

YAM: Young Artist Movement
New Orleans Youth Mural Project

Brief Business/Project Description (140 characters or less)

YAM is New Orleans' first city-wide youth mural program, engaging youth, artists, and communities in sustained public art and place making.

What is new, interesting or different about what your company is doing?

While New Orleans has always been an artistic, creative city, its beautiful murals have been one-off endeavors--artists are left to their own devices and can get lost in an extremely cumbersome city process to secure permission, and youth are often left behind in the process.

Inspired by model like Philadelphia Mural Arts, the Mural Music & Arts Project in the Bay Area, Boston Mayor's Mural Crew, and Brooklyn, NY's Groundswell, this is the first venture of its kind in our city: consistent, sustained opportunities for youth to partner with artists and engage in community design processes that engender striking, inspiring, socially-conscious public art.

When most low-income youth work downtown, it is in low-paying service industry jobs. But through YAM, talented youth have an opportunity to engage professionally with businesses and government entities, thus expanding their horizons while also developing the pipeline of the creative industry. As an example, youth are involved in presenting mural designs to the City Planning Commission

We are both supporting the creative economy by hiring local artists and developing a pipeline through our youth program so that young people are not only passionate about the creative arts but also develop the appropriate skills to navigate various financial, professional, and government systems.

Our strength is in our collaboration--we are a team of experts in the fields of youth development, public art, education, and justice. Our team includes: Judge Arthur Hunter (**Orleans Criminal District Court**); Ron Bechet (**Xavier University, Department of Art**); Carol Bebelle, Jo Ann Minor, and Karel Sloane-Boekbinder (**Ashé Cultural Arts Center**); Timeka Junius and Lesley McBride (**YAYA**); Bryan Lee, Alphonse Smith, Heidi Schmalbach and Jose Cotto (**Arts Council New Orleans**); Alberta Wright (**YEP Design Works @ Youth Empowerment Project**); Sarah Woodward (**Tulane University, City, Culture and Community Program, formerly Mural Music & Arts Project**); Jamar Pierre (**J. Pierre Studios**); and Dee Jay Pate (**New Orleans International Muralists**)
We build on the strengths of our team, recruiting participants from youth development organizations and the Orleans Criminal District Court, facilitating community design workshops and dialogues with Ashé Cultural Arts Center, and coordinating artists and walls through the Arts Council. This requires relatively low overhead.

We believe our projects have strong revenue-generating potential, and that having extra support in developing our model would be critical to a sustainable arts-based approach. Essentially, we don't want to take away from the small "pie" of foundation support, but rather use our unique services to make a bigger pie that is business-oriented and sustainable.

Why are you the right entrepreneur for this business? What relevant experience do you have?*

The following are bios of the three team leads.

Alberta Wright started Young Creative Agency in her classroom in 2013 after being tired of seeing so many of my creative, talented art students lack opportunities to channel their motivation toward jobs in the booming creative digital media field in New Orleans. In 2015, YCA became a Propeller Start-Up Accelerator fellow, in 2016 YCA won PitchNOLA Community Solutions, and later that year funded the model by coming under the umbrella of Youth Empowerment Project. YCA has successfully completed projects with Teach For America, The Ace Hotel, GirlTrek, NOLA Motorsports, and many other local and national businesses. YCA youth have gone on to full time employment in creative careers in fashion and 3D design.

Sarah Woodward has 5 years experience serving as a muralist, program director, and development director at the Mural Music & Arts Project, an acclaimed and innovative mural arts program in the San Francisco Bay Area. In her role, Sarah led over 30 community-based mural projects. She also managed the organization's portfolio of foundation, corporate, and government grants, securing significant new funding and establishing partnerships with tech companies including Google, Twitter, and Spotify. Sarah also served for four years as Co-Owner and Director of a member-driven gallery and studio space in San Francisco. Sarah is a New Orleans native and is currently pursuing her doctorate at Tulane's City, Culture & Community Program, researching the role of the arts in youth and community development.

Ron Bechet is a visual artist who works in the traditional mediums of drawing and painting. He completed his BFA at [University of New Orleans](#) in Louisiana, received an MFA from [Yale University School of Art](#), served as Xavier University Department of Art Chairman for over a decade, and, in addition, served as Acting Chairman for the Department of Fine Arts & Philosophy at Southern University at New Orleans for many years. Currently Bechet serves on the board of the Joan Mitchell Foundation, co-directs Home New Orleans Project, and the Porch Cultural Arts Organization. Bechet's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, culminating in a solo show in the summer of 2015 at the Acadiana Art Center in Lafayette, Louisiana called "Sense of Place" in which he examined the visual culture of the African Diaspora.

How will your business benefit Downtown New Orleans?*

Our model will benefit Downtown New Orleans by bringing visually arresting two-dimensional projects to organizations, businesses, and public spaces that build on the already impressive three-dimensional sculptures featured on major thoroughfares. Our extensive community engagement strategies such as design workshops, mural design presentations, community paint days, and unveiling events would build on the unique atmosphere downtown NOLA provides, bringing diverse community members downtown in a unique, enriching experience.

Over time, a multitude of works by local and internationally-recognized artists with thought-provoking themes will drive more foot traffic, buzz, tourism and economic stimulation to the area; vandalism will decrease as talented street artists take part in the murals with us and the artistic young people who work on our projects, engaged in a professional capacity in the downtown area, will engender the cool, innovative hub for arts and innovation that we know our downtown can be.