



Lower Manhattan Cultural Council

Individual Artist Feedback on Create NYC: Preview of Public Priorities

May 25, 2017

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OVERVIEW

The following feedback on the Create NYC preview of public priorities was gathered by Lower Manhattan Cultural Council on May 25, 2017 in a 2-hour meeting attended by 24 artists who represent a cross section of artistic disciplines and participation in LMCC's programs –artist residencies, presenting, grantmaking, and professional development.

Artists were asked to prepare for the meeting by reading the Create NYC preview of public priorities document in full, while considering which recommendations would be most consequential for individual artists and why. They were asked to provide feedback that represented not just their personal concerns, but also the needs of “Individual Artists” as a demographic in NYC.

Attendees split into six discussion groups, of 3-5 people. Three of the groups discussed the recommendations connected to: Equity; Social & Economic Impact; Affordability; and Citywide Coordination. The other three groups discussed the proposals for Arts, Culture and Science Education; Health of the Cultural Sector; Arts & Culture in Public Space and Neighborhood Character. The entire discussion period lasted 40 minutes, with approximately 10 minutes devoted to each issue. Each group then reported back to the room on their group's priorities.

In addition to drafting written notes in collaboration with their groups, all artists in the room were asked to use a “Personal Notes Form” to note instances where their thoughts on an issue were not represented in the group reports.

Recurring themes (sometimes across issues) include:

- Less bureaucracy and paperwork for artists working with City agencies and applying for DCLA funding
- Paid liaisons to connect artists with City agencies, rehearsal/work/presentation spaces, affordable housing, and affordable healthcare.
- Long-term support (5-10 years) in the form of funding and space to allow artists to grow creatively and create more a vibrant/healthier cultural sector –both in their local communities and for the City as a whole.
- Advocating for the importance of the arts via K-12 education programs, arts-savvy local journalism, and public education initiatives/programs.
- Supporting and advocating for standard teaching artist rates of \$50 or more per hour.
- Employment of and creation of more jobs for artists –as opposed to grants and contract opportunities. Models referenced include the WPA (Works Progress Administration).
- Referring to the People's Cultural Plan www.peoplesculturalplan.org
- Increased *economic* diversity.
- Increased representation of people of color.
- Increased involvement of artists in planning and administration of City arts programs/initiatives.
- Supporting local/hyper-local cultural orgs that are already doing good work.
- Enlisting local cultural organizations that are already doing good work to help distribute funds to artists in their communities.
- Importance of affordable rehearsal time/space for producing quality performances

SUMMARY of MEETING NOTES BY ISSUE

ISSUE: EQUITY

GROUP NOTES:

Group A Priorities:

- *Create a more equitable distribution of funding:*
 - Support individual artist who are from or work with diverse communities. Consider the implications of artists *working with* diverse marginalized communities vs. individual artists *within* these communities.
 - Need services to support new and prospective grantees:
 - Grant writing help
 - Decentralize the process – solicit individuals personally
 - Introduce non-traditional application methods such as interviews

Group B Priorities:

- *Ensure that all New Yorkers have access to affordable arts:*
 - Free access to art museums, arts, culture & science programs for NYC residents
 - Bring the arts *to people* & make more art public
- *Support arts, culture, and science institutions as safe spaces for all New Yorkers:*
 - Safe spaces for immigrants are very important – support our immigrant residents

Group C Priorities:

- *Ensure that all New Yorkers have access to affordable arts*
- *Create a more equitable distribution of funding*
 - Distribution of funding for individuals is heavily skewed towards visual artists – not enough artists from other disciplines.
 - Not enough representation of New Yorkers within their communities – not many native New Yorkers
- *Increase diversity in staff and leadership of arts organizations and the DCLA*

ADDITIONAL INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS:

- Hiring artists to help execute the proposal review process will ensure that quality and originality is part of all proposals
- Enlist organizations that are already in underserved communities to distribute their community's arts funding. For example, *Save Our Streets Crown Heights* or *Churches United* in Williamsburg.
- Ensure economic diversity in addition to ethnic and ability diversity.
- Diversity as defined here does not include women. It should.
- True community engagement in support comes from dispersing funding hyper-locally so that work can be made within communities
- Grants: Streamline processes, shorten waiting periods, and award a larger number of grants.

ISSUE: SOCIAL & ECONOMIC IMPACT

GROUP NOTES:

Group A Priorities:

- *Support the growth and development of the arts field to provide New Yorkers with quality jobs:*
 - The \$130 billion economic impact [of the arts on City income] is not felt by the artists who contribute to it. For example 73% of artists have a second job.
 - Consider tax and income implications of grants. One-off grants can affect taxation as well as income eligibility for healthcare or other forms of assistance, which can be problematic for artists.
 - Recognize the extent to which artists are often also working as administrators to support other artists. Provide more general operating support for administration.

Group B Priorities:

- *Support the growth and development of the arts field to provide New Yorkers with quality jobs:*
 - Support actual artist to make art, ie employ artists. For example, Mexico City has a program that provides 3 years of financial support to artists in exchange for 40 hours of workshops.

Group C Priorities:

- *Support the growth and development of the arts field to provide New Yorkers with quality jobs, especially:*
 - Support wages for cultural workers/artists that allow them to thrive
 - Employment and professional development of New Yorkers from diverse communities
 - Support salaries in non-profits and cultural orgs

ADDITIONAL INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS:

- Support CUNY Cultural Corps' post-degree job placement program. Job placement at arts organizations provides financial security, networking opportunities, and a leg up on acquiring administrative skills. Job placement in the private sector is also helpful –particularly health and wellness institutions for performing artists
- Promotion: International promotion of theaters is great as well as citywide promotion of local arts organizations. It fosters a wider audience and a sense of importance of cultural events. Without this, artists' work feels invisible.
- Disaster preparation and response: Albeit tragic, disaster is galvanizing. Coordinating artists to respond in those times fosters real connection with communities and gives true purpose to our creative practices. Artists are adept at response, solutions, and healing from trauma. Give us something real to do to impact our communities in times of need.
- Artists are uniquely positioned to communicate with people in communities about resilience and environmental impact. Definitely work towards more support for this i.e. a paid, elected Artist Liaison in each community.
- These proposals do not support individuals who are self-employed / working artists. Individual artists need economic support just as much as institutions, non-profits, and arts education. Artists don't want to always have to work in other fields. We want to earn income from our art.

- I strongly believe that there must be an emphasis placed on education/training people of color (African-American, Central American, Mexicans, Asians, etc.) to be audio engineers, lighting techs, etc.

ISSUE: AFFORDABILITY

GROUP NOTES:

Group A Priorities:

- *Increase access to long-term affordable workspace:*
 - Consolidate a database of municipally owned spaces for artists, cultural workers and organizations
 - Increase studio workspace access from small time frames (1-12 months) to long term (3-5 years).
 - Longer term would positively impact the output and careers of artists
 - Longer term would better support development of relationships between artist and the neighborhoods in which they work
 - Give developers/property owners tax breaks for providing art spaces. And make it for all institutions, not just a limited few.
 - Give tax breaks to developers/property owners for collaborating with and providing space for individual artists
- *Improve access to existing and newly created affordable housing for artists*
 - Artists tend to have income documented via 1099 forms. These are often not accepted by affordable housing.
- *Support long-term sustainability for artists, cultural workers, organizations:*
 - Support individuals who combine resources and/or find space for multiple artists
 - Make it easier for individual artists to access support structures currently only available to non-profits. For example, Artspool.

Group B Priorities:

- *Increase access to long-term affordable workspace:*
 - Approach this as a long term investment that should benefit artists over a period of 5, 10, or 20 years as opposed to simply addressing an immediate, short term need. i.e create infrastructure.
 - City liaison between vacant buildings and individual artists for studio and exhibition spaces
 - Access to alternative spaces. For example, vacant schools (including seasons when schools are empty, like summer or other vacations), empty lots, as well as other spaces in the public and private sector.
- *More affordable housing*

Group C Priorities:

- Affordable housing – opportunities to increase development, access, etc.
- Preserve and develop long-term affordable workspaces
- Increase access to work, performance, and exhibition spaces in existing City owned sites. Provide opportunities for cultural organizations to create workspaces in city owned properties.
- Investigate how to allow non-traditional income documentation review in affordable housing applications form artists/other freelance workers

ADDITIONAL INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS:

- Increase opportunities for artists to live and work long-term in a neighborhood. For example, require real estate developers reserve multiple live workspaces for artists in each development. Artists can apply to live there at a reduced rate – perhaps in exchange for doing creative projects.
- Support artist who have studio space in their home neighborhoods. It would help artists be even more invested in their own communities.

- Designate buildings in the Housing Lottery as artist housing. I have participated in the lottery for five years and have seen probably only one such building in that time.
- Affordable lawyers or legal advice to help artists fight gentrification related housing battles. Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts is not an option for this.
- Also see the People's Cultural Plan is a great reference. Everything in there is important.
- One concern I think we did not discuss is art and artists being used by the City and developers (for example Two Trees), as tools for gentrification i.e. being manipulated into producing negative effects on neighborhoods and communities.
- NYC's art world has lost its diversity. It has become Blue Chip and institutionalized. Give back some power to the artists by obtaining City buildings for exhibition spaces i.e. "Art Fairs." These are currently dominated by commercial galleries and art dealers. Instead try offering to all artists to create large scale affordable art events –for example, ones where there is an open call/no jury and spaces can be rented for an affordable price.)

ISSUE: CITYWIDE COORDINATION

GROUP NOTES:

Group A Priorities:

- Empower artists to navigate city government rules, regulations, and permitting
- Use LMCC as a model for more localized support infrastructures – especially its initiatives as a mediator between artists and municipal/community bodies
- Introduce and empower overarching orgs to supply legal frameworks for artists (permits, insurance)
- Matchmaking: Improve communication between City planners, developers, and communities, so that art projects better fit the community/space.
- Improve ratio and appropriateness of representation within arts-focused community boards
- Create a paid, *elected* representative in each community whose job is specifically to be a liaison between with artists. For example, Brooklyn's District 36 recently created a position similar to this, but the person in it was appointed, not elected.

Group B Priorities:

- Put information about how to access the programs and services described under “citywide coordination” on a website in a publicly accessible simple format.
- Artist list serves for healthcare, housing, and studio space
- Artist mailing list on the subject of insurance
- This section of should be updated to address multiculturalism

Group C Priorities:

- Support culture across agencies:
 - Partner with City agencies to ensure needs of cultural community during the development and planning process
 - Help artist negotiate City government

ADDITIONAL INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS:

- City agencies need to be staffed by artists and those who work in the arts.

ISSUE: ARTS, CULTURE, & SCIENCE EDUCATION

GROUP NOTES:

Group D Priorities:

- *Strengthen and promote high quality, diverse and sequential arts, culture, science education for every child*
 - Teach multiple canons – address the diversity of cultures through art and arts and education
 - More arts courses – an arts version of STEM --STEAM
- *Increase access to inclusive, relevant, culturally responsive arts programming for students, older adults, families:*
 - Have more community focused programming
 - Field trips – enrichment of students and the underserved, breakthrough and into museums / galleries
 - Intersections – encourage the artist as teacher
 - Reach out to older artists to serve/work as mentors (e.g. jazz musicians)

Group E Priorities:

- *Increase access to inclusive, relevant, culturally responsive arts programming for students, older adults, families:*
 - Professional development for artists
 - Arts during + afterschool are very important – especially for children of working parents. These trips are often their only arts exposure
 - Older artists are an under utilized resource. They could be utilized more with kids and as mentors for working artists.
 - There is lots of crossover between the field of Education and the field of Social Practice Art
 - Arts that integrate physical fitness are useful in anger management – especially dance
 - Mindfulness and wellness partnerships with teaching artists
 - Provides opportunities to employ artists as educators
 - Needs to be more formalized (standardized wages @ \$50 per hour or more, consistent work schedule, benefits, etc.): For some artists this is/can be their primary source of income, but right now it's unstable income and there are no benefits (retirement, healthcare, etc.).
 - Private funding would be great
 - More affordable trips – for example, free buses

Group F Priorities:

- *Strengthen and promote high quality, diverse and sequential arts, culture, science education for every child*
- *Increase access to inclusive, relevant, culturally responsive arts programming for students, older adults, families:*
 - Yes to hands on progress – museum visits
 - Promote the arts in school, afterschool, and in community locations
 - Utilize more older or retired adults as art educators
 - Mix students from different schools. Pair art and science departments then assign them to explain each
 - Certification for arts education gallery artist jobs

ADDITIONAL INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS:

- Don't force artists to teach science using art! Let science be science, and art be art! Connect children/students to hands-on experiences for both science and art.

ISSUE: HEALTH OF THE CULTURAL SECTOR

GROUP NOTES:

Group D

- Support expanded employment opportunities for local artists:
 - Make more direct grants to individual artists – see Peoples Cultural Plan online, \$100M in the budget for this
 - Support more emerging artists not just big name ones.
 - Make support to artists continued / ongoing / long-term as opposed to annual
 - Equity: Access to services – particularly funding for underserved communities
- Support interdependence and collaboration
 - Small business support to artists. Think outside of the 501c3 model.

Group E

- Support expanded employment opportunities for local artists:
 - Help individual artists partner directly with organizations – eliminate the middleman orgs
 - Give incentives to organizations to directly hire or fund individual artists
 - Broker connections between non-profit and for-profit institutions
 - Give tax incentives to private sector businesses for hiring artists
 - Create city or state minimum rate for teaching artists: \$50 per hour or more
- Resource arts organizations for success:
 - Streamline grant making process is extremely important

Group F

- Support expanded employment opportunities for local artists:
 - Employment vs. Grant operation support: Increase formal employment, similar to the WPA / New Deal era. Create ongoing formal employment so artists can plan long-term and improve their overall impact.
- Resource arts organizations for success:
 - Streamline the grant making process

ADDITIONAL INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS:

- Project based grants with expected outcomes inhibit experimentation! I can't say this enough!!! Fostering a healthier cultural sector requires the creation of long term artist grants that do not require production or project completion. Although seemingly counter-intuitive, these obligation-free grants will actually foster a more vibrant cultural sector by giving artists support/freedom to experiment.
- Artists need affordable health insurance. For example, help more providers do programs like the one at Brooklyn's Woodhull Hospital where artists provide creative services in exchange for healthcare services.
- We need a City-based Artist-Liaison who connects artists with commercial galleries.
- Create a program/initiative that helps people with wealth/ disposable income to invest in emerging and mid-career artists by buying their art
- Mid career artists need multi-year support! It is very difficult for individual artists to keep making work when they hit the "mid-career" point. Most funding is for emerging or highly established artists. After years of work and service to the public, mid-career artists need larger grants (\$10,000 or more per year) for multiple years as well as access to long-term space (5-10 years). This support

should not need to be reapplied for every year. Too many mid-career artists are being pushed to reinvent the wheel by reapplying for support and space each year. This wastes valuable time and resources. Instead the City should invest in its mid-career artists by providing 5-10 year awards of space and funding so that these artists can really grow their work.

- Support individual artists directly. Shift away from funding projects. Instead fund artists to develop their own body of work.
- Do not create more Artist Guides. Just make a searchable website where cultural orgs can create profiles and post info about how/why they want to contribute to the cultural landscape. For example, a coffee shop can make a profile and then post to say that they want to exhibit work by K-12 art students. See Idealist.org for a model. It is site where non-profits create profiles and then, as new opportunities arise, they post info about job openings, volunteer opportunities, etc.
- Less bureaucracy
- Simpler forms
- Long term support/funding/workspace

ISSUE: ARTS & CULTURE IN PUBLIC SPACE

GROUP NOTES:

Group D Priorities:

- Access clarified – create a culture map for art and arts
- Facilitate working relationship between public space owners/managers and artists and help artists navigate those relationships
- Expand the locations of project opportunities
- Percent for Art –what does increasing support for that mean? Would private sector be putting more money into that program? Or does it mean more money would go to outer boroughs? Support construction outside of Manhattan.
- Activate vacant plazas with art and engagement - spider web network
- Make private plazas more open and accessible for the arts, not just public plazas

Group E Priorities:

- Increasing opportunities for artists to work in public space is very important
- Allow artists to do more than just create objects in public spaces, but lead workshops and art education there.
- Create regular programming in plazas – for example regularly scheduled performances / presentations of creative work to encourage people to come out, with events where food and beverages are provided free or are available for sale. i.e. Similar to Summerstage's local park concerts, but for a wider range of creative disciplines and over the full year.
- Mentorship for artists looking to break into public art
- Sustain and expand PAIR (we had never heard of this but support it)
- Support the creation of public spaces for art education, plus a budget for programming so that they do not lay idle
- Offer incentives for in all development projects on private sites
- *Don't use artists to gentrify*

Group F Priorities:

- Avoid structures that are top heavy with administration. Remove red tape. Create public space arts programming that is run and curated by artists.
- Open competitions where artists who are selected this year must help recruit next years artists, sit on the panels, etc.
- Neighborhood-oriented public art money that is equitable

ADDITIONAL INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS:

- For effective performances in public space, certain resources like safe flooring need to be provided. This is especially true for dance. Long uninterrupted periods of rehearsal-space time is also critical.

ISSUE: NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

GROUP NOTES:

Group D Priorities:

- One starting point can be identifying local cultural icons and mavens and involving them in the project to raise awareness.
- There is a lack of awareness. We need to raise it, for example by increasing arts journalism –specifically journalism that is intelligent, smart, and based in the community being covered.
- Find out what the people want by pairing artists with communities
- Expand the Lower Manhattan bubble
- Look to both the old and the young
- Make use of under used cultural spaces

Group E Priorities:

- Map existing cultural assets in neighborhoods. Create interesting wayfinding mechanisms to make cultural assets more visible, for young people on smart phones for example, to help people discover small, hidden, under-the-radar cultural activities in their neighborhood
- Ask developers to support existing cultural assets and cultural preservation in the City
- City Commissioners supporting local culture is a Quality of Life issue
- Access to CRA money in local communities is an issue. For example, LMCC and other orgs that serve artists and arts groups should help artists connect with neighborhood businesses and CRA to fund cultural projects
- Right now, leaders of local cultural org don't necessarily live in the same area. Can artists and arts orgs meet annually with City Commissioners to share what's working in their communities and make recommendations?

Group F Priorities:

- Stop doing activities that just gather data. We have seen these kinds of data gathering projects done multiple times since the 1970's, but we have not seen tangible changes result from them. We need to see tangible outcomes this time.
- Do not create more Artist Guides. Just make a searchable website where cultural orgs can create profiles and post info about how/why they want to contribute to the cultural landscape. For example, a coffee shop can make a profile and then post to say that they want to exhibit work by K-12 art students. See Idealist.org for a model. It is site where non-profits create profiles and then, as new opportunities arise, they post info about job openings, volunteer opportunities, etc.

ADDITIONAL INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS:

(None)

ADDENDUM: Prewritten Feedback

The following comments were developed prior to the meeting by one participating artist. After the meeting, the artist requested we submit them as part of the individual notes section of the meeting summary.

ABOUT EQUITY SECTION

- I commend the City for detailing multiple lines of work to further equity in the field--I am saddened that equity-work and anti-racist language has not been fully integrated to ALL sections of the Cultural Plan. Why is that?
- Is there a plan to intentionally decrease funding of large arts organizations in order to support smaller arts organizations of color, the way it's been done in other cities like Seattle?
- While affirmative and inclusive policies are recommended, is there a way to tackle:
 - Employment of artists through casting, curatorial practices that are informed by anti-racist principles, as ACRE suggests?
 - Increase funding, wages, and artist pay for Individual Artists as The Field suggests?
 - Tackle the discrepancy between non-discriminatory language against national origin in large non-profits, whose HR departments do not hire immigrants due to their immigration status?
 - Promote diverse arts leaders rather than funding employment of people of color working back-stage, in low-paying administrative positions/fellowships which still renders POC invisible in arts organizations stages/leadership positions?
 - What is the pipeline structure for POC towards leadership positions?

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT/ARTS, CULTURE & SCIENCE EDUCATION

- What does it mean to "support wages for cultural workers and artists that allow them to thrive in New York City?" Is this taking into consideration collective action by unions, such as Equity, for #FairWage on stage? Can unions like Actors' Equity be aligned with the NYC Department of Labor?
- Are there specific actions being taken to address the dire financial needs of specific art fields, such as Playwriting, in which it is a studied FACT that playwrights cannot make a living from the field and need public subsidy? See: Outrageous Fortune by Todd London.
- While the theater sector's health needs to be addressed through audience development and the promotion of Broadway, where are we addressing:
 - The CRISIS OF ARTS JOURNALISM and the loss of audiences due to the shrinking coverage of the arts?
 - How do we address the need for MEDIA COVERAGE examining racial bias?
 - How do we tackle the media's preference for theater taking place in the Theater Subdistrict/Broadway and dwindling coverage of work downtown and in Queens, Brooklyn, Bronx, and Staten Island? This is affecting the entire theater arts ecology of NYC at all levels.

HEALTH OF THE CULTURAL SECTOR

- Why is the support of individual artists considered only through collaboration with partner organizations, and not as part of the grant programming of the Dept. of Cultural Affairs?
- Will direct funding for Individual Artists be provided by the DCLA at an annual \$100M budget level, as recommended by the People's Cultural Plan?
- Many individual artists and small/fiscally-sponsored companies and organizations are small businesses which cannot afford to become non-profits (501(c)3). These are usually run by POC, queer or immigrant artists like myself. Can we receive additional support by other agencies such as the Office of Small Businesses?

CITYWIDE COORDINATION

- Will the city hire Artists to implement its new Cultural Plan and facilitate inter-agency collaborations?
- Will the Department of Cultural Affairs observe its own recommendations to the arts sector and how can it be held accountable to its own new standards?
- How will the Cultural Plan become a functional document and what is the proposed infrastructure towards enforcing the plan?
- How will the plan be reassessed once it's put into action, and why isn't this delineated as part of the plan itself?