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Introducing the 2022 Just Tech Fellows

By: Just Tech Staff

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The Just Tech Fellowship, a project of the <u>Social Science Research Council</u> (SSRC), announced its <u>inaugural class of Just Tech Fellows</u> today. These six visionaries—**Kim Gallon, Chris Gilliard, Christine Miranda, Clarence Okoh, Meme Styles, and Rua Williams**—will each receive two-year fellowships to tackle complex issues at the intersection of tech and society.

> *"We are asking people who understand the consequences of a world reimagined by technology what they need to accelerate true positive impact." – Safiya Umoja Noble*

The Just Tech Fellowship provides unrestricted awards of $250K+ over two years for researchers and practitioners imagining different tech futures. "It is a model of transformation," said **Safiya Umoja Noble, 2021 MacArthur Fellow and Just Tech Steering Committee Member**. "We are asking people who understand the consequences of a world reimagined by technology what they need to accelerate true positive impact."

In its inaugural year, the fellowship received 600 applications from brilliant thinkers across all disciplines—social scientists, computer scientists, artists, organizers, social change leaders, and legal experts. "The Fellowship," said **Anna Harvey, President, Social Science Research Council**, "supports tool-builders who are creating the instruments we need to shape a more just and humane technological future." Following a rigorous application review by 35 tech experts, Just Tech's Selection Committee—Lydia X.Z. Brown, Rumman Chowdhury, Joan Donovan, Alex Gil, Sharad Goel, Charlton McIlwain, Dan O'Sullivan, Desmond U. Patton, and Nabiha Syed—identified six outstanding fellows who will work on issues from immigrant organizing to police accountability, tech-enabled racial health disparities, novel surveillance systems, the discriminatory impact of algorithmic decision-making, and

disability justice.

The SSRC's Just Tech program foregrounds questions about the public impact of new technologies, pursuing solutions that advance social, political, and economic rights. "Only by shifting our imagination, can we begin to think of a world that is more egalitarian, less extractive, and more habitable for everyone and not just for a small elite," said **Ruha Benjamin, Princeton professor and author of *Race After Technology*.** "The Just Tech Fellowship inspires such a shift." Just Tech builds on the SSRC's tradition of supporting rigorous research to advance the public good, while offering a new model for holistic support—designed not only to fund research, but also to provide time and space for restoration, collaboration, and exploration.

Meet the 2022-2024 Fellows:

Kim Gallon, founder of *COVID Black*, an organization that has taken on racial health disparities throughout the pandemic by telling empowering stories about Black life, will create a justice-centered framework for the design and development of health information technology.

Chris Gilliard, a community college professor and widely published critic and advocate for civil rights in tech**,** will map novel surveillance practices and technologies to create a taxonomy for identifying and assessing their social impact and risk for marginalized communities.

Christine Miranda, a community organizer and digital director with Movimiento Cosecha, a national movement fighting for immigrants' rights, will research and develop shared resources for decentralized digital organizing strategies.

Clarence Okoh, a civil rights attorney, will analyze the impact of carceral technologies on the civil and human rights of Black students in public school systems with longstanding histories of systemic racial discrimination.

Meme Styles, founder of MEASURE, a social enterprise creating antiracist evaluation tools and providing free data support for Black, Brown, and Indigenous-led organizations, will develop a data-sharing tool to enable strategic collaboration.

Rua Williams, a computer graphics designer and disability justice advocate, will partner with adaptive technology users, developers, and user-experience designers to develop a collective "Cyborg Maintenance" approach to advancing collective self-determination by eliminating barriers to equipment access, maintenance, and customization.

"The Just Tech Fellowship creates a community of leaders moving from 'we know this isn't working for us' to 'let's build something that actually does work for us'," said **Nabiha Syed, Just Tech Advisory Board Member and President, The Markup**. "That is amazing at a time when optimism feels a little scarce." Through the Fellowship, the Just Tech digital platform, and by building critical connections in the field, the program creates a thriving ecosystem of research and social engagement.

A new model of support

The Just Tech program, including the digital platform and fellowship, is funded by a broad range of philanthropic foundations committed to cultivating critical work on the intersection of technology and society, including the Ford Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Surdna Foundation, and Democracy Fund.

"The uneven benefits and harmful impacts of technology cast a long shadow over all of society. To build a sustainable, equitable, and innovative tech ecosystem, the Just Tech Fellowship has brought together a diverse cohort of social researchers from across sectors to innovate together, and light the path towards a future guided by the public interest," said **Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation**. "The Just Tech Fellowship is in itself an innovation, a model for how to resource not just the social researcher, but the whole person, with holistic, sustainable support needed to dream big."

"There is an opportunity to imagine and build an affirmative vision for technology that is rooted in equity and justice, and works for all," said **John Palfrey, president of the MacArthur Foundation**. "This first cohort of Just Tech Fellows is poised to make important contributions through work that will help shape the public conversation about technology, and inform policy and practice in a way that centers historically marginalized communities."

"The Just Tech fellows are acting on the urgent need to create technology that serves the public interest, and not just the interests of powerful elites. We need to do a better job supporting the people who care for humanity. So, all fellows will receive funding to cover necessities such as healthcare," said **Surdna Foundation president Don Chen**. "We can't wait to see what these changemakers create when they're provided with greater capacity to imagine, connect, and collaborate on solutions that bring about justice and joy."

"We are in a moment of unprecedented opportunity to transform the digital public square by making social media companies liable for their harms and effecting large-scale changes in how they operate," said **Joe Goldman, president of Democracy Fund**. "Achieving such a transformation requires research that is grounded in community and justice. Democracy Fund is proud to support the Just Tech Fellowship, and its inaugural cohort of Fellows, whose innovations and insights will not only advance essential social science research, but move us closer to our vision of an inclusive, multi-racial democracy."

For media inquiries or to reach the Just Tech team contact us at just-tech@ssrc.org