



SURDNA FOUNDATION

Position Description
November 2018

The Surdna Foundation Program Officer for Thriving Cultures

The Surdna Foundation—a national, social justice, family foundation based in New York City—seeks a Program Officer for its Thriving Cultures Program. The Program Officer will report directly to the Program Director for Thriving Cultures on a three-person team that also includes the Program Associate for Thriving Cultures.

The Surdna Foundation

Created by John E. Andrus in 1917, the Surdna Foundation has assets of more than \$1 billion and an annual grantmaking budget of more than \$40 million. The Foundation has a staff of 25, based in its Midtown Manhattan offices. The Foundation is governed by a Board of Directors that includes fourth- and fifth-generation Andrus family members, as well as non-family board members. The Surdna Foundation seeks to foster just and sustainable communities in the United States communities guided by principles of social justice and distinguished by healthy environments, inclusive economies, and thriving cultures.

As one of the oldest family foundations in the country, Surdna is dedicated to ensuring our strategies reflect our longtime commitment to the values of justice, equity, and inclusion.

Furthermore, our ongoing commitment to learning requires constantly examining our own assumptions and having continuous conversations internally and with organizations on the frontlines tackling society's biggest challenges.

Building on the successes of our ongoing work, we recently set out to examine and refine our program strategies for three reasons:

- First, to ensure we are being as effective as possible with our valuable, but limited, resources.
- Second, to identify shared goals across all of our programs to unite our work and foster collaboration.
- Third, to fulfill our commitment to social justice and a culture of learning.

As part of the strategy-refinement process, we developed an organizational theory of change to:

- Articulate the Foundation's high-level vision for the change we seek to achieve;
- Unite our programs across shared goals; and
- Identify guideposts to evaluate our work and ensure that all of the Foundation's efforts—from program-related investments to grantmaking and other initiatives—are demonstrating progress towards these institutional outcomes.



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Our theory of change is based on three assumptions:

- First, that historical and structural racial inequities are at the root of the deeply embedded challenges that communities face across America.
- Second, that advancing racial equity and addressing power imbalances are critical to solving these challenges and to achieving a more just and sustainable society.
- And, third, that the best way to address racial inequities and power imbalances is to honor the agency of individuals and communities that are most impacted by injustices. These individuals should be regarded as experts in creating solutions to the systemic issues we aim to solve.

Working from these assumptions, Surdna believes that we can achieve a more just and sustainable society by directing our resources towards grantmaking portfolios that achieve the following three institutional outcomes:

- **Democratic Participation:** Supporting communities of color and low-wealth communities to utilize their decision-making and political power to enable self-determination.
- **Building Wealth:** Catalyzing capital to support communities of color and low-wealth communities in their efforts to build and sustain wealth, in all its forms, and economic power to achieve a more just and sustainable society.
- **Building Accountability:** Investing in the capacity of communities of color and low-wealth communities to hold policymakers and institutions accountable to ensure all community benefits are shared equitably.

The Thriving Cultures Program

The Thriving Cultures Program recently announced a refined program strategy entitled *Radical Imagination for Racial Justice*. This new strategic focus seeks to foster the conditions in which artists, culture-bearers, designers, and media-makers of color can maximize their potential as leaders, agents of social change, and designers of just systems and communities.

We believe that everyone's well-being improves when we attend to the cultural fabric of our communities and build a world where all people are able to participate equitably. Through grantmaking, program-related investments, partnerships, advocacy, and movement-building we hope to address racism, increase access to capital, and expand democratic participation for artists, culture-bearers, media-makers, and designers of color.

We invest in the capacity of artists, designers, media-makers, and culture-bearers of color to imagine and practice justice with their communities; create narrative platforms that amplify the stories and experiences of communities of color; and expand community voices to develop more-equitable outcomes across racial lines.

The Thriving Cultures Program's grantmaking focuses on three integrated approaches:

- **Create:** We support artists, culture-bearers, designers, and media makers of color pursuing projects that illustrate a more just community through systems change as well as those



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working to create narrative platforms — Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, and Mixed Reality — that amplify the benefits of systems change for a more racially-just society.

- **Clarify:** We support the documentation, interpretation and critique of racially-just practices developed by artists, designers, media-makers, and culture-bearers of color in partnership with their communities. Most of this funding will directly support artist projects funded through our Create approach in order to amplify learning from their work.
- **Connect:** We support narrative change and public and private sector policy implementation that emerge from our “Create” and “Clarify” approaches.

The Thriving Cultures Program has an annual budget of approximately \$9.2 million and anticipates making between forty and fifty grants annually. Following the development of program guidelines, grants will focus support to: low-income artists and artists of color (e.g. artists, culture bearers, designers, and media-makers) working with communities to identify racially just systems and practices to address some of our world’s most intractable problems; incentivize philanthropy to support the arts and culture field more equitably; building technology platforms (augmented reality, virtual reality, and mixed reality) that are owned by and that amplify the stories and experiences of communities of color; conduct research; create communications; and develop leadership across the three strategic approaches.

The Program Officer Role

The Program Officer will be part of a three-person team led by a Program Director. The Program Officer works closely with the Program Director and a Program Associate on all aspects of the program, including both day-to-day operations and a broader learning agenda for the program.

At Surdna, Program Officers contribute to programmatic ideas and participate actively in grantmaking by developing and recommending grants and by administering projects in the program area. In addition, Surdna expects Program Officers to have expertise and knowledge in one or more of the substantive elements of the grantmaking program to help build networks among funders, as well as grantee-partners, around issues that need attention; communicate and advocate for social change; and develop partnerships to multiply the impact of the Foundation's grantmaking investments.

A successful candidate will demonstrate an eagerness to engage in ongoing assessment of the Thriving Cultures Program’s priorities under the leadership of the Program Director, and to work with the Inclusive Economies and Sustainable Environments programs to develop cross-programmatic opportunities that ultimately help achieve the goal of creating just and sustainable communities.



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First Year's Priorities

During the first year of employment, the Program Officer for Thriving Cultures will be expected to:

- Thoroughly immerse herself/himself/themselves in the Surdna Foundation—its mission, philosophy, programs, staff, grantee-partners, structure and operations, finances, constituencies, organizational culture and values, and potential.
- Become familiar with the Foundation's grantmaking strategies, grant guidelines, and theories of change.
- Begin to develop and leverage relationships with key internal and external colleagues (individual and institutional) in order to bring forth their best ideas and efforts to inform the work of the Thriving Cultures Program.
- Contribute and apply subject-matter and field expertise to an ongoing analysis of the Thriving Cultures Program's approaches; identify and assess prospective grantee-partners; and develop the ability to communicate well about the portfolio.

Ongoing Responsibilities

The Program Officer for Thriving Cultures will be expected to:

- Monitor and track ongoing grants and initiatives, including evaluating and reporting to staff, board, and external colleagues on portfolio performance.
- Maintain a breadth of knowledge, including research about current trends, emerging issues, policy interventions, and innovations in the program's areas of focus to enhance the effectiveness of program strategy and the understanding of staff and board.
- Work closely with other programs at the Foundation and facilitate cross-program collaboration.
- Review, assess, and proactively cultivate grantmaking opportunities, and work with grantee-partners on their project and proposal development.
- Recommend grants for funding by soliciting peer reviews and providing critical analyses of project strengths, weaknesses, and risks.
- Conduct site visits of pending and active projects.
- Develop relationships with private-sector stakeholders to meet program and mission objectives.
- Help to plan and implement learning opportunities for grantee-partners, staff, and board, and regularly share lessons learned from the field.
- Work with and manage external consultants.
- Assist with external communications: develop website content, newsletters, public presentations, and articles, as appropriate.
- Develop partnerships with other institutions to extend the impact of the Foundation's grantmaking.
- Track and contribute to the development of best practices among funders.
- Participate in external working groups and funder collaboratives as a thought-partner and representative of the Thriving Cultures Program and the Foundation.



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Ideal Attributes and Experience

The Program Officer for Thriving Cultures should have the following attributes and experience:

- Strong record of achievement and relevant experience in the nonprofit, public, or private sector. A minimum of seven years in the field and interdisciplinary experience are preferred.
- Substantive knowledge of the fields and issues related to the Thriving Cultures Program’s strategy (i.e., arts and culture, including their relationship to racial equity, public policy/administration, technology, and community development) .
- An outstanding relationship builder with the interpersonal skills necessary to gain the trust and confidence of the Foundation’s staff, grantee-partners, and board.
- A strong track record as a strategic, systems-oriented, outcomes-focused, creative thinker with a deep commitment to social justice, strong power analysis, and growth mindset.
- Outstanding written and oral communication skills, with strong presence, credibility, highly developed listening skills, positive outlook, a sense of humor, and openness/eagerness to receiving ongoing feedback.
- Willingness to work across programs to develop complementary strategies, grantmaking priorities, and learning opportunities.
- A track record as an energetic, flexible, self-starting team player. A direct, honest, and respectful approach to problem-solving, with the ability to foster collaboration and contribute to a strong sense of community among staff and board.
- Ability to thrive when working under deadlines; strong project-, time-, and budget-management skills; and the ability to handle multiple tasks simultaneously without sacrificing attention to detail or quality.
- Familiarity with a fast-paced, entrepreneurial environment and a readiness to share in both “big picture” thinking and administrative tasks.
- Experience working with diverse communities across race, class, gender, ethnic, political, and geographic boundaries.
- Willingness and ability to travel up to 30% of the time.

To learn more about the Surdna Foundation, please visit <https://surdna.org>.

To apply for the position, please submit a substantive cover letter and current résumé to: Marilyn Machlowitz at mm@machlowitz.com.

Submissions will be reviewed and considered on a rolling basis until the position is filled.

The Surdna Foundation is an equal opportunity employer and considers all applications without regard to race, color, religion, creed, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, age, disability, socio-economic status, marital or veteran status, pregnancy status, or sexual orientation.