



## **Veteran Artists Focus Group**

Date: April 5, 2017; 1:00-2:30pm

Location: NYC Department of Cultural Affairs; 31 Chambers Street, Second Fl, Rm 201

Facilitators: Shirley Levy, Diya Vij; Note taker: Nadia Elokdah

**The focus of this conversation is primarily the needs of veteran artists and veterans at cultural organizations, institutions.**

**We are asking, how can DCLA (and the City as a whole) better support veterans who are artists or are working in the arts and cultural fields?**

- Looking at VetsThriveNYC and how the Commissioner speaks about the arts, there is concern about complete integration of arts for veterans is only for mental health.
  - This is not to say that arts for mental health is not important, it is. But, we want to preserve arts for arts sake.
- Demand for outcome based proposals for arts groups, shifts focus away from quality arts practice (presumes art is for mental health, etc. not for art)
- We are an arts organization, and we are run by artists – so our primary lens is through building community, building trust, and the outcomes are arts focused and about opportunities for expression.
  - **The arts are a safe form in which to build community and arts practices.**

## **AFFORDABILITY & SPACE: NEED: SPACE!**

- **Underutilized spaces** (former Mitchell-Lama Housing) – is there a way to **better use these spaces and have DCLA, DVS, HPD to join together and invest in creating Veteran-Arts-Community Space?**
  - Like St. Ann's Warehouse (RFP to develop cultural space)
  - PS 122 Community Center RFP looking for cultural tenants
  - Is there political will to better utilize spaces for veterans arts use?  
It's important to have a space where many different groups can convene together.
  - Do not underestimate the power of an RFP on the public consciousness! DCLA can influence change in this space.
- We have difficulty finding consistent and affordable space in which to hold our program (off-Broadway shows); to have resources for paying teaching artists and an on-going, open door space to hold this program

- Can the City offer space for many groups to coordinate?  
Can/Should be flexible for multi-use, and low cost for artists groups to share.
- Space in Brooklyn another person can share, through Bailey's Café (building collective).
- Themes: holding your own, gloryism, returning home (recovery)

### **Building Collective / Community & Communication**

- **Recommendation** for DCLA to become an aggregator or convener, a space where people can come to connect (digitally, physically)
  - A means to communicate, but also a space in which to work, collaborate, connect, some PLACE provided by City
  - A partnership, incentivized by DCLA, with the CIG to access space (something like the NYSCA Subsidized Arts Space grants)
  - Veteran Arts is growing: theater, writing, visual arts, spoken word. Within the veteran space, we know each other, but we don't necessarily have mechanisms for collaborating or working together
  - Within Veteran Artists / Arts Programs there are many subgroups that have their own identity within the diversity of veterans:
    - Women
    - Black veterans
    - Senior vets
    - Trauma
    - Just returning home
  - Importance of Veteran-only space and also integration within other arts and cultural: **BOTH!**
- **ACCESS & INCLUSION:** Concentration of Veterans in Rockaway? YES.
  - It's important to have a space where many different groups can convene together.
  - Central, on-going rehearsal space in Manhattan
  - Performance spaces, venues can be anywhere – central or remote
- **EQUITY:** how do we compete?
  - Being at the stage and capacity level necessary to compete on City bids, RFPs, etc. within the Veteran Arts communities is far off because of the kind of support and time we've had access to in our organizations' history.
  - **Release special RFPs for orgs/programs with smaller budgets.**
  - **Make a priority statement about supporting Veteran Artists and offer funding streams that prioritize the lower-budget orgs in this cultural space.**

**HEALTH OF THE FIELD:** Through the cultural plan, we are trying to determine who within the cultural field who have capacity to run, manage spaces? Who doesn't?

- **Recommendation:** Initiate a Capacity Building initiative for smaller cultural organizations (arts/cultural consortium) within Veteran Arts to build toward operating a Veteran Arts Cultural Institution.
- IAVA & Wounded Warrior – neither organization has interest in the arts or incubating veteran arts spaces. They don't see the value of this yet.
  - **UT Austin, Houston, LA NPF, Jasper County Iowa VA, Camp Hamilton - 29 Palms**
  - **What are some best practices we can learn from other cities?**
  - Unless veterans are exposed to USO shows, vets are not exposed to the arts while in service. The Veteran Arts space is growing, but only after the fact. Cities are only starting to pick up on this now, it's low tech and not well resourced.
  - The stories being told are ALWAYS mental health driven (this only furthers stigmatization of veterans – i.e. PAIR residency with DVS)
- **Recommendation:** Writing, Acting, Dance, Music, Graphic Novels + Visual Arts sectors within Veteran Arts – help us build capacity as a consortium to operate, manage a NYC-based Veteran Arts Space
  - **DCLA to intentionally and explicitly include veteran artists as a population to work with, convene**
  - We are working toward being the place where veterans coming out of the service flock toward. A place needs to exist where vets can go.
  - Lincoln Center, BAM have veteran coordinators – there are opportunities for outreach and engagement
  - Aquilla Theater gets CDF funding and hire veteran actors.
  - Great portion of veterans are coming to retirement age, veteran seniors population growing
  - NYC Veterans Alliance share job opportunities for MTA, etc. never in the arts
  - **Recommendation:** We need veteran artists who have professional training Central Casting – jobs for veterans; BFT – jobs in creative fields – DCLA to be an advocate and convener for veteran artists getting employment in the arts.

**CITYWIDE COORDINATION:**

**Recommendations:**

1. DCLA partnering with other agencies to support veterans who want careers in the arts (DVS, MOME, MTA)
  - a. Restart internship programs: i.e.



- During the Bloomberg Administration – Veteran Internship program with MOME (film/tv)
  - Finding employment for returning veterans, many agencies discourage arts or cultural non-profit paths, they prioritize employment in “more stable” professions such as banks, etc.
    - b.
  - Blue Star Grant Funding – relatively new, requires membership with TCG; private funding from MetLife, administered by NEA(?)
  - Kim Jones – visual artist, is this a connection point to help facilitate the creation of Veteran Arts Consortium