



# Make Art Anyway

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**\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\*\***

*Arts Corps hires Elizabeth Whitford as new executive director*

Seattle, WA — After eight-plus months of careful inquiry and search, Arts Corps is very pleased to name Elizabeth Whitford the new executive director of Arts Corps. Previously Arts Corps' community investment director, Elizabeth is stepping up to continue the vision and mission developed during the tenure of founder Lisa Fitzhugh, who transitioned out of the executive director role in May.

"I am honored, humbled and thrilled to be taking on this new role," says Elizabeth. "The incredible commitment and creativity of our students, teaching artist faculty, staff, board and supporters have built Arts Corps into a groundbreaking organization. I look forward to partnering with this supportive, dynamic community to continue our momentum."

Elizabeth served for two years as Arts Corps' first community investment director, playing a key role in launching Arts Corps' new mission, vision and strategic plan and overseeing all major grants and external communications. In addition, Elizabeth initiated Arts Corps' first annual major donor campaign and played a crucial role in transforming the organization's annual fundraiser, La Festa del Arte, into a powerful, engaging event generating deep support for Arts Corps' mission.

Side by side with founder, rabble rouser and regional arts education force, Lisa Fitzhugh, Elizabeth has increased the organization's base of individual support by more than 200 percent in two years. Working collaboratively with Arts Corps' founding members, staff and board, Elizabeth has built the organization's capacity to \$1 million, helping to fulfill the increasing demand for the organization's award-winning arts education programs in King County.

"Elizabeth is the perfect person to take the helm of this fabulous creation of all of ours," says Arts Corps founder Lisa Fitzhugh. "I have seldom seen this level of judgment, equanimity, openness, creativity and strategic thinking all in the same person. Elizabeth is the type of leader I have long imagined for Arts Corps' next iteration, and I am honored she has stepped into the position so graciously."

Before joining Arts Corps, Elizabeth served as the operations director of Potlatch Fund, a newly established regional Native American foundation and leadership development organization working to expand philanthropy in Northwest Native American communities. As a founding staff member, Elizabeth secured major funding, oversaw the implementation of core operating systems and supported the work of Native staff, board and volunteers to develop groundbreaking and culturally-appropriate grant making and training programs.



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"She's very competent and culturally sensitive, she's an excellent listener, she's got a very good brain on her, and she's very collegial," remembers former Potlatch Fund consultant Carol Pencke, who recruited Elizabeth to become Potlatch Fund's operations director from her role as executive director of Odyssey Youth Center in Spokane, Wash. The youth center was where she "moved into her role like a glove and expanded the organization," says Pencke.

There, Elizabeth developed this once under-the-radar, county program into a full-fledged nonprofit organization with a pronounced community presence, nationally recognized youth programs and a strong fundraising and support base.

"She believes in and strives towards collaborative power and working across issues with a social justice framework. It comes from her personal world, and it's the way she conducts her life, not just something she puts on professionally," says former Odyssey Youth Center colleague Shannon Bedard. "In terms of her leadership and business savvy, she's always aiming for the best for everyone and she's really excellent at putting those supports in place and executing the plan in a sustainable and just way. It makes her work very powerful and intentional, and people who engage with her feel a commitment to maintain that same standard."

As Arts Corps approaches this new chapter in its history, all its members will be guided by a two-year strategic plan to strengthen the quality and sustainability of its arts education programs through deeper community engagement, student-focused evaluation and increased public awareness. Under this plan, staff, board and faculty alike express the utmost confidence in Elizabeth's leadership.

"Continuing in the direction and vision held by Lisa Fitzhugh, Elizabeth will work to build collective ownership of the Corps with staff, faculty, students, parents, program partners, donors and other community members by advancing opportunities for distributed leadership across the organization," says Liza Sheehan, board vice president and executive director search committee chair.

In Elizabeth's words: "Arts Corps belongs to our whole community, and as such, should be broadly shaped and supported by all of us with our time, money, love and input."

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### *More about Arts Corps:*

Arts Corps was founded on the principle that all young people, not just those with resources, should have access to quality arts learning opportunities. Since 2000, our excellent faculty of teaching artists have been modeling and fostering creative habits of mind in K-12<sup>th</sup> grade students so that they may reach their full potential. We work with area community organizations and schools to reach as many kids as possible with powerful arts learning experiences. And since Arts Corps believes that every child should have the freedom to imagine and the courage to be, we offer classes for free. More information at [www.artscorps.org](http://www.artscorps.org).