

Workshop Leaders

Yamily Pardo is a Programs Associate at Arts For LA. Yamily has expanded the programming at Arts For LA by leading the growth of the ACTIVATE Student Organizing program, originally initiated by high school and middle school student leaders in 2021. She is currently an undergraduate student at UCLA and loves that her work combines her interests in solutions-driven initiatives, community-building, and the arts!



Moctesuma Esparza is an American producer, entertainment executive, entrepreneur and community activist. He is the founder and Chairman of the board of Maya Cinemas, a theater chain serving United States Latino communities. His films include Selena, Gettysburg, Walkout and Introducing Dorothy Dandridge. He serves on the boards of many nonprofits.



Generation Up, or GENup, is a 100% student-led nonprofit that advocates for educational equity by uplifting and empowering student voices. They work on two levels: in the California legislature and beyond, they write and advocate for laws to address the issues students see and care about, like mental health, racial and gender equity, and bring students to the table. In their school districts and universities, they train students to advocate to their local and state representatives to create the change that matters to them.



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Elizabeth Ito has been working as a creator, writer, director, and storyboard artist in the animation industry since 2004. She's worked on TV, feature, and commercial projects. Elizabeth is also the creator of the award-winning short, *Welcome to My Life*, the second-most viewed short in Cartoon Network history. She also received an Emmy for her directing work on *Adventure Time*. Her first series, *City of Ghosts* for Netflix premiered in 2021 and won a Peabody Award, and two Emmys for directing and best animated children's show in 2022. She also directed a music video for *The Linda Linda's* and is on an overall deal with Apple TV. Currently, she is living in Los Angeles, working from home, and trying to stay hydrated.



Dr. Amir Whitaker is an educator, author, human rights lawyer, and artist. He is the founder and director of Project KnuckleHead, a nonprofit organization empowering youth through music, art, and educational programs since 2012. Project KnuckleHead aims to assist in dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline by investing in the redirection of youth, and equipping them with pro-social skills for self-expression. We focus on serving youth in the (in)justice system, youth with mental health needs, youth experiencing homelessness, and youth in underserved communities. We also support unity, healing, and liberation for Afro-descendants around the world through our Afro Unidad movement.



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Dakota McMehand-Owens is a classically trained pianist who has spent her life merging arts education and activism to create social change on a grassroots level. Having been personally impacted by the transformative power of the arts, she knows it cultivates creative expression, supports relationship building, and nurtures social-emotional healing. She is a first-generation college graduate with more than ten years of experience working in the community arts space. In 2023, she was named Women of Distinction for Senate District 33 by Senator Lena Gonzalez. Dakota earned her Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from California Baptist University, and a Master of Arts in Education Administration from the University of South Dakota. She also holds a Community Teaching Artist certificate from California State University, Los Angeles and is a trained facilitator for Social Emotional Arts on a Shoestring from UCLArts and Healing. Dakota loves spending time with her husband Phoenix and their feisty rescue cats, Anjuna and Alexis.



This event is for students enrolled in this year's California State Summer School for the Arts program only.

Please register for your spot by July 12. Don't delay as space is limited - sign up now to ensure you get a spot! [Please note there is a cap of 80 students per workshop. If your desired workshop is full, you will be assigned another based upon availability.]

