The Los Angeles Orchestra Fellowship, a rigorous two-year in-residence training and fellowship program that launches in Fall 2018, is funded by a $700,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

The USC Thornton School of Music, Inner City Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles (ICYOLA) and Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra (LACO) have teamed up to launch a post-graduate fellowship program for musicians from underrepresented communities on the verge of launching careers in orchestral performance.

A unique partnership between one of the world’s leading chamber orchestras, the country’s largest African American-majority youth orchestra and a university with one of the country’s top music programs, the program seeks to address the lack of diversity within American orchestras, in which less than 5 percent of the workforce is African American, Hispanic or Native American, according to a 2016 report on diversity issued by the League of American Orchestras.

“USC has made diversity and equity key priorities for the university,” USC Thornton Dean Robert Cutietta said. “At the Thornton School, we are honored to realize that commitment through such a rigorously designed and promising program.”

The program will recruit two violins, a viola and a cello to USC Thornton, one of the country’s top music programs. The fellows will perform and practice with Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, one of the world’s leading chamber orchestras. And they will teach, mentor, and perform alongside young musicians in the Inner City Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles, the country’s largest African American-majority youth orchestra.

The program is funded by a $700,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

The fellows receive a range of practical in-the-field experience, including in-depth mentorship, rehearsal, performance, mock audition opportunities with LACO as well as teaching and performance opportunities with the Inner City Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles, a 131-member orchestra. Fellows who complete the in-residence training
fellowship will also be awarded a graduate certificate from USC Thornton. All the while, the fellows will perform as a string quartet throughout the city representing all three institutions. The two-year in-residence training program includes unprecedented audition support designed to prepare fellows to win auditions in professional orchestras.

“We are honored to partner with LACO and USC to address the lack of diversity in American orchestras,” says ICYOLA Founder/Executive Director/Conductor Charles Dickerson, “and we are particularly grateful to the Mellon Foundation for its commitment to this issue as reflected by its tremendous financial support. Through our collaboration with our stellar partners, we hope to train young emerging musicians from our nation’s most underserved communities to be both excellent musicians and excellent citizens, and to help them to win jobs in the American orchestra industry.”

Fellows receive mentorship from professional musicians focused on their career development, as well as serve as mentors to young musicians in an effort create future generations of musicians.

“Everyone at Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra is proud to join forces with ICYOLA and USC Thornton to launch this ground-breaking, hands-on fellowship that provides intensive guidance in the important nuances of the auditioning process and orchestral performance, a topic rarely addressed in this level or depth for aspiring musicians,” says LACO Executive Director Scott Harrison. "The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s visionary leadership and financial support will enable us to further erode the barriers of race, socioeconomic status and geography that can sometimes prevent performers and audiences from fully participating in the classical music field. While similar programs exist, none are as comprehensive, none are led by an organization from a community of color, as ICYOLA is, none are designed by such a diverse group of leaders and stakeholders, and none so thoroughly connect the pipe line from community to professional.”

Four individuals will be accepted to each cycle of the program – two violins, a viola and a cello. A team of administrators from each of the three participating organizations will manage the program.

Fellows will together comprise a string quartet representing all three organizations that will perform throughout Los Angeles, providing an opportunity for them to further develop their musical decision-making, communication, presentation and performance skills.

The fellowship begins in Fall 2018. Applications are due Dec. 31, 2017.
About the USC Thornton School of Music

For more than 125 years, the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music has prepared students to excel as performers, composers, industry leaders and educators on stages and in studios around the world. Founded in 1884 and today the oldest continually operating cultural institution in Los Angeles, USC Thornton is internationally recognized as one of the finest conservatories and music schools in the U.S. By blending the rigors of a traditional conservatory-style education with the benefits of a leading research university, USC Thornton offers a curriculum designed to prepare students for successful careers in the 21st century. For more information, go to music.usc.edu.