The nation is at a point of fracture. Our landscape of conversation is often fraught with fighting, and a rejection of listening. How can we approach this moment with compassion, innovation, and a willingness to sit with the tension of identities, if not through the power of writing and art? The importance of writers and artists at this time can not be overlooked for the role they play in facilitating healing. These are the origins of the project Find X, an anthology of essays from people around the country responding to the same twelve prompts, and a podcast series illuminating those stories.

Throughout history the written word has been a tool used in both dividing people and bringing them together. It is my goal with pursuing Find X to use the written word as a common place for people to find similarities between each other instead of solving for differences by infighting and further fracturing. How this will be achieved is through an anthology containing essays from people all around the country on the same twelve prompts in partnership with a twelve episode narrative podcast series where I go and visit authors in their home state. So far, I have been in communication with over fifty writing groups who are going to push out the list of twelve prompts to their members so that I can start to gather submissions for the book. In addition I have secured a partnership with the National Writing Project and will work with teachers all around the country helping to get the prompts into classrooms furthering a multi-generational collaboration. For the podcast portion of Find X I have pitched the idea of the show to LAist Studios, and am hopeful of collaboration. If this partnership does not come to fruition however, I have my own podcast platform which I intend to use for the publishing of the series. As far as finding authors to interview, I have secured connections to each state I plan to visit with the local writing group, and so have not yet chosen the individual to interview, but have places to lodge and participants in the project.

How the project will be facilitated—as I can not be in all fifty states at once—is through a website with the URL www.findxproject.com. On this website there is an explanation of the project, presentation of the twelve prompts, my goals and desired outcomes, a place to submit essays, and finally an interactive map so that people can see who has submitted essays and from where. (I encourage you to look at the website to see the map because it shows that there are already writers writing and interested in Find X!) The website will send all submissions to my email and I will hold them in Google Drive until the close submission date of April 21st 2023. Submissions will close on that date so then I can work through a manuscript before submitting it to Belt Publishing to see if they will take up the manuscript.

The publishing aspect of the project isn’t tied to a publisher, which leaves me ambiguity to choose—once the submissions have closed—what would be best for the work. Last year I received a $4,000 grant from The City of Seattle to work on an anthology titled All the Letters I Never Sent. I chose to self-publish that book and it worked very well to accomplish the goals of the project. Because of my previous work with anthologies I have confidence in my network and myself that I will be able to create an even stronger body of work with Find X.

Because of the time that publishing takes I am sure that the book will not be published by the end of the summer. However, the body of the project will be done. Here is what I can commit to completing within the timeline of the grant: The Manuscript will be finished and sent off to Belt Publishing for review. There will be a podcast series produced in narrative essay style with the authors of the essays and it will be published and produced either working with LAist Studios or it will be available on my pre-existing podcast platform Teen-y. There will be at least twelve episodes. Finally there will be a newsletter that will go out every two weeks to authors containing an essay from the project and updates on the publishing process and what is evolving next.

Regarding the podcast portion of the project:
After the manuscript is created—May 30th— I then plan on traveling to visit at least twelve of the authors who submitted essays and create a podcast series which will take the most vastly different stories and in the end try to uncover if there are any solutions to our fracture hidden in our humanness. These twelve authors will be selected from a list of authors who have chosen the option on the submission form that they are interested in participating in the podcast. I have chosen states that I plan to travel to based on where I have connected with writing groups and I know people are writing. I have not yet chosen the individuals, but for the purpose of outlining my budget I have selected states.

The podcast furthers the mission of the project by using the same prompts which hold the book together to create the foundation for the podcast. The prompts center on very human experiences and are open enough so that people can find their own way in. Because of the shared prompt, the goal is that the essays are in communication with each other on the page and blur points of fracturing, while preserving identity. This same goal is achieved with audio.

The very first prompt on the list is “Find X” which is the origin of the title, but it also works as a metaphor for finding similarity and not solving—or trying to fix others—for differences. Other prompts include (not in order): Describe Wonder, Take a commonly used phrase in your family or friendship group and analyze the values — or problematic elements or both — embedded in it, and Relate a brief interaction with a stranger which changed the way you think about the world in a small but meaningful way. These prompts will be used in the audio series as I will have each episode focus on a prompt so that there is a common ground of those who I am interviewing. The podcast will be set up so I am using a blend of work they submitted, and interview footage from my trip.

I am aware that the goal of the grant is to have the project finished by the end of the summer and by what I have just laid out, it is clear that one of the main aspects of the project will not be completed quite yet (publication). However, what the grant will be used for—publication costs, travel to meet authors, the website and other online platforms helping to connect people to the project—will be done. What will not be done is the publication of the book, but that does not mean that the work of the project will not be accessible to the public. Additionally, the grant will be used completely by the end of the summer, there will just be an extended excitement of the “final product”.

This project has been unfolding daily with new people submitting essays and new ideas for enriching the project coming in from people who are participating. I already see the goals of the project coming to fruition in communication that I have with writers and am ecstatic for what will come. Beyond the grant and beyond the book and podcast, I envision a zoom meeting for all the authors to come together and talk about their essays and connect. As the purpose is to create connections, I imagine that Find X will expand past the summer because of the strength of the people involved. I see this as a jumping off point for finding solutions to fracture, and I see it all starting with curiosity and words.