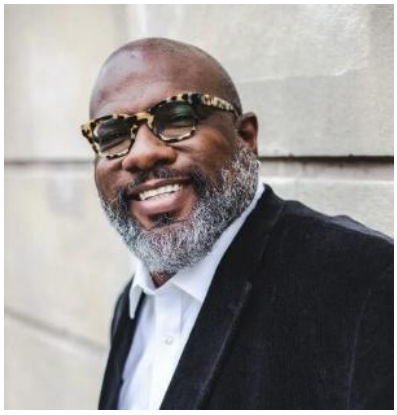
Harlem School of the Arts
Key Staff 2026-2027



James C. Horton, President & CEO

James C. Horton is the President & CEO of the Harlem School of the Arts. And has over two decades of experience in working with communities all over the country to use the arts as a tool for engagement and empowerment. James joined HSA after serving as the Vice President of Education and Engagement at the Museum of the City of New York. Mr. Horton led Public Programs, the FAO Schwartz Education Center, which impacts the lives of 50,000 students annually, and helped the Museum deepen its connection with New York City's diverse communities through the development of a new branch of programming at MCNY called Community Based Initiatives. During the Summer of 2022, under Mr. Horton's leadership, the REACH (Research, Education, Arts, Community, History) Ambassadors program was launched. The REACH Ambassadors Initiative engages NYC youth and adults in programs and experiences developed By, With, and For New Yorkers in all five Boroughs. Horton has also held leadership positions at Carnegie Hall as director of social impact, the National Guild for Community Arts Education, and the Harlem Children's Zone.

James studied Theater and Communications at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He participated in the Shannon Leadership Institute at St. Paul University in Minnesota and is a graduate of the Columbia University Business School Institute for Not-for-Profit Management in New York City. He is the recipient of several national awards and has been an invited keynote speaker and presenter at both global and national conferences focused on education, arts, culture, and community engagement. Mr. Horton is a longtime Harlem resident, where he makes his home with his partner and four children.



Monalisa Perez, Chief Operating Officer

Monalisa has devoted her professional life to empowering youth and strengthening families through education, enrichment, and community engagement. With more than two decades of service at the renowned Harlem Children's Zone, she played a pivotal role in shaping the organization's afterschool and youth development initiatives. During her tenure, Monalisa designed and oversaw the successful implementation of eight afterschool program sites, leading teams that served more than 10,000 students from kindergarten through college in the heart of Central Harlem. Her leadership ensured that young people not only had access to academic support and enrichment opportunities but also developed the confidence and skills necessary to thrive in school and beyond. Monalisa holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from Metropolitan College of New York and a Bachelor of Arts from the College of New Rochelle, grounding her practice in both organizational leadership and social impact. Beyond her professional accomplishments, Monalisa finds joy in spending time with her children and exploring new places around the world. Her passion for travel reflects her natural curiosity, cultural appreciation, and belief in lifelong learning, values that also inspire her approach to youth development and community service.



Robert Fields, Chief Marketing Officer

Rob Fields is a seasoned marketing leader and cultural strategist whose career spans major brands, cultural institutions, and creative communities. Before joining Harlem School of the Arts as Chief Marketing Officer, Rob led two New York City cultural institutions—Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling and Weeksville Heritage Center—where he expanded audiences, strengthened programs, and elevated organizational visibility. At Weeksville, he guided the institution's turnaround and secured its historic entry into the NYC Cultural Institutions Group.

Rob brings decades of marketing experience shaped by work across automotive, software, fast food, entertainment, and the nonprofit arts. His portfolio includes agency roles, PR leadership, cultural programming, and strategic storytelling for organizations ranging from the NYC Economic Development Corporation to Mercer Labs, the Museum of Art & Technology.

His parallel work as an art advisor—focused on artists of the African diaspora and Global South—grounds his perspective in the contemporary cultural landscape and deepens his understanding of creative practice, audience engagement, and the cultural economy. A former publisher of the online magazine Bold As Love and producer of the NBI Festival, Rob has written about culture and marketing for Forbes.com, the Huffington Post, and other outlets. He serves on the U.S. Advisory Board of Volta Art Fair and on the Board of Trustees of UnionDocs, the Queens-based center for documentary art.

Rob holds a BA in Professional Writing from Carnegie Mellon University and lives in Brooklyn with his wife, author and filmmaker Bridgett M. Davis, and their family.



Jonathan Kitt, Chief Development Officer

Over the past decade, Kitt has led development strategies at institutions ranging from grassroots organizations to national media networks, consistently growing contributed revenue while building systems and teams for long-term stability. At Firelight Media, he helped secure new six and seven-figure institutional commitments and launched an annual fund that expanded individual giving and spearheaded the implementation of Salesforce CRM, laying the foundation for more effective donor pipeline management and engagement. At South Orange Performing Arts Center, he created the organization's first major giving society and deepened board engagement while overseeing $1.3M in annual contributed revenue. Across his roles, Jonathan has coupled donor-facing leadership with behind-the-scenes infrastructure building—ensuring organizations not only meet ambitious goals but are also positioned to sustain their success. Jonathan holds a Bachelor of Arts in Integrative Arts & Multicultural Performance Studies from Penn State University and a Master of Science in Arts Administration from Drexel University, where his research on giving patterns among African-American donors was nominated for *Thesis of the Year.*



Ann Kim, Senior Director of Educational Operations & Partnerships

With over 30 years of experience as a professional cellist, Ann brings a unique perspective to her role as Director of Strategic Partnerships and Outreach at Harlem School of the Arts. In addition to solo appearances with the Philadelphia Orchestra and the New Jersey Symphony, she can be heard on several movie soundtracks, has toured worldwide, recorded, and performed onstage with artists such as Andrea Bocelli, Lady Gaga, Tony Bennett, Cheyenne Jackson, and the Eagles, and has appeared on David Letterman and Saturday Night Live. She has been an orchestra member of both the NY City Ballet and the Festival Orchestra of Lincoln Center, where she is also a consultant on community engagement and educational initiatives. Formerly an arts administrator at NJ Symphony, Ann created the organization's first-ever amateur chamber music program, which actively brings Symphony and community musicians together. At Harlem School of the Arts, where she has been since January 2024, she hopes to not only help steward the school's artistic excellence but make it accessible to everyone.



Lois Henry, Director of Institutional Giving

As the Director of Institutional Giving, Lois is responsible for securing funding from foundations, corporations, and government to support HSA. Before joining HSA in 2022, she spent thirty years as a development professional advocating for social justice, equity, civil liberties, and human rights at organizations such as Pacifica Radio, the ACLU, Amnesty International, the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, and the NAACP Legal Defense & Education Fund. Lois holds a Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Anthropology from Sarah Lawrence College, where she also studied dance, and print-making. HSA's unique position at the intersection of the arts, community service, education, and social justice resonates deeply with Lois' values and passions, making her work on behalf of the Harlem School of the Arts especially meaningful. And she is thrilled to live and work in the vibrant Harlem community!



Leyland Simmons, HSA Artistic Director & Dance Director

Leyland is the recipient of multiple grants, became the resident choreographer at the Harlem School of the Arts in 2017, the Chair of Dance in 2020, and the Artistic Director in 2024. He trained at Interlochen Arts Academy, Miami City Ballet, the Dance Theater of Harlem, the Ailey School, and The School of American Ballet. He also holds a Master's Degree in Dance Education from NYU. Leyland has performed with Ailey 2, Complexions Contemporary Ballet, and the New York City Ballet. He also serves on the School of American Ballet's Alumni Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion and was one of the first African Americans invited to the American Ballet Theater National Training Curriculum Board of Examiners.



Shelly Bauer, Director of Music

Shelly Bauer brings with her an incredible wealth of experience, a deep commitment to arts education, and a proven track record of excellence and leadership in music and arts programming. Shelly's career spans decades of contributions to the arts community. As the 3rd Vice President of the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA), she has been tasked to transform the organization's Summer Conference into a forward-thinking, 21st-century event. During her tenure as Zone Representative for NYSSMA, Shelly spearheaded the first virtual NYSSMA Festival in NYC, enabling over 1,400 students to participate amidst the challenges of the pandemic. Her experience extends beyond advocacy and policy; Shelly is a visionary arts leader. At Harlem Children's Zone, Promise Academy Charter Schools, she built and led the arts and music program, securing over $500,000 annually in grants and fostering partnerships with organizations like Jazz at Lincoln Center, The Juilliard School, and VH1 Save the Music. Shelly holds a Master of Music in Clarinet Performance from the New England Conservatory of Music and a Master of Science in Education from The College of Saint Rose. Her comprehensive expertise spans classroom management, curriculum design, and public speaking, and she is certified in both K-12 music education and school district leadership. She has an impressive background in performance, including credits at Lincoln Center, and Carnegie Hall, and as a composer for films and prestigious events such as New York Fashion Week. Beyond her impressive credentials, Shelly is passionate about nurturing creativity, diversity, and collaboration in every aspect of arts education.



Mercedes White, Director of Theatre

As the Director of Theatre at The Harlem School of the Arts, her goal is to ensure that students receive the best Theatrical training in not just Harlem, but all of NYC. As a graduate of the University of Illinois with a BFA in Acting in 2012, she cultivated her passion for acting and storytelling. Her roots as a biracial child of both African American and Mexican descent in Chicago inspire her to tell stories of individuals whose voices are often unheard, specifically those of women and girls who look like her. Mercedes is known for her role in the hit show Somebody Somewhere on HBO, where she is currently a series regular. Her play Genesis: A Prequel to a Raisin in the Sun received its Off-Broadway World Premiere earlier this year at the Queen's Theatre. Her TV and film writing credits include the 30th Year(s), Mailroom, and Cupid's Chokehold, which won Best Screenplay at the Gladiator Film Festival. She is currently working on a new play called Metaphor for a Tree, which addresses the Disparities in Maternal Mortality Rates for Black Women. Mercedes is based in Brooklyn, NY but is a Chicagoan at heart. EARTH without ART is just "EH".



AK Lovelace, Director of Arts, Media & Design

A.K. Lovelace is the esteemed Director of the Media & Design Department at Harlem School of the Arts (HSA), where he has been an integral part of the team for nearly eight years. A successful artist in the art world, A.K. brings a wealth of experience and creativity to his role. Under his leadership, the Media & Design Department has achieved significant milestones, including the sale of student designs at the local Harlem H&M, hosting multiple exhibitions across New York City, and organizing high-profile auctions. A.K.'s commitment to fostering artistic talent and innovation has made a lasting impact on HSA's students and the broader arts community.



Myxolydia Tyler, Student Services Manager

Myxolydia Tyler is an accomplished performer, director, and educator with over 15 years of experience in arts education and performance. She has taught and developed curriculum for Lincoln Center Education, The Acting Company, Kennedy Center Theatre Competitions, and McCarter Theatre. She has served as an adjunct acting professor at NYU LIU and for 4 years as a guest professor and director at Dartmouth College. As an actor, she has appeared in world premieres including Susan-Lori Parks' Sally and Tom (The Public/Guthrie), Berta, Berta! (Everyman Theatre), and Sheepdog (Contemporary American Theatre Festival). Screen credits include Law & Order: Reboot and Organized Crime (NBC), Homeland (Showtime), New Amsterdam (NBC), Manifest (NBC), and Cathedral: Judy (Venice/Sundance). Regional highlights include roles in Detroit '67, The Mountaintop, and All The Way. Her voice and commercial work include campaigns for Mercedes Benz, Golden Corral, Reckitt Benckiser, and Pandora. Myxolydia is deeply committed to centering Black voices and fostering transformative spaces for artists.



Maria Perez, Education and Outreach Coordinator

Maria Perez is a passionate advocate for the performing arts and equitable access to creative opportunities. A graduate of The New School with a Bachelor of Arts in Theater and Global Studies, Maria has cultivated a deep connection to the transformative power of the arts. Her experience includes working with the Wooster Group's Summer Institute, both as a student and a teaching artist, and serving as a Theater Teaching Artist for the Big Green Theater program through the Bushwick Starr. These roles have allowed her to inspire and empower students through innovative and meaningful artistic experiences. Maria firmly believes that discovering a sense of purpose makes us better human beings—both for ourselves and for each other. She views the arts as a powerful tool for self-discovery, connection, and fostering a more compassionate world.



Madelena Kobezko, Program Manager

Magdalena Kobeszko (Magda), is a multimedia artist located in New York City. Her artistic expertise spans printmaking, textiles, ceramics, photography, and various 2D materials. Magda earned her BFA in Fine Arts from The New School's division of Parsons School of Design and is presently working towards an MA in Arts Administration at Baruch College. Since 2021, she has been an instructor at HSA teaching youth in the Media & Design department, and is currently also the Program Manager at HSA.



Pria Dahiya, Development Associate

Pria Dahiya is an arts administrator and theater director originally from Bethesda, Maryland. Outside of her work at HSA, Pria is the founding co-artistic director of New Product Company, a Pittsburgh-based experimental theater company. She has previously worked with the Carnegie Museum of Art, Hatch Arts Collective, Pittsburgh Public Theatre, and the New Jersey Arts and Culture Renewal Fund. Pria received her BFA in Theater Directing from Carnegie Mellon School of Drama, where she studied performance, projection design, and the intersections of digital culture and live art. She is a 2026 Drama League Directors Project Recipient, a 2025 Critical Insight Fellow at American Theatre Magazine, and a 2024 Kelly-Strayhorn Theatre Freshworks Artist-in-Residence.