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The Loft Literary Center Announces Arleta Little as New Executive Director

Little is a local and national champion for increasing equity and justice in philanthropy, arts

MINNEAPOLIS (Dec. 8, 2021) — [The Loft Literary Center](#) — one of the nation’s leading independent literary centers — today announced that it has named Arleta Little as its new executive director. Little joins the Loft after serving as an arts & culture program officer and the director of artist fellowships at the McKnight Foundation.

After a comprehensive, national search process through Ballinger Leafblad, the board chose Little based on her leadership experience and advocacy for the literary arts, her track record advancing racial equity and justice, her strategic and skillful approach to organizational development, and her integrity in forging partnerships.



“We were introduced to extraordinary candidates throughout the search process – and we couldn’t be more thrilled to choose Arleta,” said Eric Roberts, lead for the Loft’s search committee. “She has incredible community connections, a fierce commitment to local writers and artists, and a strong vision for taking The Loft into its next chapter.”

David Mura, a consultant to the search committee and Loft teaching artist, added, “Arleta Little is the ideal executive director to help the Loft address the new challenges to literature, creative writing, racial equity, and nonprofit arts organizations. With her deep experience and connections to our community, she has long been a leader and supporter of the arts and I know she will hit the ground running.”

For the past eight years, Little has directed the McKnight Artist Fellowships, a nearly \$3M program providing unrestricted support for artists and culture bearers across 15 creative disciplines in Minnesota. In her tenure at McKnight, Little grew and diversified McKnight’s fellowships program; built a strong community of practice with McKnight’s fellowships program partners, including the Loft; advanced racial equity within McKnight’s arts team, organization-wide, and in coalition with philanthropic and arts partners; managed relationships and made funding recommendations for \$9 million in grants to nearly 200 organizations per year as a member of McKnight’s arts & culture team.

Prior to her time at McKnight, Little served as the executive director of the Givens Foundation for African American Literature and worked for more than 15 years as an organizational development consultant providing strategic planning, program evaluation and grant writing services to Minnesota organizations.

Little is a poet and writer. Her essay, *Life and Death in the North Star State*, recently published in *Water-Stone Review Vol. 24* has been nominated for a 2022 Pushcart Prize. Her work is included in *We Are Meant to Rise: Voices for Justice from Minneapolis to the World*; *This Was 2020: Minnesotans Write About Pandemics and Social Justice in a Historic Year*; and *Blues Vision: African American Writing From Minnesota*. She also collaborated on writing and publishing Josie R. Johnson’s memoir *Hope in the Struggle*.

She earned a bachelor's degree in English and psychology from Penn State University, a Master of Social Work from the University of St. Thomas/University of St. Catherine, and a Master of Public Affairs in public and nonprofit leadership and management from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.

Little serves as a board member for Headwaters Foundation for Justice, Grantmakers in the Arts, TruArtSpeaks, and Common Ground Meditation Center.

Little will work collaboratively with the Loft's board of directors, providing vision, strategic planning and management oversight to effectively carry out the organization's mission. She will represent the Loft in building community with diverse constituencies including its members, writers and literary artists, educators, foundations, and the rich variety of cultural communities in Minnesota and nationally.

"The Loft is committed to doing the deep work of becoming an antiracist organization and leader in Minnesota and the country – Arleta is the strong and compassionate leader to get us there," said Loft board chair Mike Meyer. "Her strategic vision, which includes strengthening our programming and connecting with new communities, is crucial to acting on that promise."

The Loft currently offers more than 300 creative classes each year for youth and adults at its home at Open Book, in community and online, serving thousands of writers and readers annually. In addition, the Loft presents dozens of gatherings and happenings each year, awards fellowship grants and mentorships to writers, maintains a small resource library, offers writing studios and a book club meeting room, and provides a wealth of online resources about the value and craft of writing and the writing experience. The Loft's annual festival Wordplay, and conference Wordsmith, are recognized for their scope, innovation, and excellence. Britt Udesen – who served six years as the organization's most recent executive director, ended her tenure in May 2021. Managing director Beth Schoeppler currently serves as interim director and will continue to do so on a part-time basis until Little begins full-time in March 2022.

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About The Loft

Incorporated in 1975, The Loft Literary Center is one of the nation's leading independent literary centers. The Loft advances the artistic development of writers, fosters a thriving literary community, and inspires a passion for literature. Learn more at loft.org.