



IMAGINING AMERICA
artists + scholars in public life

2023-2024 Annual Report

June 30, 2024

CONNECTING AND ENGAGING IN 2023-2024

The Imagining America (IA) national consortium continued to grow and change this year as we welcomed seven new member institutions and the new IA Associate Director of Membership, Troy Nichols, to our network. Over the past year, the IA community of artists, scholars, students, and cultural organizers committed to the IA [mission](#), [vision](#), and [values](#) joined together in a diverse array of programs, events, and learning opportunities.



Images from sessions at the 2023 IA National Gathering.

The 2023 IA National Gathering “Radical Reckoning: Invoking the Elements for Collective Change” was organized in partnership with IA member College Unbound, AS220, and the City of Providence’s Departments of Art, Culture + Tourism, and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging. With record setting attendance, over 630 people convened in multiple sites in Providence, Rhode Island for three days of learning, sharing, and building energy to sustain and grow commitments to public scholarship, culture change, and collective imagination towards social change. The 2023 IA National Gathering welcomed 113 students, 133 people from non-IA member higher education institutions, 200 attendees from foundations, government, non-profit, and cultural organizations, and 247 participants from IA member institutions. With support from generous sponsors, IA distributed 173 complimentary registrations to students, cultural producers, artists, and community organizations in Rhode Island. Following the National Gathering, over 70 IA members registered to participate in IA’s [Mail Art Project](#) and explored their practices of radical reckoning through creative art making.

2023-2024 was also an active year for IA online and in-person local programming. Nearly 1,000 students, faculty, staff, and cultural leaders registered for and engaged in these free learning opportunities.

IA focused on sharing out the creative tools developed from findings from IA's [national action research project](#) to better understand how to shift institutional culture in higher education to more fully support public and activist scholarship. The [Public Scholar Conversation Cards and Public Scholar Imagination Guide](#) were shared virtually in a members-only workshop and a public Teaching and Learning Circle (TLC) webinar in spring. Two in-person workshops with the UC Davis Center for Regional Change and with University of Michigan graduate scholars at the Rackham Graduate School expanded possibilities for the IA tools.

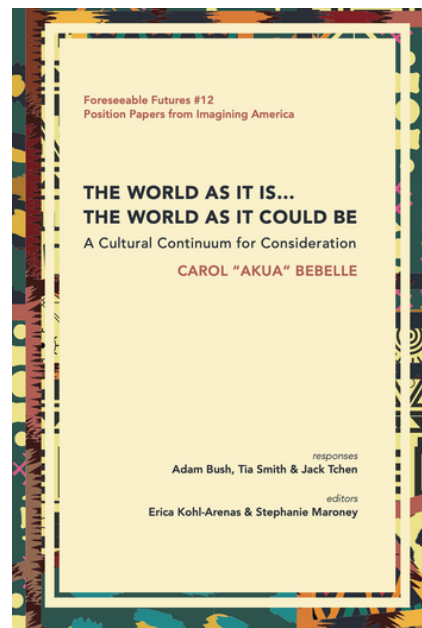


Engaged graduate scholars at IA member University of Michigan participated in the two-day workshop "Graduate Public Scholars Creating Change, Catalyzing Culture," facilitated by IA staff and PAGE fellows, and organized by the UM Rackham Graduate School.

Other virtual events included a TLC webinar for Maria Avila's book *Building Collective Leadership for Culture Change* (2023), two Meet IA webinars orienting prospective and current members to the IA network, and a Study Group for the IA Book Club selection, *Imagination: A Manifesto* (2024) by Ruha Benjamin. In-person local "happenings" at the IA offices in Davis, CA connected with the regional arts community and supported the vision of IA student intern Rosie Mendoza for an intergenerational creative learning event titled "IA Primary Day."

IA's research collaboratives continued to provide opportunities for member participation and engagement. [Assessing the Practices of Public Scholarship \(APPS\)](#) and the [Collective of Publicly Engaged Designers \(CoPED\)](#) both offered participatory workshops at the 2023 IA National Gathering on their respective work in transforming evaluation practices and publicly engaged design.

In 2023, IA relaunched the Foreseeable Futures publication series with a foundational essay from Ashé Cultural Arts co-founder Carol Bebelle and three responses from IA network collaborators. Bebelle's essay, "[The World as It Is ... The World as It Could Be: A Cultural Continuum for Consideration](#)," is exemplary of her lived practice of radical hopefulness where community connections, culture, artmaking, and storytelling help humans realize that we must be fully present for one another to survive and thrive in the world. A print copy of Foreseeable Futures, as well as the IA Public Scholar Tools and past publications, can be purchased online through [IA Marketplace](#), also launched this year.



Items available for purchase in the IA Marketplace.

The research team from the [Equitable Food Futures \(EFF\)](#) participatory action research project with IA and the Mississippi Center for Cultural Production (Sipp Culture) published a [book chapter in the handbook](#) on *Trauma Informed Creative Placemaking (2024)* available from Routledge. In the coming year, IA will host a learning exchange between the Mississippi Center for Cultural Production and the Pan Valley Institute of California's Central Valley to share their work on agri (cultural) organizing.

IA is especially proud to grow our membership in 2023-2024. Please join us in celebrating these **new members to the IA consortium**:

- Clark University
- Fort Hays State University
- Georgetown University
- The Ohio State University
- University of Idaho
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- Xavier University of Louisiana

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 names of new students and colleagues who would benefit from receiving news from IA.

IA LEADERSHIP

This year we welcomed new members to the IA **National Advisory Board (NAB)** and wished fond farewells to others. IA is excited to welcome David King, Director of Education at The Apollo Theater as a new NAB Member for 2024-2025. Robyn Rodriguez (University of California, Davis) is the only leader transitioning off the NAB this year, and we thank her for her service and sustained commitment to IA.

We thank our current board members for their ongoing and deep engagement with IA and look forward to all we will accomplish in 2024-2025:

Chair Paul Schadewald (Bringing Theory to Practice)
Vice-Chair Milmon Harrison (University of California, Davis)
NAB Members: Sophia Acord (ASK Associates), Mari Castañeda (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), Rebecca Castillo (Los Angeles Times), Caroline Cheung (PAGE co-Director), Lizzy Cooper Davis (Emerson College), Frederick "Wood" Delahoussaye (Ashé Cultural Arts Center), Liya Escalera (Harvard University), Denise Frazier (Prospect New Orleans), Sylvia Gale (University of Richmond), Kayhan Irani (Artivista Productions), Carlos Jackson (University of Michigan), Darby Ray (Bates College), Sylvia Spears (College Unbound), Winoka Yepa (Native Americans in Philanthropy), and Carol Zou (Independent Artist, Teacher, Strategist).



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. IA also continued to offer an internship program through our host campus, the University of California, Davis, and mentored three undergraduate students this past year: Maricela Lopez, Dani Biala, and Rosalie Mendoza.



JGS Fellows at the 2023 IA National Gathering.

JGS FELLOWS

- Ezra Bantum, University of Washington-Bothell
- Achali Cochrane, Reed College
- Jeanne d'Arc Koffi, Vanderbilt University
- Nia McMillan, University of Southern California
- Rayan Mohammad, Syracuse University
- Jonathan Nguyen, Carleton College
- Gabriella Nieves, Macalester College
- Danny Zuniga Zarat, Bates College

PAGE FELLOWS

- Raquel Banaszak, University of Minnesota
- Chelsea Bouldin, Syracuse University
- monét cooper, University of Michigan
- Angela Rose David, UCLA
- HL Doruelo, UC Riverside
- Ural Grant, Michigan State University
- S. Coco Herda, UC Davis
- Sonya Squires-Caesar, University of Maryland-Baltimore County

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2024-2025

We look forward to continued partnership with our members in the year ahead as Imagining America plans for a 25th anniversary celebration. Organized with IA member University of Cincinnati, the **2025 IA National Gathering** will take place in October in Cincinnati, OH and uplift local issues with national resonance while celebrating the promising future of Imagining America. As a member benefit, IA member institutions can access one free registration and reduced registration rates.

Other benefits of IA membership in 2024-2025 include:

Publicly Active Graduate Education (PAGE) Fellowship. The PAGE Fellowship is a national, interdisciplinary community of publicly-engaged graduate students interested in the humanities, arts, and design. 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 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.



Creative sessions at the 2023 IA National Gathering.

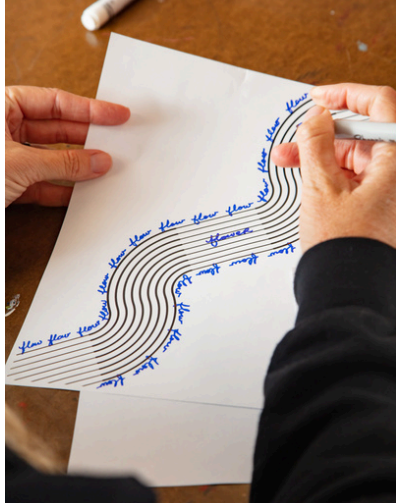
Peer Learning Tools. The Public Scholar Conversation Cards and the Public Scholar Imagination Guide are pedagogical tools inspired by the findings of the LLI research. The card deck is designed to spark conversation and deepen understanding about the contributions and struggles of public, engaged, and activist artists, designers, and scholars. The Imagination Guide is an interactive workbook that provides reflection, action, and imagination tools for anyone trying to make the university a more hospitable, caring, and creative place to nurture public, engaged, and activist scholarship, art, and design.

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 relaunched Foreseeable Futures position paper series shares the work of culture keepers and thinkers, in dialogue with respondents from the IA network.

Research Initiatives and Collaboratories. IA's action research portfolio includes Equitable Food Futures (EFF) with Sipp Culture, an action research project 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. Member engagement opportunities include virtual study groups on select topics related to the IA action research agenda and opportunities to use IA materials to advance your own campus culture change efforts. Members are also invited to participate in IA's research collaboratories. Assessing the Practices of Public Scholarship (APPS) works to build values-based evaluation frameworks for assessing the impact, process, and relationships of public scholarship and campus-community engagement projects, and the Collective of Publicly Engaged Designers (CoPED) convenes leading design thinkers and doers to reflect upon and assert the importance of design in developing innovative strategies for public engagement.



Concurrent sessions at the 2023 IA National Gathering.



Creative works, a performance from AS220 youth, and a workshop from 2023 Randy Martin Spirit Awardee Terri Bailey at the 2023 IA National Gathering.

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 member 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 have included waterways and movements, 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 IA 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 access to resources to support organizing on their own campus, as well as organizing multi-campus IA networks in their regions.

National Spotlight. IA promotes public scholarship, cultural organizing, and campus change by lifting up the stories of our members through a number of platforms, including: the IAStoryShare podcast and featured member spotlights in our monthly newsletters and social media. Members are invited to submit news, job postings, and other stories.

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE OF IA

Open Call for the Next IA Host Campus

We are excited to announce the opportunity to [become the next host of Imagining America](#) in 2027. Following founding years at the University of Michigan, a ten-year term at Syracuse University, and what will soon be ten years at the University of California, Davis, IA has begun the search for the next campus home.

This transition is part of an intentional cycle for higher education institutions to host IA for five-year once renewable terms. An ideal host will be in a strong position to strengthen and leverage IA's existing values, history, collaborations, and programs, while infusing new energy, creativity, and mission-aligned interests to the national network. Interested parties must first [register interest](#) and then submit a Letter of Interest by January 15, 2025 to be invited to submit a full proposal in 2026.



Visit imaginingamerica.org/transition to learn more about the process to become the next campus host of Imagining America.

IA's Strategic Directions, 2024-2027

The IA staff team and National Advisory Board are excited to create and deliver learning opportunities and resources to IA members over the remaining three years of the IA-UC Davis hosting term. After completing an IA-UC Davis strategic planning process, IA emerged with a refreshed mission, vision, values, spheres of impact, and clarified modes of organizing. IA staff will continue to improve programs and processes and create new resources and tools in alignment with our [Strategic Directions for 2024-2027](#).

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

In community,

- Erica Kohl-Arenas, Faculty Director
- Stephanie Maroney, Managing Director
- Erin Syoen, Operations & Events Manager
- Troy Nichols, Membership Director
- Dani Biala, Communications Specialist (2023-2024)
- Anuj Vaidya, Director of Communications (as of July 1, 2024)
- Matt Foster, Financial Analyst



Stay connected with IA throughout the year @imaginingamerica



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