



About Castle of our Skins

Our Mission

Born out of the desire to foster cultural curiosity, Castle of our Skins is a concert and educational series dedicated to celebrating Black artistry through music. From classrooms to concert halls, Castle of our Skins invites exploration into Black heritage and culture, spotlighting both unsung and celebrated figures of past and present.

Our Values

- *Connections:* among audiences of different cultures; within the Black community using music, history and other artistic disciplines; between an individual and his/her community.
- *Culture:* to showcase the breadth and depth of Black culture.
- *Curiosity:* curiosity leads to learning and when paired with a curiosity about culture, learning leads to greater social understanding, justice and ultimately social harmony.

Our Vision

Castle of our Skins aims to empower citizens with cultural pride, cultural curiosity and cultural harmony through and beyond music. COOS seeks to empower organizations as social change agents through the power of dialogue and culturally diverse programming.

Our Programming

- Thought provoking concert experiences combining music, spoken word and other arts.
- Interactive educational workshops for youths, elementary through high school aged.
- Ensemble in Residence positions held at various colleges and institutions.
- Annual Creative-in-Residence program attracting an international roster of creatives.
- Online educational engagement through Beauty in Black Artistry (BIBA) blog and social media.

Our Inspiration

Castle of our Skins takes its name and inspiration from the famed poet Nikki Giovanni's *poem for nina*. The poem beautifully captures the sense of adoration, respect and pride for the very fabric that makes us who we are: our skin.

The Community We Serve

Through its focused educational work, *Castle of our Skins* has to date reached over 1,000 youths from Mattapan, Roxbury and Dorchester to Brighton, Chestnut Hill and the greater city of Boston. Castle of our Skins' international call for proposals invites composers of all races, ethnicities, ages, and nationalities to seek musical inspiration from Black culture and history. Our themed concerts – which have taken place at the Museum of African American History, Hibernian Hall and Roxbury Community College among other venues – stimulate audiences from diverse backgrounds within the Boston community.



Season Highlights

As an organization dedicated to fostering cultural curiosity through music, Castle of our Skins is deeply aware the lack of equity in composer representation in concert halls and the omission of important stories and figures in Black history. This lack of equal inclusion is one we hope to change. Through carefully designed educational workshops and creative concert programs, we aim to highlight the achievements of Black artists and historical figures who have slipped through the cracks of fame and history. We hope to engage and re-engage audiences with the power of music, dialogue, and curiosity through our celebration of Black artistry from across the diaspora.

Blending music with other arts, history, and culture we have presented concert programs to audiences ranging in age, ethnicity, socio-economic background and geography over our brief eight season history. Highlights include:

- Season I/2013-2014: The inaugural Castle of our Skins performance entitled "Love Affects" held at Roxbury Community College (RCC) in May 2014.
- Season II/2014-2015: A musical and narrative exploration of the Abolitionist and Civil Rights movements entitled "Oh, Freedom!" held June 2015 at the Museum of African American History.
- Season III/2015-2016: World premiere art songs setting the text of Black writers ("Night Songs"), a musical-narrative exploration into the American prison system ("Freedom Rising: From Emancipation to Incarceration"), an international call for proposals of works inspired by Black visual art, and a year-long concert and educational position as Cultural-Ensemble-in-Residence at the Roxbury YMCA.
- Season IV/2016-2017: Castle of our Skins' first ever portrait concert highlighting the solo and chamber works of Black composer Jeffrey Mumford; our first college residency at Gettysburg College (PA); and an inter-generational, cross-cultural exhibition of the arts (MassQuerade Ball 2017: Convergence).
- Season V/2017-2018: Performances at the Museum of African American History and Hibernian Hall in Roxbury; and collaborations with new music and visual art concert series New Gallery Concert Series, Celebrity Series of Boston, and the BSO/Boston Pops. This season also marked our second college residency held at Brandeis University.
- Season VI/2018-2019: Performances at the Gardner Museum, Community Music Center of Boston, RCC, the MFA, Lyric Stage Company of Boston, Back Bay Fens, and Hibernian Hall. Collaborations with Boston Lyric Opera, Celebrity Series (a continued partner), the Handel & Haydn Society, and Boston Children's Museum. Our third college residency was held at Keene State College.
- Season VII/2019-2020: Performances at the Esplanade, Salem State University, the Gardner Museum, and the BCA. This season marked the first of a three-year ensemble-in-residence position at the BCA. COVID-19 cancelled spring projects but were replaced by a variety of digital offerings including live concerts, chats, storytime readings for children, and the Black Composer Miniature Challenge (18 world premieres from May to September). New partnerships with the Rockport Music Festival and Lincoln Center, plus the launch of the Shirley Graham Du Bois Creative-in-Residence.
- Season VIII/2020-2021: Livestream and recorded projects with the Kennedy Center, Phillips Collection, Gardner Museum, Strand Theatre among others. Publication of our first anthology of compositions.



Board Chair Description

General Responsibilities:

The Chairperson is the senior volunteer leader of Castle of our Skins ("COOS"), presiding over all board meetings and overseeing the development of policies and procedures that ensure that COOS operates in compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and bylaws. The Chair also has primary responsibility for board development. A highly effective Chair possesses a skill set including:

- Excellent facilitation skills
- Strong leadership skills to drive the board toward a shared vision of the organization
- Ability to remain objective during discussions, allowing the opportunity for fluid conversation to take place in order to tackle and resolve difficult issues
- Ability to access and leverage relationships to benefit the organization
- Partnership skills to develop, encourage, and nurture an effective leader
- Excellent organization skills and a decisive nature to keep meetings running on time and according to the agenda

Specific Responsibilities:

- Serves as an informed and persuasive spokesperson and ambassador for COOS
- Serves as the primary contact point for every board member on board issues
- Develops board meeting agendas in partnership with the Executive Director
- Presides over board meetings and ensures that meetings are well-run
- Creates a safe environment where each board member can contribute freely and where conflicting opinions and points of view are considered openly
- Calls special meetings, including but not limited to executive sessions, if necessary
- Works in partnership with the Executive Director to make sure all board resolutions are carried out
- Leads other board members to recruit new board members in cooperation with the Executive Director
- Ensures new board members receive proper orientation
- Coordinates and ensures that the Executive Director's annual performance evaluation is completed
- Oversees succession planning and search for new Executive Director when transitions occur
- Works in partnership with the Executive Director to drive and monitor the development of annual goals and a long-term strategic direction for COOS, and to ensure that they are met
- Periodically consults with board members on their roles and helps them assess their performance and ensures that the board evaluates it/s collective performance

Additional

- *Appoints chairs of all standing and ad hoc committees as well as task forces*
- *Recommends committee membership*



Secretary Description

General Responsibilities:

The Secretary of Castle of our Skins ("COOS") assumes primary responsibility for the organization's records. The Secretary is responsible for board meeting minutes and completes important transactions and legal filings.

Specific Responsibilities:

- Ensures that COOS' board decisions follow any applicable laws and regulations
- Ensures that minutes are recorded at every board meeting
- Ensures that COOS' bylaws are followed when determining quorum, electing Directors and Officers, setting terms and term limits, casting votes, calling meetings, and completing other activities regulated by the bylaws
- Distributes minutes to board members in a timely manner after meetings
- Ensures there is a record keeping system to store meeting minutes and other significant documents
- Advises the board on necessary corporate filings and other legal filings
- Completes business transactions that require the secretary's signature

Treasurer Description

General Responsibilities:

The Treasurer of Castle of our Skins provides strategic direction for the financial management of the organization, ensuring that the board meets its financial oversight responsibilities.

Specific Responsibilities:

- Leads COOS' financial oversight
- Leads the board in assuring compliance with federal, state and other financial reporting requirements
- Establishes and maintains effective practices in accounting and financial oversight
- Advises the board on financial matters and financial implications of strategic decisions
- Advises COOS fundraising staff on appropriate stewardship of donations, accounting for gifts, and pledge management
- Advises staff and board on appropriate policies and procedures for receiving gifts of stock and other investments
- Ensures that COOS engages appropriate financial institutions and vendors for COOS' goals
- Leads the oversight of COOS' accounting for grants, contracts, and other sponsored programs
- Ensures the development of an annual budget and its submission to the Board for approval
- Monitors and advises on policies for cash flow
- Oversees the creation of financial forecasts
- Ensures the presentation of timely and meaningful financial reports to the board, leading the monitoring of budget to actual results
- Ensures that assets are protected and invested according to board policy
- Ensures that all board members receive appropriate orientation to effectively conduct oversight of the financial health of COOS



General Board Member Description

Anticipated Time Commitments:

- Six meetings annually, 2 – 2.5 hours per meeting
- One Committee Meeting (frequency to be determined by committee) – 1½ hours
- Preparation/follow-up work outside of meetings: 2-6 hours per month

Each board member will support the work of Castle of Our Skins (COOS) and provide mission-based leadership, strategic governance, and fiduciary duties. While day-to-day operations are led by COOS' Executive Director (ED), the Board-ED relationship is a partnership, and the appropriate involvement of the Board is both critical and expected. Specific Board Member responsibilities include:

Leadership, Governance, and Oversight:

- Serves as a trusted advisor to the ED and board chair as s/he develops and implements COOS' strategic plan
- Determines and supports the mission and purposes of the organization
- Evaluates candidates for organizational leadership; contributes to an annual performance evaluation of the ED
- Evaluates outcomes and metrics created by COOS for measuring its impact, and regularly determining its performance and effectiveness using those metrics
- Reviews the agendas and supporting materials; prepares for, regularly attends, and conscientiously participates in board/committee meetings
- Approves annual budget and audit reports; provides strong fiduciary oversight, financial, and legal management
- Assists the CEO and board chair in identifying and recruiting other Board Members
- Collaborates with the CEO/other board members to ensure that board resolutions are carried out
- Serves on committees or task forces and takes on special assignments
- Leverages business and personal connections, networks, and resources to the advantage of COOS' growth and development
- Represents COOS to stakeholders; acting as an ambassador for the organization and working to enhance its public image
- Ensures COOS' commitment to a diverse board, staff and volunteers that reflects the communities COOS serves

Evaluation:

- Regularly reviews and evaluates operations and standards of organization performance
- Monitors program activities
- Assesses its own performance as the governing body of COOS

Fundraising & Financial Obligation:

COOS, Inc. Board Members will consider COOS, Inc. a philanthropic priority and make annual gifts that reflect that priority (see Board Agreement). So that COOS can credibly solicit contributions from foundations, organizations, and individuals, COOS expects to have 100 percent of Board Members make an annual contribution that is commensurate with their capacity.



General Board Member Description (continued)

Board terms/participation:

- COOS, Inc.'s Board Members will serve a two-year term to be eligible for re-appointment for one additional term.
- Follow the organization's bylaws, policies, and board resolutions
- Sign board agreement and update it during the year, if necessary, as well as disclose potential conflicts of interest before meetings and actual conflicts during meetings
- Maintain confidentiality about all internal matters of ABC Organization

Qualifications:

This is an extraordinary opportunity for individuals who are passionate about COOS's mission and who have a (3+ years) record of leadership accomplishments. Selected Board Members will have achieved leadership stature in the following areas:

- Business & Finance
- Philanthropy / Fundraising
- Music / Cultural Administration
- Human Resources
- Program Development & Sustainability
- Sponsorship & Relationship Development
- Government
- Nonprofit Sector
- Community Engagement
- Risk Assessment & Evaluation
- Marketing & Communications

Ideal candidates will have the following qualifications:

- His/her accomplishments will allow him/her to attract other well-qualified, high-performing Board Members.
- Extensive professional experience with significant executive leadership accomplishments in business, government, philanthropy, or the nonprofit sector
- A commitment to and understanding of COOS, Inc.'s beneficiaries, preferably based on experience
- Savvy diplomatic skills and a natural affinity for cultivating relationships and persuading, convening, facilitating, and building consensus among diverse individuals
- Personal qualities of integrity, credibility, and a passion for improving the lives of COOS's beneficiaries



Board Member Application

Name: _____

Home Phone: _____

Address: _____

Cell/Business. Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

How did you first learn about Castle of our Skins?

What inspires you about the Castle of our Skins mission?

Please select the areas of expertise where you believe you can add value.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Education
<input type="checkbox"/>	Finance
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fundraising
<input type="checkbox"/>	Governance
<input type="checkbox"/>	Music/Arts/Culture
<input type="checkbox"/>	History (African Diasporic)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____

<input type="checkbox"/>	Legal
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marketing
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grant Writing
<input type="checkbox"/>	Production/Management
<input type="checkbox"/>	Human Resources
<input type="checkbox"/>	Community Engagement
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____



Board Member Application (continued)

Please list any prior board member experience, noting if you served as an officer.

Please describe any current or past affiliation with Castle of our Skins.

At a minimum, can you annually commit to attending 4 board meetings each year?

Y N

At a minimum, can you annually commit to donating or raising money outlined in the board agreement each fiscal year?

Y N

In time, would you be willing to serve as an officer (President, Secretary, Treasurer)?

Y N

Please email this application and submit your resume to chair@castleskins.org, with subject line "COOS Board Member Candidate."