

CUSTOM  
COLLABORATIVE

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2021



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**ANNUAL REPORT**

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# FOUNDER'S NOTE

2021 was full of surprises, challenges, and joy. We continued to invest in our participants to build their skills and confidence. While we had hoped to operate at least one in-person Training Institute cohort, the pandemic's various Greek letters disrupted our plans. We instead capitalized on the "opportunity" of virtual instruction to teach Custom Collaborative's program participants new skills and provide them with ways to earn money.

Guest instructors introduced the Custom Collaborative community to trademark law, couture-finishing techniques, garment reconstruction, and two dozen other topics. 20+ participants received mentorship and training through projects for Iona College, Rebecca Chamberlain, Fashion Girls for Humanity, and others. Participants received stipends while they learned more skills, enabling them to provide for themselves and their families when so many had lost employment and many companies were still not operating at pre-pandemic capacity. Custom Collaborative successfully placed several women in advancement-track business programs with community organizations and our friends at the University of Fashion, providing participants an opportunity to learn and build their resumé's.

While we dedicated resources to invest in our makers, we also invested in our organization and staff. In July 2021, we paused external meetings and projects to focus on planning and internal projects: strengthening our infrastructure by hiring new staff members, establishing shared project management protocols, improving employee benefits, and developing new curricula and outcome assessments. We also brought on new board members to facilitate our strategic direction and growth. All of us look forward to even more exciting developments in 2022 and beyond, including reopening our Training Institute to new participants.

Thank you for telling your friends about Custom Collaborative, for buying masks, cheering for us, and contributing your resources to our mission. Together, we will continue to create equitable economic opportunities for no/low-income women.

Thank you,

**Ngozi Okaro**  
Executive Director







# MISSION

Founded in 2016 as a New York City-based entrepreneurship and workforce development organization, Custom Collaborative trains, mentors, and advocates for and with no/low income and immigrant women to achieve economic success in the sustainable fashion industry and broader society.

## Serving the underinvested

Much of the fashion industry is extractive and exploitative of people and the environment. Led mainly by men, it demands labor from Black and brown people, usually women, who often work in inadequate conditions for pay below a living wage.

## Investing in women

Regardless of their race, ethnicity, or economic background, we provide women with skills to achieve economic success in the sustainable fashion industry and the agency to design their futures.

## Investing in environmental and humanitarian sustainability

We repurpose textiles to reduce the amount of waste in the environment. We also advocate for and pay fair wages. We educate partners, the community, and our participants on both parts of sustainability: planet and people.

## Challenging inequality

Through training and action, we support the development of inclusive, equitable, and affirming workplaces for all people.

# OUR PROGRAMS

## Training Institute

A comprehensive 15-week program that teaches the art, technique, and business of fashion. Training includes extensive instruction in fashion business basics including marketing, sourcing, ethical manufacturing, and sustainability, along with personal finance. Students also learn how to construct made-to-measure clothing and accessories.

## Business Incubator

Custom Collaborative offers personalized consulting, mentorship, technical assistance, advanced training, professional equipment, job placement, and business referrals to Training Institute graduates and other emerging designers. Not only does the business incubator ensure continued support and professional advancement, but it also maximizes work opportunities and improves socio-economic outcomes for all.

## Fashion That Works

Fashion That Works develops and incubates worker-owned cooperatives. FTW provides the necessary tools, resources, and support for co-ops to work effectively towards their community and economic goals.



# 2021 PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

## We partnered with:

Fashion Girls For Humanity to produce hundreds of PPE gowns for facilities in need nationwide. Fashion Girls For Humanity brings humanitarian services and funds to communities in need by engaging and emboldening the fashion industry. This project enabled 12 CC participants to learn and earn through this special collaboration.

The CFDA Materials Hub Vendor Directory offers sustainable sourcing products and production support for designers and organizations seeking sustainable resources.

Garment District Alliance to offer 20+ in person and remote workshops and master classes with fashion industry professionals, providing access to garment district resources and offering hands-on participant training exercises, laying the groundwork for in person apprenticeships and paid production work within the Garment District.

We also proceeded with several production projects, particularly in upcycling and mending, consistent with our commitment to sustainability.

## Featured in:

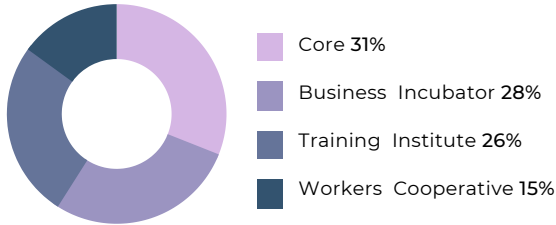


# FINANCIALS

## Income

Foundation	\$223,713.40	36.5%
Individual contributions	\$149,797.08	26.5%
Corporate contributions	\$94,781.15	14%
Earned Income	\$82,325.74	12%
In-kind	\$66,300.00	10%
Government Grants	\$5,000.00	1%

## Expenses



# SUCCESSFUL FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGNS: THANK YOU!

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CC** \$ 5,904  
MARCH 2021

**FASHION MONTH CAMPAIGN** \$ 15,061  
SEPTEMBER 2021

**DESIGNING THE FUT(HER) CAMPAIGN** \$ 28,936  
DECEMBER 2021

# SELECT CORPORATE AND FOUNDATION DONORS

- Anand-Delaquis Family Foundation
- Bank of the West
- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation/Elevate
- Chanel Foundation
- Darma Fund
- Eileen Fisher
- Federal Home Loan Bank of America
- Garment District Alliance
- Gucci Changemakers
- Higg
- Hyde and Watson Foundation
- Levi's
- Magdalin Family Foundation
- National Cooperative Bank
- New Economy Coalition
- New York City Council Member Mike Levine
- New York Urban League
- New York Women's Foundation
- Patrina Foundation
- Paypal Giving Fund
- Robert Sterling Clark Foundation
- Schwab Charitable Foundation
- Triumph Group Charitable Foundation
- Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative



## Custom Collaborative Circle

\$1,000+ Individual Donors

Anonymous, Brendan Bradley, Manon Clavel-Solender, Dana Cox, Melody Rollins Downes, Gale Epstein, Steven Goldberg and Frazer Goldberg, Gita Gupte, Vanessa Barbour Hallik, Michael Hirschhorn, Kerry Ann James, Patricia J Kozu, Anifa Mvuemba, Andrea Pozzi, Daria and Mark Reed, Richard Shuster, Taylor Smith, Corina Stonebanks, Susan and Tucker York, Jayne Baron Sherman and Deby Zum, James Guthrie, Nini Melvin



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Melody Rollins  
Downes



Andrea Pozzi



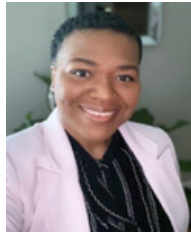
Céline DeCarlo



Leandro E.  
Brufman



Dana L. Cox



Gita Gupte



Jackie Swanson



Kristina  
Fietkiewicz



## Advisors

Meeta Anand  
Starita Ansari  
Heidi Bruce  
Caitrin Burns  
Stephen Burrows – Senior Advisor  
Deborah Chay  
Dennis Derryck  
Dominique Drakeford

Cathy Gilliard  
Guylene Grace  
Tabitha St. Bernard Jacobs  
Tessa Maffucci  
Marsha Modeste  
Eric Palmer

Katherine Parr  
Michelle Pryce-Screen  
Mark Reed  
Arva Rice  
Andrea Rogers  
Cameron Russel  
Alfonso Wyatt

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Custom Collaborative would like to highlight a few people who taught our participants and friends in 2021. Thank you, **Manon Clavel-Solender**, **Lauren Domio**, **Keyonna Hallums**, **Rebecca Chamberlain**, **Corina Stonebanks**, and many others, for helping our participants learn new skills through our Workshop Wednesdays and Master Classes.

**Manon Clavel-Solender** presented a three-part sustainability workshop series introducing the concept of sustainable principles and how to incorporate them into a fashion brand.

**Lauren Domio** taught an eye-opening course on pant alterations. Many of the participants looked forward to this class and requested a repeat session!

**Rebecca Chamberlain** led a fantastic class on upcycling jackets. We also partnered with her sustainable clothing brand, Regenerative, to produce her upcycled denim and liner jackets.

**Corina Stonebanks**, drawing on her entertainment law expertise, taught the basics of intellectual property, patents, and how to trademark a business.

# AMBASSADOR HIGHLIGHTS

The CC Ambassador Program started in March 2021 and includes several active ambassadors. The program is an online community of individuals who represent Custom Collaborative and our mission to support no/low-income and immigrant women to launch careers in the sustainable fashion industry. Ambassadors use their voices online to help support Custom Collaborative's various initiatives including social media, virtual events, and fundraising.



— “ —  
*“Thank you to all of the ambassadors, especially the ones highlighted below, Lidia, Veronica, Ngozi, and all of the staff members who have helped me launch the new program this year.”*

— Alicia Bennett, Ambassador Coordinator —  
” —

## Thanks

Ambassador Alex Mitchell, @alongsmith helped us raise \$685 in September for our Fashion Month Campaign and participated in an Instagram takeover featured in our blog.

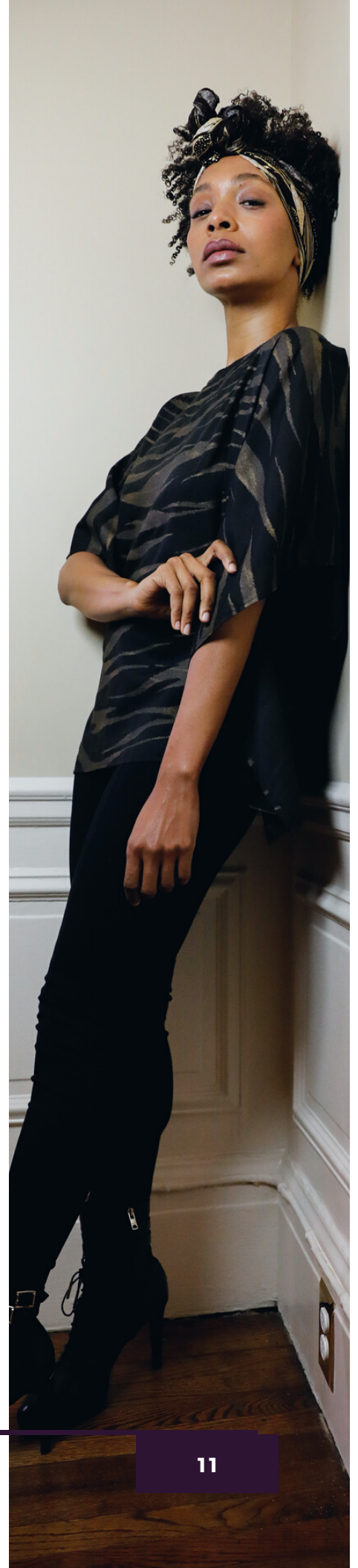
Ambassador Laura Snebold, @laura\_snebold raised over \$300, has participated in 2 Instagram takeovers, and attended all ambassador meetings. She is also a dedicated monthly donor.

Ambassador Rachel Ceruti, @reclipt has participated in one of the Instagram takeover and featured CC on her Clubhouse account. She is also the winner of the Ambassador Giveaway for our end-of-the-year Designing the FutHER Campaign.

**3** Instagram takeovers  
Ambassador meetings



over \$1000 raised  
collectively







# INCUBATED COOPERATIVE HIGHLIGHT

## Fashion That Works Production

In 2021 Fashion That Works Production cooperative partnered with Iona College in New Rochelle, NY. The goal was to produce lab coats for Iona's speech therapist graduation ceremony. The owners of the co-op successfully managed a production order and secured recurring annual production.

Moreover, the cooperative partnered with *indigena* to deconstruct and alter 20 vintage denim jackets with one-of-a-kind woven panels from Guatemala. Working on this project, the co-op successfully executed sustainable upcycled production project.





## PARTICIPANT UPDATE

### *Jasminea*

Jasminea Burity, the Angolan-born owner and creator behind the brand **ONYEKA**, originated from a Mechanical Engineering background but loves designing, sewing, and bringing unique products to life. She has always had a passion for fashion, wellness, and sustainability. Jasminea heard about Custom Collaborative through her church community and was part of the second cohort of the Training Institute. Jasminea co-led the design and production of Custom Collaborative's private label Wakanda Collection in 2018, her introduction to the business incubator. In 2020, she founded the sustainable fashion brand **ONYEKA**.

Jasminea's exceptional talent has led her to many accomplishments. Custom Collaborative joined collaboration [One X One project](#) hosted by The Slow Factory, Swarovski, and UN Department of Partnerships. This global program was designed to foster sustainable collaborations between the fashion industry and scientists. Custom Collaborative worked with Mara Hoffman to develop a six-week apprenticeship program for participants to learn applied skills training with the fashion house. Concluding the apprenticeship, Jasminea was highlighted for her designs. She was awarded a manufacturing opportunity through The Black Design Matters Fellowship, helping her launch **ONYEKA**'s first collection. She also received a scholarship from the University of Fashion to learn more technical design skills.

**ONYEKA** is a brand committed to implementing more sustainable and responsible practices. **ONYEKA**'s products are designed and handmade in New York. Most are made with ethically sourced, repurposed, upcycled and reclaimed materials, with some obtained from FabScrap, the non-profit organization dedicated to reducing fabric waste.


One of **ONYEKA**'s most sought-after products is the **ONYMAT**, a handmade mat that can be used for Pilates, yoga, exercises, sleeping, stretching, etc. The product was a sell-out at Custom Collaborative's Online Holiday Market. Jasminea also sells 100% silk handmade neckerchiefs, square scarves, reversible scarves, beautiful bags handmade with ethically sourced recycled materials, and vegetable-tanned harness leather coasters.



ONYEKA's products have been sold and highlighted at FABSCRAP's online and physical storefront from January to March of 2021 as part of their Featured Designer edit. Products have also been showcased at Grand Bazaar, Made in NYC, and the Garment District Alliance Artisan Showcase.

For the future, Jasminea is on a mission to turn ONYEKA into the most reliable, trustworthy, sustainable, gender-equal, fair-wage brand, providing unique and flawlessly constructed quality and lasting products.

In 2022 ONYEKA will debut its clothing line in collaboration with One432. ONE432 is an "Equal Share" design philosophy that embodies an unprecedented standard of equality, transparency and responsibility within the fashion industry. Unlike other social impact brands that donate products, ONE432 shares 50% of the actual net profits from each unit sold, with its female artisans and education to children in Pakistan. Jasminea is really excited to have joined forces with an organization that resonates with a vision similar to ONYEKA.

 @onyeka.official



# THE TEAM

**Alicia Bennett**

– Ambassador Coordinator

**Ashna Chopra**

– Head of Industry Partnerships and Social Impact

**Anthony Galante**

– Senior Manager, Industry Partnerships

**Cristina Ivory**

– Graduate Intern & FTWP Cooperative Liaison

**Veronica Jones**

– Entrepreneurship Coach

**Hannah Yael Katz**

– Proposal Writer

**Patricia (Pat) Kozu**

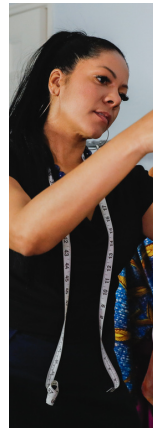
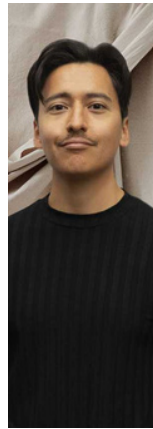
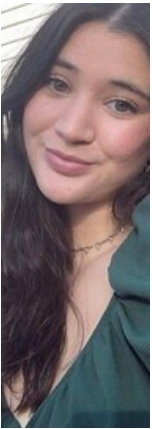
– Chief of Staff

**Doris Monsac**

– Operations Associate

**Ngozi Okaro**

– Executive Director



## Thanks to those who helped us along the way:

Ivannah Alexander – Operations Fellow

Lidia Alvarez – Operations Fellow

Auden Barbour – Photography Intern

Irene Chiu – Annual Report Intern

Lesley Enston – Development Manager

Jeymi Gomez – Content Curation Intern

Jhessy Gonzalez – Video Editing Intern

Nichole Lawrence – Communication Associate

Mahati Shastry – Content Intern

Amy Zhang – Development Intern

# 2021: YEAR IN REVIEW

- January** Custom Collaborative is Fabscrap's Featured Designer
- February** Launch of the Ambassador Program
- March** Participant Isabel Espinoza's belt featured on Refinery 29 for the launch of the GUCCI VS. EVERYBODY campaign
- April** International Women's Day Campaign
- May** Joined the UN 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
- June** Launched Master Class in sustainable business, workshop series in partnership with Garment District Alliance
- July** Custom Collaborative held a staff retreat during our July hiatus
- August** Launched Sustainability 4-part Mini Series. Participant Marcela Peralta's collection shown in Miami Swim Week
- September** SB62 Garment Worker Protection Act fair-wage legislation in California passed with support from CC and a coalition led by Remake
- October** Fashion Month Campaign
- November** Town Hall Meeting, which launched of Giving Tuesday Campaign
- December** Hosted the second annual Holiday Marketplace for our business incubator