



# DEFENDING EACH OTHER IN THE USA

STEPPING UP - STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVE SOLIDARITY  
WITH ARTISTS IMPACTED BY FORCED DISPLACEMENT  
IN THE UNITED STATES

**Mary Ann DeVlieg**



ON  
THE  
MOVE

## **Defending Each Other in the USA:**

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## **Defending Each Other in the USA:**

### **Stepping Up - Strategies for Active Solidarity with Artists Impacted by Forced Displacement in the United States**

**Mary Ann DeVlieg**

#### **Foreword**

This paper is a co-commission by On the Move and CEC Artslink as follow up to the '[Artslink Assembly 2025: Defending Each Other](#)' held in New York on 6 and 7 November 2025, curated and produced by [CEC ArtsLink](#) in partnership with the [Artistic Freedom Initiative](#).

[On the Move](#) is a professional network of national arts mobility actors and a comprehensive resource base dedicated to artists' mobility as an international right. Since 2018, it has facilitated an ongoing working group, '(en)Forced Mobility', on this topic. Throughout 2025, On the Move has coordinated wide-ranging research on pertinent public policy and practice, resulting in a series of research papers collected into four volumes. (See References).

The author thanks On the Move's continuing research and especially for the generous work of participants at the Artslink Assembly 2025, including those who gave feedback to the first draft, and the four peer-to-peer working groups held at the Assembly: Artists; Arts Support Organizations; Artist Resettlement Organizations; Funders/Foundations. (participants are listed in the Reference section on page 25).

*What if, the girl says. Instead of saying, this border divides places. We said, this border holds together two really interesting different places. What if we declared border crossings places where, listen, when you crossed them, you yourself became doubly possible.*

(Ali Smith, 2019)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, A. (2019). *Spring*. London : Anchor Books.

## Part One

### The Argument, the Approach and the Questions

*The emotion that needs to be triggered is courage, not guilt.*

(Helena Nassif, former Director,  
al Mawred al Thaqafy Culture Resource,  
Art During Crisis discussion, 2024)

This paper argues for the creation of a new consolidated movement in the USA of organizations and individuals who believe that a flourishing society, now threatened, must be based on equitable interchange and mutual support amongst creative thinkers and actors, and that artists bring the multifaceted perspectives necessary to the continued development of such a society. Artists who have experienced repression and displacement are an integral part of this equation and are crucial to the continued evolution both of the arts and our democratic societies.

The arts sector is located at the intersection of community, responsibility and the duty of living in an interdependent world. Judith Butler has written: 'If resistance is to enact the principles of democracy for which it struggles, then resistance has to be **plural** and it has to be **embodied**.'<sup>2</sup> This is a call to resist; to resist narratives that downgrade people who move to the USA to escape repression, narratives that downgrade the contribution of artists and the arts, that downgrade concepts of justice and equity. It is a call to the arts sector to claim our territory.

*Solidarity is always about connection across difference, about the way you stand with someone you have something crucial in common with but who may be different in other ways. It is a quilter's art of bringing the fragments together into a whole. It is E PLURIBUS UNUM.*

(Rebecca Solnit, *Meditations in an Emergency*, 1 December 2025)

Written for the arts sector, **this paper is intended to initiate a process for key actors to produce the answers that only they can identify; it is an invitation to think and create together, from concept to action.** It calls for a cross-sector alliance to strengthen what can be called a solidarity network, be it formal or informal. Networks in the arts sector are ubiquitous because (and when) they are

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<sup>2</sup> (Butler, J. (2012). 'Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life? Adorno Prize Lecture', *Radical Philosophy*, 176.

effective. Some may see a simple ‘coordination’ process as needed. It may be better to think of this as a movement that can include a multiplicity of responses, in large cities, in rural areas or small towns, local, regional or national, each acting according to their own strengths and interests. The aim will be to prepare the arts sector for resilience in a constantly and rapidly shifting political and social environment, specifically as it relates to artists impacted by forced displacement. Yet by sharing and addressing concerns, pragmatic actions will emerge and the sector as a whole will move forward. Various approaches are valid but whatever is created should be founded on a number of principles:

- Firstly that there is a **shared, baseline goal that emerges out of this process**. This might be along the lines of ‘to contribute to society through a vibrant and pertinent arts sector that supports artists at risk and impacted by displacement who have relocated to the USA, to develop their potential as fully as possible.’

This goal needs to be further articulated as **actionable and strategic, and respond to the question – what needs to exist or be done that is not here already? It cannot be abstract – outputs must be concrete and material.**

- Secondly, that the arts sector can break away from a model shaped by competition for resources, and build a **pragmatic, forward-looking solidarity movement that combines the unique strengths of all** in order to **envision and prepare for a positive future** environment.
- Thirdly, that this positive environment will emerge through the hard work and **dedication of a cross-sector, multi-scale critical mass including those with skills of advocacy organizing.**
- Fourthly, that despite a scarcity of existent resources (time, money, energy), there is enough creativity in the sector to construct an **agile, feasible, enjoyable, equitable and productive structure or process to comprise and sustain such a movement.**
- And, rather than last, a principle that underscores all the above: **it must be artist-centered.**

A seminal study of transnational advocacy networks defined them as civil society activists who **‘identify a problem, specify a cause, and propose a solution, all with an eye toward producing procedural, substantive, and normative change in the area of concern’** adding that **‘without the disruptive activity of these actors neither normative change or change in practices is likely to occur’**.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kekk, M. and Sikkink, K. (1998). *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Artist’s residencies are already liaising with community, migrant and refugee actors, social and health services, legal and rights professionals. **Aligned by shared values and principles, networks act as organizers, awareness-raisers and federators.** Arts sector professionals, beyond upholding their own public rhetoric, have a responsibility to actively influence policy and political action in their sector, to demand that policy and action are coherent with the rhetoric in their policies, missions and project proposals. **It is time for the arts sector, including artists, arts organizations, funders and perhaps also audiences, to step up to defend one another, to become a unified voice that demonstrates its focus, strength and purpose to past and potential supporters and in so doing, strengthens itself.**

### The ‘Blueprint’

*It is very urgent - we need to collaborate and exchange now more than ever; we need alternative models and blueprints.*

(Interview, June 2025).<sup>4</sup>

In the following pages, elements of discussions and interviews are accompanied by questions to spark reflection in and amongst those who wish to contribute to this initiative. The results of this process should result in a type of ‘blueprint’ to develop a nationwide/ internationally entwined coordination mechanism and/or an inspiring ‘movement’ to support artists impacted by displacement. And artists need to participate in its formation: ‘In practice, many displaced artists find themselves caught between visibility and invisibility – welcomed for their stories but not always integrated as full collaborators’ (Written feedback, December 2025)

- **Networking is seen as a strategic method to achieve a common goal. Sample questions** are suggested for participants to address in order to achieve a feasible collective movement. **Only a structure and system defined and designed by its participants will be legitimate.**

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<sup>4</sup> This and all quotations marked ‘Interview, June 2025’, are part of research conducted for On the Move in the paper, [‘Opening Our Minds: Including Incoming Artists and the Communities and Cultural Sector of the USA’](#) included in *Volume Three: Case Studies of the Situation of At-risk and Displaced Artists and Culture Professionals* (See Resources).

- Sector professionals, including artists and funders, are all **under pressure** currently but **pockets of promising practice can explore** models, share experiences, and ultimately grow, **scaling both up and out**.
- Networked initiatives thrive when **members gain something** – mutual support, learning or skills exchanges, useful contacts, inspiration for their own work, recognition, resources, new innovative shared projects. It stresses the importance of **early, quick, visible wins to keep members motivated**.
- Far more can be achieved if the **arts sector allies with other pertinent sectors** e.g. immigrant and refugee organizations, human rights, free expression, faith groups, social and community, educational institutions and so on.
- **A hub and spoke concept maximizes the capillary nature of networks** to spread information, both within the group and between groups via brokers and ‘bridgers’ active in multiple locations, between artists, other organizations, funders, policy-makers. A) **small experimental clusters** analyze their work to support artists and formalize local or regional coalitions, while they B) build towards a **national grouping** in which everyone can be represented and to which funders and supporters can react.

## Addressing Challenges by Strategizing

*We need to rethink and refresh; we need more information and resource sharing;  
there is too much isolation....*

*We miss the strategists; we need a strategic build-out...*

(Comments from funders working group  
at the Artslink Assembly 2025)

Repeatedly, participants at the Artslink Assembly 2025 called for **strategizing as necessary** to successfully move forward. This paper sees creating a networked structure or movement as a means to that end. There are many individuals and organizations with strong organizing and /or strategizing skills, and in a cross-sector network, the additional experience of other sectors would be enriching for all. Some funders have required training in strategizing, and the human rights sector has been offering similar training to create and sustain resistance movements. Although networks and consortia do exist, there has been a repeated call for better coordination and communication both between them and with others. Strategic thinking will be needed to build a network or coordination point, and strategies will be needed to create common actions and achieve the goals set by the network. Strategic thinking must take into account

the ‘messiness’ of displaced artists’ complex, unpredictable and often disjointed experiences. What is the future we wish to co-create? What is already happening, happening on a limited basis, or not happening? What has to be in place before that happens? **What steps are needed to put those elements in place? Who or what can help this? What is needed to bring them in, and so on, thinking logically of the steps needed to go forward and build.... This paper aims to provoke thought and responses by those in the USA who can answer these questions.**

Resisting the hostile environment for migrants means building alliances with like-minded colleagues, audiences and organizations. This benefits all by including more reflections, approaches and perspectives including convincing arguments for new supporters. Displaced artists frequently move through fragmented systems – legal, social, cultural, educational – that do not communicate with one another’ (Feedback December 2025). A successful networking initiative can gain by including those who understand and work in these systems. Residencies, such as [Pittsburgh’s City of Asylum](#) successfully embed and integrate artists into their community, which then becomes a supportive and loyal community.

In order to address tightening budgets and socio-political threats, courage and conviction can convince, especially when the party to be persuaded is already unsure of their direction. One funder has noted ‘we can ignore one voice, but if 35-50 organizations come to us with the same message, we cannot ignore it.’ (Interview, June 2025)

When resources are limited, the argument supporting competition for funding disappears. When resources are sufficient, competition is meant to bring out the best in the field. When resources are scarce the best strategy is to collaborate in order to be able to provide more services, to more beneficiaries, in more depth.

Polls in the USA demonstrate that there is growing antipathy for current treatment of migrants, and also that there is still strong support for arts and culture. Whereas mainstream media focus on extreme political positions to elicit outrage, locally rooted arts organizations interact well with their supporters. This public engagement challenges political inattention.

While some resources, such as housing, are difficult to access, arts residencies interviewed in June 2025 are using creative solutions to find housing for artists, in collaboration with universities (when students are absent), artist who themselves are at residencies or have space and municipalities that control buildings and accommodations.

Some ideas may be inspired by the 2013 Salzburg Statement on Supporting Artists at Risk, edited by Matthew Covey and Mary Ann DeVlieg, compiled by 50 artists and allies at the intersection of contemporary art, activism, politics, law, research, technology, ethics and organizing (See Resources).

## Recommended Approach and Timeline

*Solidarity: a relationship among separate and dissimilar actors who decide to stand together, for one another...*

(Young, (2011)<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, there are experienced and capable actors and hosting initiatives highly motivated to support the immediate as well as ongoing development of artists who have been displaced from home countries and are in the USA. This is evident from the discussions at the Artslink Assembly 2025 in November 2025. The importance of coalitions is demonstrated for example, in Fall of Freedom, the call to collective action in November 2025 led by artist Dread Scott, and Collective Courage, the nationwide initiative addressing the rise in US authoritarianism through the arts and coordinated by the NCAC (National Coalition Against Censorship). The US Protection Group for Cultural Rights and Human Rights Defenders, a coalition of US-based arts, education and human rights organizations, is another example of a learning and mutual support initiative.

However, there is a call for more coordination and communication of this type of activism in the arts sector, with the additional aim of inspiring others to act where and how they can. This would benefit from more peer-exchanges, together with artists, and exploration of the deeper values and differences that underlie hospitality. It is equally important to map resources and assets but also **gaps that exist and could be filled**, whether in major cities or in smaller towns.

Artists themselves must be central to this discussion. Although the terminology ‘at risk’ or ‘displaced’ provides a useful argumentation for specialized public and private support, does it become a stigma? **Surely the narrative needs adjustment - the emphasis should be on their status as artists, and the conditions in which they can flourish, both inspired by and giving new inspiration to the US arts sector.**

One approach would be to create a selected number of **cross-sector local or regional clusters** of good practice including artists, arts organizations and residencies, with pertinent health, legal, social, rights or other advocates and community activists, and local funders. These clusters can start to build trust and experiment with skill-sharing, identification of resources and gaps — while at the same time working on **defining both focused objectives and a common goal or mission that might be adopted by a national grouping.**

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<sup>5</sup> Young, I. M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The smaller **clusters' representatives ('bridgers')** could meet on a **national level** to share their experiences and work toward defining a common national goal and message that can be taken to the larger, national funders. If this initiative were to be conceived as a movement, 'artists support group clusters' might inspire other local clusters to form in other places, even 'naming' the movement in order to be attractive to communities wishing to be aligned. Again, displaced artists need to be central to this, but also local artists.

A **funders affinity group** should also be created and be represented at the national level. Whereas funders are also under pressure, a few of them do support at-risk artists, artistic freedom and artists seen as human and cultural rights defenders. (See also the Swedish Arts Council's initiative described here in a later section.)

## **Summary of Sample Questions and Potential One-year Timeline**

The following sample questions are intended to be discussed by individuals and organizations wishing to be part of a process that creates a networked movement initiative. Following discussions within the organizations or groups, representatives could meet to compare findings, piggybacking onto key relevant events that many would ordinarily attend in any case.

### **Core Questions**

- What are the strategic and practical approaches needed to build towards a national, networked movement initiative, whether more formal or informal, for bringing together artists impacted by displacement, arts organizations, dedicated at-risk residencies and organizations, and funders?
- If this is, at least initially, a coalition of the willing, who are the key organizations needed to take part in such an initiative? (and why these?)
- What does it mean to NOT create another layer or duplication of efforts? How to address what is not being done and identify the gaps?
- How can artists be included in co-constructing strategies?
- What is the central mission that all of these players would agree on? How best to settle on a singular, focused priority and message? Research into mission statements to find commonalities? Focus groups whittling down multiple priorities into something focused? Group tasked to do this with a fixed deadline?
- How would that mission be defined more narrowly to pertain to artists at-risk, impacted by displacement?

### **Structure and Process**

- Would a structure with local or regional hubs of organizations, linked to one coordination point, be better than a national-only initiative? Why/why not?
- What funders might be attracted to an initiative undertaken by a coalition of organizations collaborating on a common goal? What arguments would be convincing to funders?

- What process of collaborating would be feasible in terms of time, energy and money?
- Which existing arts organizations can offer what pieces of the puzzle of artists' needs? (databases/information on available resources; health and mental health support, housing, arts spaces, safety training, effective legal aid, mentorship...

### **Partners**

- What collaborations or coalitions already exist (locally, regionally or nationally) that might be built upon, expanded, scaled up and out?
- What non-arts alliances might be added to an arts-based coalition? (health, refugee or migrant support, human rights, religious or humanist organizations, community groups...). What can they add, and what can the arts sector offer them?
- How best to find aligned partners in terms of values, vision, organizational culture and motivations? How to build the trust that coalitions need to be founded upon?
- How to decide in what way organizations and individuals would be involved? In a small strategy group(s)? in a larger advisory group?

### **Local Connections**

- What other local organizations or agencies respond to the needs? How can a local, regional or national arts organization form partnerships with these?
- How can local artists collaborate with incomers, and what will it bring to each?
- Can audiences or communities be engaged to contribute to the needs?

### **Motivation and Momentum**

- How to best create motivation and resources within your organization to participate? What internal processes are necessary and what might be absorbed already into normal work? How to ensure this is central to your

work, and the excitement of participating is shared throughout the organization? What learning will impact on your organization's daily work?

- How to ensure that the initiative is owned by the whole organization and not only one staff member? How to integrate the values and goals into the participation organizations?
- What valuable learning needs to take place and be shared? By whom?
- What could be initial, easy, quick and frequent 'wins' to keep motivation strong amongst partners and keep the 'network' together?
- How to engineer the activities and discussions in order to keep the momentum going?

### **Coordination**

- What basic coordination activities would be absolutely necessary, either on a regional or a national basis? Is this a campaign manager? A network coordinator? A person or group?

## Draft One Year Timeline

**18 December 2025.** First meeting of ad hoc committee to discuss and refine this paper.

**January 2026.** The paper is revised according to comments by the committee, published by On the Move and circulated by CEC Artslink.

**1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2026.** A steering group is set up to advise and help direct an initiative, including reviewing existing surveys and resources and making a list of what needs to be done next. This would probably include initiating a mapping process of gaps and provision to complement the ARC-led National Artists' Safety Survey. Ideally this will be done in parallel to a convening with key players including funders, that will result in a more detailed roadmap and clear guidelines for participating. This will set in motion a reflection period that has the capacity to look beyond the now, into the next five to ten years. But it will also share learning regarding the increasing obstacles currently being thrown at artists, arts support and resettlement organizations.

**2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2026** (early April? after mid-term primaries results in the USA). A convening with a wider spread of players, including non-arts sector, to discuss, amend and agree an inclusive road map. Funders to move towards an affinity group. Advocates may lobby for certain issues with winners of the primaries. (See References: the 2013 EU Council Conclusions on At-Risk and Displaced Artists for ideas).

**3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2026.** Ideas might be discussed in local festivals and events. Speakers could present and collect ideas in panel or community discussions. Established artists might act as champions for the movement.

**4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2026** (after mid-term election results in early November) A larger convening (or series) to launch the initiative as an exploratory model.

## Part Two

### Artists at Risk and Impacted by Displacement, What Do They Contribute and What do they Need to Flourish

We are seeing an increase both in the repression of artistic freedom globally (a violation of internationally recognized human rights) and the resultant displacement of artists, from countries where they are pursued and persecuted, to countries deemed 'safe'. The artists, who will be impacted by their displacement, may have faced direct repression due to their artwork, armed conflict, poverty, or any number of obvious or subtle mechanisms that civil society or governmental groups exercise to obstruct the free artistic expression of one's identity, culture or thought. The phenomenon is growing, also becoming more visible even if existing statistics are necessarily partial.<sup>6</sup> Not all artists who relocate due to repression advertise it as such. Various occurrences exist, from urgent, emergency relocations negotiated with human rights NGOs to unplanned decisions during an artist's residency, performance tour or educational sojourn, and any number of unique pathways in between. Every artist's story is unique. If the creative arts sector is to reflect the range of human experience, it needs to embrace the unique perspectives that incoming artists bring.

**The US arts sector needs artists who have relocated;** they make local (and national) cultures more vivid, profound, innovative and allow us to explore what it means to be a creative human being in today's world. Research also indicates that newcomer artists in a locality tend to make that locality look more attractive both to local artists and others, nationally, who may choose to join an artistically vibrant community.<sup>7</sup> Artist's residencies exist to help artists develop artistically, and that happens through exchange of ideas, processes, techniques and approaches with other artists and communities. Hosting artists from outside one's local communities, indeed from other countries and cultures, stimulates

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<sup>6</sup> Several organizations dedicated to supporting at-risk artists collect statistics albeit based on their own contacts and media monitoring. These include ICORN (International cities of Refuge Network) <https://www.icorn.org> ; the Martin Roth Initiative <https://www.martin-roth-initiative.de/en> ; Safemuse <https://safemuse.org> ; the Artists at Risk Connection <https://artistsatriskconnection.org> and the similarly named but completely separate Artists at Risk <https://artistsatrisk.org/about/?lang=en> . Non-Western organizations with support programs include Ettijahat Independent culture

<https://www.ettijahat.org/site/index?lang=1> ; Al Mawred Culture Resource <https://mawred.org/?lang=en>

<sup>7</sup> Borowiecki, K.J and Graddy K. (2021). 'Immigrant Artists: Enrichment or Displacement?', *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 191, 785–797.

mutual creativity. Opening to others helps to ‘challenge fixed echo chambers and open thinking to contemporary issues... [without which] we become smaller.’ (Kala Art Institute, Interview, June 2025).

Artists who have experienced the pressure of censure and repression have insights into these phenomena that are necessary for those who would avoid them. This argument has been successfully used by the human rights defender sector in Europe. Residencies that host artists-at-risk describe the challenge and benefit of opening minds and systems to perspectives by incomers, enabling arts organizations to see their habitual processes in a completely different way.

However, it must be stressed that relocation is a last resort and a difficult personal choice, and that good practice models, though limited, also exist on continents beyond the USA and Europe, and colleague organizations there should be included in global support initiatives. Uprooting oneself from family, friends, audiences, familiar locations and cultures is not a luxury but a hardship.

**The lived experience and participation of artists impacted by displacement must be the foundation stone for any legitimate support initiative.**

## **What Do Artists Impacted by Displacement Need to Flourish?**

*All of these things are part of the situation of a refugee; that is, the difficulty of making a new life, financial problems, re-education, psychological trauma as a result of leaving the homeland, and facing a new culture. Experiencing asylum is like climbing stairs that were not built for you. They do not suit your walking style. Worst of all, by going through each step, you remember that step that you took years ago when you were a child when you graduated when you got your first salary in your country. You have gone through it all before and now this constant repetition hurts you.*

(Iranian poet, Fatemeh Ekhtasari, 2020)<sup>8</sup>

While there are differences in infrastructures, policy frameworks and professional environments, support for all artists anywhere remain similar: education and training (from arts education to language support); professional integration into the arts sector, networks and networking; access to resources necessary for creation, production and diffusion through supportive organizations, and access to existing and potential publics. If the arts sector aims

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<sup>8</sup> Ekhtesari, F. (2020). ‘Struggling with Destruction’, *Shuddhashar Issue 21 Exile*.  
<https://shuddhashar.com/struggling-with-destruction-fatemeh-ekhtesari/>

to be vibrant and pertinent, it needs to welcome artists who are or have been at-risk and displaced, now forming part of our communities. In order to do that, equitably and decisively, cooperation and coordination between key actors is necessary.

‘Displacement is not simply a category; it is an ongoing experience marked by instability, loss, and the emotional, legal and practical labor of starting over in systems not designed for us.’ (Feedback, December 2025). Artists present at the Artslink Assembly 2025 discussed specific needs shared by artists who have been or still are at risk and are impacted by their displacement, frequently ‘in survival mode’.<sup>9</sup> Often an artist who has been relocated for safety in collaboration with other agencies is stereotyped as ‘a victim, saved’ by the arts or human rights organization (NB. Although some artists want to tell their stories, retelling a traumatizing story is not always helpful and thus should not be expected). This binary of victim/savior is ‘not unrelated to colonization’ and it is necessary to ‘dismantle this cycle’. It leads to tokenism by some ‘arts givers’ or immigration lawyers who may use the credibility of doing ‘good works’ yet still treat the artist with a lack of understanding at best, or with co-option of stories or artwork, stereotyping and exploitation at worst. Often in political limbo awaiting citizenship, residency or asylum status decisions, the rights of the artists are suspended. Whereas ironically, the very reason they are in the host country is often their work in promoting their, or their communities’, rights through art. Artists lose their agency, distanced from a support system, mentors and colleagues in the home country, and most often not legally able to work in the new host country. Then, displaced, they are at risk of losing what is required to make art – a safe mental and emotional space, space for creation, materials, a network of artists and arts professionals and audiences. All of this, from securing basic stability to reconnecting to one’s identity as an artist, can be non-linear and protracted.

Anyone experiencing an abrupt and not necessarily wanted relocation is highly sensitive to their environment. Artists will be aware of anti-immigrant discourses and threats, and they may face very real violence from their persecutors from home following them, digitally or physically, or threatening their loved ones or former colleagues at home. Some artists experience trauma or hyper-vigilance; some have an initial honeymoon period that precedes it. Artists describe this as a gradual ‘healing in progress’. Arts censorship is increasing in the USA and artists who have already experienced this may be even more sensitive to it, feeling it as a triggering repression.

*‘To cultivate a space for expression for the silenced’*

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<sup>9</sup> Unattributed remarks in single quotation marks come from the artists at the CEC Assembly.

In brief, artists' needs are:

- Art community support: individuals, artists, organizations, networks, introductions to the host landscape
- Arts professional support: access to see current exhibited or performed work (all disciplines) and access to create, produce, exhibit, perform, publish own work, access to publics and further diffusion
- Housing support: residencies, temporary relocations, medium and longer term accommodation
- Medical and psycho-social support: insurance, affordable or free access to healthcare for self and family members
- Legal support, visa questions, work permits
- Employment support: ability to source and undertake paid work in arts or arts-adjacent projects

**Agency is reinforced by being a member of a community.** Artists' agency is reinforced by connecting to local, national and international networks of artists, curators, academics, arts administrators, educators, practitioners, and researchers considered as peers. These relationships will expand over years.

**Time, real care and personal connections** are obvious human needs. Exiled persons experience unfolding phases of their relocation, including emotional and other types of 'pull' towards both former home and the new one. Connecting newly arrived artists with artists having similar lived experience is helpful and includes informal or formal mentoring between 'generations' of arrivals. 'Companions' – people who offer to accompany a recently arrived migrant susceptible to harassment by ICE agents, is also sometimes crucial.

**Work is a human, economic and cultural right.** Many artists survive on a combination of arts-adjacent jobs, non-arts jobs and artistic work. If an artist cannot legally work due to immigration status, this potential for self-sufficiency disappears, again undermining agency and creating a domino effect obstructing professional progress based on being active in networks, creating and showing work, seeing other artists' work. Some of the US arts residencies interviewed in June 2025 have configured legal ways or pathways to paid work.

**Opportunities** to make art, to access creation and production spaces, to share work and mutually learn and exchange with other artists is a basic minimum for all artists yet often sits behind a wall of obstacles for artists impacted by displacement. Rather than pity or fetishization, the artists need **respect** that is actively realized by arts organizations and professionals who open their doors and spaces without prejudice, expectations or condescension.

**Information and training.** Language skills are essential to artists whose work depends on language, from writers and poets to playwright and song composers, not to mention artists needing to write job or funding applications. Some residencies, including non-specifically artist-at-risk residencies, assist artists with writing funding applications and fulfilling other bureaucratic requirements.

More pragmatically, artists are calling for an updated, searchable **database** of the resources they need, such as available and affordable health care, medicines and insurance, reliable lawyers and other professionals offering pro bono or low-cost services, emergency grants to cover food and shelter.

### **Part Three:**

#### **Models of Hospitality, Care and Collaboration**

*The promise of combining a political ethics of care with renewed conceptions of social justice and citizenship is that it makes us realize, not only that power and conflict as well as ambiguity, contingency and unpredictability are here to stay, but also that we can act ‘as well as possible’ in order to do what needs to be done.*

(Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 68–69)<sup>10</sup>

In the citation above, feminist scholar Selma Sevenhuijsen riffs on Jacques Derrida’s concept of a realistic yet just form of hospitality, combining the ‘best arrangements, the least bad conditions, the most just legislation’ (2005: 6).<sup>11</sup> A few of these ‘best arrangements’ are described below, giving us examples of how to ‘act as well as possible’.

Below are some examples in Europe that US-based organizations and artists may not be aware of.<sup>12</sup> European arts organizations have become accustomed to

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<sup>10</sup> Sevenhuijsen, S. (1998). *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality and Politics*. London: Routledge.

<sup>11</sup> Derrida, J. (2005). ‘The Principle of Hospitality’, *Parallax*, 11(1)

<sup>12</sup> Similar examples in the USA include the [SHIM: NYC residency](#), an ‘incubator’ facilitating connections between the resident artists and individuals, groups and

collaborating across borders, due to the rise of artistic co-productions since the 1990s and to the European Union's cultural funding programs that require multinational coalitions to build a unified European cultural space. Local, municipal, regional or national funding is normally a portion of any collaborative budget. This has resulted in a mentality that looks towards partnerships, with each partner contributing equitably with their strengths: premises, location, approaches, thematic expertise, specific artistic or managerial experience and so on. Overall funding is allocated to each partner calculated on their share of direct + managerial costs.

On the international arts level, some funders including those based in the USA increasingly appreciate initiatives undertaken by coalitions, providing funding to each organization for a single collaborative project. Two of these are also mentioned below.

**Collaboration without (or little) funding: one hour a month, fixed zoom = matching needs and resources and creating a solidarity community.**

- [Kunstenpunt](#) (Flanders Art Institute) and [Art during Crisis](#), one-hour, once a month zooms, 9am on Thursday mornings, organized by staff. In February 2023 [TransArtists](#) (a Dutch-based centre and global database for artist's residencies) collaborated with Kunstenpunt in Belgium to organize a peer-to-peer meeting at [GlobeAroma](#) (an artistic workspace and meeting place for artists in forced displacement). This brought together professionals from the cultural and humanitarian sectors across Flanders and The Netherlands. The program included working sessions on subjects from protocols for initial crisis response to the interactions between policy makers, refugee workers and art communities. Sharing firsthand experiences among colleagues from the art scene, social workers, and displaced artists proved invaluable to reflect how to improve structures and policies. This initiative has continued under the form of first weekly, and now monthly online gatherings: **Art During Crisis**, open discussions for artists and professionals in times of crisis. During Covid, artists with specific needs were matched with organizations (programs who might address them. Now, each session features speakers discussing a topic (eg visas), experience (arts in Palestine today) or an initiative in arts schools for

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organizations key to the artists' professional development. [ARC \(Artists at Risk Connection\)](#) has evolved from a connector and database of opportunities for at-risk artists to a funding and project-producing agency, offering emergency grants, training, accompaniment, and advocacy. [ONWARDS \(Opportunity Network for At-Risk Writers, Artists, Rights Defenders, and Scholars\)](#) is a collaboration of civil society organizations offering training, resources, and connections to services needed by at-risk scholars, human rights defenders and artists.

displaced artists). In April 2026 to concretize these four years of exchange, they will organize **Reflection to Action** a conference on international solidarity and hospitality in a world undergoing radical change to collect available knowledge and offer concrete tools and good practices to implement solidarity and hospitality.

**Collaboration with very little funding = few fixed costs for coordination; partners contribute to provide necessary elements of events**

**Safe Havens Freedom Talks (SH|FT)** is a non-profit with two part time staff based in Sweden dedicated to the protection and promotion of artists at risk, human rights defenders in the arts and artistic freedom globally. Since 2013 it develops meeting places for, and in collaboration with, organizations, groups, institutions (non-governmental and state), individuals and artists who defend the rights of the persecuted creatives and academics. Local organizations, international agencies and embassies contribute costs. Knowledge is shared from shelter city initiatives, international campaigns, funding opportunities and legal specialists. SH|FT annually organizes live conferences (e.g. Sweden, South Africa, Mexico, Cambodia) and multi-day online virtual conferences, plus Garden Sessions exclusively for artist-to-artist exchange. Partners pay for travel and accommodation of participants, usually artists and speakers, whom they identify; embassies pay for catering; local partners provide premises and local coordination and so on. SH|FT has recently researched and published an ongoing **interactive database 'map' matching artists' needs to available resources.**

**Collaborative support for exiled artists (with funding) = 360° vision of artists' needs, building a community of artists +producer/presenters; new audiences across borders.**

**L'Agence des artistes en exil and In Ex(ile) Lab.** The agency of artists in exile (aa-e) supports artists in exile with work space and contact to professionals. One project, co-funded by the EU's Creative Europe program, In Ex(ile) Lab, comprised nine arts organizations in France, Italy, Cyprus and Portugal from September 2022 to August 2024. The partners tested transdisciplinary pathways for a group of artists in exile. In Ex(ile) Lab helped to equip cultural structures with tools and methodologies to work with artists in exile, aiming to increase the participation of artists in exile in Europe. Twelve artists took part in a one-year program including artistic creation and practice (master classes, audiovisual creation workshops, residencies, pitch sessions, presentations), information and professionalization (mentoring, webinars) to enrich their artistic practice, increase their mobility and build relationships with new partners and audiences. Public online meetings of researchers and cultural

professionals discussed themes related to exile. A catalog presenting the artists and the performances and a toolbox for cultural organizations wishing to work with artists in exile were created.

A similar example of an EU-funded collaborative project supporting artists who have relocated into Europe is Rawabet, linking arts producers in Belgium, Italy, Norway, Sweden, France and Germany, providing production grants to artists, residencies, festivals and publications.

### **International Coalitions that Attract Collaborative Funding**

**Ettijahat Independent Culture, Action for Hope with various others.** These Arab and Arab/African cultural support organizations are each respected, established, stable and strong individually. However, on a number of occasions, flexibly adapting to crises such as Covid, conflict or abrupt socio-economic crisis, they have convinced **funders to co-fund initiatives** that, for example, give living cost grants to artists, a model probably unheard of in the arts sector before Covid. A further example, **Tomorrow: culture as a cornerstone...** is an initiative to develop the cultural sector in Syria that links four partners specializing in arts production, refugee support, cinema and cultural management.

### **Coalitions of Funders**

The International Donor Dialogue on Artistic Freedom an initiative of the Swedish Arts Council, was held (online) for the first time, in October 2025. The Swedish Arts Council, responsible for the EU's 'Council Conclusions on At-Risk and Displaced Artists in 2013, is currently active in highlighting the field of artistic freedom and Sweden's position in it. The Donor Dialogue is part of the Arts Council's Programme for Artistic Freedom. Donors participating recognized the 'rapid deterioration of artistic freedom worldwide and the parallel decline of dedicated funding'. Shared key objectives included: strengthening coordination and communication among donors supporting artistic freedom...increasing visibility and knowledge-sharing...encouraging continued dialogue between donors and cultural actors...promoting flexible, context-sensitive funding models.... whereas a majority of funders were from Nordic countries, the group also included USA-based, Swiss-based and international organizations. (See also Mimeta's initiative: <https://www.mimeta.org/artist-at-risk-funding-initiative> )

### **Concluding Remarks**

As evidenced at the Artslink Assembly in November 2025, in written and online feedback by participants, as well as reflected in On the Move's interviews in summer 2025, there is a clear need and interest in coming together to identify gaps in provision supporting forcibly displaced artists and acting collaboratively to address such gaps. This might be done by starting with key actors and artists who are willing to think and strategize together to envision how to move forward and create a movement, network, coordination point or other useful and pragmatically effective initiative. This effort will naturally include those organizations already actively doing similar work but importantly must include artists as central to the thinking and planning.

The questions, examples, texts and timeline in this paper aim to provoke interest, ideas and actions that will be generated by the people, agencies and funders committed to welcoming and supporting artists impacted by displacement. Preparing a feasible collaborative present and envisioning a desired future will build a system that welcomes displaced artists as equal artistic contributors to the rich mix that makes a country worth living in.

## **References and Further Reading**

On the Move:

[At-risk and Displaced Artists and Culture Professionals 2024- 2026](#)

European Union Council of Ministers (2023). *Council Conclusions on At-Risk and Displaced Artists*. Council of the European Union, General Secretariat of the Council, 16 May, 9260/23. 2023/C 185/09.

'The Salzburg Statement on Supporting Artists on the Front Line', Salzburg Global Seminars (2023). Salzburg, Austria: Salzburg Global. Edited by Matthew Covey and Mary Ann DeVlieg.

## Peer-to-Peer Working Groups at the Artslink Assembly 2025

### Arts Support Organizations

Data Chigholashvili | Residency Unlimited  
 Gracie Golden | Artistic Freedom Initiative  
 Kibra Yohannes | Artist Communities Alliance  
 Mary Ann DeVlieg | On the Move / Independent  
 Matthew Covey [moderator] | Tamizdat  
 Melissa Levin | Artist Communities Alliance  
 Sam Myers | Association of Performing Arts Professionals (APAP)  
 Sara Roer | Dance NYC  
 Stanlyn Brevé | National Performance Network  
 Ya Yun Teng | New York Foundation for the Arts – Immigrant Artists Program  
 Yohann Floch | On the Move

### Artist Resettlement Organizations

Alison Russo – Artist Protection Fund / IIE  
 Ashley Tucker [moderator] Artistic Freedom Initiative  
 Hannah East – City of Asylum Pittsburg  
 Jonathan Miller – ONWARDS  
 Julie Trebault – Artists at Risk Connection  
 Rachel Switlick – SHIM-NYC / Tamizdat  
 Zanya Andrade-Fitz – Artistic Freedom Initiative

### Funders/Foundations

Barbara Lanciers [moderator] | Trust for Mutual Understanding  
 Craig Peterson | New York Community Trust  
 Leanne Tintori | New York State Council on the Arts (retired)  
 Rachel Shuey | Razom for Ukraine

### Artists

Achiro Olwoch | Artist Community Network  
 Bart Was Not Here | Artist Community Network  
 Cansu Korkmaz | Artist Community Network  
 Fabiana Salgado | Independent  
 Lama El Homaïssi | Artist Community Network  
 Mai Khoi | Independent  
 Shelly Bahl [moderator] | Independent  
 Yasmeen | Artist Community Network

## **Appendix One**

### **CHECKLIST: Questions to Consider**

#### **Core Questions**

- What are the strategic and practical approaches needed to build towards a national, networked initiative, whether more formal or informal, for bringing together artists impacted by displacement, arts organizations, dedicated at-risk residencies and organizations, and funders?
- Who are the key organizations needed to take part in such an initiative? (and why these?)
- How can artists be included in co-constructing strategies?
- What is the central mission that all of these players would agree on? How best to settle on a singular, focused priority and message? Research into mission statements to find commonalities? Focus groups whittling down multiple priorities into something focused? Group tasked to do this with a fixed deadline?
- How would that mission be defined more narrowly to pertain to artists at-risk, impacted by displacement?

#### **Structure and Process**

- Would a structure with local or regional hubs of organizations, linked to one coordination point, be better than a national-only initiative? Why/why not?
- What funders might be attracted to an initiative undertaken by a coalition of organizations collaborating on a common goal? What arguments would be convincing to funders?
- What process of collaborating would be feasible in terms of time, energy and money?
- Which existing arts organizations can offer what pieces of the puzzle of artists' needs? (databases/information on available resources; health and mental health support, housing, arts spaces, safety training, effective legal aid, mentorship...

**Partners**

- What collaborations or coalitions already exist (locally, regionally or nationally) that might be built upon, expanded, scaled up and out?
- What non-arts alliances might be added to an arts-based coalition? (health, refugee or migrant support, human rights, religious or humanist organizations, community groups...). What can they add, and what can the arts sector offer them?
- How best to find aligned partners in terms of values, vision, organizational culture and motivations? How to build the trust that coalitions need to be founded upon?
- How to decide in what way organizations and individuals would be involved? In a small strategy group(s)? in a larger advisory group?

**Local Connections**

- What other local organizations or agencies respond to the needs? How can a local, regional or national arts organization form partnerships with these
- How can local artists collaborate with incomers, and what will it bring to each?
- Can audiences or communities be engaged to contribute to the needs?

**Motivation**

- How to best create motivation and resources to participate within your organization? What internal processes are necessary and what might be absorbed already into normal work? How to ensure this is central to your work, and the excitement of participating is shared throughout the organization?
- What could be initial, easy, quick and frequent 'wins' to keep motivation strong amongst partners and keep the 'network' together?

**Coordination**

- What basic coordination activities would be absolutely necessary, either on a regional or a national basis?

## Appendix Two: Some Historical Context

Support for individual artists has evolved in recent years, beginning with a focus on censorship and freedom of artistic expression, or artistic freedom. Although PEN International was founded in 1921 and Index on Censorship in 1972, their main concern has been writers. See [www.pen-international.org](http://www.pen-international.org) and [www.indexoncensorship.org/what-we-do/](http://www.indexoncensorship.org/what-we-do/) Key associations protecting and defending other types of artists evolved from the late 1990s. In the USA, Tamizdat was founded in 1998 to navigate US visa processes and hence international exchange for performing artists. Freemuse from 1998 initially focused on censorship of musicians but since expanded to all artists; Cities of Asylum from 1996 and the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) from 2006 created so-called safe havens where persecuted writers and, later, other artists could be temporarily relocated.

Arguably, the concept of the ‘artist-at-risk’ was inspired by the first Scholars at Risk conference at the University of Chicago in 1999 and likely first used to describe artists by Todd Lester, founder of freeDimensional. As interest and advocacy increased, a number of conferences and organizations began to appear in the early 2000s. Examples are the creation of the Arts-Rights-Justice Working Group and of Artsfex (led by Freemuse) in 2012, and the ongoing development of the annual Safe Havens conference. Key players included, among others: Action Committee for Artists Rights, International Theatre Institute Germany; Art Moves Africa; Arterial Network; Association of European Open Air Museums; Article 19, European Academy of Yuste Foundation; European Council of Artists; European Composer and Songwriter Alliance; European Music Council; European Theatre Convention; European Writers Council; Federation of European Film Directors; Federation of European Publishers; freeDimensional; Freemuse; Hors les Murs/Circostrada; IDEA Europe; ICORN, IETM, Index on Censorship; International Federation of Actors; International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity; International Federation of Musicians; Latin America Network for Social Transformation/Foundation for Community Dance; May Congress Russia; National Coalition on Censorship, On the Move; PEN International; PEN Scotland; ResArtis; Roberto Cimetta Fund; Swedish Theatre Union; Theatre Without Borders USA; TransEuropeHalles; UNESCO Chair Cultural Policy for the Arts in Development at Hildesheim University; UNESCO Austrian Commission on the Diversity of Cultures; and the Union des Théâtres de l’Europe.

In 2015, the Artists’ Protection Fund <https://www.iie.org/programs/artist-protection-fund/about/> was launched under the auspices of the Institute for International Education. In 2017 the Mellon Foundation funded a consultation process leading to a series of major grants to PEN America for a USA-based global initiative, eventually becoming the now-independent Artists-at-Risk Connection. The same year saw the creation of the US-based Artistic Freedom Initiative <https://artisticfreedominitiative.org/about-us/mission/>

## Colophon

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**On the Move [OTM]** supports artists and professionals to operate internationally while working to reimagine mobility as fairer, more diverse, and more sustainable. International mobility is an essential part of the cultural field. OTM provides information on cultural mobility that is up-to-date and always free to use. They source open calls for their website, maintain a collection of more than 60 funding guides, and point to external guidance on specialist topics like visa and tax law. OTM publishes thematic reports and publications, undertakes research, and designs professional development programs for artists and organizations. All their work is underpinned by a commitment to engaging with the context, environmental impacts and ethics of mobility.

**CEC ArtsLink** supports transnational cultural mobility and collaboration, empowering artists and arts leaders to engage communities in dialogue and creative collaborative projects for a more equitable, compassionate, and sustainable world. The **ArtsLink International Fellowship** program supports pioneering artists, curators, and arts leaders from their network countries in developing their community engaged practices in the US and transnationally. The program emphasizes the value of independent artist networks and sustained dialogue around the urgent issues facing our societies, particularly social justice and the climate emergency. The **ArtsLink Assembly** is a gathering of ArtsLink Fellows, transnational artists, curators, cultural organizations, philanthropists, thought leaders, activists, and academics to share perspectives on transnational cultural exchange, civil society, and the role artists can play in building a better world. With a focus on community based cultural practices and socially engaged art, the Assembly explores the powerful role creative interventions play in civic life and offers inspiration and strategies for social change.

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