walnut Creek	Yale College, B.A. African American Studies; UC Berkley, Ph.D. English	Dean & Margaret Leshar Foundation, Program Officer & Grants Manager		As the Arts & Culture Program Officer at the Dean & Margaret Leshar Foundation, I am committed to supporting the development of a more equitable, diverse, and representative Arts Council for all of Contra Costa County. The Leshar Foundation will support the process for creating the Arts Council and I am applying to the steering committee to remain engaged and uphold our strong commitment.
Arlene Kikkawa-Nielsen	4	Clayton	Mt. San Antonio College, Associate of Science - Liberal Arts Studies; Mt. San Antonio College, Associate of Arts - Design	Curves Health and Fitness Center, Circuit Coach	Clayton Community Library Foundation, Creekside Artists Guild; Diablo Taiko Drumming; Jsei, Diablo JA Religious and Cultural Center & Club; Cancer Support Community; NorCal Gagaku; Diablo Valley Hui O'Aloha	To further expand over 25 years of diverse experience providing service in the public, private, non-profit, and health related sectors towards a career that utilizes my collaborative, organizational and project managerial skills to benefit and enrich communities.
Tari Loring	4	Walnut Creek	Chapman University, Performing Arts Major/Business Minor	Local Edition Creative	Currently serve as the Secretary & Treasurer as well as the COO for a nonprofit arts organization, Three Thirty Three Arts.	As a resident of Contra Costa County for 10 years and as a business owner of a public art & creative placemaking company, I've witnessed the lack of public arts & culture investment in many areas of the County. Through my business, we're making a concentrated effort to change that by adding more diverse public artworks to cities that don't have much public art and also by building cultural experiences that ignite inspiration & excitement in our county. I'm well-versed in creating strategies for public arts projects that are realistic for each unique setting. I've also co-founded a nonprofit arts organization that focuses on providing artists opportunities to build their experience with public art and directly work on projects that benefit the community.
Christy Mack	2	Lafayette	University of Iowa, BA Chemistry	Bess Brand Studio LLC	Art Committee (Member, 2022 - present); Art Moves Project (Past President/Board, 2016 - present); Lamorinda Arts Council (Board, 2017 - 2018); 100 Plus Women Who Care Contra Costa County (Founding Member/Grant Maker, 2016 - present); Lafayette Juniors (Past President/Board 2012 - 2018); San Luis Obispo Children's Museum (Board, 2008 - 2010); San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation + Women's Legacy Fund (Founding Member/Grant Maker 2009 - Present)	I have lived in Contra Costa County for 12 years and want to help define the future of arts and culture here. I have seen firsthand the benefits of collaborative planning and the positive outcomes of establishing arts councils. I welcome the opportunity to work in partnership to ensure accessible, diverse arts and culture experiences for everyone who lives in, works in, or visits Contra Costa County. I have contributed to the arts and culture sector for almost 15 years as a City public art committee member, arts non-profit co-founder, arts council board member, museum board member, consultant, and grant maker. I have also served on non-profit boards, issuing \$1M in grants to facilitate the creation of more equitable communities.

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Margot Melcon	N/A	San Francisco	CSU Chico, BA Theater Arts	Zellerbach Family Foundation	Too numerous to name, but all arts and culture related.	Margot Melcon (she/her) joined the Zellerbach Family Foundation six years ago and manages their arts and culture grantmaking portfolio, including the Community Arts program, where she works to create an equitable, responsive, and accessible relationship in community with Bay Area artists. Prior to joining the foundation, she worked with nonprofit arts organizations for 20 years as a dramaturg, producer, and arts administrator,. She is also a published and produced playwright (of Miss Bennet, The Wickhams, and Georgiana and Kitty, co-written with Lauren Gunderson). She is also, importantly, a parent.
Alison McKee	4	Concord	San Jose State University, Master of Library and Information Science; San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Bachelor's of Music Performance; Indiana University, Bachelor's of Music Performance	Contra Costa County, County Librarian	Economic Opportunity Council	I am an art and music lover and I am especially interested in the cross section of the arts and public libraries. I am the County Librarian for Contra Costa County and I have a music degree and worked as a musician for professionally for 10 years prior to moving on to a different career.
Ben Miyaji	5	Pittsburg	Allan Hancock Community College, General; University of Maryland, History; Evergreen Valley College, General		Children's Musical Theater of San Jose Board of Directors; San Jose Arts Commission - Chair; Palo Alto Public Art Commission - Chair; Numerous California Arts Council/Silicon Valley Creates/San Jose Arts Commission grant panels; Numerous selection panels for public art projects in Bay Area counties	The arts are a very important part of our lives. Contra Costa County deserves an arts organization that can bridge the gap between the residents and county arts groups that will bring quality arts programming to the county. The Steering Committee is a significant step in bringing needed cohesion to the county arts organizations. I believe my experience serving on the San Jose Arts Commission (over 20 years), Palo Alto Public Art Commission (since 2013) and the Arts and Culture Commission of Contra Costa County give me a unique view on commissions/councils. Also my serving on numerous grants panels on the local and state level also give me insight into the inner workings of arts organizations.

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John Nakanishi	4	Pleasant Hill	Hartford Art School, Fine Arts Major; College of San Mateo, Chemistry; UC Berkeley, Chemical Engineering	Retired	Concord Art Association Boardmember and President; Past session Member, Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church; Past Boardmember Pleasant Hill Martinez Soccer Association; Past Volunteer Art Teacher (Sequoia Elementary School, Monument Crisis Center, Wren Avenue Elementary School PTA); Columnist for the Clayton Concord Pioneer newspaper (Arts in Motion)	I believe Contra Costa County needs a strong and vibrant arts council to bring art to the community. I would like to be a part of the process to develop this arts council in order to enrich the creative lives of local artists and county residents. My experience as president of the Concord Arts Association has provided me with a view of the arts community in and around the Concord area. I can also provide perspective based on my Japanese-American heritage.
Joel Roster	5	Martinez	Diablo Valley College, Theater Arts	Executive Director, El Campanil Theater	Board Of Directors for the Chamber of Commerce, City Of Antioch Chairperson of Nonprofit Arts Committee, Chamber of Commerce, City of Antioch 20+ years of various events, fundraisers, and mixers for various organizations in Contra Costa County	I have been involved in arts administration and arts education since 2002. I re-built the Diablo Valley College "College For Kids" theatre program, and was recruited by Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette to help build their education program. After serving as a Teaching Artist for a few years, I was promoted to Director of Education for Town Hall Theatre, and restructured their entire program, renaming it to "Town Hall Education" and seeking qualified teaching artists to give their students a fully professional experience. I directed over 40 productions for young artists, and was then promoted to become Town Hall's Artistic Director. Over my tenure, Town Hall Theatre received more awards for their productions than any period in their 90-year history. I then served at Berkeley Playhouse for their educational programs, and in 2019 was invited to interview to become the Theatre Manager for El Campanil Theatre in Antioch. I steered the company through the pandemic, innovating new entertainment options, and in 2021 was promoted to become the foundation's Executive Director. Since the fall of 2020, I have secured over \$500,000 in grants for El Campanil, and I currently oversee a staff of 50+ employees.

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Najari Smith	1	Richmond	NYC College of Technology, Graphic Art & Media; School of the Visual Arts, Bachelors of Fine Art	Founding Executive Director	Human Rights and Human Relations Commission, Commissioner; Our Power Richmond Coalition; Climate Justice Alliance; Sustainability Comm.; Richmond Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Richmond Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee;The City of Richmond, Arts & Culture Commission	In 2014, I served as an Arts and Culture Commissioner for the City of Richmond. Najari is chair emeritus and long time member of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee for the City of Richmond. Najari is the founding executive director of Rich City Rides. In 2014, 2-years after founding Rich City Rides, Najari co-founded the Rich City Rides Bike Skate Shop Cooperative, a Black Worker-owned cooperative for-profit business. Najari is a former member of the Sustainability Committee for Seed Commons. Najari is a founding steering committee member of Cooperation Richmond. Cooperation Richmond builds community-controlled wealth through worker-owned and community-owned cooperative businesses and enterprises by and for low-income communities and communities of color in Richmond whose wealth has been extracted.