

Serendipity Arts Launches THE BRIJ Cultural Leaders Fellowship

India's first nine-month leadership programme for cultural practitioners and cross-sector professionals

Serendipity Arts announces the launch of THE BRIJ Cultural Leaders Fellowship, a capacity building initiative supported by the French Embassy in India. A nine-month leadership development fellowship for mid-career cultural practitioners and cross-sector professionals across India, the fellowship is built on a single, radical premise: that the most important thing a leader can develop is not a product, but a *question*.

Applications are now open until May 5, 2026. The fellowship will welcome its inaugural cohort beginning June 2026.

A different kind of leadership programme

Leadership development in India's cultural sector has historically been fragmented with short workshops, international opportunities accessible to few, and almost nothing designed for the specific realities of practitioners working in the Indian context. THE BRIJ Fellowship is designed to fill that gap.

Over nine months, a carefully selected cohort of fellows, drawn equally from cultural practice and from adjacent sectors including business, legal, technology, education and social enterprise - will pursue a structured process of intellectual inquiry. They will not be taught a curriculum. They will be supported in building one, shaped by their own practice, their questions, and their context.

The fellowship is organised around three phases

Phase I - Self & Context: Includes a six-day residential in Goa, also focussing on self-examination, cohort formation, and foundational dialogue. Who am I as a leader, and what draws me?

Phase II - Ecosystem & Region: Expert dialogues and fireside conversations along with peer exchange. What question am I pursuing, and what does it demand?

Phase III - Leadership & Futures: Includes three days at the Serendipity Arts Festival in December 2026, and the final report submitted in March 2027. How do I say what I have found, and where does it lead?

Fellows complete with a Research Inquiry Proposal - a written articulation of the inquiry they are pursuing, why it matters, and what they intend to do with it. Not a business plan. Not a project brief. A compass for the work ahead.

What fellows receive

THE BRIJ Cultural Leaders Fellowship is a significant investment in each fellow's development as it offers a thoughtfully structured journey combining mentorship, immersive residencies, expert-led engagements, and collaborative peer learning. All accepted fellows receive:

- **A senior mentor** – individually matched, for monthly one-to-one sessions across all nine months
- **A psychometric assessment** – accredited assessment with individual coaching and debrief
- **Six-day residential in Goa** – accommodation, all meals, and full programme costs
- **Three days at the Serendipity Arts Festival** – accommodation, meals, and full Festival accreditation
- **Weekly live sessions** – with industry leaders across all nine months
- **Expert-led fireside conversations** – with practitioners, thinkers, and sector leaders
- **Curated reading materials** – across all three phases of the programme
- **Peer Inquiry Circles** – Sustained peer group relationships across the nine months, with structured sessions to develop and pressure-test your inquiry question.
- **Alumni Network** – Lifelong membership of the BRIJ alumni community, with access to Serendipity Arts' networks, events, and future programming.

Over nine months, fellows are supported through personalised guidance, curated sessions with industry leaders, and access to rich resources and networks—ensuring a holistic experience that nurtures both individual inquiry and collective exchange.

Why THE BRIJ Cultural Leaders Fellowship

THE BRIJ Cultural Leaders Fellowship is delivered by Serendipity Arts, one of India's most significant contemporary arts organisations, home to the Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa, South Asia's largest multidisciplinary arts festivals. For over a decade, Serendipity Arts has been convening artists, institutions, and ideas across disciplines, geographies, and forms.

The fellowship has been designed in close conversation with an advisory committee of leaders drawn from Indian cultural life, education, and cross-sector practice, including **Seema Bansal, Paul Thompson, and Pramath Sinha***. Its curriculum framework draws on rigorous study of the world's leading cultural leadership fellowships, thus globally benchmarked and adapted specifically for the Indian context.

“THE BRIJ Cultural Leaders Fellowship emerges from a long-standing recognition that India's cultural sector needs sustained, context-specific leadership development. At Serendipity Arts, we have consistently engaged with practitioners across disciplines and geographies, and what has become clear is the need for spaces that privilege inquiry over instruction. This fellowship is designed to support individuals not in arriving at definitive answers, but in shaping the questions that will inform their practice and leadership over time. We see this as an investment in the intellectual and ethical foundations of the cultural ecosystem in India.” said **Smriti Rajgarhia, The Director of the Serendipity Arts & The Course Director of THE BRIJ Cultural Leaders Fellowship.**

Anchored in this strong institutional legacy and forward-looking vision, THE BRIJ is supported by the French Embassy, notably through a FEF grant allocated by the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, aimed at encouraging capacity building in the field of culture. More generally, France is supporting the development of the creative economy, as a strategic priority, mapping key players and platforms worldwide, such as Serendipity Arts.

On this occasion, **Grégor Trumel, Counsellor for Cooperation and Culture and Director of the French Institute in India**, reflects, *“In a context of significant growth of the cultural and creative industries - across the globe and especially in India -, this unique programme responds to important needs in terms of capacity-building and professionalisation. Investing in growing local talents is key for us. With its significant support to THE BRIJ, France is excited to be part of a platform that empowers a new generation of cultural leaders while fostering dialogue between French and Indian creatives. Announced on the occasion of the official visit of President Emmanuel Macron to India last February, alongside M. Sunil K. Munjal, the initiative will definitely pave the way for new cultural passeurs.”*

The Fellowship values the intellectual life of the cultural practitioner, and treats leadership not as a set of skills to be acquired but as a question to be pursued.

Who should apply

The Fellowship is open to mid-career professionals across two equally weighted streams:

Cultural practitioners: arts managers, producers, arts administrators, festival directors, cultural educators, artists, curators and practitioners working in performing arts, visual arts, heritage, film, literature, design, and related fields.

Cross-sector professionals: leaders from business, public policy, urban development, social enterprise, public health, technology, and philanthropy who are engaged with questions of culture, community, and creative life.

Eligibility Criteria

- A minimum of seven years of professional experience in your field
- A demonstrated practice or role with a clear connection to culture, communities, or creative life
- Intellectual curiosity and a genuine question about your work that you are ready to pursue
- Commitment to the full nine-month fellowship, including residencies and immersive sessions
- Indian national at the time of application

Key Dates

- Applications Open: Now
- Application Deadline: May 5, 2026
- Final Selections Announced: May 20, 2026

- Fellowship Begins: June 20, 2026

Notes to the Editor:

Overview:

About [Serendipity Arts](#):

Serendipity Arts is a not-for-profit foundation nurturing artistic practice, research, and cross-cultural dialogue across South Asia. We believe the arts have the power to foster empathy, curiosity, and meaningful connection, and everything we do is guided by that conviction.

Through grants, residencies, collaborative projects, and art writing initiatives, we support emerging and established artists working across disciplines, from visual arts and music to theatre, dance, craft, photography, and beyond. We are equally committed to education and sustainability in the arts, recognising that a thriving creative ecology depends on long-term investment in both people and practice.

Alongside our year-round programmes, we are proud to host the Serendipity Arts Festival in Panjim, Goa, South Asia's largest multidisciplinary arts festival. Held annually with free public access, the festival brings together artists, institutions, and audiences in a spirit of openness and shared discovery, celebrating the civic responsibility of supporting the arts.

About [Serendipity Arts Festival](#):

Serendipity Arts Festival is South Asia's largest multidisciplinary arts festival, held annually in Panjim, Goa, with free public access. Transforming over 300,000 square feet of iconic buildings and alternative spaces, the Festival spans visual arts, music, theatre, dance, culinary arts, craft, film, and live arts, creating vibrant platforms for artistic exchange and public engagement.

At the heart of the Festival is a belief that culture has the power to cultivate empathy, teach kindness, and build the foundations for a more progressive and inclusive society. We work to challenge received ideas about the relationship between art and viewer, city and citizen, stage and audience, fostering conversations that strengthen cultural ecosystems and spread impact across regions and generations.

The Festival and its leadership have received wide recognition for their contributions to culture and accessibility. Founder-Patron Sunil Kant Munjal was conferred the Chevalier de l'Ordre national du Mérite by the French Government in acknowledgment of his enduring commitment to the arts. The Festival itself has been recognised for its contribution to cultural life, having received the Cultural Impact Award at the Business Goa Lifestyle Awards 2025, Best Cultural Festival at the 8th Annual LCD Berlin Awards, and the Svayam Accessibility Award 2025 for its commitment to creating a truly inclusive cultural environment.

About [THE BRIJ](#):

Spread across an 8-acre land parcel in Delhi, THE BRIJ is Serendipity Arts' upcoming cultural center that will host multiple artistic projects and expressions, based on the principles of innovation, sustainability, accessibility, and inclusion.

The centre, currently under construction, will have a Museum, an Academy & Workshop, a Gallery, Library, a Stepwell Gallery, an Arena, Theatre and Black Box, and much more. The facility will also house a crafts centre and an artisanal village, where dying and fringe art & craft forms will be brought back to life, through research, practice, and incubation. The entire campus has been designed in a way that is 100 percent accessible to the differently abled.

About Smriti Rajgarhia:

Director of Serendipity Arts and the Serendipity Arts Festival, and Course Director of THE BRIJ Cultural Leaders Fellowship. Trained as an architect with a Master's in Design, she has led Serendipity Arts since its inception, shaping interdisciplinary programming and expanding access to the arts in India.

About THE BRIJ Cultural Leaders Fellowship Advisory Committee:

Seema Bansal: Vice-Chairperson of the Punjab Development Commission, where she is leading its establishment and driving the state's development agenda across sectors including economic growth, education, health, and public finance.

Paul Thompson: Museum professional and academic leader, former Vice Chancellor of the Royal College of Art, and currently Chair of the British Council. With extensive experience across leading global institutions, he also serves as an advisor to Serendipity Arts.

Dr. Pramath Raj Sinha: Leading figure in Indian higher education, Founder & Chairman of Ashoka University, and Founding Senior Partner at Jetri. He was also the Founding Dean of the Indian School of Business and continues to contribute to its Executive Board.

About [the French Institute in India/Embassy of France](#):

The French Institute in India (IFI) is the Education, Science and Culture service of the Embassy of France in India. It facilitates academic and scientific exchange between higher institutes of learning and research, enables student mobility, and promotes the French language, and artistic and cultural partnerships. Cooperation between India and France takes place through a number of sectors: Arts & Culture, Books & Ideas, French Language & Education, Study in France programme, Academic Partnerships, Science and Technology, as well as Innovation and Multimedia.

In 2026, we celebrate the India-France Year of Innovation which programming is designed to renew the narrative of the bilateral relationship, encouraging pioneer opportunities across various fields, including creative economy.