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SOULS GROWN DEEP PROVIDES DIRECT FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND NEW COMMUNITY RESOURCES BENEFITING BLACK COMMUNITIES IN ALABAMA

Souls Grown Deep Supplies Staffing, Computers, and Internet Access to Promote
Voter Registration, Census Participation, and Assistance in Obtaining Federal Stimulus Payments

June 11, 2020 (Atlanta, GA) – Seeking to address historic underrepresentation in Gee’s Bend, Alabama, Souls Grown Deep Community Partnership is partnering with the United States Census Bureau to ensure a complete and accurate survey of its Census tract in Wilcox County, which [currently has the lowest response rate in the state](#). To encourage participation and enhance access, Souls Grown Deep established the Gee’s Bend Resource Center, offering the first free, public Internet access and laptop computers for the community, employing residents to staff a phone bank, and incentivizing Census completion. Since 62.5% of the rural tract’s households have no home Internet subscription, the new Resource Center also provides essential access for residents to receive economic stimulus payments from the CARES Act and register to vote. Souls Grown Deep is complementing the physical infrastructure it has provided with an information campaign dedicated to help share the significance of voter registration and Census participation to increase representation and crucial federal funding.

Best known for its dedication to transferring artworks by African American artists of the South from its Foundation to the permanent collections of leading museums, Souls Grown Deep is committed to the social and economic development of Gee’s Bend, a community that gave rise to many of the artists in its collection. The new center builds on previous initiatives to promote these artists; sustains recent efforts to support the community through the COVID-19 crisis; provides direct financial support during the resulting economic downturn; and leverages SGD’s strong relationships in the region.

Maxwell L. Anderson, president of Souls Grown Deep Community Partnership & Foundation, stated: “The art world is struggling, along with the rest of America, to evaluate its past role and current responsibilities in combating the persistent scourge of racism. The 160 artists represented in our collection, together with their families and communities, endured discrimination and lived in poverty, ignored by the art market and by museums. We are doing what we can to redress these injustices by

transferring their extraordinary contributions into public art collections, and simultaneously obtaining and dispersing financial support to improve economic opportunity for residents of the Black Belt.”

The new Gee’s Bend Resource Center temporarily assumes the lease of local restaurant Aunt Ruby’s Kitchen in Alberta, AL. Souls Grown Deep is paying members of the community to staff the center, who have been trained to assist residents of Wilcox County, Alabama in completing the 2020 Census, filling out required forms for federal stimulus checks, and registering to vote. Souls Grown Deep is also partnering with the U.S. Census Bureau to establish a phone bank, staffed by paid community members, to target households that have yet to participate in the Census. It is further incentivizing participation in the Census by distributing gift certificates valid at local grocery stores.

The availability of Internet access and additional resources was promoted through Souls Grown Deep’s distribution of cloth masks in an initiative led by Mary Margaret Pettway, Souls Grown Deep Board Chair, and Mary McCarthy, Souls Grown Deep Research Associate, who are both esteemed artists of the quilting community in Gee’s Bend. Souls Grown Deep paid quilters to produce the masks and also supported the distribution of materials to quilters and the delivery of 600 finished masks, which they provided for the entire community. The masks were accompanied by flyers on preventing the spread of COVID-19, the availability of economic impact payments, and the community benefits of filling out a census and registering to vote.

The center has already served individuals not only in the unincorporated areas of Alberta and Boykin, Alabama, which comprise Gee’s Bend, but also across Wilcox County, where one out of three residents lives in poverty, according to the 2010 Census. Souls Grown Deep is evaluating opportunities to extend its presence in Gee’s Bend beyond the current lease and to launch additional initiatives to support economic development and creative industries through the center. The center adheres to all safety procedures in accordance with CDC recommendations for stopping the spread of COVID-19.

Funds received through the Foundation’s Collection Transfer Program, which has already transferred 400 works to 20 prominent museums across the country, benefit the Community Partnership and enable it to deepen and accelerate grantmaking to economically challenged communities in the rural South. **To follow updates and to make a contribution to the Gee’s Bend Resource Center, please visit [here](#).**

About the Souls Grown Deep Community Partnership & Foundation

Souls Grown Deep Community Partnership is dedicated to improving the quality of life of communities that gave rise to the art made by African American artists of the South in the care of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation. It advances its mission by fostering economic empowerment, racial and social justice, and educational advancement in select regions across the Southeast. The Partnership derives its name from a 1921 poem by Langston Hughes (1902-67) titled *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, the last line of which is "My soul has grown deep like the rivers."

Souls Grown Deep Foundation holds the largest and foremost collection of works of African American artists from the Southern United States, encompassing almost 1,000 works by more than 160 artists. The Foundation advances its mission by advocating the contributions of these artists in the canon of American art history, accomplished through collection transfers, scholarship, exhibitions, education, public programs, and publications.

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