

BlackStar Continues Growth with Six New Hires

2022 Film Festival Submissions Now Open

Producer of acclaimed BlackStar Film Festival continues expanding



Counterclockwise from top left: Akili Davis, Ashley Ijoema Omoma, Autumn F. Valdez, Dessane Lopez Cassell, Mariam Dembele, and Patrice Worthy

(Philadelphia, PA - January 11, 2022) -- [BlackStar Projects](#), producer of the acclaimed BlackStar Film Festival, is thrilled to announce several new hires and staff promotions this January. Six new individuals are joining the team, bringing their respective expertise to the rapidly growing organization. This organizational growth represents the culmination of BlackStar's tenth anniversary celebrations over the past year.



New additions to BlackStar include **Akili Davis** as Administrative Coordinator, **Ashley Ijeoma Omoma** as Program Coordinator, **Autumn F. Valdez** as Business Manager, **Dessane Lopez Cassell** as Editor-in-Chief of *Seen*, **Mariam Dembele** as Marketing Associate, and **Patrice Worthy** as Director of Programs.

Dessane Lopez Cassell's hire was previously announced last November with the debut of *Seen* Issue 003. **Issue 004**, the first with Cassell in the role of Editor-in-Chief, will be released this Spring.

Several team members have also been promoted, including **Leo Brooks**, who will assume the role of **Design Manager**. **Imran Siddiquee** will assume the role of **Chief Communications Officer** and **Sara Zia Ebrahimi** will become **Chief Operations Officer** this January.

"We're thrilled to have these incredibly talented individuals joining our team as we continue to expand the scope of our organization and vision," said **Maori Karmael Holmes, Artistic Director and CEO** of BlackStar. "I am also delighted to have Sara and Imran join me in leading the organization as we move into the second decade of BlackStar, leveraging our collective expertise and imagination for another transformative decade."

BlackStar has opened festival submissions this week for their 2022 iteration, set to take place August 3-7. To be eligible for consideration, films must be directed by a person who identifies as Black, Brown, or Indigenous, or tell a story of Black, Brown or Indigenous experiences. Last year's festival featured approximately 80 films, including 19 world premieres and representing 27 countries. Submissions may be uploaded via [FilmFreeway](#).

For more information on festival submissions, please visit blackstarfest.org/submissions.

In 2021, BlackStar presented the 10th annual [BlackStar Film Festival](#), launched the [Philadelphia Filmmaker Lab](#), presented a new limited-edition print each month through the Blackstar 10th Anniversary [Print Sale](#), shared the first season of the [Many Lumens](#) podcast, and published two editions of [Seen](#), their signature journal of film and visual

culture. In 2022, this expansion will continue with additional signature programming alongside new events. More information on this year's festival, and other BlackStar programs, will be announced soon.

For more information about the BlackStar team, please visit blackstarfest.org/staff.

About BlackStar Projects

BlackStar Projects is the producer of the BlackStar Film Festival, an annual celebration of the visual and storytelling traditions of the African diaspora and global communities of color — showcasing films by Black, Brown, and Indigenous people from around the world. In addition to the acclaimed festival, BlackStar presents an array of programming across film and visual culture year-round, and produces the twice-annual journal *Seen*.

Press Contacts

Ed Winstead

Director, Cultural Counsel

ed@culturalcounsel.com

Emma Frohardt

Account Coordinator, Cultural Counsel

emma@culturalcounsel.com