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Word Seed Inc., Prototype 237, and Local Partners Awarded \$266,540 NJEDA A.R.T. Phase II Grant to Launch Year-Long *Poetic License Project* in Paterson

Paterson, NJ — January 9, 2026 — Word Seed Inc., a Paterson-based poetry and literary arts nonprofit, has been **awarded a \$266,540 Phase II Activation, Revitalization, and Transformation (A.R.T.) grant from New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) to launch the *Poetic License Project***: a series of four intensive poetry weekends featuring performances at Paterson's independent arts cooperative, Prototype 237, by some of the best national and local poets, in addition to participatory workshops, publications, and community-centered events designed to activate Paterson's cultural corridors and strengthen its identity as New Jersey's historic poetry capital.

Word Seed was among 39 organizations statewide selected to receive funding as part of NJEDA's **\$15 million** initiative to support community development through community-driven arts projects. Notably, **Word Seed was the only Paterson-based organization to receive an award**, earning the **#3 overall score out of nearly 100 eligible submissions**. The application's success was bolstered by partnerships with seasoned cultural and community institutions **Prototype 237**, the **Paterson Museum**, **CavanKerry Press**, and **New Jersey Community Development Corporation (NJCDC)**.

A Year-Long Celebration of Poetry, Place, and Participation

The *Poetic License Project* builds on Word Seed's eight-year trajectory of cultivating poetry in Paterson — from the founding of the **Paterson Poetry Festival** in 2018 to the citywide expansion of **Paterson Poetry Month** in 2024. With support from the A.R.T. Phase II grant, the project represents a significant next chapter, designed to **reignite the city's cultural and economic embers through community building and poetry** and to **enable Paterson to cultivate its place in the national poetry landscape**.

Poetic License will present **four multi-day Poetic License Sessions** at Prototype 237, each featuring a performance by a distinguished national poet and several supporting poets, as well as multiple public workshops, interviews, and community events. These will take place in **May, June, July, and October**. Coinciding with Paterson Poetry Month, the final session in October will expand into a six-day **Poetic License Writer's Incubator**, with a residency for a poet newly published by **CavanKerry Press** — offering them concentrated time to build new connections with the greater Paterson literary community while on their book tour.

Works by all participating poets will be included in a *Poetic License* written anthology, and their performances captured in a dedicated video anthology.

The *Poetic License Project* is anchored by two large-scale public events: a **Poetic License Welcome Party** in March of 2026, at both the Paterson Museum and Prototype 237, and the **Paterson Poetry Prom** on October 31, 2026. Both will feature multiple performances, bands, and DJs.

“This grant represents more than funding — it's a recognition that poetry is essential to Paterson's cultural and economic future,” said Talena Lachelle Queen, President and Founder of Word Seed Inc. and Paterson's Poet Laureate. “For eight years, we've been building a foundation. Now, with the support of NJEDA and our incredible partners, we can offer Paterson residents sustained access to poets and poetry throughout an entire year — not as visitors to the art form, but as active participants in it. This is how we ensure poetry remains rooted in the daily life of our city.”

At its core, the project is designed not only to present world-class poetry performances, but to give Paterson residents direct, meaningful access to the poets themselves — through participatory workshops, community meals, and shared creative experiences. As outlined in the grant proposal, the goal is to **foster a thriving poetic community and inspire the next generation of writers and residents.**

“We have tremendous faith in the arts,” says Miranda Dahl, Co-Owner of Prototype and Grants Administrator for Word Seed Inc., “as a vehicle for personal and artistic growth, as well as community formation and economic development. For the past five years, we've been operating on a nickel, out of personal determination. It's exciting to have the support from NJEDA and our partners to advance our commitment to the arts.”

Bringing Poetry Directly to Paterson's Neighborhoods

Programming will take place across multiple Paterson venues, intentionally embedded within the city's cultural and commercial corridors. The majority of performances and workshops will be hosted at **Prototype 237**, serving as the project's central performance hub. Additional workshops and events will take place at **NJCDC's Great Falls Youth Center** and the **Paterson Museum**, supporting nearby small businesses and local commerce in the Historic Great Falls Neighborhood.

By situating poetry where residents already gather — and inviting them to return repeatedly throughout the year — Poetic License advances the A.R.T. program's placemaking goals while reinforcing poetry as a living, accessible art form rooted in Paterson's daily life.

Rooted in Legacy, Focused on the Future

Paterson's literary legacy includes **William Carlos Williams**, whose epic poem *Paterson* helped define modern American poetry; **Judith Ortiz Cofer**, whose work foregrounded Puerto Rican and Latina identity; and **Maria Mazziotti Gillan**, founder of the Poetry Center in Paterson. Word Seed's founder and president, Talena Lachelle Queen — Paterson's first Poet Laureate — has continued that lineage by creating sustained, public-facing platforms for poetic expression.

Today, organizations such as Word Seed Inc., Prototype 237, and the Paterson Museum are working collectively to **reclaim and reassert Paterson's role as New Jersey's poetry capital**, pairing national-caliber artists with a deeply local creative ecosystem.

For emerging and established poets alike, the project provides a rare platform — pairing live performance with professional documentation and publication opportunities. As the grant application notes, **“by documenting and preserving the work of local poets, we can ensure that their voices are heard and their legacy lives on.”**

Workforce Development Through the Arts

In partnership with **NJCDC**, Word Seed will also launch a **year-long technical apprenticeship program**, engaging Paterson youth as active participants in the production of Poetic License events. Apprentices will gain hands-on experience in live event production environments, learning lighting, sound engineering, and arts marketing skills across multiple sessions — building technical proficiency, professional confidence, and exposure to career pathways in the creative economy.

Continuing a Growing Movement

Since 2018, Word Seed Inc. has steadily expanded the scale and reach of poetry in Paterson. In 2024 alone, **Paterson Poetry Month** featured 22 events across the city and drew approximately 2,000 attendees — activating venues from Hinchliffe Stadium and the Great Falls National Historical Park to the Paterson Free Public Library and City Hall.

With the support of the NJEDA A.R.T. Phase II grant and its partners, Word Seed aims to transform that momentum into a sustained, year-long initiative — one that reconnects Paterson residents with poetry, elevates local and visiting artists, and firmly repositions the city within New Jersey's — and the nation's — contemporary poetry landscape.

About Word Seed Inc.

Word Seed Inc. is a Paterson-based nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing poetry through performance, education, publication, and advocacy. Since 2018, Word Seed has created inclusive platforms for poets and audiences to engage with literature as a living, community-centered art form.

About Prototype 237

Prototype 237 is an artist-built and artist-run performance and creative production space located in Paterson, New Jersey. Housed in a historic industrial building, Prototype 237 serves as a hub for experimental performance, music, poetry, theater, and interdisciplinary arts.

About the Paterson Museum

The Paterson Museum preserves and interprets the history, culture, and innovation of Paterson, New Jersey. Located in the historic Rogers Locomotive and Machine Works complex, the museum celebrates the city's industrial, artistic, and literary legacy.

About New Jersey Community Development Corporation (NJCDC)

Founded in 1994, NJCDC is a Paterson-based nonprofit providing comprehensive programs in youth development, education, workforce training, housing, mental health, and community revitalization.

About CavanKerry Press

CavanKerry Press is an independent literary publisher based in Fort Lee, New Jersey, celebrating 26 years of publishing poetry and literary nonfiction, with more than 125 titles in print.

About the NJEDA A.R.T. Phase II Grant

A.R.T. – Phase II is a competitive grant program that will disburse \$15,000,000 in funding to address the impact of COVID-19 in 31 selected municipalities throughout the state. It is aimed at supporting the development and recovery of New Jersey's commercial corridors and invigorating community focused arts and cultural organizations. The program supports the creation of public space activation initiatives, such as place making projects, public art installations, and arts-based projects. **"The A.R.T. program delivers essential grant funding to local arts and cultural organizations for initiatives that boost foot traffic, support small business growth, and strengthen the economic resiliency of municipalities most impacted by the pandemic,"** said NJEDA CEO Tim Sullivan.

The Poetic License Project is supported by funding through the NJEDA's A.R.T. – Phase II Grant Program.