



IMAGINING AMERICA
artists + scholars in public life

2025-2026 Annual Report

June 30, 2026

We are pleased to share the Imagining America Annual Report for the 2025-2026 membership year. It has been a joy to build new and meaningful relationships with so many people, organizations, and places across the national network and we hope that you enjoy reading on for all that we have learned and accomplished. We look forward to engaging with one another in the year ahead, especially at [the 2026 IA National Gathering in Davis, California from October 23-25](#).

CONNECTING AND ENGAGING IN 2025-2026

The Imagining America (IA) national consortium continued to grow and deepen this year as we welcomed 10 new member institutions. Over the past year, the vibrant IA community of artists, scholars, students, and cultural organizers joined together in a diverse array of programs, events, and learning opportunities.



Images from the 2025 IA National Gathering in Las Cruces, NM

The **2025 IA National Gathering, Providing Passage: Practicing the Worlds We Want** was organized in partnership with IA member New Mexico State University and explored creative and expansive community engagement efforts and public scholarship projects in the Paso del Norte Region of Las Cruces, New Mexico, El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. We are thankful to the incredible NMSU team and regional Steering Committee for co-organizing a joyful and restorative gathering that convened over 450 participants for three days of immersive learning and co-creation.

The program featured over 100 speakers across 70 concurrent sessions that highlighted critical community engaged research projects, artmaking activities, participatory workshops, and media screenings. Registrants represented over 150 different institutions from 34 states (in the U.S. and Mexico), including 374 attendees from Imagining America member campuses.

The National Gathering also included an **IA 25th Anniversary track** representing the good work across IA's distributed networks from current IA Collaboratories and ongoing research initiatives, and special participatory activities from [The IA Clearing](#), designed and organized by a creative NAB and staff committee.



Weaving together lessons from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Sekou Sundiata's 'The America Project,' **The IA Clearing** featured an IA Makerspace to build the worlds we need and want, a listening station, a community mapping activity to chart and deepen our relationships across time and place, and a series of Magical Questions on paper airplanes to foster community dialogue.

[Magical questions](#) included: *What carries you? What is your place of peace and how do you get there? What practices help you imagine?*

We celebrated the 2025 **Randy Martin Spirit Award** (RMSA) recipient Terri Bailey, Publicly Active Graduate Education (PAGE) Fellows and IA/Joy of Giving Something Foundation (JGS) Undergraduate Fellows at the Friday evening reception and recognized David Hoffman (UMBC) as the 2026 RMSA recipient. The **inaugural Julie Ellison Vision Award** was announced in honor of IA's first Faculty Director, under whose leadership the PAGE Fellows program launched in 2003 and expanded through the organized efforts of community-engaged graduate student fellows in the arts and humanities from IA member institutions. The first award was given to Queer Black Feminist Love Evangelist and an aspirational favorite cousin to all life, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, who was a PAGE Fellow during her time at Duke University, and who will deliver the keynote *"Every Night": June Jordan and the Orbit of Freedom* on the opening plenary at the 2026 IA National Gathering.



Illustrations from *The IA Clearing* at the 2025 National Gathering, created by NMSU artist Stella Aude

2025-2026 was an active year for **IA online and in-person local programming**. Throughout the year, we offered 13 events engaging over 600 students, faculty, staff, and cultural leaders in these free learning opportunities.

In Davis, CA, IA hosted **seminars and regional events** with campus partners to gather community and connect creatively. UC Davis professor Ryan Cartwright convened a seminar at IA offices on the topic of “Enduring Conditions: A Disability, Illness, and Care Collaboratory,” and IA staff co-taught a first-year seminar with UC Davis undergraduate students on “Imagination Practices,” utilizing IA research and tools as part of the curriculum. With the UCD Arboretum and Public Garden, IA launched the 2025 Mail Art Project, inviting IA members to find grounding and inspiration from The IA Clearing’s magical questions.



IA staff led **Meet IA** virtual events to orient new and prospective members to the Imagining America network and feature IA research and upcoming events. IA Communications Director Anuj Vaidya and PAGE fellow Leah Friedman led a multi-part **Digital Divestment series** for the IA network focused on divesting from big tech and reorienting to community tech. IA developed and shared several **member resources** this year, such as the [Activate Your IA Membership](#) toolkit, a [Story Circle Activity Guide](#), a toolkit for [Building a Just Collaboration with Culture Bearers](#), and a two-part guide to engaging [ideas and activities from The IA Clearing](#) at the 2025 National Gathering.



Resources and toolkits created by Imagining America: 1) IA Clearing Toolkit, 2) Guide to Building a Just Collaboration with Culture Bearers, 3) Activate Your IA Membership Toolkit

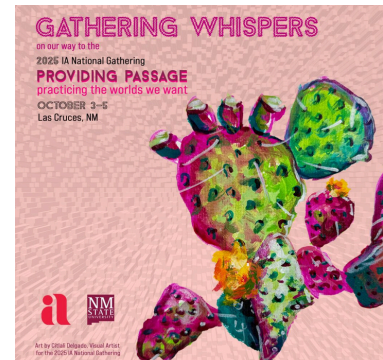
IA produced several podcasts with voices from the network. Each **IA StoryShare** episode features one-on-one conversations between publicly engaged community members who join together in critical dialogue and share lessons learned:

- [IA Storyshare 13](#): Jan Cohen-Cruz and Lynne Elizabeth
- [IA StoryShare 14](#): Chaz Barracks and Sylvia Gale
- [IA StoryShare 15](#): Lizzy Cooper Davis and Ural Grant



Gathering Whispers is a podcast series featuring stories from the Paso del Norte region and about the inspiring people and expansive community-engaged projects we encountered on our way to the 2025 IA National Gathering.

- [Episode 1](#): A Conversation with Citlali Delgado, Visual Artist
- [Episode 2](#): A Conversation with IA's Stephanie Maroney
- [Episode 3](#): A Conversation with Ma. Eugenia Hernandez and Cynthia Bejarano



IA COLLABORATORIES

Imagining America celebrates the success of the **2025 IA Collaboratories**: • B-More with Imagination - Romy Hübler (Towson University), Susan Tuberville (MICA), and David Hoffman (University of Maryland-Baltimore County) • Creating Refuge - Jenna Vendil (Bates College) and Ruth Jansich (Macalester College) • Dreaming “America,” Enacting Community Joy - Kate Duffy (Reed College) • Enacting Our Radical Imaginary: A Place-Based Activation of Speculative Learning Design - Ijeoma Njaka (Georgetown University) • Pedagogies of Possibility - Deborah Keisch (University of Massachusetts, Amherst) and Jessica Bacal (Smith College) • Tools for the Undercommons - Jacqueline Jean Barrios and Harris Kornstein (University of Arizona).

Collaboratories led workshops and creative engagements at the gathering, and created share-back reports in the form of blog posts and toolkits available on the IA website. Expanding on Kornstein and Barrios's [Querying Public Scholarship](#) project, the Tools for the Undercommons Collaboratory offered a year-long series of online conversations with IA that paired innovative scholars, artists, and community organizers on the theme of the undercommons. The [Pedagogies of Possibility](#) Collaboratory formed a national community of practice and convened two virtual workshops, leading to a forthcoming book publication.

IA selected **2026 Collaboratories** proposals from campuses and partners with an intentional effort to support and activate regional engagement in the IA network. Altogether, these eight IA Collaboratories will engage 24 universities and colleges across their regions and dozens of community partners through activities that center creative exploration, provide space for co-creation, and demonstrate ways of being together rooted in curiosity and care.

IA MEMBERS

IA is especially proud to grow our membership in 2025-2026. Please join us in celebrating these **10 new members** to the IA consortium:

- University of North Carolina Greensboro
- Arizona State University
- Smith College
- Hunter College
- Southwestern University
- Portland State University
- American University
- University of Redlands
- University of Texas, San Antonio
- Florida International University

IA member stories and successes were uplifted through member spotlights in our monthly newsletter and social media. Faculty, staff, students, and community and cultural leaders from across our network stayed up to date on the latest news and offerings from IA by [subscribing to our mailing list](#). Never hesitate to send us news from your member campus or names of new students and colleagues who would benefit from receiving news from IA. If your institution is not yet a member of Imagining America, now is a great time to join! Just reach out to connect@imaginingamerica.org to explore the opportunities and to learn more about how to join the national consortium.

IA LEADERSHIP

This year we welcomed new members of our **National Advisory Board (NAB)** and wished fond farewells to others. IA is excited to welcome Ijeoma Njaka (Georgetown University) and Brett Snyder (University of California, Davis) to the NAB next year. IA recognizes and appreciates the work of Rebecca Castillo (Los Angeles Times) and Mari Castañeda (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), who completed their thoughtful and generative service to the IA National Advisory Board. We thank our current board members for their committed leadership and deep engagement with IA and look forward to all we will accomplish in 2026-2027:

- Chair Paul Schadewald (Bringing Theory to Practice)
- Co-Vice-Chair Milmon Harrison (University of California, Davis)
- Co-Vice-Chair Sylvia Spears (College Unbound)

NAB Members: Lizzy Cooper Davis (Emerson College), Denise Frazier (Prospect New Orleans), Sylvia Gale (University of Richmond), Meng-Hsuan Ho (Emerson College, PAGE Co-Director), Romy Hübler (Towson University), Kayhan Irani (Artivista Productions), Carlos Jackson (University of Michigan), David King (Apollo Theatre), Erica Kohl-Arenas (IA/UC Davis non-voting member), Mandy Muise (Vanderbilt University, PAGE Co-Director), Ijeoma Njaka (Georgetown University), Michael Pride (University of New Mexico), Judy Pryor-Ramirez (New York University), Darby Ray (Bates College), Brett Snyder (University of California, Davis), and Winoka Yepa (Native Americans in Philanthropy).

IA STUDENT FELLOWS

IA supported the professional development of emerging publicly engaged scholars and practitioners by welcoming new cohorts of eight undergraduate student [Joy of Giving Something Fellows](#) and eight graduate student [Publicly Active Graduate Education Fellows](#) to the IA network. Only students from IA member campuses are eligible for these fellowship programs.

All IA student fellows participated in the 2025 IA National Gathering in Las Cruces, NM. IA/JGS Fellows met throughout the year and carried out community-engaged photography and digital media creative projects and events this spring. PAGE fellows convened for a summit at the National Gathering and shared their work in a Lightning Talk session. They also met virtually throughout the year and created the annual [PAGE Blog Salon posts](#).

IA / JGS UNDERGRADUATE FELLOWS

- Kenza Aissaoui, University of Pennsylvania
- Genevie Hong, University of California, Davis
- Keona Huang, University of California, Merced
- Loree Keushgerian, Macalester College
- Kovonna Mcpipe, University of Minnesota
- Helen Mei, University of Richmond
- Arykah Melton, University of New Mexico
- Kendle Weaver, Towson University



*IA/JGS Fellows at the 2025 IA National Gathering Opening Procession (above)
Photo of Loree by Kendle Weaver (top right)*

PUBLICLY ACTIVE GRADUATE EDUCATION FELLOWS

The PAGE Program was led by four exceptional Co-directors in 2025-2026:

- Ololade Faniyi, Emory University
- Victor Omni, Emory University
- Huy Phan, University of California Santa Barbara
- Gabby Wen, University of Arizona

PAGE Program Fellows

- Chimee Adìṣha, University of California, Irvine
- Asia Nicolette Ashley, University of Washington, Bothell
- Leah Friedman, Arizona State University
- Meng-Hsuan Ho, Emerson College
- Ada Marys Lorenzana, University of Illinois, Chicago
- Shromona Mandal, Emory University
- Ashley Martin-Casler, University of Arizona
- Mandy Muise, Vanderbilt University



PAGE Fellows at the 2025 IA National Gathering

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026-2027

IA staff are thrilled to be organizing with our regional community for the 2026 IA National Gathering in Davis, California from October 23-25. In partnership with UC Davis and a diverse regional Steering Committee, we invite you to join us for [*Tides of Transition: Restoring Collective Spirit In Troubled Times*](#).

Reflecting on the importance of transitions – from political crises to global climate change, and personal identity to organizational transformation – this call for participation invites proposals that share stories, research, creative works, and community practices exploring the complex process of transitioning away from systems of fear and domination and towards restoring collective spirit.





The 2026 IA National Gathering will share examples of critical imagination, collective care, intergenerational knowledges, creative practice and action, or other activities that demonstrate how the enduring spirit of the expansive IA community (students, artists, educators, organizers and leaders, cultural workers, scholars) thrives through transition. Special thanks to [Taller Arte de Nuevo Amanacer \(TANA\)](#) artists for providing the visual identity for the gathering. The snail, heron, and cattails are integral parts of the wetland ecology in the Yolo Bioregion.

The 2026 IA National Gathering also marks a transition within Imagining America, as this occasion is the last gathering organized by the IA-UC Davis team before IA moves to a new home campus on July 1, 2027. At this moment in a natural cycle of transition for IA, we will celebrate the good work we have done together over the past decade and join new host Pennsylvania State University, in dreaming up the exciting possibilities to come.

IA HOST CAMPUS TRANSITION (JULY 1, 2027)

After a two-year search process led by the IA National Advisory Board (NAB), where we engaged multiple inspiring campus communities, **Pennsylvania State University** (Penn State) emerged as a well prepared and visionary candidate to lead and strengthen the national consortium. We are deeply grateful for partners from all of the potential host campuses who spent time with the NAB and shared with us the good work taking place in their communities.

Penn State's demonstrated commitment to lifting and catalyzing public service and engaged scholarship, art, and design towards a vibrant and healthy democratic society is just what IA needs in these times. The IA staff and board are eager to engage in a thoughtful transition process with Penn State colleagues over the coming year, as we continue to develop and support the diverse programs and benefits the IA community values.

BENEFITS OF IA MEMBERSHIP IN 2026-2027



IA National Gathering. This three-day immersive experience engages public scholars, artists, designers, students, cultural organizers, and members of the general public in collaborative learning, making, dreaming, dialogue, and problem-solving. Located in a different member institution region each year, the [IA National Gathering](#) provides a space for participants to connect with one another and to experience and strategize on how the arts, humanities, design, and cultural organizing can be leveraged towards transformative learning and action. Members receive one free conference registration and discounted registration fees for students, faculty, and staff.

Leadership Forum. Institutional leaders of IA member campuses are invited to participate in the annual IA Leadership Forum, which takes place at the annual National Gathering. The Forum provides institutional leaders a space to engage in critical analysis of leadership challenges and opportunities to devise collective strategies to better support public and creative scholarship.

Publicly Active Graduate Education (PAGE) Fellowship. The [PAGE Fellowship](#) is a national, interdisciplinary community of publicly-engaged graduate students engaged in public humanities, arts, and design scholarship and creative practice. PAGE enhances the practice and pedagogy of public scholarship and provides peer support, career networking, and opportunities for collaborative knowledge production. Graduate students from member campuses are eligible to apply for the PAGE Fellowship on an annual basis.

Joy of Giving Something (JGS) Fellowship. The [IA/JGS Fellowship](#) aims to elevate photography and digital media as pathways for undergraduate students to pursue their careers and to make a difference in their communities. JGS fellows commit to a year-long learning exchange that includes tuition support, financial support for a community project, and opportunities for professional development. Undergraduate students from member campuses are eligible to apply for the JGS Fellowship on an annual basis.

Research Initiatives and Collaboratories. IA's action research portfolio includes Equitable Food Futures with Sipp Culture to activate agri (cultural) imaginations towards equitable, thriving food futures, and the Leading and Learning Initiative (LLI), which documents challenges and successful practices to shift campus culture in support of public and activist scholarship. Members are invited to participate in IA's Collaboratories, which have long been part of IA's work to connect members across the IA consortium in the production of public knowledge and collective imagination through collaborative research and experimentation.

BENEFITS OF IA MEMBERSHIP IN 2026-2027



Webinars and Virtual Convenings. IA regularly organizes virtual convenings to provide accessible, year-round networking and learning opportunities. The Teaching and Learning Circle (TLC) webinar series facilitates conversations, learning, and resource sharing on critical topics within the IA consortium. IA Study Groups provide spaces for peer study and connection. Meet IA sessions help orient prospective, new, or current members to the IA network, and other information sessions provide insight into specific IA programs and initiatives. Webinars are free for members, and we welcome proposals for future topics.

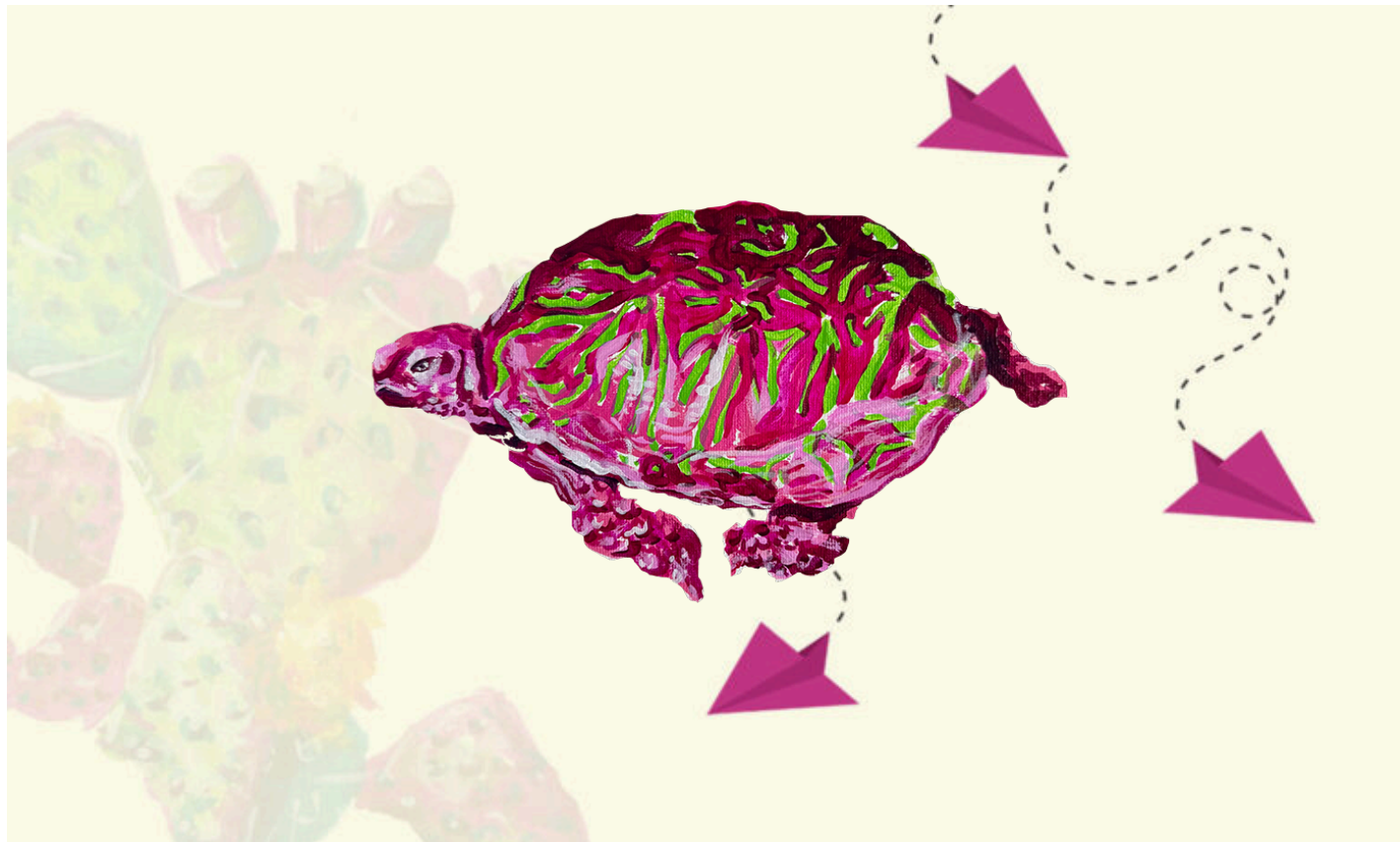
Mail Art Project. The Mail Art Project is an annual opportunity for IA members to engage in important topics and issues through shared creative art making and reflection. Themes are drawn from IA's National Gatherings and include rituals of repair and renewal, and radical reckoning for collective change. This is a free, members-only program.

Member and Regional Organizing. Supported by IA staff and the National Advisory Board, member and regional events offer scholars, students, artists, designers, and community organizers opportunities to explore the theory and practice of public scholarship and cultural organizing, discuss pressing issues impacting member campuses and regions, and foster a peer support network. Members have resources to support organizing on their own campus, including the [Activate Your IA Membership toolkit](#), and IA Collaboratories in their regions.

National Spotlight. IA promotes public scholarship, cultural organizing, and campus change by lifting up the stories of our members through the [IAStoryShare](#) and [IA Hubbub](#) podcasts, featured member spotlights in our monthly newsletters, social media, and other formats. Members are invited to submit news, job postings, and stories at any time.

Peer Learning Tools. The Public Scholar Conversation Cards and the Public Scholar Imagination Guide are [pedagogical tools](#) inspired by the findings from IA action research projects. IA also develops and shares toolkits that draw from work within the network, including guides for facilitating Story Circles, leading creative events, and engaging with community leaders.

Publications. [PUBLIC](#): A Journal of Imagining America is an innovative peer-reviewed, multimedia e-journal that features art, scholarship, and dialogue at the intersections of the humanities, arts, and design in public life. The digital archive is available to view; we are not currently accepting submissions. The [Foreseeable Futures](#) position paper series shares the work of culture keepers and thinkers, in dialogue with respondents from the IA network.



IA staff thank you for a year of important and meaningful engagement and we look forward to the year ahead!

- Erica Kohl-Arenas, Faculty Director
- Stephanie Maroney, Managing Director
- Erin Syoen, Operations & Events Manager
- Anuj Vaidya, Communications Director
- Matt Foster, Financial Analyst
- Isabelle Woodruff-Madiera, Student Staff

Stay connected with IA all year by signing up on the [IA Mailing List](#).



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