

TAMIA STINSON

creative connector

words
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Tamia Stinson, Cincinnati's creative connector, was the recipient of a 2017 People's Liberty Haile Fellowship, which allowed her to develop her aspiration of empowering visual artists. Recognizing that the city has more Fortune 500 companies per million residents than the nation's largest cities, she envisions Cincinnati's stylists, fashion designers, hair and makeup artists, photographers, videographers, and models being celebrated—and compensated. Part community and part online platform, Tether was born out of Stinson's own frustrations with the image-making industry that she so loves.

"There has been an emphasis in the city on talent retention—keeping people from moving away—which a lot of creatives tend to do because they feel like there are better opportunities in Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles. You can really make a mark here. So I'm trying to encourage people to stay and to connect them with the business community that actually needs our services, ensuring that the creatives can make a living and stay here. I don't want my friends to leave!"

Having worked as a graphic designer, social media manager, photo stylist, writer, and project manager, Stinson understands the artist's struggle. But she's also convinced of the rich opportunities that have yet to be explored and developed.

"When you're trying to start something up, one question people always ask in your business plan, your loan, or grant application is, 'Why are you the best person for this?' I think I had a pretty strong argument for, 'I've been here. I am here. I am one of these people. These are my people. They have come to me with these questions, and we have discussed these issues.' I did a little test of the idea of bringing a group of image-makers together for a happy hour, and people really enjoyed it and made quite a few connections. I thought that if it worked on this very small scale for free, what would that look like if we put the money and the resources available via a People's Liberty Fellowship behind that?"



Connecting creatives with viable work is something Stinson takes seriously and personally. She recently received an email from an aspiring photographer she met at an event who asked if she had any leads for fashion shoots.

"I didn't and it frustrated me to no end. I was sitting at my laptop, nearly in tears, thinking 'What can I tell this guy? Who can I reach out to? How can I connect him to the people who can help him the most? What can give? What can I give?' I don't like not having a solution. I one hundred percent understand where he's coming from. He's got this vision, he's got this desire and wants to go make it happen. How? I understand that."

Though her fellowship ended in the spring of 2018, Stinson's efforts have not. She imagines an intersection of creativity and commerce, with a platform that's a cross between Instagram and Amazon. A digital bazaar where visual artists can display their work and where businesses of every size can find and employ them.

"My dream scenario is that there is a version of Tether dotted in multiple cities and multiple groups of creative people dotted throughout the United States, potentially abroad, coming together to meet each other, to network, and to collaborate. What could that look like if creative work was highly valued, fairly paid, and accessible to everybody? How much better would we all be? Socially. Economically. I'd love to see that."

