

James Kass

www.jameskassconsulting.com

Phone: 415.902.5637 E-Mail: james.m.kass@gmail.com

Profile

An innovative, entrepreneurial, and creative social impact leader with over 25 years of experience as an Executive Director and consultant, James is a writer, producer, organizational consultant, cultural & narrative strategist, content creator, educator, development strategist, coach, and program lead. An advocate for the nonprofit social impact, arts, and cultural sectors, James has raised over \$65 million while launching numerous highly visible programs, and facilitated strategic plans for dozens of organizations that include evaluations and impact assessments, strategic communications, capacity growth and resource planning; all of which centers sustainability, innovation, equity, access, and inclusion.

James built a grassroots organization into a multi-million dollar internationally-recognized institution, while facilitating expansive networks through collaborative program design and resource distribution. James is also recognized as a leading expert in narrative strategy, arts education, performance, media production, and cultural equity, and has helped dozens of organizations scale their impact while operationalizing an advanced vision for impact.

Areas of Expertise Include

Fundraising & Development		Marketing & Communications		Strategic Planning & Org Design		Program & Convening Design
Public Speaking & Meeting Facilitation		Professional Development & Training		Impact Evaluations and Executive Search/Hires		Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Work
Coaching & Mentoring		Youth Development		Arts & Arts Education		Event & Festival Production
Change Management Consulting		Community & Civic Engagement		Organizational & Staff Development		Literary & Performing Arts
National & Global Networks		Media Production & Content Creation		Meeting & Conference Facilitation		Board Development
Artistic Collaborations and Productions		Commissioning & Editing Think Pieces		Public & Private Partnerships		Social, Cultural & Environmental Justice
University & School Partnerships		Editing, Publishing, & Dramaturgy		Trauma-Informed Practice		Grantmaking & Strategy

Experience

Organizational Development Consultant/Strategic Advisor

Consulting work ranges from multi-year partnerships to short-term engagements, with dozens of organizations in Executive Management, Strategic Planning, Resource Development, Major Donor Cultivation, Meeting Facilitation and Design, Community Engagement, Equity-Based Design, Communications Planning, Program Design, Staff and Board Trainings, Staffing Plans, Operational Plans, and Pedagogy Development.

Current work includes:

The Apollo Theater, Project Lead for Apollo Stories, redefining the performing arts canon: October 2019- Present: Launching a major national educational initiative, *Apollo Stories*, to reimagine the role of performance to launch public conversations about critical issues in the United States. Program launches in partnership with the staged production of Ta-Nehesi Coates' *Between the World and Me*, to facilitate a national, youth-led conversation about racism.

- Developed idea, wrote concept paper and project plan, helped develop fundraising strategy and bring in seed money, and serving as Project Lead for launch in Spring 2022.
- Hired Teaching Fellows to build and develop curriculum.
- Hired web development team to build a new Digital Learning Environment for Apollo education programs.
- Serving as a core spokesperson for project.

First Peoples Fund, investing in the collective spirit of Indigenous Culture Bearers and their impacts on their communities:

November 2018 – October 2022 Onsite Advisor, Individual Donor and Major Donor Advancement and Strategy. Working to launch a major donor campaign to increase the organization's capacity and flexibility to program in Tribal Communities across the United States. Supporting on organizational Strategic Plan, and strategic communications plan, as well as planning major anniversary event. Highlights include:

- Partnering with CEO Lori Pourier and the Board of Directors to plan 25th Anniversary event – *We The Peoples Before* - at the Kennedy Center in early 2022, including building the concept, the team, and securing resources and partnerships.
- Launching nationwide educational initiative to support a narrative around indigenous cultural and community practices, historical, contemporary, and future for educational spaces nationwide.
- Helped launch a major growth capital (Legacy) campaign, including the development of a new fundraising narrative that targets donors, highlights key points of future ambition, and details organizational needs. To date, \$10million has been raised of \$15million goal.
- Serving as peer council to CEO as she scopes out future role as thought leader and organizational visionary, and developing plan to increase the capacity of the organization to support future vision.
- Providing Succession Planning, Fundraising, Communications and Strategic Planning Support. Executive Hire Search support.
- Providing Strategic Communications support, narrative strategy and engagement with external communications partners.

Bright Research Group, redefining the power of community-informed practice for health access and justice equity work. October 2021- Present. Strategic Advisor, developing strategic planning framework and new business model research and thought partnership for Founder and CEO Brightstar Ohlson

- Conducted research/SWOT Analysis, and initial interviews with staff and key stakeholders
- Mapping out new strategies for revenue diversification and impact goals
- Working with CEO on Strategic Planning for next phase of the organization to increase its capacity, financial flexibility, and explicit impact goals.
- Supporting the codification of methods, values, and strategies to achieve said impact goal

Studio Pathways, educational innovation. August 2022- present. Strategic Advisor, resource development

- Mapping out new strategies for revenue diversification and impact goals
- Working with Co-Directors to development fundraising plan and strategies, including creating new assets (decks, etc)
- Creating narrative frame to expand potential customers and supporters
-

The Redford Center, environmental filmmaking and storytelling to accelerate the movement for environmental justice, protection and repair: June 2019 – July 2021: Strategic Planning, Board Development, Fundraising, Organizational Capacity.

- Served as partner and Executive Coach to Executive Director and Board to map out next phase of organization, including building a leadership team and a new model of operations for the board of directors.
- Facilitated Board Development and Strategic Planning process.
- Launched a \$25million major growth capital campaign to support the strategic directions of the organization; helped secure initial \$6million.
- Built up internal communications and development capacity, as well as engaging a new organizational narrative for next phase of operations.
- Co-Led on Executive Hire Search for Deputy Director and other leadership staff (communications and program).
- Led on Communications/Amplification Strategy, bringing in and identifying external partners and mapping out narrative strategy.
- Wrote Concept Paper and creating assets to launch next public phase of institution, including launch communications and fundraising strategies.
- Developed plan for major research project around the relationship between cultural production and cultural transformation, with focus in the environmental/climate space.
- Launched 2nd phase of national educational program, Redford Center Stories, to bring high-quality film into middle schools nationwide, and engage students in a storytelling project about environmental justice, protection, and repair.

The Center for Cultural Power, women-of-color led arts ecology building organization on the forefront of social change: March 2018 – January 2020 Onsite Advisor, Directed Strategic Initiatives and Strategic Growth. Supported the Founding Executive Director/President Favianna Rodriguez during a merger and organizational transition (bringing together CultureStrike and the Citizens Engagement Lab), while serving as leadership coach and directing strategic planning and growth plan. Helped to launch a field-wide initiative that supports artists and storytellers of color nationally to support positive social change. Primary functions included:

- Provided Development and Fundraising Support, including launching a major donor campaign and supporting foundation solicitation, including grant writing and strategic support. Helped raise initial \$7million of \$10million drive.
- Supported and launched Strategic and Business Planning, Operational and Organizational Design, including the development of revenue strategies, formation of staffing and board plans, and the development of an executive team to support the Executive Director. Led on organization's strategic plan, and led Executive Hire search.
- Provided Thought Leadership, including the drafting of concept paper and development of organizational framework for missiondriven work to capture and executive on vision of Executive Director.
- Provided Operational and Financial Management Support, including implementing new financial system, onboarding of new financial staff, and setting up internal operations and financial plans.
- Provided Communications Leadership, Financial Support, and Board Development support, including developing a strategic communications plan, designing and overseeing new brand identity, including new website and asset development.
- Led the Executive Search and Hiring of Deputy Director, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Sr. Program Director, and Communications Director.
- Served as a Design Team Lead Partner for National Convening on Cultural and Narrative Strategy, with support from the Surdna Foundation.
- Commissioned and edited major papers from leading thinkers in the field of cultural and narrative strategy for public launch of new website and field-wide resource tool.

Greenbelt Alliance, February – May 2019: Equity and program development consultant, foundation and institutional support and institutional marketing.

- Served as consultant to redevelop framework for internal and external understanding of equity in the environmental sector, with a specific focus on affordable housing and displacement, and the relationship between protecting natural spaces, smart growth, and transit line planning.
- Worked with Director of Advancement to plan and execute a new foundation fundraising plan based in principles of equity and justice, and presenting that plan and action to incoming CEO.

Other Current Projects Include:

ArtsChangeUS October 2022- present: Leading on Strategic Plan after leadership transition from founder to Co-Director model.

Points North Institute/Camden International Film Festival January 2022-May 2022: Co-Led on Strategic Planning, with a built in fundraising and communications narrative strategy.

City Lights Publisher and Bookseller, May 2019- Present: Succession Planning, Nonprofit Foundation Planning, Fundraising, Strategic Plan for overall institution.

WestSide Arts Coalition, San Antonio, October 2019 – March 2021: Commissioned to write a strategic communications plan and brown paper about the importance and impact of Latino Arts in San Antonio. Leading into Strategic Planning for 2020.

Center for Story-Based Strategy, February 2020-July 2021: Served as Executive Coach to Executive Director, supporting new organizational narrative and language, preparing to launch \$5million growth capital campaign.

Hardly Strictly Bluegrass, December 2019-March 2020: Planned and facilitated board and staff retreat to plan for organization's 25th anniversary event in Golden Gate Park, and how it would/could impact future festivals and next generation integration moving forward.

Stage-Write, Oct 2019- Present. Working with Executive Director on narrative and fundraising plan, targeting individual donors and new foundation support.

Sample list of organizations worked with include:

The Apollo/ The Redford Center/ CultureStrike / First Peoples Fund/ Center for Story-Based Strategy/ University of Wisconsin, First Wave / Scholastic Awards, National Student Poets Project / 826 Valencia / Hardly Strictly Bluegrass – Hellman Foundation/International Youth Against War / Stanford University / Voto Latino / Young Chicago Authors (Louder than a Bomb) / Inner City Arts / Albany Park Theater/ DeVos Institute for Arts Management / Arts in a Changing America (Arts Change US) / Barrel of Monkeys / Urban Word NYC / Get Lit/ Intercultural Leadership Institute (ILI) / Hip Hop Theater Festival / Spellman College / LitQuake / XQ Institute & Super School Project / Emerson Collective / Root Division / KQED / Oakland Museum of California/ Overbrook Entertainment – Will & Jada Smith Family Foundation / San Francisco Foundation / SF & Oakland Public Library / San Francisco Unified School District / San Francisco Dept of Children, Youth, & Their Families / Animating Democracy Initiative of Americans for the Arts / Grammy Foundation / Presidents Committee of Arts & Humanities / Current / Gear Up / Yerba Buena Center for the Arts / SF MOMA/ DeYoung Museum

Founder & Executive Director, Youth Speaks

September 1996 – December 2017

- **For over 21 years, led an award-winning, internationally recognized organization** that intersects arts education, youth development, and artistic presentation, with civic and cultural participation, growing it from an all-volunteer, grassroots operation to a \$6+million org with 30+ staff members. Alumni and mentees include Danez Smith, Chinaka Hodge, Tish Jones, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Daveed Diggs, Rafael Casal, Elizabeth Acevedo, and thousands of others.
 - Raised close to \$50million toward youth arts, poetry, media, and theater programs from individual and institutional supporters. ○ Developed pedagogy and methods that were replicated and employed in over 200 schools, and thousands of community sites.
 - Led or co-led program design for key, foundational programs including the Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam, Bringing the Noise for Dr. Martin Luther King, Queeriosity, The Brave New Voices Festival, Spoken City, the Living Word Festival, and the in-school and community-based writing and performance workshops.
 - Launched major media projects in partnership with HBO, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, NPR, PBS, and others.
 - Facilitated writing workshops with over 500,000 students and 10,000 teachers, and trained over 2,500 arts educators in the methodology.
 - Created innovative, award-winning community and civic engagement programs, and partnered with multiple districts, schools, and municipalities.

- Managed highly qualified, creative, and effective senior leadership teams, and oversaw communications and development strategies.
- Developed, managed, and engaged with high-functioning Board of Directors ○ Developed management frameworks that allowed for individual and collective creativity, social impact, and accountability. ○ Developed innovative evaluation and social impact assessments through funding from the James Irvine Foundation.
- Secured major support from local, regional and national funders that include The Ford Foundation, Nathan Cummings Foundation, OSI, William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Mellon Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, The California Endowment, Doris Duke Charitable Fund, Emerson Collective, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, NEA, NEH, Google, Yahoo!, and many high net-worth individuals.
- **Created and Invested in a Field** ○ Helped develop Youth Speaks NY (now Urban Word), Youth Speaks Seattle, Youth Speaks Hawaii, Youth Speaks Nashville, Youth Speaks Wisconsin, Sacramento Area Youth Speaks, Volume! Youth Poetry (Ann Arbor), and directly supported the development of dozens of other organizations.
 - Oversaw the Brave New Voices Network, which has grown to over 120 programs from across the United States, and another 20 programs abroad, and provided:
 - professional development
 - trainings, digital learning networks, best-practice share, coaching, and mentoring
 - annual and semi-annual convenings
 - annual festivals
 - programmatic grants
 - program subsidies and other funding support
 - Developed a grantmaking strategy that distributed \$5 million over 4 years through general support grants.
 - Developed Emerging Arts Leaders Fellowship programs (Arts Educators, Performing Artists, Arts Administrators) that hired over 50 emerging arts leaders from across the United States and placed them at Youth Speaks and other programs. ○ Partnered with the University of Wisconsin to launch First Wave, an innovative scholarship program for spoken word and hip hop artists to develop a cohort on campus with a focus on performing arts through a diversity and equity lens.
 - Partnered with the University of San Francisco's School of Education to launch First Sound, a program that taught hundreds of public school teachers the Youth Speaks pedagogy and practice.
 - Provided thought leadership and advocacy.
 - Provided Fiscal sponsorship and mentoring to dozens of orgs, including 826 Valencia with Dave Eggers, Voto Latino with Maria Teresa Kumar, and LitQuake.
 - Led Diversity staff trainings for major corporations, including Google, Lyft, Pinterest, Square, and AirBnB, among others.
- **Produced and Created** ○ The Brave New Voices Festival and Network
 - Co-Founded The Living Word Project with Marc Bamuthi Joseph as the Resident Theater Company of Youth Speaks, and commissioned, produced, and presented a new generation of theater artists including Chinaka Hodge, Daveed Diggs, Dahlak Braithwaite, George Watsky, and Rafael Casal.
 - Helped produce the Life is Living Festival, an innovative approach to community engagement and cultural participation in West Oakland, and then expanded to the Bronx, Houston, Hampton Roads, Chicago, and Los Angeles.
 - Served as Executive Editor of First Word Press, a Youth Speaks Imprint that published multiple anthologies and first books of emerging writers, including award-winning and publishing poets Chinaka Hodge, Adriel Luis, Kirya Traber, Katri Foster, George Watsky, and Danez Smith.
 - Co-Created the San Francisco, Oakland, and National Youth Poet Laureate Programs with public libraries, the NEH, and the Obama Administrations' Presidential Arts Council with First Lady Michelle Obama. Sat on Inaugural SF Poet Laureate Committee and served 10 years.

- Curated the poets for the Obama Administration's first White House Poetry Jam in 2009, featuring Joshua Bennett, Jamaica Osorio, Mayda DeValle, Esperanza Spalding, and Lin-Manuel Miranda, among others, and brought the cameras from HBO that documented the evening.
- Led the launch of *The Next Generation Speaks*, an international collaboration to embed spoken word programs in Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK, South Africa, Bermuda, and Trinidad & Tobago.
- Launched the California Spoken Word Youth Initiative in partnership with the California Endowment, and a national Civic Media project with the MacArthur Foundation.
- Convened arts leaders from across the country for 3 key gatherings funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Fund, around issues facing the next generation of Arts Leadership in regards to equity and access, in partnership with the Hellicon Collaborative.
- **Led Digital Initiatives and Issue-Based Collaborations:** Created digital platforms and channels, garnering over 7 million unique views per year, 500,000 per month on various [Youth Speaks distribution channels](#). Issue-based collaborations include:
 - **[The Bigger Picture](#) with the California Diabetes Project, the California Endowment, and UCSF's Center for Vulnerable Populations.** A ground-breaking, award-winning collaboration designed to change the conversation around Type-2 Diabetes. Created 25+ unique media pieces, trained peer-to-peer educators and advocates, and presented to over 50,000 high school youth, and dozens of public health conferences. Media includes NY Times, [Using Art to Tackle Diabetes in Youth](#).
 - **Brave New Voices Speak Green with Robert Redford** and the Redford Center, a focus on engaging young people in the conversation about global warming. Created multiple media pieces, peer-to-peer educators and advocates, and presented at the Sundance Institute Mayor's Summit, the GreenBuild Conference, with Tom Steyer, Al Gore, Nancy Pelosi, Van Jones, and many more. Included [an event at the Kennedy Center](#) (Green Mic) as part of the 2008 Brave New Voices Festival. ○ [Raise Up!](#), a national campaign with the **Corporation for Public Broadcasting**, targeting the high school drop out crisis. Over 10,000 young people participated, and pieces were distributed through NPR and PBS stations nationwide. Included several live performances and workshops, and a culminating event with the Kennedy Center. Garnered over 100,000,000 social media impressions.
 - **[Brave New Schools](#) with the XQ Institute and the Emerson Collective**, a national program that engaged 25,000 youth around ReThinking High School. Hosted 25 events in 25 regions, created multiple media pieces and social media campaigns, gathered over 85,000,000 social media impressions, and were part of the XQ Super Schools program that aired on CBS, ABC, NBC, and Fox.

Media Producer (Sample)

- **Creator and Co-Executive Producer of Brave New Voices on HBO and Brave New Voices 2010, Simmons-Lathan Media**, with Russell Simmons, Stan Lathan, and Kamilah Forbes. 8 episodes of documentary-style programming that filmed and aired 2008-2010, following the lives and poetry of young people from throughout the United States as they prepared to attend Youth Speaks' Brave New Voices Festival.
- **Creative Director and Producer, Poetic License**, documentary that aired on PBS stations and film festivals nationwide in 1999, following the lives of young poets. Partnered with ITVS and KQED to create educational materials and train teachers through PBS stations nationwide.
- **Creative Consultant, 2nd Verse: The Rebirth of Poetry**, Cornell Productions. An award-winning follow-up to Poetic License that aired in film fests nationwide.
- **Casting Director**, Partnership for a Drug Free America and MTV, series of PSA's based on the writing and lives of young people, that focused on substance abuse.
- **Producer**, The Drop In with CPB that addressed the high school drop out crisis.
- **Casting Partner**, HBO's Russell Simmons Presents: Def Poetry.
- **Launch Video, Center for Cultural Power**, Animated short film announcing the organization launch.

Lecturer/Instructor – SFSU, UC Berkeley, University of San Francisco, California College of the Arts Taught numerous courses in creative writing, community arts, arts administration and leadership, and public engagement.

Other Experience

KQED Center for Education and Lifelong Learning – Communications Manager	1995-1997
Phoenix Urban League, Head Start - Lead Teacher	1993-1994

Awards & Recognitions Include

- Inaugural [Forward Under 40 Award](#), University of Wisconsin, Madison. Award for outstanding alumni under the age of 40. 2008
- Inaugural [Visionary of the Year Award](#) Finalist, San Francisco Chronicle, nominated by Laurene Powell Jobs. 2015
- James Irvine Foundation, Leadership Award. 2009
- Gerbode Foundation Leadership Award for Outstanding Executive Directors, 2006
- Named Future Aesthetic Artist by the Ford Foundation, 2009
- Youth Speaks named one of 8 exemplary arts education organizations by the Wallace Foundation, 2012
- Milestone Award from the National Guild of Community Arts Education for 20+ years of service to the field, 2017
- State Senate of California named James Kass as Outstanding Oakland Arts Educator April 23, 2004
- Creative Work Fund recipient with Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Paul Flores, and Beau Sia for *No Man's Land*, 2007
- Open Spaces Award, Kenneth Rainin Foundation for *We So Bay*, 2017
- Individual Artist Award, San Francis Arts Commission, 2010
- San Francisco State University Award for Service to the Creative Field (3 times)
- Yes Magazine, Cultural Hero Award (nominated by Robert Redford), 2009
- Goldie Award, San Francisco Bay Guardian, 2006
- Remix Award for the Art of Social Change, presented by Words Beats & Life, 2016
- Social Justice Award, for Inspiring Social Change, UC Davis, 2017
- City of San Francisco, Future Legacy Award, 2017
- City of Chicago named June 30, 2009 Brave New Voices Day
- City of San Francisco named May 20, 2011, James Kass day, in honor of service to youth and families.
- City of San Francisco named May 20, 2011, Youth Speaks day in honor of 15 years of representing San Francisco values at its best.
- San Francisco Unified School District honored James and Youth Speaks Nov 14, 2011, for empowering youth through the art of words.
- San Francisco Magazine awards Youth Speaks as Best Children's Charity, 7 years running.
- Arts Cohort Award, National Arts Strategies, 2014

Sample Media, Publications, & Public Speaking

Has been featured in media across the nation, including Poets & Writers, the New York Times, Seventeen Magazine, the San Francisco Chronicle, The Washington Post, Huffington Post, Upworthy, CNN, ABC, Nightline, Source, Vibe, The Chronicle of Philanthropy, SF Magazine, 7x7, GIA Reader, Language Magazine, HBO's *The Buzz*, Ode Magazine, PBS, and National Public Radio, among many others. Public Speaking includes:

- Commencement Speaker, University of Wisconsin – Madison, 2009.
- TEDx Silicon Valley, TEDx San Francisco, TEDx Presidio
- Commonwealth Club, San Francisco
- Arts for Social Change, Carnegie Hall
- The Importance of Arts Networks, The Ford Foundation
- Stanford University, Impact Program for Arts Leaders
- Americans for the Arts, Session Keynote
- NCORE, Diversity in the Arts and Literacy
- New Progressive Coalition

- Hip Hop Activism, OSI and the Ford Foundation

Artistic Collaborations (Sample)

- Anna Deaveare Smith and Berkeley Repertory Theater for Notes in the Field, audience engagement strategy around the school to prison pipeline. Conceived, created, trained and facilitated in-show audience engagements.
- Sara Shelton Mann, A Revolution is Coming, spoken word and dance performance about social change.
- *No Man's Land* with Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Paul Flores, and Beau Sia addressing masculinity.
- *Cause*, with Robert Moses Kin, dance and poetry addressing issues of hate.

Boards and Advisory Councils Include

- Board Member, LitQuake
- Board Member, The City Lights Foundation
- Advisory Board Member, Action Lab/Center for Popular Democracy
- Advisory Council, Arts in a Changing America
- Secretary for Belief in the Next Generation, US Dept. of Arts & Culture
- Past Board Member, National Performance Network
- Past Board Member, African American Arts & Culture Complex, Treasurer
- Past Board Member, Speak Out
- Past Advisory Board Member, SlamBush.net, 826 Valencia, Youth Sounds
- Funding panels for the San Francisco Arts Commission, Oakland Arts Fund, NEA, Future Aesthetics Arts Grant, California Arts Council among others.

Education

MFA in Creative Writing, San Francisco State University

9/1995 – 12/1998

Focus on Fiction and Poetry

BA, University of Wisconsin-Madison (English/Creative Writing & Afro-Am Studies)

9/1987 – 12/1990

Executive Management Programs

- **Stanford University School of Business, Executive Program for Nonprofit Leaders in the Arts** (part of James Irvine Foundation Leadership Award).
- **National Arts Strategies Chief Executive Program** (Harvard School of Business, Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan (Arts Cohort through Nathan Cummings Support)
- **Rockwood Leadership Institute** (Arts Cohort through Surdna Foundation)
- **DeVos Institute for Innovation and Arts Management** (through Ford Foundation and Bloomberg Foundation support)