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CAREERS Special Edition



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Established in 1970
Committed to Cultural Diversity



BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Ifanyi Bell, an Emmy-nominated filmmaker and multimedia artist, leads a new fellowship for black Portland filmmakers at Open Signal, a community broadcast organization, as a way to increase opportunities for African Americans in the industry.

Filmmaker creates jobs incubator for blacks, females

BY DANNY PETERSON
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

With more and more films by black writers, directors, and stars hitting movie theaters each year—like this year’s box office smash *Black Panther*—it’s no wonder why community media organization Open Signal is betting the future of media is black with their new incubator for local African American filmmakers, called ‘Open Signal Labs.’

“We hope to create a safe space immune from outside influence that will inspire true innovation and authentic stories of black Americans,” Ifanyi Bell, the program’s director, said.

A 12-month pilot ‘fellowship and laboratory for creative investigation,’ which

Betting on Diversity

held its orientation at the beginning of this month, convenes six film makers from Portland’s black community at the organization’s public access center in northeast Portland in part to help bolster female and minority representation in professional media careers. Only 5 percent of the top 1,223 directors in the country between 2007 and 2017 were black, and only four of them were black women, according to

a 2018 University of Southern California study.

“This is the kind of initiative that our organization has been missing all along,” Open Signal Executive Director Justen Harn said, citing the responsibility of a community organization in a historically black neighborhood.

The fellowship is the brainchild of Ifanyi Bell, an accomplished and Emmy-nom-

inated African American filmmaker who grew up a mile and a half north of the original 35-year-old Portland Community Media building at 2766 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, which was re-launched at its same location as Open Signal in 2017.

Bell, 39, had been floating the idea of having a black filmmaker fellowship to Harn, and others in the film industry, for the past two years before it was finally brought to fruition.

“In the years leading up to my first conversation with Justen, I’d been doing a lot of independent work and freelance work for places in New York City and in Philadelphia. And in my spare time I would visit a lot of festivals and I would talk about creating something just like this, for black creative people around the world, really,” Bell said.

Using his connections in the film industry, Bell will be bringing in successful black media professionals from across the country

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