

Strength Through Solidarity: Art & Environmental Justice Co-Learning Initiative

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is Strength Through Solidarity: Art & Environmental Justice Co-Learning Initiative?

Strength Through Solidarity works in partnership with BIPOC-led environmental justice organizations rooted in frontline communities to support artistic and cultural processes that improve their communities' health, well-being, and resilience in service of a more regenerative and just future. (Materials and methods could include performance, digital work, video, spoken word, street art, social media, podcasts, foodways, story circles, photography, murals, etc. For more examples, see page 11.)

This initiative helps Environmental Justice organizations leverage the power of participatory art practices to:

- Help increase local and national awareness of environmental justice issues.
- Strengthen and expand connections between frontline community residents.

Q: What are the intended outcomes of Strength Through Solidarity?

To support three environmental justice organizations in developing the capacity and knowledge required to engage arts and cultural practices as a catalyst for change.

To support artists (selected by each EJ organization) using creative strategies and practices that support communities engaged in the movement for environmental justice.

To help build a network of people and organizations able to strategize, experiment, learn and share arts-based practices that advance the work of environmental justice.

Q: How can my organization apply?

The [application](#) process is open to BIPOC-led Environmental Justice organizations that meet the below criteria. Application information can also be found on our webpage.

Q: Why is the focus on funding BIPOC-led EJ organizations?

Due to legacies of land theft, systemic racism, political marginalization, white supremacy, and other forms of oppression, Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color bear the brunt of environmental harms, from the impacts of climate change to toxic pollution. Recognizing this, Mural Arts Philadelphia will prioritize supporting BIPOC leadership and ally with organizations whose missions represent a more just future for these communities. Strength Through Solidarity is designed to address multiple needs, with the needs of environmental justice organizations rooted in front-line communities being the largest and most important.

Specifically:

Frontline Communities: First and most impacted by climate change and environmental injustice, these communities traditionally have the least say in regulations, placement of toxic and extractive industries, and the fewest resources for addressing the impacts on physical and mental health. This initiative is designed to help environmental justice groups integrate arts and culture in their community-based work in effective and engaging ways.

Q: Who has contributed to the funding for Strength Through Solidarity?

While the JPB Foundation is the sole funder of the Art and Environmental Justice Initiative, the Mural Arts Institute has also received significant support from the Mellon Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, and several fee-for-service consultations.

Q: When is the application deadline?

Please submit the written application or video link (and required attachments) no later than **6 p.m. U.S. Eastern Time on Monday, July 24th, 2023**. You will be notified as to whether or not you were selected by August 21st, 2023 at 4:30 p.m. ET

Q: Will MAI offer technical assistance to support proposals?

We strongly believe that proposal writing should not be a barrier to funding and plan to offer support during the application process through free technical assistance. Thank you for using Calendly to schedule a 30-minute meeting via Zoom Tuesday thru Thursday from 9:00 am- 4:00 pm, excluding holidays. Late availability until 7:30 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays for organizations outside central and eastern time zones starts June 12th and ends July 20th. [Calendly Schedule Link](#)

Q: What kinds of groups are eligible to apply?

Eligible Environmental Justice organizations will:

- Have diverse leadership made up of leaders who self-identify as BIPOC and represent the communities they serve.
- Be a 501c3 or have fiscal sponsorship and insurance (see pg 9).
- Be rooted in communities vulnerable to climate change or suffering from environmental injustices and environmental racism that include devastating health impacts, losses, vulnerabilities, and a history of neglect or harm.
- Demonstrate a pattern of community engagement and community partnership.
- Desire to include socially engaged public art processes as a tool for community healing and/or change to support environmental justice work.
- Have the capacity to lead a multi-year project in the public realm.
- Have the capacity for learning, discovery, and sharing knowledge across the cohort and nationally through formal/informal documentation practices.
- Willingness to travel and/or host partners traveling from other cities.
- Have knowledge of the current and historical context of the environmental conditions facing the community and be able to demonstrate community demand for, and interest in the initiative.
- Plan to compensate community members for their time and leadership in the project.
- Desire to collaborate and co-design programming/projects with artists.

- Plan to identify and compensate artists who could advance the organization's work and community goals. We recommend a minimum rate of \$15.00 per hour or a stipend of at least \$25,000/year.
- Plan to determine their own approaches to integrating artists and culture in a way that best meets the goals and needs of communities (Materials and methods could include performance, digital work, video, spoken word, street art, social media, podcasts, foodways, photography, murals, etc.)
- Ability to co-design learning content based on specific interests and needs of the project/program.
- Willingness to contribute to a culminating document to be published in 2026.
- Willingness to share cross-cohort learning in a public forum at the end of 2025.
- An intention to continue producing socially engaged public art projects past the duration of this initiative.
- Demonstrate commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

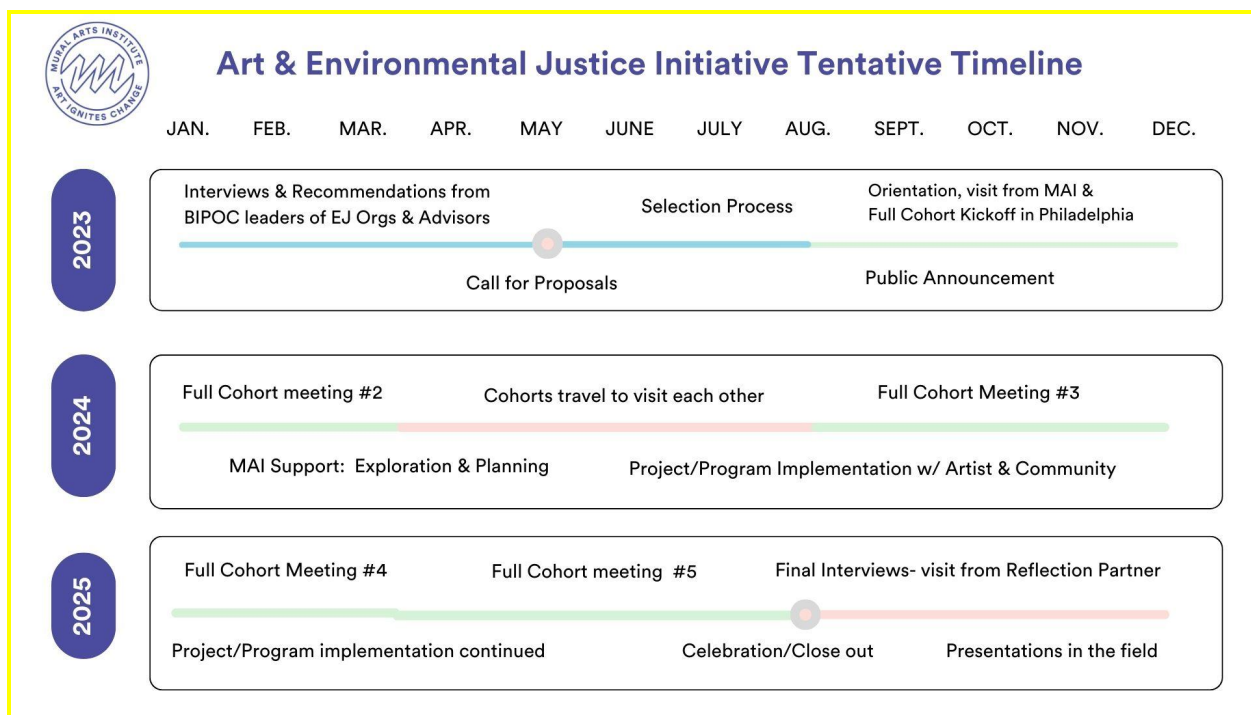
Q: How is the initiative structured?

The initiative has several interrelated components:

1. **Discovery and Orientation**— Early on, we will support cohort relationship building through peer exchanges, visits from MAI staff to each EJ organization location to allow for deep listening and the opportunity for matching Mural Arts consultants to themes, priorities, and community interests.
2. **Public Art Tour and Networking**—Cohort members will travel to Philadelphia for the first time to explore murals, meet artists, experience hands-on workshops and discover the range of socially engaged participatory public artworks created in collaboration with Mural Arts Philadelphia. There will also be the opportunity for cities to travel to one another to build face-to-face relationships in the second year.
3. **Reflection and Assessment**—The full cohort will meet at regular opportunities for collaboration, learning, sharing knowledge, and showcasing the work of cohort members, facilitated by Mural Arts Institute with support from our reflection partner. Each EJ organization co-creates the learning framework and receives individualized support for its project/program. Organizations will select artist mentors that reflect their interests and needs. Each location chooses from a range of public artmaking learning options, including project management, community engagement, understanding socially engaged public art, creating calls for artists, contract and insurance basics, the design process, program/project planning and development, and documenting the process. Each organization will be asked to participate in reflective activities such as surveys, interviews, and more to share feedback on the program and to document its impact. Each organization will also be offered the chance to opt-in to support from the reflection partner to help with documenting and reflecting on the impact of its art projects.
4. **Customized Consultations**—Beginning in 2024, cohort members work independently to design and implement their projects with artists and community members in their region. The Mural Arts Institute team will continue to support each location and its selected artists through customized training, conversations, and visits as they work toward their identified goals. We will provide your team with on-site and remote consultation services through calls, workshops, and scheduled site visits at important milestones.

5. **Share Knowledge**— Each location will share its process in a forum of its choosing at the end of 2025. Participation in public forums offers an opportunity to engage in national dialogue within the environmental justice field, increasing networks and building agency.
6. **Lasting Contribution to the Field of Public Art**- Each organization will share insights that lead to a final published document written by our reflection partner that can be shared more broadly to support learning and growth across the field of public art.

Q: What does the timeline of the initiative look like?



Q: How often will the full cohort meet?

MAI will host five full cohort gatherings. See the timeline above for details of projected periods for when these meetings would take place. All dates are to be defined with the group once EJ organizations have been selected. Polling will be used to determine the best dates across regions and timelines.

In addition, each selected EJ organization will also choose individualized learning opportunities that broaden their understanding of the role of artists and cultural workers in advancing their goals and will begin working independently to design the scope of their project/programs to align with community-driven needs. Scheduling is based on each organization's individual needs and capacity.

Q: How will submissions be assessed?

After the deadline for submissions has passed, the MAI team will review submissions to ensure eligibility and to confirm that proposals meet the requirements. Eligible applications will advance to the Participatory Review session, where MAI staff and

advisors will score organizations using a rubric that measures: community involvement, track record of environmental justice work, team capacity, cohort participation and focus on participatory arts-based practices that advance the work of environmental justice.

Q: How will MAI announce finalists to the public?

We will announce the full cohort in the fall of 2023 through our website. Mural Arts has a robust series of digital platforms and a large audience exceeding 25,000 general email subscribers and 160,000+ social media followers. MAI has its own segmented subscriber list, which exceeds 2,500 people. MAI communicates with this audience via a quarterly newsletter and through invitations to join public events and convenings, many of which are digital. At significant moments throughout the initiative, we invite cohort members to help shape what public engagement should look like both for our audience and for their own audiences. We have a flexible and collaborative approach to public opportunities for sharing the work.

Q: How is the funding divided and provided?

Funding is provided by ACH electronic transfer and divided into three areas:

Participation: \$130K over 3 years (towards salaries, fees, insurance for your capacity to participate in full cohort meetings, interviews with our reflection partner, customized coaching, and other deliverables related to reflection and documentation)

Support for the development of a program or project: \$130K over 3 years (to be applied towards artist compensation, other contractor fees, community stipends to support engagement, and all project/program materials, equipment, and supplies)

Additional funding available for travel to support relationship building and sharing: \$36K

\$10,000	Upon Signing the Award Letter	Participation/Consultation/Reflection
\$50,000	October 2023 Upon Signing the Agreement	Participation/Consultation/Reflection & Program/Project Support
\$12,000	October 2023 Upon Signing the Agreement	Travel/Lodging/Meals- Visiting Philadelphia, PA

\$50,000	January 2024	Program/Project Support
\$50,000	January 2024	Participation/Consultation/Reflection
\$14,000	January 2024	Travel/Lodging/Meals -Building Relationships with other cohort members

\$50,000	January 2025	Program/Project Support
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\$50,000	January 2025	Participation/Consultation/Reflection
\$10,000	January 2025	Conference Fees/Travel/Lodging/Meals

Q: How many organizations will be awarded?

Mural Arts Philadelphia will provide funds and co-design individualized learning opportunities to three BIPOC-led environmental justice organizations rooted in front-line communities. The intention is to support their capacity to harness participatory public art processes to advance environmental justice goals and strengthen long-term advocacy work. Future cohorts are possible as funding allows.

Q: Can applications be submitted by multiple organizations, for example, in collaboration with another organization?

Yes. We've learned that applicants with a history of collaboration will be most successful. The award amount remains the same regardless of the number of organizations applying together.

Q: What can funding be used to support?

As outlined in the table above, three funding areas are divided into categories.

Participation funding can include salaries, insurance, professional development including workshops, seminars, conferences, support for mental health, support for team members to manage capacity, support for managing this project, partner collaboration, administrative costs and technical costs.

Program/Project funding includes expenses related to supplies and materials, space rental, stipends to collaborators, community meals, documentation of experience, equipment and technology, marketing or publicity, artist fees, community stipends (including gift cards or gift certificates), and other production costs identified during production or in the planning phases.

Travel funding supports expenses related to networking within the cohort, visiting Philadelphia, and participating in a public forum of your choosing; including registration fees, hotel fees, meals, and transportation within the United States.

Q: Can BIPOC led Environmental Justice organizations working outside the US apply?

To be eligible for participation, organizations must be based in the United States or Puerto Rico. MAI will prioritize locations where we have not previously led cohorts in the past. Previous locations include Akron, OH; Detroit, MI; Memphis, TN; Austin, TX; Kern County, CA; and Santa Fe, NM. Ideally we look to form a cohort of EJ organizations representing different regions of the United States and Puerto Rico.

Q: Does the fiscal sponsor need to meet the criteria of being BIPOC-led?

No, the fiscal sponsor does not have to be BIPOC-led. However, we hope that fiscal sponsors ask for no more than 10-12% of the total funds awarded. We ask that the fiscal

sponsor submit a letter outlining their commitment to this value including their support of your organization and this initiative. For a list of fiscal sponsors in your area, The National Network of Fiscal Sponsors has a [searchable directory](#) online.

Q: Is travel optional?

While remote learning has been beneficial, we've learned it cannot replace the connection that comes from spending time together in person. We will provide time and resources for travel across the cohort and prioritize in-person relationship building when possible. In addition, we encourage masks, testing, and vaccinations to support safe travel experiences for everyone.

Travel includes:

2023

- MAI staff travel to each EJ organization to get to know each other and to discuss initiative expectations as outlined in our agreement.
- Full cohort travels to Philadelphia (hosted by MAI) to get to know each other and to explore community-driven public art practices together.

2024

- Funding will be provided for each team to visit each other in their locations.

2024-2025

- Funding provided to MAI staff, including Artist Mentors, to travel to the location/artist/organization they support.

2025

- Funding will be provided to each EJ organization to travel to a conference of their choosing to present their work.
- Funding provided to the Initiative Reflection Partner for final interviews in person with each EJ Organization.

Q: Are there required deliverables as part of the application or reporting requirements if selected for funding?

We're interested in hearing about your experience, process, successes, and lessons learned throughout this initiative. The information you provide through surveys, full cohort meetings, interviews, and other documentation is valuable to our funder and to the Mural Arts team. It helps us to:

- Understand the impact of this work with your community more deeply.
- Appreciate your successes, challenges, and lessons learned.
- Report back to our funder at regular intervals as required.
 - Grant reports are 2x a year in August and February.
 - Budget reviews
- Make improvements to our learning model and cohort design to be more responsive to the needs of the organizations we work with.
- Further our strategy to adopt practices that advance this work in the most ethical, collaborative way possible for all participants.

Q: What is the role of reflection and documentation?

We highly encourage your participation in this process. Future funding depends on consistent moments of reflection and evaluation throughout the initiative. MAI will hire a reflection partner to:

1. Assess and document the initiative's intentions and impact in real-time. Give participants a confidential channel by which to provide feedback to inform the direction of the initiative. The reflection partner will also provide content for a final publication sharing methods, learning, and inspiration
2. If the EJ organization opts in, the reflection partner will also offer tailored reflective tools for each organization to assess the impact of their art projects on their own.

Reflection and documentation tools that the reflection partner will ask EJ org to respond to may resemble a combination of the following. (These are similar tools that the reflection partner can offer to each EJ org to use for its own reflection and documentation about its art projects.)

- Goal and metric-setting exercises
- Journal notes
- Quotes from interviews
- Survey feedback
- Drawings and other imagery
- Information gathered in community engagement
- Social media posts
- Photos and video from engagement, activities, community meetings
- Participant observations, and the observations of core partners and residents
- And many more

Q: If my organization applied and was awarded in the past, are there any restrictions to reapplying?

Yes. Organizations that participated in the past are not eligible to apply. In addition, MAI will prioritize locations where we have *not* previously led cohorts in the past. Previous locations include Akron, OH; Detroit, MI; Memphis, TN; Austin, TX; Kern County, CA; and Santa Fe, NM.

Q: Will there be a signed agreement or any legal expectations in order to participate?

Organizations selected to participate will first receive a letter of agreement that includes basic requirements that align with the information provided in this FAQ, to confirm both organization's intention to work together. This letter will come with the first portion of the total funds as outlined above. The more formal contractual agreement between Mural Arts Philadelphia and each organization will include an outline of the program's key deliverables, proposals for shared communications, an outline for the disbursement of funding, and indemnification and insurance requirements, among other terms. You may want to retain a lawyer for support, and there exist many local organizations with volunteer lawyers ([National Directory for Volunteer Lawyers in the Arts](#)).

About Insurance Coverage:

One is General Liability coverage which provides coverage for the Organization should any negligent actions cause bodily injury or property damage to a third party. The other is Workers Compensation which provides protection to the Organization's employees should they get hurt on the job, covering their medical expenses and pay for lost wages.

Typically, Mural Arts requires partner organizations to carry General Liability coverage with limits of \$1,000,000 per Occurrence, \$2,000,000 General Aggregate, \$1,000,000 Personal & Advertising Injury, \$1,000,000 Products and Completed Operations, and Workers Compensation and Employers Liability as required by your state (the location where the Project that is being funded will take place). Additional insurance may be needed depending on the type of project being funded, and we will support your exploration of these options.

Q: Who is the point of contact?

Ellissa Collier, Senior Program Manager for the Art & Environmental Justice Co-Learning Initiative, can be reached at [Calendly Schedule Link](#)

Ellissa Collier is a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania-based artist, educator, and community advocate. She specializes in curriculum design, program management, and group facilitation. Since 2018, she's coached thousands of non-profit and public sector professionals who work to influence public health issues such as violence, poverty, and education inequality. Her goal is to help organizations work more collaboratively and more transparently with the communities they serve to promote respect, trust, and healing. She received her B.A. from Oberlin College, her M.F.A from Rutgers University, and holds a Teaching Certification in Art Education from Moore College of Art. In addition, she has a graduate certificate in Restorative Practices from the International Institute for Restorative Practices and is a 200+ hours certified trauma-competent professional. She serves as treasurer for the [Spiral Q](#) advisory board and volunteers with [Urban Tree Connection](#) community farm. This marks her 11th year with Mural Arts Philadelphia since joining the organization in 2008.

Q: How did Strength Through Solidarity get started?

In July 2017, Mural Arts Philadelphia launched the Art & Environment Capacity Building Initiative as an anchor program within its Mural Arts Institute.

To date, 6 locations in different regions have participated in deep learning engagements customized to specific goals and needs. With this opportunity, the Art & Environment Capacity Building Initiative is entering its third iteration (as the Art & Environmental Justice Co-Learning Initiative), following two grants of three years each beginning in 2017 with collaborations in Akron, OH; Detroit, MI; Memphis, TN; and Austin, TX; Kern County, CA; and Santa Fe, NM; in 2020.

Q: What is the Mural Arts Institute?

The Mural Arts Institute (MAI) is dedicated to advancing the development of socially-engaged, community-driven public art practices. Our approach centers on building relationships and strengthening collaboration between artists, community members, and other partners through participatory public art practices. As collaborators and co-designers, we believe in an individualized approach to working with organizations as reflected in our core values; that people should have a say in the decisions that impact their lives and communities; that art and creative practice are critical to people's sense of identity and place; and that true cultural vibrancy means honoring and reflecting the identities and experiences of the people who make up a community.

Q: What are the various roles of those involved?

MAI Team: We are a small team of artists, arts administrators, and community advocates. Our approach to this work is collaborative; we seek to share knowledge, experiences, and resources based on our many years of community-based public art practices while also facilitating learning among participants. As an intermediary funder, the team reports back to our funder to share successes, challenges, and learnings.

Initiative Reflection Partner: To support evaluation and reflection, MAI works with a reflection partner responsible for assessing the efficacy of the Initiative's approach to achieving its intended outcomes; supporting our partners around their unique learning goals; and helping partners develop individual plans for assessing their work. Through another of MAI's initiatives, its Public Art and Civic Engagement Capacity Building Initiative (PACE), we received several strong proposals in response to a call, ultimately selecting the team of Sherman Cultural Strategies and Deidra Montgomery Consulting. We've opted to work with this team again because of their strong familiarity with the organization and the Mural Arts Institute, which they have been supporting since 2020, and because of our overall high level of satisfaction with the outcome of their prior work. In addition to supporting MAI and organizations participating in the initiative, the reflection partner will play a key role in producing a final publication that can be shared more broadly to support learning and growth across the field. The reflection partner will ask cohort members to complete surveys or provide feedback in other ways on their experience to support reflection and learning. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted between the reflection partner and participants towards the end of the initiative.

Advisory Group: Our advisors include six BIPOC environmental justice leaders and community-based arts advocates with decades of experience in their fields. This team makes recommendations to the initiative design and supports the selection process using a scoring rubric. Valid applications will be scored during the Participatory Review in August of 2023.

Q: How does Mural Arts Philadelphia support public art?

With over 40 years of experience in participatory public art projects, specifically large-scale murals, we see our role as a conduit and catalyst for serving the issues and needs most pressing to communities.

Within the City of Philadelphia, Mural Arts has united artists and communities through a collaborative process to create art that transforms public spaces and individual lives. Mural Arts engages communities in 50–100 public art projects each year and maintains

its growing collection through a restoration initiative. Our core program areas—Art Education, Community Murals, Environmental Justice, Porch Light, and Restorative Justice—yield unique, project-based learning opportunities for thousands of youth and adults.

Each year, 15,000 residents and visitors tour Mural Arts’ outdoor art gallery, which has become part of the city’s civic landscape and a source of pride and inspiration, earning Philadelphia international recognition as the “Mural Capital of the World.”

For more information, visit: www.muralarts.org

Q: Is Mural Arts Philadelphia known for public art beyond mural making?

Below is a small selection of recent projects and programs that illustrate a diverse range of participatory public art processes:

- And You Will Know it’s Done When the Oil Stops Bubbling: A community-developed cookbook and storytelling performance. Created by Lead Artist Mike Durkin with participation from Kensington community members, recipes and accompanying installations look at important dishes, traditions, and rituals that bond us together.
- In Partnership with Mural Arts Philadelphia in their project, The Future Is Worth The Fight, Just Hold On & You Will See, artist Jess X. Snow guides young people from all over Philadelphia through this transformation process. By tackling the question of what safety and community would look like if defined by those who are most often silenced, young people imagine a world beyond and without the systems they have inherited, many of which have failed them.
- With support from the Mural Arts Program of Philadelphia’s Porch Light program and the city’s Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services, The Black Paradise Project, created by visual artist Yannick Lowery and counseling psychologist Dr. Kimberly Marie Ashby, aims to mitigate the mental health consequences of exposure to racism by providing opportunities for Black people to share their experiences and engage in joy.
- Climate Justice Initiative* (2020-present), set out to work directly with movement builders, activists, and community leaders across the Lenapehoking (Delaware River Valley) region to build networks, share resources, and inspire support for their work towards climate justice.
- Covid-19 and Climate Change* (2020) was a collaborative effort between artists and activists who are interested in better understanding and illustrating the many hidden intersections between climate change, environmental justice, and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Emerge Campaign* (2020-2021) fostered inspiration and hope, acknowledging not just the impact of the intersections of COVID-19 and systemic racism in America but the innate strength and resilience of people of color challenged by both pandemics. Participants in Mural Arts’ Guild, a workforce development curriculum for citizens returning from incarceration, were paired with a writing coach to develop and polish original PSAs.

Q: What if I have additional questions?

Please use the [Calendly Schedule Link](#) to request a virtual meeting time and include your questions in the message. We look forward to supporting you in your interest in this initiative.