



a blade of grass
nurtures socially engaged art

A Blade of Grass FINALISTS FOR ABOG FELLOWSHIP – Letters of Interest

NAME OF APPLICANT: Sol Aramendi

WEBSITE: <http://www.solaramendi.com/>

“Apps for Power” is a collaboration between day laborers, artists, organizers, developers, and lawyers to create an App that will help workers report wage theft. Distributing the App will generate social situations and cross-sector collaborations. The App is a contribution to the new labor rights movement, at the intersection of art, fairer labor standards, and immigrant rights.

This mobile phone application (App) will be developed through collaborative design sessions at New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE) with day laborers. The App will provide a powerful, useful, and safe platform for day laborers to share information, identify harmful employers, seek legal aid, and strengthen their community. Immigrant day laborers experience rampant exploitation and wage theft on an almost daily basis, affecting 100,000 men and women in the US. None of the tools for empowerment and for reporting wage theft created thus far are effective for undocumented workers. The App is also the first tool to involve the network of 11 organizations that are a part of the NYC chapter of the National Day Laborers Organizing Network (NDLON). NDLON has expressed a hope that the App could be used on a national level, and has pledged financial and organizational support to the project.

Artistic creation and expression are central to the development and distribution of the App. The “Apps for Power” project evolved from creative dialogues initiated with NICE by artists Barrie Cline and Sol Aramendi in 2013 and aligned with strategies and methods of social formation espoused by Arte Util. Day laborers and union workers met at Immigrant Movement International (IMI) to make images and create an installation using construction materials and a publication around workplace safety, culminating in a public event at Corona Plaza. In 2014 Aramendi led collaborative App design and tech literacy/social media community building encounters with NICE day laborers. Developer JR Baldwin created the first stages of the App based on the outcomes of those encounters. Workers from other centers in the NYC Metropolitan area verified that, because the App can be adapted to mobile working conditions, collecting data, and building more connection between the worker centers, it could be a crucial empowering tool for identifying contractors who steal wages with impunity.

As Sol continued with the project, the workers expressed a desire to combat the negative stereotypes of day laborers as criminals, and helped collectively create a photo studio where the workers made self-representations, contributing these images to a social media campaign #Merezcolgualdad (“I deserve equality”) that is urging immigration reform. Luis, a Mexican worker, is looking forward to the App’s instant message feature since it will help NICE address immediate hazards within their whole network. For the social media campaign he posed with a drill, helmet and safety vest and wrote in his portrait: Father/Husband/Day Laborer.

The Fellowship would enable the continued crafting of a creative social forum that contributes to the completion and dissemination of the Wage Theft App by the end of 2015, while further brainstorming art strategies towards fairer labor conditions and immigration policy.