



# leeway foundation

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Leeway Foundation announces its 2025 Transformation Award Recipients**

PHILADELPHIA, PA — Leeway Foundation is proud to announce the recipients of its 2025 Transformation Award (LTA), awarding a total of \$180,000 in unrestricted support to 12 women, trans, and/or gender nonconforming artists and cultural producers working at the intersection of art and social change in the Greater Philadelphia region.

The Transformation Award honors artists and cultural producers who have demonstrated a long-term commitment to social change work, sustained artistic practice, and leadership within their communities for five years or more. Selected from a competitive pool of applicants, the 2025 LTA recipients represent a wide range of disciplines, including dance, theater, performance, film, literature, folk and traditional arts, culinary arts, social practice, and multidisciplinary work. Ranging in age from their mid-20s to early 70s, this year's cohort reflects the many life experiences, creative paths, and justice-driven work shaping today's movements.

The 2025 LTA cohort includes artists whose practices engage urgent and interconnected issues such as immigrant and refugee justice; cultural preservation; racial justice; environmental justice; prison abolition; Palestinian liberation; gender justice; mental health and community healing; and Black, queer, and trans liberation. Across practices, recipients center art as a tool for collective memory, resistance, care, and transformation.

This year's awardees include but are not limited to: a Mexican folk dance artist creating intergenerational spaces for migrant families to reconnect with cultural tradition; a formerly incarcerated activist-filmmaker documenting resistance to mass incarceration; a Black, queer, and agender artist creating experimental performances centering liberation and interiority; an expressive arts practitioner creating accessible wellness spaces for underrepresented communities; a poet and audio storyteller archiving intimacy and care among Black women; a chef and cultural worker preserving African diaspora foodways; and a Palestinian director and organizer creating politically informed theater that transforms grief into collective vision.

Together, the 2025 Transformation Award recipients exemplify Leeway's belief that art is essential to building just, liberated futures – grounded in community accountability, imagination, and sustained cultural work.

The 2025 Transformation Award recipients are (in alphabetical order):

[Andrea Espinal](#) of Northeast Philadelphia, *Multidisciplinary*, \$15,000

[Connie Yu](#) of Cedar Park, *Multidisciplinary*, \$15,000

[Debbie A. Davis](#) of Lamokin Village, *Media Arts/Visual Arts*, \$15,000

[Donna Oblongata](#) of Kingsessing, *Performance/Visual Arts*, \$15,000

[Imran Siddiquee](#) of Olde Kensington, *Media Arts/Literary Arts*, \$15,000

[Nia Benjamin](#) of Fairmount, *Performance/Media Arts*, \$15,000

[Raina J. León](#) of Chestnut Hill, *Literary Arts/Media Arts*, \$15,000

[shanina dionna](#) of West Philadelphia, *Visual Arts/Performance*, \$15,000

[Silvana Cardell](#) of Francisville, *Performance*, \$15,000

[Sojourner Ahebee](#) of West Powelton, *Literary Arts*, \$15,000

[Valerie Erwin](#) of Germantown, *Folk Arts*, \$15,000

[Zaina Yasmin Dana](#) of Northern Liberties, *Performance*, \$15,000

## ABOUT THE TRANSFORMATION AWARD

Transformation Award applications are evaluated by an independent peer review panel. A national panel of artists and cultural producers convened to review applications and work samples in this two-stage process. Grantees were selected through a process that values commitment to social change, lived experience, and creative rigor.

The 2025 review panel consisted of Brooklyn-based visual artist Chitra Ganesh; Philadelphia-based poet, writer, and performer [Denice Frohman \(LTA '12; WOO '19, '20, '23\)](#); Knoxville-based playwright, director, and actor Linda Parris-Bailey, Philadelphia-based illustrator and arts administrator Elliot Waters-Fleming; and Houston-based writer, poet, and translator Jadine Pluecker. The panel was facilitated by Jess Garz, founder and director of RAE Consulting, who holds over a decade of experience in arts-focused grantmaking.

The [Transformation Award](#) provides unrestricted annual awards of \$15,000 to women, trans\*, and gender nonconforming artists and cultural producers living in greater Philadelphia who create art for social change and have done so for the past five years or more, demonstrating a long-term commitment to social change work.

Applications are made available on the Leeway website and may also be obtained by calling 215.545.4078 or emailing [info@leeway.org](mailto:info@leeway.org). Potential applicants are encouraged to attend one of the many support sessions offered throughout the year or schedule an appointment with a staff member for one-on-one support.

**The next deadline for the Transformation Award is May 15, 2026.**

## ABOUT LEEWAY FOUNDATION

The Leeway Foundation supports women, trans\*, and gender nonconforming artists and cultural producers working in communities at the intersection of art, culture, and social change. Through our grantmaking and other programs, we promote artistic expression that amplifies the voices of those on the margins, promotes sustainable and healthy communities, and works in the service of movements for economic and social justice. For more information about Leeway, its grant programs, grantees, and events, visit [leeway.org](http://leeway.org).

*\*Leeway is a trans-affirming organization committed to gender self-determination, and we use the term “trans” in its most inclusive sense, as an umbrella term encompassing transsexual, transgender, genderqueer, Two-Spirit people, and anyone whose gender identity or gender expression is nonconforming and/or different from their gender assigned at birth.*

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