

Creating Social Change

An Interview with Natalie Tran, Executive Director, CAA Foundation

EDITORS' NOTE Natalie Tran serves as the Executive Director of the CAA Foundation at leading entertainment and sports agency Creative Artists Agency (CAA). Based in Los Angeles, Tran consults clients, executives and corporations on their philanthropic and pro-social initiatives. She manages the CAA Global Fellows program, dedicated to developing future generations of Agents/Executives and industry leaders. She is a founding member of FORWARD, a women's committee dedicated to



Natalie Tran

engaging, inspiring, and developing women at the agency, and helping to empower and connect women across the industry. Most recently, Tran led the formation of the Civic Alliance, a non-partisan group of leading companies working together to build a future where everyone can participate in shaping the country. In 2018, Tran co-founded I am a voter., a nonpartisan awareness campaign that aims to create a cultural shift around voting and civic engagement. Tran also serves on the Board of the ACLU of Southern California and the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF). She is a native of Los Angeles and is a graduate of the University of Redlands with a degree in business management, creative writing, and art history.

FOUNDATION BRIEF The CAA Foundation (caa.com/foundation) harnesses the power and reach of the entertainment industry to create positive social change by forging strategic partnerships, encouraging volunteerism, granting financial contributions, stimulating public awareness and providing in-kind donations. Since launching in 1995, the CAA Foundation has become a leader in the entertainment community on education, the environment, and health and social issues. Employee involvement is at the heart of the Foundation's mission. Over the years, CAA employees have volunteered in schools, helped communities rebuild following natural disasters, served on nonprofit boards, and donated generously to service organizations around the world.

Will you highlight the history of the CAA Foundation and how you define its purpose?

Founded in 1995, CAA was the first Hollywood agency to have a philanthropic arm and establish

a Foundation. Since then, we have been at the heart of our company, investing in our communities, serving our clients, and harnessing popular culture to create social change. Our company ethos is: "If we take good care of each other, good things happen." The CAA Foundation is that in action.

How broad is the CAA Foundation's focus and what are the key areas it supports?

As a Foundation we invest our efforts in the following:

- Public Education: we lead and provide support for initiatives that reimagine a more resilient and equitable public education system.

- Civic engagement: we work to strengthen our democracy by inspiring civic engagement and increasing voter turnout through strategic partnerships and coalition building.

- Climate: we harness our network of culture-makers to achieve maximum public awareness, provide opportunity for action and inspire a global network of climate activists.

- Crisis: we provide immediate support and amplify critical needs of organizations working in communities impacted by crisis.

We look to utilize our convening power to bring attention and solutions to these issues by mobilizing timely initiatives and partnerships. We also see a unique ability to be able to shift culture through narrative change. Our work in leading the Full Story Initiative is designed to generate more authentic and equitable storytelling in television and film.

We are so fortunate to represent clients that are passionate about many causes; our work in

service to them takes us across a wide range of critical issues. We work with our clients to create a social good strategy uniquely tailored to them.

CAA Foundation created the "Civic Alliance" program in partnership with Democracy Works. What is the vision for Civic Alliance and what has made the program effective at building such a strong, nonpartisan business coalition?

The Civic Alliance is America's premier nonpartisan coalition of businesses united by our commitment to our democracy, which we believe depends upon active participation in safe, accessible, and trusted elections. We are currently 1,250 company members strong and we are so proud of what we have been able to achieve together. Since launch in January 2020, we have been very intentional that this coalition is about building community – a community of do-gooders at some of the most recognizable and influential companies – who can use their platform to empower Americans to use their voice and vote. I am so inspired by the commitment of our members.

The 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer recently reported that business is the most trusted institution in our society today – ahead of nonprofit organizations, government and media. Of respondents in the U.S., 74 percent said that they trust their employer the most, making the relationship companies have with their employees unique and powerful. Many companies want to take action, they just might not be sure how. That's why we want to make sure that our members have the resources, tools and platforms to create a dynamic culture of corporate civic engagement.

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One of those tools I'm most excited about is the Corporate Civic Playbook we just published, which is a first-of-its-kind resource that provides companies with concrete examples of how to create a civic action plan. Our hope is that we can help companies level up and inspire new companies to join our efforts. You can check out our Playbook and much more at civicalliance.com. This is exciting work that has a ripple effect all throughout our country.

Voting rights is a major issue facing the country. How is the CAA Foundation addressing this issue and will you discuss the creation of “I am a voter.” to help increase voter registration in every state?

In 2018, I co-founded “I am a voter.” with CAA as the Founding Partner in this public facing campaign that aims to create a cultural shift around voting and civic engagement. Our mission is to make voter identity mainstream, aspirational and an integral component of how anyone identifies themselves. We want to inspire and excite this generation by engaging the brands and talent they love. We've been so fortunate to work with partners such as Urban Outfitters, the NBA, H&M, Bumble, Shopbop, Freeform, AMC Theaters and Ciara, the cast of Friends and Bridesmaids, Lizzo, Becky G and so many more. Each partner engages with us in unique and exciting ways such as making unique merchandise (Stuart Weitzman made their iconic 50/50 boot with the word VOTE spelled out in the back calf) to inspire their fans to vote. The Golden State Warriors launched a VOTER'S WIN campaign to compete with other NBA teams on who could register the most fans. I can't wait to see what creative ideas our partners come up with this year.

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How critical are metrics to track the impact of the CAA Foundation's programs?

It's very important and it's an area we are constantly trying to improve in. Our initiatives are so unique that each require a different set of metrics. One of my favorite things about the CAA Foundation is that we are often learning and building at the same time as we are activating and facilitating. This means we are very fluid, and we realize that sometimes the goal post needs to move further down the line, or we need to incorporate a different metric in real time.

We are lucky in that we are not tied to traditional funder metrics since some of the work we set out to do, such as changing and shifting culture, doesn't happen overnight. We are committed to this work for the long run.

How do you engage CAA's employees in the work of the CAA Foundation and how proud are you to see the involvement and commitment from CAA's workforce for the Foundation's efforts?

Our work is 100 percent not possible without the support of our colleagues. Their commitment to a more optimistic tomorrow is what drives our culture and actions. This commitment has enabled us to build out a robust employee engagement program which ranges from volunteer opportunities to Board service.

The CAA Task Force is led by our amazing assistants and staff across the globe who lead many of our community volunteer opportunities. We have partner schools, reading and mentor programs and a wide range of service days. We are also excited about our partnership

with Boardsource, as we hope to increase nonprofit Board opportunities for our Agents and Executives. We are intentional about tailoring these opportunities to our employee base who we know have many commitments but want to make a difference and have unique access.

Do you feel it is the responsibility of leading businesses today to be engaged in the communities they serve and to be a force for good in society?

Absolutely. We know that Gen Z expects companies to demonstrate their commitment to their values and they also want to know that their work is contributing to the overall betterment of our society. I feel that it is no longer an option for companies to be quiet about their values.

The Civic Alliance just released new data in our Corporate Civic Playbook that shows publicly traded companies that were active in civic engagement in the 2020 elections significantly outperformed the market. The Civic Alliance's analysis found these companies were more profitable and grew faster than the overall S&P 500. So yes, not only is engaging in the community the right thing to do, but it's also undeniably good for business.

However, I do feel that by now most companies are engaging in this work, but the question is how far are they willing to go? How much of their networks and platforms do they want to use and what message are they putting out there? How much influence do they really want to have?

There is so much opportunity for business to have a lasting impact and there's never been a more critical time for companies to become a force for good.

The CAA Foundation has made a major impact in addressing many societal needs. How important is it for you and your team to take moments to reflect and celebrate the wins?

Each year, we publish our annual Impact Report which gives us and our company the ability to reflect on all the good we have been able to achieve together. I am always in awe and am so inspired by the incredible work of the team. We are a small but mighty and ambitious team, and we move at such a rapid pace that truthfully, this question is a good reminder that we need to celebrate our incredible wins more often. ●