Read about our State of the Arts speakers below

Adam J. Fowler is a founding partner at CVL Economics, a Los Angeles-based economic consultancy practice specializing in inclusive economic development and growth with an emphasis on the role of the creative economy.

In recent years Adam has led several high-profile engagements including the annual Otis College Report on the Creative Economy and economic analysis on the state of the screen industries for LA County’s Department of Economic Opportunity. He has presented widely on the power of creative industries to support economic vibrancy and the importance of investment in removing barriers to creative career pathways.

As a recognized thought leader on the future of the creative economy, he has provided commentary to a wide variety of media outlets, including the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, Bloomberg, and National Public Radio.

Amy Aquino is an American television, film, and stage actress. She is a graduate of Harvard and Yale University, and has for 30 years appeared on stage, film and in dozens of television series such as Amazon’s current Bosch, Brooklyn Bridge, ER, and Curb Your Enthusiasm. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband Drew McCoy where they have actively supported many arts and education institutions, including Inner City Arts (including the establishment of the Eamon Cannon Comedy Class), the Virginia Avenue Project (a free after-school performing arts and arts mentoring program in Santa Monica), the Cornerstone Theater Company, the Boston Court Theater, and Arts for LA. Amy is also Vice-President of her neighborhood association and an active strategist and spokesperson in the historic preservation movement in her neighborhood and LA as a whole, was a founding board member of the Hollywood Hills West Neighborhood Council, and a member of the Hollywood Community Police Advisory Board. Since 1994 Amy has been a strong force in the Screen Actors Guild’s – and later SAG-AFTRA’s - executive leadership. She has served as vice president, national secretary-treasurer, chair of the finance committee, and as a member of multiple negotiating, strategic planning and national executive committees. She shepherded the
revamping of SAG’s communications and outreach, and was critical to the achievement and implementation of the SAG-AFTRA merger. Amy is intrigued with taking her volunteerism to the next level with Arts for LA. She is interested in developing broad arts policy and learning more about our government relations efforts and interactions with the schools. She has a wide and strong network of friends and colleagues in the creative industries and looks forward to including that network in the Arts for LA family.

Austin Beutner is a civic leader, philanthropist and and public servant with a unique set of leadership experiences in business, government and as an entrepreneur including as CEO of Evercore, a publicly-traded company he founded, First Deputy Mayor of Los Angeles, Publisher and CEO of the Los Angeles Times and San Diego Union Tribune, Chairman of Vision To Learn, a national non-profit he created, and as Superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Mr. Beutner served as Superintendent of Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation’s second largest, from 2018 through 2021. Under Mr. Beutner’s leadership Los Angeles Unified led the nation in responding to the crisis in public schools created by COVID-19. The school district created and operated the single largest food relief effort in our nation’s history which provided more than 140 million meals to children and adults along with 40 million items of much-needed supplies to the communities it serves. It also provided every student and their family with a computer and free internet access to remain connected with their school and continue learning and built the most comprehensive and cost-effective COVID testing program in the nation.

During Beutner’s tenure, Los Angeles Unified was transformed from a top-down, one-size-fits-all bureaucracy into an organization led by 44 nimble, local teams each dedicated to the communities it serves. He also launched the nation’s most successful early literacy effort, the Primary Promise, which has led to dramatic increases in literacy and numeracy for tens of thousands of elementary school students.

At age 29, he became the youngest partner at The Blackstone Group. He left Blackstone to serve in the US government, where he led a portion of US efforts to help Russia transition to a market economy after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He went on to found Evercore Partners and as President and Co-CEO helped build it into one of the leading independent investment firms in the world.

Beutner is a longtime supporter of the arts and education. He served on the Board of CalArts from 2000 – 2014, including five years as Chair.

In 2012 he founded Vision To Learn which provides free vision screenings, eye exams and glasses to children at schools in low-income communities in more than 500 cities across the country. The organization has provided more than 310,000 children with glasses and will provide them to another 100,000 children this year, despite the challenge COVID-19 continues to present in schools.

Vision To Learn was recognized as a “Bright Spot in Hispanic Education” by the Obama Administration and received the Pacesetter Award by the Campaign for Grade Level Reading as well as the Gold Award for Community Organizations by the California Teachers Association. In 2019 the U.S. Senate passed a resolution recognizing the work of Mr. Beutner and Vision To Learn.
He currently serves on the board of the National Park Foundation, is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

**Gustavo Herrera** was appointed as Arts for LA’s Executive Director in December 2018. Prior to working with us, he was the Western Regional Director for Young Invincibles (YI), where he was responsible for leading YI’s California offices, including its West Coast expansion. As director, he set strategic direction and advanced YI’s policy priorities on health care, higher education, jobs, and civic engagement for the region. Before starting at Young Invincibles, Gustavo was the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of L.A. Plaza de Cultura y Artes (LAPCA), overseeing the day-to-day operation of a county museum, including the oversight of a master plan committee responsible for strategically developing three acres of additional museum campus. From 2010-2012, Gustavo led the Maestro Foundation, a classical music and performance arts foundation, as the Director of Organizational Development. Between 2007-2010, he assessed and recommended business growth strategies in the US marketplace for the global Fortune 500 Company, American Honda Motors, Co. Gustavo holds a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree from American Jewish University and a dual Bachelor of Arts in Global Studies with an emphasis in socio-politics and economics and Art History from the University of California Santa Barbara. Gustavo served on the Board of Directors of the Create: Fixate Arts Organization (2006-2010). He is a current Strong Workforce Implementation Advisory Board Member for the California Community Colleges, Advisory Board Member for the California Physician's Alliance and founding Board Member of Silverlake Forward.

**Jason Foster**: Prior to joining Destination Crenshaw, Jason served as the Director of Strategic Partnerships at River LA, the organization charged with improving and revitalizing communities adjacent to the 51-mile stretch of the LA River. Jason helped to build the non-profit organization from its inception. He developed the organization’s partnerships philosophy and spearheaded programming for River LA’s strategic partnerships. Jason worked closely with community partners, corporate representatives, and residents to grow the civic pride and social responsibility surrounding the LA River. Before moving to Los Angeles, Jason worked as a Project Manager for Impactct Brooklyn (previously Pratt Area Community Council) in Brooklyn, New York. He managed multiple multiunit affordable housing projects through construction, including tenant relocations, construction project management, and property management services. Prior to construction management, Jason worked as a community organizer and was involved in campaign policy strategy and coordination.

Jason holds a B.A. in Business Administration, Finance from Howard University, and is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. (Beta Chapter), a founding member of Beta Chapter Alumni Association (501(c)3) and the Beta Chapter Investment Club. Jason also holds an MBA from the Metropolitan College of New York where he focused his studies on community redevelopment and small business incubation.
He currently lives in South Los Angeles with his wife and two children, who are all native to Los Angeles. Jason is proud to have grown up in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Joe Smoke is a senior executive with the City of Los Angeles DCA, who has also been working as an adjunct university professor in the L.A. region for more than 30 years. Mr. Smoke received a bachelor’s degree in art & archaeology with an emphasis on American Studies from Princeton University in 1987; and completed his graduate studies in media-arts theory at UCLA in 1992. His long career has emphasized how building creative ideas, projects, and jobs can foster both personal and community wellness. He is the author/publisher of more than 50 essays and lectures relating the arts to social expression and worldly experience. In his spare time Joe is either a global traveler or a home gardener (and he occasionally finds time to make custom-jewelry for friends and charities).

Karen Mack is a passionate, visionary leader in Los Angeles focused on leveraging the power of arts and culture to empower individuals, build connections and develop communities. Twenty years ago, she founded LA Commons, a South LA based nonprofit implementing artistic and cultural programs reflecting the unique character of diverse neighborhoods to foster interaction, dialogue and a shared understanding of Los Angeles. Through grassroots art projects, festivals and tours in partnership with communities across Los Angeles, LA Commons plays a unique role facilitating local engagement in arts and culture as well as in other important issues - health, transportation and education to name a few, giving residents and particularly young people, a voice and an onramp to making positive change. Prior to work with LA Commons, she served as Public Service Fellow at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University where she researched the role of culture in community building and Vice President at Community Partners, responsible for Program Planning and Development. She holds an MPA from Harvard University and an MBA from the John Anderson School of Management at UCLA. She has served as the President of the City’s Board of Neighborhood Commissioners and of the nonprofit Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative and is currently a mayoral appointee to the City of Los Angeles Planning Commission (Equity Subcommittee Chair). She is also an appointee serving as co-chair of the Los Angeles County Cultural and Inclusion Initiative. Finally, she co-chaired the national initiative, Creative Placemaking from the Community Up.

Kelly Caballero [Gabrielino Tongva, Chicana] is a poet and songwriter. Her work lends voice to the critical and important conversation of California’s First People in relation to place and belonging, offering a lens through the poetics of her life as a California Native woman. Performance, hosting workshops, participating in panels and keynotes are some ways in which Kelly shares her writing and works to educate people on intersecting identities and the history, lives and current achievements of California Native peoples. “My writing, my voice, is only a vessel for the Spirit of this place to say what needs to be said. As for my own lived experience, I am tethered to and am only continuing a story that has been writing itself for thousands of years.” - Kelly Caballero
**Kristin Sakoda** is Director of the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, a local arts agency which fulfills a mission to advance arts, culture, and creativity throughout the largest county in the U.S. The Department of Arts and Culture provides grants and technical assistance to hundreds of nonprofit organizations; runs the largest arts internship program in the nation; coordinates countywide public-private arts education initiatives; increases access to creative career pathways; commissions civic artwork; supports free community programs; leads the LA County Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative; and advances cross-sector cultural strategies to address civic issues. Appointed by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Ms. Sakoda previously served as Executive Director of the Los Angeles County Arts Commission. Under her leadership, she led the organization during its historic transition into the County’s first Department of Arts and Culture.

**Leticia Rhi Buckley**: A native of East Los Angeles, Leticia Rhi Buckley is deeply committed to making the arts accessible and has led major countywide initiatives to effectively shape more inclusive and equitable policies throughout the Los Angeles region. While at the LA County Department of Arts and Culture, Leticia led the County’s Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative (CEII), working closely with stakeholders to develop and implement actionable strategies to support the arts in historically under-resourced communities. In her most recent role as Senior Civic Strategist at The Music Center, Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County, Leticia was responsible for the overall direction and strategic implementation of civic and community relationships. She is an LA County Arts Commissioner, Board Chair of the Arts for Healing and Justice Network, and adjunct professor at Claremont Graduate University’s Center for Business and Management of the Arts.

**Mark R. Edwards** is the Vice President of Government Relations for JVS SoCal a 91-year leader in helping people overcome barriers to employment. On behalf of JVS SoCal he advocates at all levels of government for an inclusive workforce system.

Community Service Background:
- Abundant Housing LA c4 Secretary
- On the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce Board of Governors, the Executive Committee as Vice Chair - Workforce Development Committee
  - Member of the Creative Jobs Collective Impact Initiative Co-Chair – Economic Development
- Former President, Barnsdall Art Park Foundation
  - Supported the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery
  - Supported the Hollyhock House (UNICEF World Heritage Site)
- Former Board member of Homeless Health Care Los Angeles
- Served 4 years in the United States Marine Corps Reserve (final rank of Corporal)

Raised in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, he has lived in Los Angeles County since 1995.
Martha Demson is the board president of Theatre Producers of Southern California (TPSCA), a trade association of small and mid sized nonprofit theatres in SoCal. In this capacity, she has helped to lead the coalition in support of SB805; she also chaired the organization’s COVID Safety Task Force, a cooperative venture between Los Angeles theatre producers and the artist labor unions (Actors Equity, American Federation of Musicians, Society of Directors and Choreographers.) Ms Demson is the Producing Artistic Director of the Open Fist Theatre Company, a highly acclaimed ensemble theatre now in its 30th year. Career highlights include THE COSMONAUT’S LAST MESSAGE TO THE WOMAN HE ONCE LOVED IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION (LA Weekly Production of the Year); the multi-award winning world premiere production of Frank Zappa’s JOE’S GARAGE; the world premiere of Glen Berger's THE WOODEN BREEKS with Matthew Fox, the world premiere of DEAR JOHN MAYER, written by and starring Broadway superstar Shoshana Bean, the world premiere of HOW TO EXPLAIN THE HISTORY OF COMMUNISM TO MENTAL PATIENTS (the same production moved to New York); and the Ovation award winning PAPA (which also toured to San Francisco and Turkey. Actor Adrian Sparks later reprised the role of Hemingway in the film PAPA.) Ms Demson is a champion of creative placemaking, believing that by embedding the arts in communities, we can transform lives and create a stronger sense of civic engagement and identity.

Nicole Hendrix (she/hers) is a four-time Emmy winning Producer and has won five PromaxBDA GOLD awards as a Producer and Creative Director. With a multi-disciplinary background, Nicole has used storytelling as the main ingredient in her successful campaigns that span across television, games, live events, and film. She is the Co-Founder/Executive Director of the BRIC Foundation, an organization that focuses on increasing representation for women and people from underrepresented groups in the entertainment industry. She is also the Co-Founder of the Concept Art Association, and organization focusing on elevating and raising the profile of concept artists within the entertainment industry, where she directs their yearly Concept Art Awards show.

San Cha is a singer-songwriter, based in the City of Angels, increasingly known for her visceral and explosive live performances. Her name, derived from the Spanish word sancha, which translates to ‘mistress’, is a mischievous reference to the title of ‘San’, given to male saints in the Catholic tradition. Fans of cumbia and punk, bolero and electro, flock to see San Cha’s emotional renditions of traditional Mexican rancheras and original songs that queer conventions of identity, power and love. Her striking stage presence is accompanied by the one-of-a-kind garments she adorns, aesthetic reflections of the years spent performing in drag and club scenes in the Bay. San Cha was the headlining act at the kickoff of the 2019 Red Bull Music Festival, with recent performances at the Getty Museum, TBA Fest, Levitt Pavillion, HOCO Fest, Sonido Clash Music Festival and Santa Monica Pier.
Yamily Pardio is currently a student at Los Angeles City College and Educator at the Museum of Contemporary Art. She migrated from Yucatan, Mexico in 2001 and was deeply impacted by her experiences as an undocumented immigrant. She has been an organizer in various realms of youth-led immigrant movements including undocumented student advocacy efforts for Dream Resource Centers and grassroot campaigns to stop the deportations of queer and trans migrants. She eventually found herself in contemporary art museums working with visitor engagement, family, and school programs. She plans to continue exploring the intersections of advocacy, organizing, law and the arts in her professional and academic career to hold institutions accountable for their historical exploitation of workers, First Nations and Indigenous people across the world.

Yesika Salgado is a Los Angeles based Salvadoran poet who writes about her family, her culture, her city, and her fat brown body. She has shared her work in venues and campuses throughout the country. Salgado is a two time National Poetry Slam finalist and the recipient of the 2020 International Latino Book Award in Poetry. Her work has been featured in the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Teen Vogue, Univision, Spotify, CNN and many more networks and publications. She is an internationally recognized body-positive activist and the writer of the column Suelta for Remezcla. Yesika is the author of the best-sellers Corazón, Tesoro, and Hermosa, published with Not a Cult.

ACTIVATE: Emerging Arts Leaders is Arts for LA’s newest leadership development program. Through this program, we hope to better prepare, educate, and inspire the next generation of arts leaders across the region, expand the field's definition of arts advocacy and ensure it is considered an essential skill for any arts leader. The mission of EAL is to support a diverse, equitable creative workforce through professional development opportunities.