



# Griot21: Our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Story Keepers

***Training a new generation to capture the wisdom of the past and shape the future.***

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## Project Overview

**Griot21** is a multi-phase, youth-led digital storytelling initiative that transforms young people into modern-day *griots* - the revered West African keepers of history and memory. Through hands-on training in interviewing, recording, and content creation, students capture the life stories of elders in their families and communities.

What begins as a powerful intergenerational experience becomes a lasting archive of *lived cultural history*, blending personal legacy with collective memory and digital literacy.

This work begins with **Girl Scouts in Queens** and will expand through **local and national partnerships with Divine 9 youth auxiliaries**. In doing so, **Griot21 becomes a scalable model for cultural preservation, digital empowerment, and generational healing**.

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## Expanding Impact Model

The vision of Griot21 is its layered impact - from the personal to the global:

Layer	Focus	Impact
Level 1	Family Legacy	Reconnects families across generations and sparks meaningful conversations
Level 2	Community History	Documents local leaders, institutions, and change over time
Level 3	Cultural History	Preserves cultural identity, traditions, migration stories, and movements
Level 4	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Griots	Trains youth to become lifelong cultural archivists, digital storytellers or ethnic culture influencers

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## Phase One: Girl Scouts @ Allen Senior Center

**Pilot Site:** Allen Community Senior Center (Jamaica, Queens)

**Partner Organizations:**

- **Girl Scouts of Greater New York**

- **LinkNYC – Queens Gigabit Center**
- **Allen AME Church Network**
- **BlackFacts.com**

#### **Participants:**

- 4th–12th grade Girl Scouts (earning Bronze, Silver, or Gold Awards)
- 12–15 elders from the Allen Center, matched in pairs with scouts

#### **Activities:**

- Scouts meet with elders multiple times over 3 - 4 weeks
- Interviews span themes: childhood, education, migration, civil rights, career, community change
- Youth learn **interviewing, filming, and editing** skills
- Resulting content is edited into short, powerful life-story videos
- Videos may be shared via:
  - Queens Public Library archives
  - Queens Borough Hall
  - BlackFacts.com
  - Community screenings or exhibits

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## **Why It Matters: Social Media Meets Social Legacy**

In a culture dominated by selfies and viral trends, **Griot21 gives youth a deeper, more purposeful media experience.** Participants don't just consume content - they **create meaningful media** that:

- Develops **editing, scripting, and production skills**
- Strengthens **critical thinking and empathy**
- Builds **confidence** as storytellers and public historians
- Helps scouts produce digital portfolios they can use for college, scholarships, and careers

Through this process, they become **cultural stewards**, not just content consumers.

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## Phase Two: Local Divine 9 Youth Auxiliaries

Following the pilot, Griot21 will expand to **youth arms of local Chapters of Black sororities and fraternities**:

- Sigma Gamma Rho's *Rhoers*
- *Alpha Phi Alpha's Alpha Esquires*
- Delta Sigma Theta's *Delta GEMS*
- Omega Psi Phi's *LAMPLighters*
- Alpha Kappa Alpha's *ASCEND*
- *Kappa Alpha Psi's Kappa League*
- *Zeta Phi Beta's Archonettes*
- *Phi Beta Sigma's Sigma Betas*
- *Iota Phi Theta's Iota Youth Alliance*

Each chapter will document stories of their local alumni - preserving **Greek legacy and community impact**, while training their own next generation of storytellers.

Other community and civic action organizations with youth programs, like the NAACP, Urban League, National Action Network, 100 Black Men and Jack and Jill will also be invited to participate.

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## Phase Three: National Rollout

Griot21 will evolve into a **national model**, including:

- A **toolkit** for running intergenerational projects anywhere
- A growing **digital archive** of stories by geography, theme, and organization
- A **curriculum** in storytelling, video editing, and digital legacy building
- Integration with **libraries, museums, and historical societies**
- A presence at national conferences, HBCUs, and service orgs

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## Partnerships for a Lasting Future

Backed by **LinkNYC's Gigabit Centers** which provide access to high-speed internet, digital devices, and professional support at no cost, Griot21 interviewers will be able to conduct their interviews with only a smartphone, regardless of any limitations of their personal carrier plans.

**BlackFacts.com's** specialty of creating cutting-edge technology applications for historically silenced communities will be mobilized at full strength to leverage Artificial Intelligence, real-time translation and mobile technologies to make Griot21 a powerful demonstration of community-based technology excellence unlike anything ever done before.

And with fundraising, hosting and sponsorship from BlackFacts' non-profit arm, the **BlackFacts Educational Foundation**, Griot21 will become a part of history itself, while protecting and preserving stories across the African Diaspora for future generations.

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## Sharing Stories, Building Legacy

Through showcases, exhibits, digital archives, and social media, Griot21 will bring community stories to life - preserving the past while inspiring a new generation to carry it forward. These stories won't just be captured; they'll be seen, heard, and celebrated in ways like:

- Griot21 Website featuring interviews linked to historical articles
- Short-form edited video profiles of each elder
- Optional artifact photos and transcripts
- Searchable Digital archives on BlackFacts.com
- Public showcases and in-person events
- Scout-produced portfolios and highlight reels
- Scout-produced Social Media Pages