

Cultural Plan Focus Group: Community Anchors

2/10/2017

City Lore Gallery, 56 E. 1st Street, NY, NY 10003

City Lore, Inc.

What type of engagement was this?

Focus Group/ Discussion

How many people attended the event? (Overall)

1-15

Who were the attendees?

NYC Residents, Foreign-born / Immigrant Community, Artists and culture bearers (e.g. visual artists, musicians, poets, dancers, performers, etc.), Creative workers and makers (e.g. crafts people, weavers, carpenters, jewelry designers, etc.), Arts Administrators, City of New York Employees, Educators / Teachers / Teaching Artists, Business Community (e.g. small business owners, merchants associations, BIDs, etc.), Cultural Funders, Social Entrepreneurs

Please provide some demographic details about the attendees.

Our discussion section was comprised of adults ranging in age from mid-20s to early 70s, and included individuals of Colombian, Haitian, Trinidadian, Puerto Rican, Jewish, Irish, Brazilian, and other heritages. 5 of the participants were women. Incomes ranged. Many were traditional culture bearers or advocates.

Briefly describe any other activities, strategies or materials that you used to gather input.

We played videos that City Lore created for our 2016 People's Hall of Fame Awards, which highlighted the work of several individuals and organizations present at and included in the focus group discussion

What issues did you touch upon in your discussions?

Equity (The rights of all people everywhere to develop their practice and traditions), Access (Distribution of and participation in cultural activities throughout the city), Social & economic impact (The role of arts and culture in an equitable economy and healthy communities), Affordability (Live, work and presentation space for artists), Education (Increase arts education in public schools and ensure that curriculum is culturally relevant and diverse), Citywide coordination (Arts and culture across City agencies), Neighborhood character (Prevent displacement of culture and communities through planning and community development), Folk and Traditional Arts incubators that fall between the cracks of the issues listed above

From the issues above, what did the group prioritize? Please describe.

Affordability, equity, and access to resources

Synthesis of Event

The event took place over the course of roughly two hours, and included a roundtable conversation about the importance of community anchors like small businesses, social clubs, and religious institutions to community health and vibrancy. We learned that many of the city's community anchors operate as hybrid commercial/non-profit entities, and are not able to rely on grant funding, because the application, reporting, and back office support requirements are simply too onerous and take valuable, limited resources away from the organization's core work.

From your overview, what were the key recommendations from your discussion that can inform the cultural plan? Please describe.

- Access to Resources

1. Offer more General Operating Support for administration and operational incidentals that are not covered by project grants, or increase amount of funding that can be applied to administrative costs
2. Align city's budget cycles, contract negotiation and registration, and funding distribution time-frames with real project timelines
3. Create a position in each borough, perhaps situated in a service organization, that mentors and helps community anchors and small organizations negotiate the funding world (ie. how to deal with matching funds requirements, how to deal with Grants Gateway, how to write reports, how to create work samples)
4. Establish partnerships with CUNY/SUNY/NYU etc to offer paid internships through DCLA to help provide back-office support for small organizations
5. Incentivize organizations with space who successfully apply for capital improvement grants to allow smaller organizations to use their equipment for free for a number of hours per week/month
6. Create a pooled resources agency for support and administrative help (like ArtsPool <http://artspool.co/> but city-funded)
7. Create a position to help commercial entities apply for 501 c3 status so they can become hybrid organizations

- Space for Rehearsal

1. Establish grant program to incentivize institutions/organizations/churches/businesses/office/housing complexes (NYCHA? Private developers?) with space to offer free rehearsal time
2. Establish a partnership with the Department of Education to be able to offer rehearsal space when school is out
3. Perhaps related to the "affordable units" required in de Blasio's Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning for housing, create something similar for community space and permits, so as to prevent privatization of public space (or something like this so gentrification doesn't force the demise of steel pan, the Mariachi Academy, etc, or Gran Bwa in Prospect Park at the hands of the Prospect Park Alliance, for example)

- Visibility

1. Increase city's budget and support for marketing and promotion of ethnic media outlets
2. Incentivize mainstream media to write about cultural offerings in outer boroughs
3. Create joint mentorship programs for larger institutions and smaller organizations so help increase visibility (for funders if not for public and specific communities) and increase capacity moving forward
4. Incentivize geographically or culturally similar arts groups to cross-promote
5. Increase CASA allocated funding so that smaller groups can slowly and manageably develop relationships with and visibility to DCLA

-Ability to Thrive in the City's Cultural Landscape

1. Establish a Folk and Traditional Arts panel at DCLA
2. Generate incentive for Folk and Traditional Arts groups to apply to NYSCA, BAC, DCLA by offering micro-grant or \$25/hr to first-time grantees
3. Give DCLA some say in the use of city-owned land
4. Eliminate the blind bidding system for city-owned land
5. Community anchors should keep their independence on the type of aesthetic orientation they want to offer to the public. This could be supported by committee of local artists.
6. Create a position in each borough, perhaps situated in a service organization, that helps small organizations translate their vision/program into language that funders are seeking [Folk and Traditional Arts organizations see their program as a ritual, but funders see it as a performance]. DCLA could create RFP for organizations to apply for a development director type of person for each borough, just to help small organizations negotiate the grant world. Perhaps this person would need experience/knowledge of Folk and Traditional Arts worlds
7. Offer grant applications in multiple languages, or provide for translators to be reimbursed for their time speaking with and transcribing interviews with applicants whose first language is not English
8. Complete a comparative study of which organizations get funding through DCLA and which get funding through NYSCA,

- Affordable Private Space

1. Create Cultural Landmark designation that leads to a limited number of sites eligible for commercial rent control to protect small business located in diverse communities, with some tax exemptions for landlords who rent their spaces to community anchors. Community anchors will be scored to measure their impact on their communities, and recognize their financial needs. To evaluate the impact of the venue, an independent organization of local artists can apply a simple list of criteria: a. we can measure the impact just to ask how many artistic performances happen per week b. how many days a week they offer space for musical rehearsals c. how many times per week do they do video or audio documentation d. how many days a week the venue offers artistic workshops e. does the venue donate or rent the space for artistic events or other non-profit f. how long has the establishment existed
2. Advocate for the creation of specifically local commercial and residential rent control boards, specifically located in diverse communities

3. Advocate for a better purchasing power of salaries, particularly on diverse districts. Our businesses doesn't depend on tax exemptions, what we need is good purchasing power of the people in our local stores.
4. Regulate the number of chain stores in diverse districts – Local taquerias not Taco Bells
5. Democratize credits for real small businesses – don't force them to compete for loans with entities that only pretend to be small businesses
6. Redirect grants used to support ballet and opera venues to cover the cost of daily live music performance expenses, such as video and audio presentation, sound engineers, musicians fees, and rent of the stage, that will support small business' cost of operations.
7. Lower the minimum ask for capital grants from DCLA
8. Eliminate DCLA requirement of having previously received funding for programming to be able to apply for capital grants