



The New York Community Trust: The Edward and Sally Van Lier Fund

Evaluation Report: Abstract

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ABSTRACT

The Van Lier Arts Fellowship Program at The New York Community Trust

As one of the largest private funders of New York City nonprofits, The New York Community Trust (The Trust) is a leading supporter of arts organizations. Committed to building equity in the arts, The Trust makes grants to organizations that promote diversity and expand access, develop young artists from disadvantaged backgrounds, and strengthen arts advocacy.

The Van Lier Fund (the Fund) was set up with The Trust at the bequest of Sally Van Lier, who shared a lifelong passion for the arts with her husband, Edward. Although the couple did not have children, they encouraged young people to enjoy the arts and to develop their creative talents. The purpose of the Fund was to “provide education assistance and training to gifted young persons who aspire to a career in the arts.”

After undertaking a comprehensive review of opportunities available to young artists, The Trust determined that the Fund would target young people from culturally diverse backgrounds, specifically those from economically disadvantaged households. The Trust established the Van Lier arts fellowship program in 1991 to enable artists who could not afford classes to get into the best colleges or, when they graduated, establish themselves as working artists. Thus, the Van Liers were able to realize their vision of supporting young artists in perpetuity.



“Without crucial funding from The Trust, many dancers might otherwise be forced to delay or abandon their pursuit of careers in dance.”

- Troy Powell
Artistic Director, Ailey II
Image: Eduardo Patini

Over time, the Edward and Sally Van Lier arts fellowship program has had a multiplier effect, impacting the individual artists served as well as the New York City arts organizations that receive the grants. Without a doubt, the Van Liers paved the way for innovative artists whose voices otherwise may not have been heard. These artists have shaped the arts discourse, introducing new perspectives and pushing the boundaries of their artistic genres. In doing so they have inspired a younger generation of aspiring artists and, as advocates for social change, benefited society as a whole.

Assessing the Impact of the Van Lier Arts Fellowship Program

Since its inception in 1991, the Van Lier fellowship program has awarded over 300 grants, totaling just over \$17 million, to more than 100 New York City arts and culture organizations. These groups have awarded close to 2,000 fellowships to artists, many of whom otherwise would not have had the means to pursue their careers or gotten the break they needed to launch them.

At this 25-year mark, The New York Community Trust undertook a comprehensive review of the Fund to determine whether the Van Lier arts fellowship program has been successful in meeting its goals, and to garner insights and feedback that could be used to refine the program going forward.

Findings

The Van Lier fellowship program has succeeded in its goal of advancing fellows’ careers at two critical junctures: at the pre-college level, to help gifted youth prepare for college, conservatory, or another advanced training program; and at the post-college level, to help young artists launch their professional careers.

Summary of Van Lier Funding

<p>137 PRE-COLLEGE FELLOWSHIP GRANTS ISSUED</p> <p>50 ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVED PRE-COLLEGE GRANTS</p> <p>912 PRE-COLLEGE FELLOWS SUPPORTED</p> <p>\$7,521,500 DISBURSED FOR PRE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS from the Van Lier Fund and other sources</p>	<p>175 POST-COLLEGE FELLOWSHIP GRANTS ISSUED</p> <p>67 ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVED POST-COLLEGE GRANTS</p> <p>962 POST-COLLEGE FELLOWS SUPPORTED</p> <p>\$9,576,500 DISBURSED FOR POST-COLLEGE PROGRAMS from the Van Lier Fund and other sources</p>
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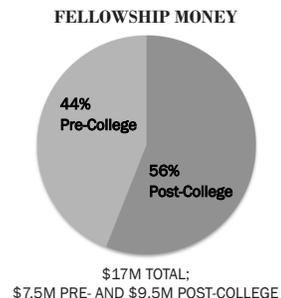
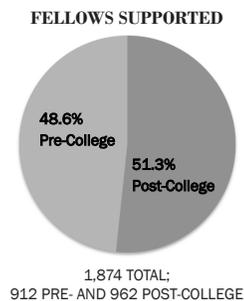
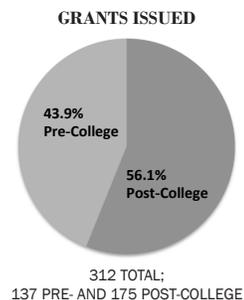
The review found that the Van Lier fellowships have:

1. Advanced the Careers of the Awardees

While the positive impact of the fellowship is most tangible immediately after the award, fellows report that the benefits represent a turning point in their professional careers with long-lasting impact. The fellows report improved educational and career advancement opportunities, realization of personal goals, and increased independence and motivation. The fellowships enabled early-career artists to attend some of the most prestigious art programs in the city and present their work to New York City audiences for the first time. This public exposure led to new work opportunities and in many cases helped launch their careers. Further, fellows and others credit the fellowship with increasing the visibility and credibility of the fellows and their work. This is affirmed by the numerous prestigious awards fellows have won, such as Guggenheim Fellowships, MacArthur “Genius Grants,” and Pulitzer Prizes, in recognition of their contributions to the field.

2. Helped the Grantee Arts Organizations Achieve Their Goals

Grantees repeatedly commented on the critical role Van Lier support has played in the successful implementation of their results-driven programs. With these grants, organizations have been able to make deeper investments in their fellows, providing them with the intensive training and professional development opportunities needed to advance their careers. Market research revealed that other funders provide program support, without offering direct support to the artists enrolled—or, conversely, that they support the fellows but not the program. The Van Lier Fund does both. And while it is not alone in this regard, the Van Lier Fund’s singular focus on the development of early career artists, rather than the organizations that serve them, makes the program unique.



SOURCE: NYCT

3. Diversified the Arts and Culture Field

The Van Lier program has helped The Trust become a leader in addressing diversity in the arts. Nearly 80% of the Van Lier fellows are artists of color. This has influenced the field by enabling intermediaries to work with a more diverse roster of artists, and it has provided important recognition to these artists. Now, 25 years after the Fund was established, other foundations are following suit, shifting their grantmaking to be more inclusive and equitable.

4. Increased the Potential for Greater Impact with Larger Grants

Grants were capped at \$60,000 for many years; this was raised in 2014 to \$90,000. In 2015 the maximum grant size was raised again, to \$150,000, to be paid out over two or three years depending on the number of fellows served. Increasing the grant amounts has enabled the Fund to remain relevant as the cost of living escalates, especially as some groups would like to pay post-college fellows stipends that are in closer alignment to a living wage. It is too soon to ascertain the full impact of the grant size increase.

Recommendations

The report identified recommendations to make the Van Lier program even stronger. These include, most notably, the following:

1. Increase Name Recognition of the Van Lier Fund.

To promote a stronger sense of identity, both for the fellows and for The Trust's arts and culture community, The Trust should ensure that grantees inform artists that they have been awarded the fellowship. In addition, The Trust should create a dedicated page on its website, listing fellows by year, artistic discipline, and affiliated organization. A "Fellow of the Month" profile would keep this page active, while providing fellows with increased exposure. These tactics will establish a direct link with the Van Lier fellows for

the first time in the Fund's 25-year history, enabling The Trust to better track their progress and careers, and setting the stage for networking.

2. Foster Greater Connectivity among Van Lier Grantees.

The Trust could host grantee events to facilitate information and knowledge sharing. It could also use social media to engage and connect the grantee organizations, cultivating a culture of cooperation.

3. Develop a More Interconnected Grantmaking Program.

Grantee organizations are being forced to make hard choices about where to focus their resources and have expressed concerns about their long-term sustainability. The Trust should encourage grantees to apply for its capacity-building grant, when needed and if appropriate, to help them develop and sustain their organizations.

Conclusion

In its 25 years of operation, the Van Lier fellowship program has had a far-reaching impact. Participating young artists have gone on to successful careers; host organizations have benefited from an expanded talent pool while refining their programs; and the field has been strengthened by artists whose work might have otherwise gone unnoticed. While no single finding suggests the need for a program overhaul, the review resulted in key recommendations for strengthening the Van Lier fellowship program in the future.

Profiles of Selected Fellows



Jean John Daniel (born 1996) is a junior at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, a college of The City University of New York, where he is studying dance and psychology on a partial scholarship. He plans to transfer to Howard University's dance program and pursue his master's degree after graduating, and to establish himself as a professional dancer and educator.

At age 16, he received the Van Lier fellowship from Ifetayo Cultural Arts Academy, where he already had been taking classes and performing with the youth ensemble, a pre-professional touring company that tours nationally. The fellowship nominates the very best of those performers and invites them into the Van Lier fellowship program.

Fellows engage in a two-year intensive training program, which includes classes and workshops presented by some of the most renowned choreographers working today. The

fellows perform across the country on world stages. Daniels said that performing before a large audience at the renowned Apollo Theater and meeting Michelle Obama when he performed at the White House “set the bar, and raised my standards.”

In addition to the professional training, Daniels received guidance on the college application process and was able to attend his first-choice college on a scholarship. As a college student, Daniels remains involved with Ifetayo as a teacher and mentor.

I don't know where I would be today without Ifetayo. I have grown significantly as a performer, as well as physically and mentally. It opened up my world and allowed me to discover my passion. I have grown significantly because of Ifetayo. My kids are going there, and my children's children are going there. I'm staying there forever.

My fellowship opened new doors, which allowed me to accomplish so many other things. I had a place to go after school and on weekends, [to] take free classes, and have academic support at the same time. I got to see a lot of free shows, learn about all aspects of the performing arts, and perform professionally. I would not

have been able to stay afloat in high school nor would I be attending this college on a scholarship if it weren't for the fellowship. Overall, it helped me become a better person.



Kristoffer Diaz (born 1977) is a playwright of Puerto Rican descent who grew up in Yonkers and now lives in Brooklyn. He is currently a New Dramatists resident playwright and a speaker, and he teaches playwriting at New York University. He earned both his bachelor's and graduate degrees from NYU. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Guggenheim Fellowship, The Playwright's Center Jerome Fellowship, and the New York Times Outstanding Playwright Award.

He was a Van Lier fellow from 2005 to 2006 at New Dramatists, which “gives playwrights time and space in the company of gifted peers to create work, realize their artistic potential, and make lasting contributions to theatre.”

His first full production, the play *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama (2009) and went on to have 25 productions nationwide. “Being a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize changed my career overnight,” Diaz said. The play also won the Lucille Lortel Award, the Obie Award, a Drama Desk nomination, and the Jeff Award for Best Production and Best New Work. His work has been produced, commissioned, and developed at the Public Theater, Dallas Theater Center, Second Stage, Geffen Playhouse, American Theater Company, and many others. As a screenwriter, he has developed original television pilots for HBO and FX.

Diaz attributes the successful rise of his career directly to the Van Lier fellowship. He described the fellowship as providing...

an amazing opportunity to access resources early in my career, when I needed it most, such as rehearsal space, mentors who provided guidance on practical issues, and peers who gave me feedback on my work. The Van Lier fellowship gave me exactly what I needed at that time. I developed a new play at New Dramatists and connected with actors,

directors, and others that I continue to work with. The relationships I developed, and the exposure my final project received, led to countless opportunities.

The Van Lier fellowship opened so many doors and led to significant connections, which led to other connections. I certainly would not be doing what I'm doing if I hadn't received the Van Lier fellowship at New Dramatists. It provided the connective step for me and was a turning point. I went from being a struggling playwright to a playwright whose plays are actually produced. It eventually led to the first full production of my play, which led to me being a Pulitzer Prize finalist.



Vijay Iyer (born 1971) is an American jazz pianist, composer, bandleader, producer, electronic musician, and writer based in New York. In early 2014 he was appointed professor of the arts at Harvard University. He is the recipient of many prestigious awards, including an Alpert Award in the Arts in 2003 and, most notably,

a MacArthur Fellowship, which he received in 2013.

Iyer performs around the world with ensembles, most frequently in his trio with Stephan Crump and Marcus Gilmore, featured on three albums. One of those albums, *Accelerando*, was voted No. 1 Jazz Album of the Year for 2012 in three polls surveying hundreds of critics worldwide, while another, *Historicity*, was a 2010 Grammy nominee for Best Instrumental Jazz Album. The latter was named No. 1 Jazz Album of 2009 by *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and NPR, among many others. On the strength of these recordings, Iyer was named 2010 Musician of the Year and 2012 Pianist of the Year by the Jazz Journalists Association. Iyer is also known for sustained multi-year collaborations.

He was awarded the Van Lier fellowship in 2002 by Creative Capital, a commissioning foundation, which provides project support and professional development opportunities to groundbreaking artists. The fellowship provided him with financial support, strategic counseling, and professional development services. At that time and as a result of the fellowship, he was able to develop his most ambitious project to date. Entitled *In What Language?*, a song cycle about airports, fear, and

surveillance before and after 9/11, the project premiered in 2003 at the Asia Society and ended up touring nationally. The exposure led to new commissions by major establishments such as the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Harlem Stage, and many others. He stated that this opportunity represented a turning point in his practice.

Iyer describes the fellowship as an empowering experience: "It helped me understand that I didn't have to be poor if I wanted to live as an artist." The fellowship enabled him to expand his practice by engaging in his first interdisciplinary collaboration, a genre-bending production that allowed him to push his artistic boundaries.

Most important, the resources and professional development services that came with the fellowship allowed him to realize the project on a scale that otherwise would not have been possible.

It allowed me to make music that doesn't fit into any genre. It also allowed me to realize that I can collaborate with anyone... It helped me understand the different spheres of art. For me, my music is about moving the needle aesthetically, and that brings a certain transformative experience with a message.



Jessie Montgomery (born 1983) is a New York–based African American violinist, composer, and educator. She has been recognized as an important emerging composer and has received grants from the Joyce Foundation and the Sorel Organization. She has also received numerous commissions from the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Symphony Space, and the Young People's Chorus of New York, among others. She is one of the founders of PUBLIQuartet and regularly performs with Catalyst Quartet. She received her undergraduate degree from Juilliard School and earned her master's degree from New York University.

She received two Van Lier fellowships, one at the pre-college level from Third Street Music School Settlement (1995), which provides access to high-quality music education, and the other at the post-college level from American Composers Orchestra (2011), which increases opportunities for emerging American composers and generates

broader awareness of their work. She emphatically stated that both fellowships “came at critical junctures that allowed me to take my career to the next level.”

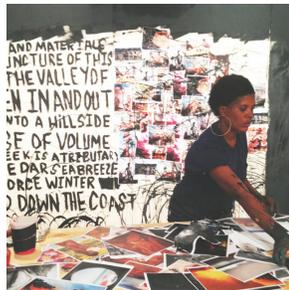
She won the Van Lier fellowship at Third Street when she was in high school, but had been taking classes there since she was four years old. She received her first fellowship once she had made the decision to “play the violin for the rest of my life.” As part of the fellowship, Third Street gave her a violin to play, which she said she otherwise would not have been able to afford. She also got to work with a new teacher, whose fee was partially underwritten by the fellowship. This teacher gave her the technical training and push she needed to take her violin practice to the next level.

It completely changed the way I play. It gave me a lot of confidence. Without the Van Lier fellowship, especially in high school, I would have missed out on having the opportunity to study with a really good teacher and play a high-quality violin. I wouldn't have been able to afford it. The training I received allowed me to play at a much higher level. Because of that, I was able to attend Julliard.

She received her post-college fellowship not long after receiving her

master's degree from NYU, where she had studied film scoring, thinking by taking that route she would be able to make a living as a composer. But when she received the fellowship, she was able to follow her dream to pursue a career as a new-music composer.

American Composers allowed me to produce my first major production and showcase my work to New York audiences for the first time. They gave me a check, plus additional production monies. It allowed me to experiment and to stage my first interdisciplinary work. The experience I gained from that was invaluable. And the exposure I received from that concert gave me a really big push. I connected to so many composers and got introduced to the new-music world. This has led to so many other opportunities. I discovered all these things about myself, and what I really wanted to do with my career.



Xaviera Simmons (born 1974) is an African American visual artist who has developed an interdisciplinary practice

that encompasses sculpture, video, photography, installation, live performance, and choreography. Based in Brooklyn, she has built a reputation as an internationally recognized artist.

Simmons received her BFA from Bard College after spending two years on a walking pilgrimage retracing the transatlantic slave trade with Buddhist monks. She completed the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program in Studio Art, as well as a two-year actor-training conservatory with Maggie Flanigan Studio.

She received her one-year fellowship in 2012 when she was accepted into the Studio Museum in Harlem's highly prestigious artist-in-residence program. The residency is well known and highly respected and has therefore been effective in launching the careers of those who participate in it. Simmons was no exception. The exposure she received led to many other presenting and commissioning opportunities.

Simmons has exhibited nationally and internationally at the Museum of Modern Art; MoMA PS1; the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; the Public Art Fund; SculptureCenter; the

Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum; and Savannah College of Art and Design, among many others. Her works are now in the collections of numerous well-known institutions, including the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Guggenheim Museum, and the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. Her most recent commissioned, site-specific installation is on view at the highly visible The Modern Window, MoMA. She was recently commissioned by The Kitchen to choreograph and perform her first major interdisciplinary dance piece, representing her most ambitious project to date.

She captures her fellowship with the Studio Museum in Harlem as follows:

The fellowship allowed me to make a substantial jump in my career; it emboldened me and engaged me in important conversations. Now, my work is part of the collection; it is incredible to be part of that lineage. Becoming part of the Museum's community has had many benefits. It has allowed me to grow professionally, as well as establish a life-long relationship with the Museum. I think it's important to give back, which is why I continue to work with the Museum's youth program.