

**Creative Transformations: Arts, Culture and Public Housing Communities Roundtable
3/21/17**

WELCOME

Alison Fleminger and Baba Israel welcome the group to University Settlement Campos Plaza Community Center. The site's Cornerstone Director, Angel Sacarello, was a resident of the community and was part a theater company with Alison.

INTRODUCTIONS

What are ways that we're already working/ways we've seen arts and culture working in public housing communities? How have you seen arts and culture working effectively?

Baba Israel, University Settlement –SHARE! series is intergenerational and non-hierarchical. Our event partnership with Atlantic Terminal Tenants Association is a lesson of true collaboration and co-curation - artists and invested residents contributed meaningful response and recommendations to help inform the cultural plan.

Masoom Moitra, Hester Street Collaborative – Hester Street is working on a project in Gowanus to make connections between public housing residents and artists.

Lakai Worrell, Purelements: An Evolution in Dance - Based in East Brooklyn: Brownsville, East New York, Cyprus Hills. Offering arts education, pre-professional dance program for youth, and a professional dance company. Several programs and structures, including a partnership with the mayor. Dance school partnership with 15 schools, 130 students. *East New York In Motion* festival partners with ARTs East New York to represents cultures that exist in East Brooklyn.

Benjamin Solotaire, Office of Council Member Steve Levin – Background in theatrical design, have been involved with Public Works, Theater of the Oppressed and I manage the Participatory Budget process for D33. The District has 7 public housing communities. Gowanus is facing multiple planning process: CreateNYC, Department of City Planning, neighborhood rezoning.

Caron Atlas, Arts & Democracy and NOCD-NY – Through Arts & Democracy, involved in Participatory Budgeting with public housing residents. There's something about creating creative representations of project proposals in that moment that brings joy. At discussions with public housing residents, I'm struck by the programs that used to exist that no longer do.

Rico Washington, artist – An independent artist and writer. Projects, with creative partner Shino Yanagawa, meld oral histories and journalism. ***We the People: The Citizens of NYCA*** series counterbalances negative pejorative perceptions of public housing. Last year in Queensbridge, inspired by ***Nas: Time is Illmatic*** documentary, collaborated with teens to use lyrics to narrate through images.

Chris Hanway, Jacob A. Riis Settlement House – We are embedded within public housing: Queensbridge, Ravenswood, plus a bit of involvement in Astoria Houses. Our arts relationship is mostly through partnerships, limited by resources and restrictions. Partnered with MoMI for Saturday movie series, Joan Mitchell Foundation for 15 years of intergenerational visual arts, Groundswell for new mural. Community-based, place-based in the settlement house tradition.

Alison Fleminger, University Settlement – It's crucial that community based orgs have art as a tool for community engagement. We're building a scaffolding that is a visible progression at the city level. Our 18-26 year olds are demonstrating new leadership, despite a lack of arts in the educational system. Partnerships are essential: with BRIC, developing community arts council, activating at Ingersoll in Fort Greene. On LES, partnered with NYTW to form a young actress company (company as activists), tying into the East 4th Street/Fourth Arts Block (FAB) community.

Naomi Sturm, Staten Island Arts – Working with Park Hill African Market, a grassroots West African market, connected to several local social service and arts service organizations. Learned that this was the only grassroots, economically driven cultural market in NYC. A forum for empowerment and economic development, but also as a creative space (festivals, performance). Park Hill is an isolated community in an isolated borough, insular and lacking transport. Here, people can sell wares, watch grandchildren, and participate in arts and culture all in the space. Opportunity to elevate this as a citywide model.

Nicholas Bloom, NYIT – Involved in many editorials around public housing. History of public housing archive. In the book [*Affordable Housing in New York: The People, Places and Policies That Transformed a City*](#), I make the argument that public housing is more like other affordable housing traditions in the city than different. Exhibiting as part of ongoing partnership with an affordable housing agency in Harlem, storefront site adjacent public houses in Harlem.

Jessica Sucher, BRIC - Developing community arts council with University Settlement (Ingersoll) for the next 18 months. BRIC's community engagement work is focused on a small radius around BRIC House, intentionally to become part of the strong network of cultural and service orgs in the neighborhood. Community producers for TV, increasing access to low-cost or free classes, equipment, studios, in libraries, schools and after schools. Starting a new project with

Red Hook Initiative in Red Hook Houses, youth-led documentaries about growing up in public housing, teaching skills under a media lens.

Sarita Daftary-Steel, El Puente – Participation with Williamsburg Library and Spaceworks, Jonathan Williams Houses. Getting a sound studio through participatory budgeting. Cultural divide between Orthodox Jewish community and people of color can be an issue. Oral history project in East NY.

Tamara Greenfield, Building Healthy Communities, Mayor's Office of Strategic Partnerships and the Fund for Public Health – Focused on 12 neighborhoods that haven't seen an equitable distribution of resources. Spearheading PAC Play Streets, renegotiating to include teen cultural programs, with Groundswell, other arts groups, and anti-violence providers. Working with other agencies, including DFTA, DYCD. At Ingersoll, Mayor's Action Plan has done a small study on well being, commissioned by Pratt and Gehl Institute to see what design and safety obstacles and opportunities there are...having a workshop next week.

Emily Ahn Levy, Pratt Institute Urban Placemaking and Management program – Helping to facilitate the workshop (above), speaking with facilities managers, tenant association. In terms of engagement, the youth demographic has been missing, also the Chinese speaking community.

Tom Oesau, NOCD-NY – co-coordinating the Creative Transformations series, from our first roundtable through planning and implementation phase. Effective work has been exemplified through many partners through this process.

Claudie Mabry, Groundswell – Last year, facilitated a citywide approach, working in 5 NYCHA developments. We sat with TAs/tenant leaders, asked what's happening and how art can tell a story about the community that lives there. The program demonstrated engagement from different generations beyond the youth with whom we typically engage, including a lot of participation of seniors with youth. In a new partnership with Building Healthy Communities, we're looking to do a better job of measuring impact. Follow-up, evaluation, measuring what it's actually doing.

Ryan Gilliam, Downtown Art (DTA)– We've been part of the anti-displacement effort on the LES for a long time. Our new space has opened up new partnerships and collaborations. City Council candidate Carlina Rivera is a lifelong resident of public housing, brought us closer to Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES). Fernanda Espinoza is doing an oral history project, with a bilingual approach. A DTA dance resident is particularly looking to engage people in public housing, given our historic neighborhood connections. Also, Cooper Square Committee, with a historic commitment to affordable housing, is housed in the same space as FAB.

Elizabeth Hamby, Assistant Director of Public Housing and Health – It's my 8th day, so a lot of learning. I sit in the Center for Health Equity, with the NYC Department of Health, focused on moving toward root causes that drive health injustices in inequities, having to do with things like systemic racism and multiple forms of violence. Like at our ***What is Health*** conference,

thinking about new ways to talk about health.

Maritza Carmona, Friends of the High Line – In FHL’s Teen program, we hire teens as cultural producers and horticulturists in training. Many program participants are residents from public housing adjacent to the High Line. Continuation in education and training, partnering with Hudson Early Childhood Education Center, our dancers in residence Feng Dancers (from Fulton Houses), The Avenue (leveraging relationship to offer space). Come to join us for the first public program and June.

Catherine Green, ARTs East New York – Programs for social and economic change. Educational work, youth, displacement and gentrification, also connecting on a national level with Oakland, CA, New Orleans, LA and Portland, OR. We offer Arts and Music Academy, gallery space, public art installations in areas of need (areas that have faced violence or need economic drivers), and ReNew Lots (the first year we specifically went to NYCHA residents to give them first opportunities to occupy the container spaces). Currently looking into public housing community events as part of Summer Saturdaze series. Have also partnered with Groundswell.

Nadia ElokDAH, DCLA – As the project lead on CreateNYC, DCLA is heavily in our listening phase. It’s important to be listening to work on the ground. As an agency, we’re removed from the every day. At a CreateNYC workshop held at MoMI with Astoria residents, a public housing resident wasn’t aware of Flux Factory. They made an immediate connection. It’s enthusing to see communities connecting.

ADDITIONAL INTRODUCTION REMARKS

Some groups weren’t able to attend today that have been involved in our process: Casita Maria and MoCADA. Those relationships are continuing.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS ABOUT EVERYONE’S WORK

Is there a central space where all of this exchange sits?

One of the goals of this project is to start documenting and finding opportunities for people to collaborate and share. One thing has emerged consistently in the cultural planning engagement process is that people want access to information about what’s going on.

There’s a lot of wisdom and knowledge. And that informs policy and ways to advance in multiple realms: public space, health, safety, murals, marketplaces, economic development, individually and systemically, inter-generationally, and new generations guided by what existed before.

Framing break-out conversations:

How do we make programs and relationships sustainable? There are great community partnerships, but there should also be a structure for people within public housing to create

their own work and be recognized.

Maybe plug into NYCHA's Office of Resident Economic Empowerment & Sustainability (REES), focused on creative entrepreneurship, building economic empowerment. They did a survey to figure out what they're doing. It might be interesting to look at an art/cultural enterprise partnership. Connecting creative talent to a program that can be supported.

They now have youth councils to create youth leadership, counterbalancing resident associations, which tend to be older.

In cataloguing, there's a question of legibility. REES is a place-based model. Coordination happens within zones, smaller geographies that makes the information a bit more digestible. In making stuff accessible, there's a question of scale.

Have an eye toward recommendations and solutions, but also identify themes that are challenging. Highlight ways that things fall apart or are challenged.

Recognize a living NYCHA and that the reality of the federal administration is going to impact us.

As a group, we have to get louder about no cuts. And we have to ramp up our efforts throughout the country. We need to be present beyond NYC.

There's still a lot of small town public housing.

At the neighborhood level, how have people worked together to make change, like through resource/knowledge exchanges?

In Park Hill, Napela (Liberian women's group) and United States Sierra Leonean Association (USSLA) have partnered with The Other Sign Theater, an educational theater with young women and they do it trans-nationally. The director started working with Adama Fassah of Napela.

LIC Arts Open usually coincides with Jacob A. Riis Settlement House's Spring Arts Festival. There already is amazing work at Queensbridge, so we just went ahead and became a site for the tour. Over the years, people started showing up. Along the LIC waterfront, through dance festival, Gantry, Hunter's Point, Queensbridge, we can bring the two parts of LIC/Astoria together. We've been trying.

BREAK OUT DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Funding and Opportunities

Challenges:

- Tenuous relationships with NYCHA
- Perception that arts aren't core to what you want to get funded. Example of Settlement Houses.
- Competition for resources – hard for arts and culture when such a need for essential services.
- Getting Money for permits
- Different languages for grant writing
- Ability for non-arts groups to access DCLA
- Private Foundations – Perception that community-based groups don't work with quality artists or do right by them. Don't pay enough/rate justifications, bidding out.
- Private Funders – changing areas of focus. Sporadic initiative funding that isn't sustained. Initiative fatigue.
- Small groups can't apply to DCLA if not a 501c3.
- Lack of multi-year support – have to keep applying hard for volunteer group.
- Way to have funding that you can anticipate and plan around.
- For Settlement Houses (University Settlement):
 - Program integration is encouraged but budget integration is not.
 - As community organization, it's hard to get arts and culture funding. They're not seen as arts orgs.
 - Don't have skill sets to write arts proposals and relationships to get funded.
- For Arts Councils (Staten Island Arts):
 - Can be intermediary between small orgs and NYCHA. But capacity issue – it's hard to sustain.

Recommendations:

1. Funding for scaffolding and infrastructure. Connecting and Network role. Funding for ongoing trust building/relationship building work. Without it, work can't succeed with constant starting and stopping.
2. Create multi-year funding opportunity for small orgs, even if it's a small amount. It enables groups to work overtime and plan.
3. Funders should understand importance of co-designed programs involving community and cultural orgs. Sustainable partnerships, not just project oriented. Incentivize partnerships.
4. Make a better case about arts and culture role in work happening in public housing regarding social impact.
5. Coordination in foundations and agencies – Ability to have a more holistic ask, so able to

include arts in other areas. Identify funders making connections—internally—and have them be our allies – Funder briefing.

6. Corporate funders? Value to them? Neighborhood corporate funding programs? Way to access real estate funders.
7. City Agencies – reduce/coordinate around huge amount of paperwork. Cut back time people have to do the creative work. DYCD, DIFTA, DCLA all ask for info, not coordinated. Ability to have one account for different city funders.
8. More flexibility on how we can use the funds. For example, using DYCD contract for event that goes beyond just kids in contract.
9. Reduce time it takes to vet partnerships, vendors, co-locator agreements.
10. Address barriers to apply to DCLA. Administrative, eligibility (501c3, number of years as a non-profit), time it takes to apply. Streamline process – Have a short form for small grants.
11. For grant programs, involving community-based orgs (ie. CASA) criteria that rewards working with artists from those communities or with deep connections to communities and aesthetic choices from those communities.
12. Representation of community based orgs on panels (panelists looking down on community arts)
13. Community context is important in the consideration in funding decisions. Like in folk arts, need to make explicit.
14. Regularly scheduled group for arts issues/funding across city agencies.

Strategies:

- Partners as fiscal conduits who can better access funds.
- Collaborative fundraising and action to access larger grants. For example, Cultural Agenda Fund and United Neighborhood Houses.
- City agency or other intermediary as conduit for arts projects for large public funding program. Providing flexibility and access. Outside arts example: NYSCA/ REDC. Also happens with private money.
- Help with repurposing money.

Effective Collaborations

Horizontal collaboration

- Triangular relationship: non-profits/CBOs, artists <> Residents <> NYCHA
- Partnerships with like organizations
- Orgs with residents
- Artists with residents
- Artists with orgs

- Recognition and support for partnerships
- Assess and understand ecosystem of neighborhoods. Not competing, minimize RA fatigue.

- Support depth, history of work
- Value of community based intermediaries
- Beleaguered gatekeepers (at NYCHA, RAs, schools)
- Need for civic infrastructure. Carries history, has process for participation, distributed leadership.
- NYCHA decisionmaking structure is bewildering. Tension between local and citywide control.
- How do we define artist/culture?

Cross Sector Collaboration

- Quadrangular relationship: Non-profits/CBOs/artists <> Residents <> NYCHA <> Other agencies
- City agencies with each other
- City agencies with orgs and artists
- “Healthy villages”, health lens (hospital, CBOs, arts orgs, food access)
- Mayoral initiatives
- Schools
- Criminal justice lens
- Knowing where resources and space support might exist in other agencies/initiatives
- Mary Miss flowchart on how artists could work with agencies
- Artist in residence at every agency. Form Artist Justice League!
- Need people to facilitate relationships

Recommendations

- Make cross agency artist in residence: Health/NYCHA, NYPD/NYCHA
- Form an Artist Justice League from artist in residence in city agencies
- Have a permitting process for use of public space (events programs)
- Look at Gardening program as a model
- DCLA should partner to lead/support/build out NYCHA arts programs
- REES regions – cultural coordinator? Fit with “connected” platform of NextGen
- Supporting capacity for collaboration
- Better understand what’s already there and figure out how to support it better. Economic empowerment, training, convening/networking.
- Connect resident leadership to more opportunities to realize their visions/priorities. i.e. Participatory Budgeting for non-capital needs.
- Mapping neighborhoods/regional resource partners/arts
- Recognize cultural centers as asset in other initiatives
- Solicit cultural ambassador(s)/docent/advocate models for each development

Capacity Building

- This topic has a direct connection to Building Community Capacity initiative, where communities bid, then they hire an organizer over a year process. Still a colonizing

approach. So decentralize it. Structure so that it enables the objectives.

- Pay organizers that have their finger on the pulse locally/are experts, rather than depending on the DCLA to do external research. It builds trust and contextualizes goals for residents and agencies. (i.e. Gowanus has many planning processes going on at once, which is confusing and fatiguing for residents, plus agencies aren't connected in their own processes). It's two-way capacity building: for neighborhoods and agencies.
- The city is bad at scaling and should rely on networks to inform context.
- Artists and makers come in to train people, but they have their own capacity responsibilities, which should be built on knowledge from the neighborhood.
- Sustainability of organizing through decentralized, ongoing and comprehensive approach. If independently of agencies, it can connect local efforts (NextGen, DCLA, DCP, DOT, jobs/economic development) and make the case for arts and cultural connecting sectors together. It aligns competing interests and amplifies relevance for residents to plug into the network.
- Organizers function as a neighborhood liaison/ambassador. From Bed Stuy workshop, recommended a "cultural council." It can connect jobs, seniors, the community board, work on the role of arts and culture in BIDs, incentivizing businesses that incorporate local work (local arts economy).
- Question of sustained capacity/staff. Institutional example of [Philadelphia Assembled](#).

Artist and Activist Support

Challenge/Recommendations:

- Staff at organizing and advocacy groups are stretched thin/capacity
 - Support staff on site through arts and culture funding streams
 - Hire project managers for new arts based collaborations
 - Find ways of showing the importance of arts and culture
 - Come up with a starter level model. Showing how programs rooted in arts and culture are beneficial. Nuts and bolts programmatic breakdown and data about impact.
 - Use that model as a way to support how arts can be used to help with trauma
 - With that "starter level model", include a "starter level mentor"
- How to create a structure that supports artists and activists within public housing rather than replicating a cycle of oppression
 - Connect arts programs to other housing, mental health, childcare components of settlement houses
 - Create funding that looks a bit different. More for artists coming out of public housing
 - (Where does this live?) Build infrastructure to support artists and activists like: people with skills, resources, on-site staff, community organizers, entry-level programming.

Access to Space/Addressing Barriers

- Create culturally relevant arts/cultural centers beyond community centers.
- Make all open space in public housing communities open and accessible.
- Involve residents in planning for space and programs from the very beginning.
- Lower barriers to public use of public spaces. Easier permitting, lower fees.
- Schools have space, but with barriers.
- Co-op spaces for artists/funding for unused spaces.
- Permitting process is a pain.
- Streets and plazas operated by BIDs are not focused on arts.
- NYCHA resident permitting for public space use. NYCHA open space is often not available. Empty/open unused space needs to be available.
- What is space?
- Renovation of space including focus on the arts.
- Connect space to Building Community Capacity (DCP with DCLA)

