

Coalition Launches Historic \$50 Million Initiative to Bolster Nonprofit Literary Arts

New fund is dedicated to strengthening the field, advancing support for creative writers and ensuring their contributions to American literature for generations to come

New York, NY (October 28, 2025) – Today, a coalition of seven charitable foundations—the Ford Foundation, Hawthornden Foundation, Lannan Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Mellon Foundation, Poetry Foundation, and an anonymous foundation—announced the launch of the **Literary Arts Fund**, an unprecedented effort to dramatically boost the essential yet critically underfunded nonprofit literary arts field in the United States. The fund, initiated by Mellon as a collaborative effort in service of the field’s needs and promise, will distribute at least \$50 million over the next five years, with continued fundraising planned.

“Art does not find its way forward in a search for commercial success. Without nonprofit publishers American letters would have stalled long ago,” said **Percival Everett, poet and author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *James***. “This initiative demonstrates the kind of spirit that we hope our writers exhibit. This is the kind of support that will reinvigorate the entire artistic landscape of our culture.”

The nonprofit literary field comprises hundreds of charitable organizations and publishers that serve writers and readers in ways that are distinct from commercial publishing. These organizations champion established writers, critical first-time and historically underrepresented authors, and provide a home for the intellectually rigorous and artistically adventurous voices whose work deepens and challenges our culture. They bring literature to communities nationwide—hosting book festivals and events that connect authors and readers across the country; broaden the reach of writers by publishing works in translation; mentor and encourage authors through retreats and residencies; and celebrate artistic achievement through literary awards and fellowships. Together, these efforts sustain the vitality and independence of American literature and ensure that a wide spectrum of voices and ideas continues to shape our collective imagination.

Literature is the least-supported artistic discipline in the U.S., receiving only 1.9% of the \$5 billion in arts grants awarded in 2023 per data collected from [Candid](#). This disparity, which is persistent, coupled with other ongoing challenges, including shrinking public funding and rising operating and publishing costs, underscores the underfunding in the nonprofit literary arts field and the urgent need for the Literary Arts Fund’s support.

“The literary arts give voice to who we are as a people,” said **Elizabeth Alexander, poet and President of the Mellon Foundation**. “Novelists, poets, and all manner of creative writers shape and drive our collective discourse and capacity for invention and imagination. American philanthropy can play a bigger role in strengthening the financial infrastructure of the literary

organizations and nonprofits that serve these literary artists. As we initiate this historic effort, we at Mellon are pleased to join with our co-funders in sustaining and further stewarding the extraordinary legacy and power of the written word in our country."

Ann Patchett, international best-selling author of *Bel Canto* and *Commonwealth* notes, "I am so grateful to the Literary Arts Fund for making a commitment to writers, to writing, to reading, to the bond we make with books and how those books help us forge bonds with one another. The support of the future of literature is a cause for celebration."

Each of the initiative's seven founding funders made a one-time gift to establish the fund along with the Literary Arts Funders Collaborative, a new affinity group for charitable foundation leaders interested in learning more about the literary arts field and championing literature. Since its inception, additional pledges and contributions have been provided by new members Houston Endowment, Jerome Foundation, McKnight Foundation, and the Adrian Brinkerhoff Poetry Fund of the Sidney E. Frank Foundation. Interested charitable foundations can learn more about the nonprofit literary arts field, join the Literary Arts Funders Collaborative, and contribute to the fund, here: literaryartsfund.org/about.

"As a Midwest-based philanthropic institution, the Poetry Foundation views the Literary Arts Fund as an excellent opportunity to leverage our endowment and extend its influence in service to poetry and the literary arts at large," said **Poetry Foundation President and CEO, Michelle T. Boone**. "The Poetry Foundation is honored to be among this cohort of trusted, forward-thinking philanthropic organizations, and looks forward to the new opportunities this fund presents for strengthening the literary arts in the U.S."

"It's shocking – not even 2% of arts funding goes toward our shared literary life. Lannan has supported writers since 1960, so we've known the many ways this scrappy field punches far above its weight. Yet even we did not fully grasp the severe imbalance between investment and impact," said **Brenda Coughlin, Executive Director of Lannan Foundation**. "May this new fund and the Literary Arts Funders Collaborative invite in and encourage new supporters to experience, as we have, the delight and high returns of literary brilliance."

The coalition has tapped veteran literary leader Jennifer Benka to direct the fund, which is fiscally sponsored through the National Center for Civic Innovation. For the past 20 years, Benka has helmed organizations such as the Academy of American Poets and Poets & Writers that have supported hundreds of literary arts nonprofits, and poets, fiction writers, and creative nonfiction writers across the U.S. Benka's professional expertise includes creating and administering new grantmaking, residency, fellowship, and capacity-building programs supporting writers and nonprofits across the U.S.

"I'm grateful to the foundations that founded the Literary Arts Fund for the critical leadership role they've played for years in supporting literature and writers and to those that have recently joined in this effort. I hope their combined generosity will inspire other foundation leaders who appreciate writers, books, and reading to help sustain our literary culture well into the future," said **Jennifer Benka, Executive Director of the Literary Arts Fund**.

The Literary Arts Fund will award grants to U.S.-based nonprofit or fiscally sponsored literary organizations and publishers that support contemporary writers of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, or hybrid literary forms through an annual open call beginning **November 10**. Full guidelines and eligibility details are available here: literaryartsfund.org/grants.

To learn more about the Literary Arts Fund, subscribe to their newsletter here: literaryartsfund.org/newsletter.

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About the Literary Arts Fund

The Literary Arts Fund, a fiscally sponsored project of the National Center for Civic Innovation, is a national effort to support the nonprofit literary arts field in the United States, which includes publishers, presenters, and other organizations that directly support creative writers and strengthen their relationship to readers. Launched in 2025, the fund will distribute at least \$50 million over the next five years, concluding in 2031. It will also further the development of the Literary Arts Funders Collaborative, a new affinity group for charitable foundation leaders interested in learning more about the literary arts field and championing literature. The initiative was founded and launched by the Ford Foundation, Hawthornden Foundation, Lannan Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Mellon Foundation, Poetry Foundation, and an anonymous foundation.

Ford Foundation

The Ford Foundation is an independent organization working to address inequality and build a future grounded in justice. For nearly 90 years, it has supported visionaries on the frontlines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. Today, with an endowment of \$16 billion, the foundation has headquarters in New York and 10 regional offices across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Learn more at www.fordfoundation.org.

Hawthornden Foundation

Hawthornden Foundation is a private charitable foundation supporting contemporary writers and the literary arts. Established by Drue Heinz, the noted philanthropist and patron of the arts, the Foundation is named after Hawthornden Castle in Midlothian, Scotland, where an international residential residency program provides month-long retreats for creative writers from all disciplines to work in peaceful surroundings. Hawthornden also supports a residential program at Casa Ecco, on Lake Como in Italy, the site of “Conversazioni,” attended by many celebrated writers and others in the literary arts, and a retreat for invited authors to complete a literary work in progress. The Foundation operates a third non-residential retreat – Hawthornden Brooklyn – in New York. In addition, the Foundation sponsors the annual Hawthornden Prize, one of Britain’s oldest and foremost literary awards, and provides grant support to literary arts organizations internationally.

Lannan Foundation

Lannan Foundation is dedicated to cultural freedom, diversity, and creativity through its support of exceptional contemporary visual artists and writers, as well as Native organizers in rural Indigenous communities. The Foundation recognizes the profound and often unquantifiable value of the creative process and embraces the risks inherent in ambitious and experimental thinking. For more than forty years, Lannan's Literary Program has supported hundreds of writers and literary organizations through awards, fellowships, residencies, public readings and events, a free media archive, and grants to publishers, libraries, and university humanities and writing programs. Founded in Chicago in 1960, the Foundation will conclude its work by 2032, ensuring that its remaining resources are used boldly to achieve their greatest impact in this moment.

John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

The MacArthur Foundation boldly invests in creative solutions to urgent challenges, sparking hope for our future. We work on a few big bets that strive toward transformative change in areas of profound concern, including the existential threats of climate change, the challenges of criminal justice reform, revitalizing local news in the U.S., and corruption in Nigeria. In addition, we maintain enduring commitments in our hometown Chicago, where we invest in people, places, and partnerships to build a more inclusive Chicago and in journalism and media, where we invest in more just and inclusive news and narratives. We also make awards to extraordinarily creative individuals through the MacArthur Fellows program and for solutions to critical problems of our time through *100&Change*.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive.

Poetry Foundation

The Poetry Foundation transforms lives through the power of words. Our work aims to amplify poetry and celebrate poets by fostering spaces for all to create, experience, and share poetry.