

**CARIBBEAN ARTS THINK TANK**



# The Introduction



## EVENT OBJECTIVE

The Caribbean Arts Think Tank was an inaugural conversation to ensure that the voices of Caribbean Artists and priorities as Creators, help to inform and shape the New York City Cultural Plan, now being developed by the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs.

Invitation to join the dialogue was programmed around talks about considerations to practice the art of cultural traditions, equitably. Because Caribbean culture is not germane to New York there are needs specific to this group, and that of the communities serviced.

## EVENT GOALS

- Spread awareness of CreateNYC New York Culture Plan within the Caribbean-American community citywide.
- Convey an effective message that galvanizes the Creative community to act
- Have a collaborative initiative with discussions specific to Caribbean Artist & Arts Organizations
- Learn about arts and cultural priorities, and challenges, that limit the Caribbean Artist/Arts Organization participation in mainstream activities across platforms
- Mobilize, facilitate and drive momentum for the works of the artist and cultural practitioner

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## COMMUNITY VALUE

CULTURE IS COMMUNITY ASSET! In East Flatbush and Caribbean-American neighborhoods across New York City, the enthusiasm is good.



Existing however, is lack of optimism and a bit of anxiety, regarding a 'Cultural Moment' that may not include Caribbean Artist and if it does, marginally. The greatest concerns are, this "shift" might = expendability.

Change do not always happen by osmosis. There are REAL ISSUES driving the thoughts that worry the Caribbean Creative Community, even within the maturity of the work. The Think Tank was specifically put together as a moment that brings Caribbean Creators into one room to amplify voices, individually and collectively. It lend ears to hear concerns, needs and



desires - Met the artists where they are, and talked about best practices, relative to their particular work of arts and programs in the humanities.

Interest in leveraging cultural work as a reason that promotes "Community Value" is at top of the mind for many. To ensure optimal success as Arts Practitioners, Caribbean Artists and Caribbean Arts Advocates must be present at the table, participating in the conversations around funding, programs creation and development as well as implementation.



The convening had approximately fifty Artists who huddled in art genre groups after Edwin Torres, Deputy Commissioner, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs addressed and explained what is CreateNYC A Cultural Plan For All New Yorkers. There was qualitative discourse, a Table Manager and Scribe assigned to each group. Report back with compressed notes of conversations at each table was shared with exuberance.



*Social objectives of Arts and Culture generate positive attitudes of value. While CreateNYC will offer exciting opportunities that aid cultural life, Caribbean-American Artists want to know, will this Cultural Plan be "equitable" for them? What are the*

values behind the findings? How accessible will it be to them? What is the definition of affordability, especially linked to health of works and how will it be scaled? With these issues on the table, Policy Makers must now look at their ingredients in the plan and see what will be done to improve the well-being of the Caribbean Artist Community and the Caribbean-American Community by extension. The trepidations and cautions voiced out loud are within reason. Caribbean Artists want to know this movement supports and advances them too.

The takeaway all participants agreed on is, the number one concern of need for space to create/be creative. This is vital. Having a dedicated space provides consistency, efficiency and effectiveness of works. Designated space additionally, allows a place where resources are shared, organizational training takes place, solid sustainable partnerships with public and private are cultivated, nurtured and maintained, and community residents become stakeholders. This Speak Out provided active encouragement for the Artists upgrade in furtherance of Caribbean Arts.



*Represented were Performers, Fine & Visual Artists, Photographers, Cinematographers, Arts & Culture Historians, Writers and Resource Providers in addition to the CreateNYC Team. This very popular and common thought about need for space to create/be creative, develop, nurture and sustainability has been voiced by Creative Community Builder, Maxine Hamilton-Alexander, a Visual Artist and the producer of the Think Tank consistently. Her advocacy for Caribbean Creators is understated. The fundamental argument is, The Arts improve poor, struggling and disadvantaged communities. "Our input is one of the keys to the CreateNYC Cultural Plan"*



A Public Engagement  
**SPEAK OUT**





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PASSION AT ALL TABLES



# WE HAVE CHALLENGES & WE HAVE SOLUTIONS

## **Challenges**

- Funding
- Designated Space
- Organizational Leadership
- Community Support
- Capacity Building Enhancement
- Funding Models
- Strategic Planning
- Technology Support
- Supplies

## **Solutions**

- Inclusion and access
- Promote and encourage consistent interaction in public spaces and places
- Increase and expand civic participation through cultural expressions
- Engage and include "youth" within the community

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# **THE CARIBBEAN ARTS THINK TANK**

A CreateNYC Community Event

Produced & Sponsored by Blue Mango LLC

## **Co-Sponsors**

*CreateNYC*

*NYC Department of Cultural Affairs*

*Honorable Eric L. Adams, President of the Borough of Brooklyn*

*Senator Jessie Hamilton III*

*Brooklyn Public Library*

*Hester Street Collaborative*

*Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts*

## **Other Generous Contributors**

*Brooklyn Arts Council (BAC)*

*Humanities New York*

*Parkhill Planning + Development*

*Alliance Resident Theaters New York*

*Bric Arts*

*Materials For The Arts*

*Whatz Up New York*

## **Presenting Partners**

*Event Strategies For Success*

*The Caribbean Cultural Theatre*

*Something Positive Inc*

*Donation Courtesy of Tower Isles Patties*

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**CARIBBEAN ARTS THINK TANK SERIES**

**CARNIVAL  
ARTS**

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Blue Mango LLC Presentation

Greetings,

Happy Friday! Just wanted to say thanks for coming out last night. I was delighted to have you join the conversation. See encapsulated takeaway from our dialogue. Looking forward to see you next month when The Caribbean Cultural Theatre leads the discussion building upon where we left off last night.

Issues Area

### PRIORITIES

Affordability For Artist: The needs of artists to be able to live, work and present their work

Equity: The rights of all to develop their cultural arts and traditions

Education: Increase arts and culture education particularly in public schools, during and out of school time with relevance to diversity

Other concerns around access and inclusion: Distribution of and participating in cultural activities throughout the city

From Rhea 'Legislative mandate at city and state level that can transform the way how Cultural Diversity is approached.

SPACE TO PRESENT .. reoccurring sentiment

Additionally, here is a list of resources I am sharing inline with the mission to strengthen our work.

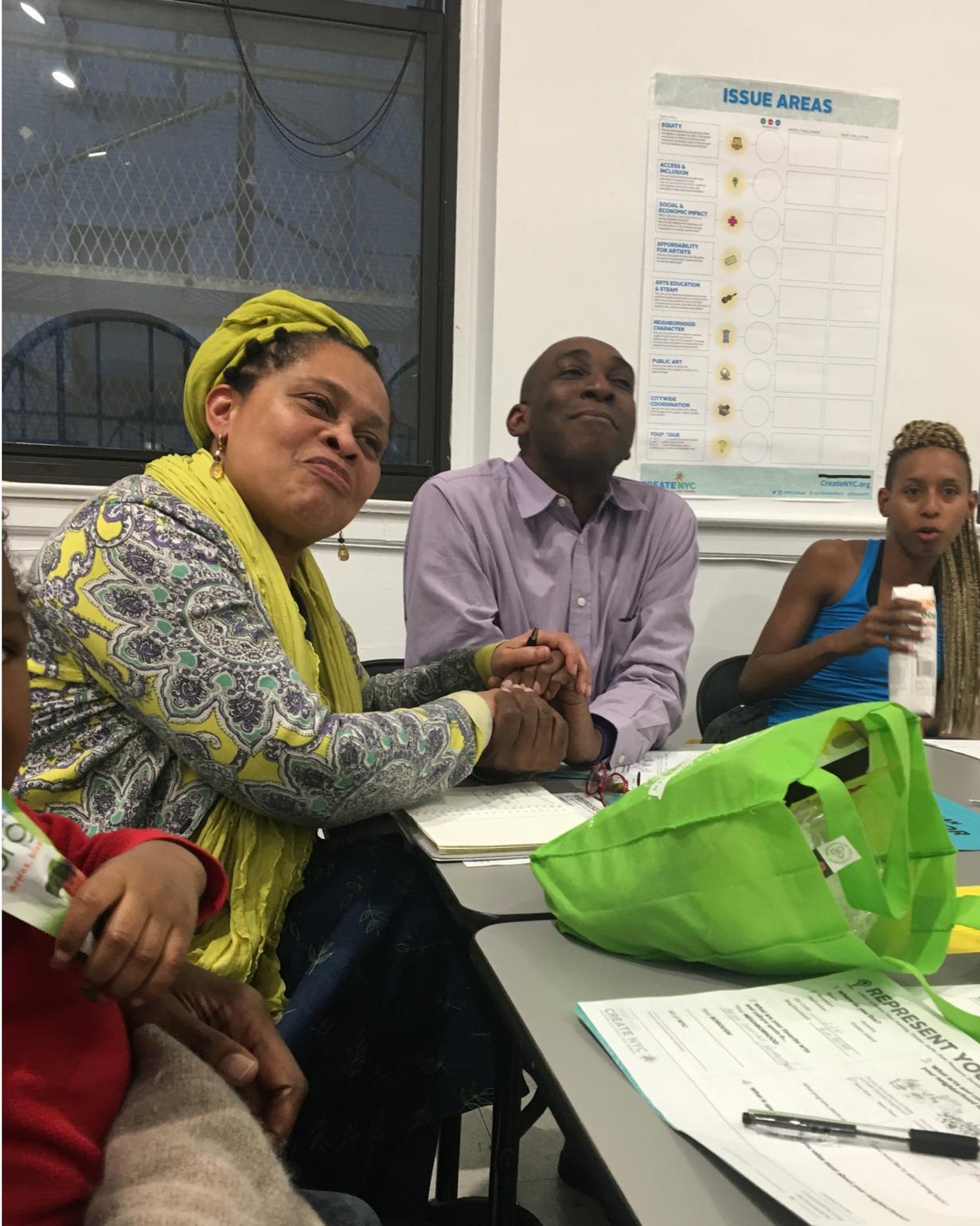
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- Wage Calculator will help you decide what to charge organizations based on their operating budget.
- Contract Construction Website will walk you through how to build a contract, step by step.
- Limited Use Contract Sample is a good example of all the elements of a contract
- Tips for Getting Paid
- Non-Payment Checklist:
- Volunteers Lawyers for the Arts provides free consultations for artists
- Freelance Isn't Free Act: going into effect on May 15 will offer new protections for freelance workers  
Independent Workers

Again... Thank you for coming. Have an amazing weekend.

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Caribbean Arts Think Tank  
Brooklyn Public Library Central Branch  
2/26/17

## GENERAL ARTISTS TABLE

Writers, Musicians and other artists

### *Running through our creative canvas cards:*

Joan – community center, central location for all people to commune and share  
Baba - From Bed-Stuy. A space for people to interpret their indigenous culture.  
Unknown - Culinary historian. Making history relevant so we know where we're going,  
Tracey – artists in classrooms, especially in terms of Black history, pre-history of slavery  
Connor – foster public conversations.  
Claudette – telling of African history from a Caribbean Diaspora perspective  
Unknown – gardening and farming integrated with art  
Unknown – research library that focuses on African history. A physical space.  
Hassan – more programs for jazz/education . What it means in the past and now.  
Unknown – diverse afterschool programs for youth

## Values in Community

- Enthusiasm is good, but what's bad is enthusiasm/attention on cultural moment: materialism. The purpose of Caribbean arts was education, but has shifted to entertainment. Expendible.
- What are the values behind the funding we're asking for? Arts as substance.
- Historic culture is no longer perceived to be a priority in mainstream existence. Re-education of our people and culture. We see an eagerness in people (and children) to bring arts and cultural diversity into our environment.
- In East Flatbush, the community is engaged, but not enough focus on the arts. We need to reconnect arts and the community for children. There are so many life priorities, there is a disconnect with adults. We have many jobs, how do we do what's "extra"?

## Education

- After school curriculum/education budget to capture traditional values behind curriculum. Community-based. But it's core curriculum, then arts in supplementary role. Education companies like Pearson and the industrial complex have influence. "We need to have [and generate] a text book for that." We have to teach to the test. So it becomes arts VERSUS education. No room for critical thinking.
- If you can't quantify art, how do you assess it? There are arguments for the value of arts and education in the classroom. Metrics as an argument- here is the evidence. **(impact argument)**
- How can we acquire a more organic interface? Opportunities through summer programming. More resources in afterschool programs.

- Administrators are planning the curriculum and teachers just have to hop in and react, without knowledge about how they're planning. Teaching artists and historians need to be involved in that planning from the ground floor. Artists function as sub-contractors, but must be in full relationship where you're building how it works.
- Besides the curriculum of a particular program, organizations have to be in constant relationship with children, like a family dynamic. A holistic approach.

***“Capacity Building” as an Anglo/Western Construct***

- Before we talk about capacity building, what's the result that motivates it? Looking at the end to figure out the beginning. We're dealing with a stereotypical, mainstreamed definition of capacity building.
- Who doesn't know what music does? It lowers our blood pressure. Classical music is being pumped into science labs in New Jersey schools. It's accepted as a western history of violins compared to an African tradition of drumming. Percussion is seen as less because the standards is based in the Western mainstream.
- Miseducation of the Negro was intentional. Don't see recognition of historic African modes of education prior to Western definitions. Our children hear and they respond, but they don't know WHY! References Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences. But we're constrained by specialization.
- Taking on structures that aren't malleable. What is the language?

**Space**

- Need a space to create/be creative and broaden our funding mode, a clearing house where resources are shared in the community, hub for organizational training, developing leadership structure. Space/place is associated with investment and act as channels for fundraising.

**PERFORMING ARTISTS TABLE**

- Present at table:  
Michael from Something Positive  
Sean from Something Positive  
Counsel General of Barbados Debra Hunt Fox  
Jade guest of the American University of the West Indies  
Nadia Feet of Rhythms  
Stephanie Cunningham African Americans Museum and of Ratta  
Carol Victor - Artist  
E. Wayne McDonald. Artists in residence
- A spirited conversation around the space needed to create and to be creative and the importance of support at all levels.
- Much of what we do is self-produced and resources are stretched but we make it happen. We need strong leadership and capacity building is also paramount. We also discussed the need to consider broader funding models. So in addition to our individual

programs we must move the needle in the direction of greater resources and collaboration.

- Must know more about the funding that exists: DCA , Brooklyn Arts Council, NYSCA  
Also discussed the CIG. Where do the large non-profit organizations belong? Hence the creation of the CEG, Cultural Equity Group created by Dr. Vega.
- Most importantly, we need additional:  
Leadership  
Organizational structure  
A School for the artists  
Costumes  
Transportation

## **VISUAL ARTISTS TABLE**

### **Space**

- Spaceworks – affordable space, but not many know about this.
- Work spaces are currently outrageous in size and price
- Affordability for non-working artists
- Art materials and living take up a lot of space – you need at least 20 x 20 ft to be able to practice
- Lack of access to or awareness about public funds
- Resources to find out about projects – access to information
- Lack of awareness of programs like MTA Arts, MFTA etc.

### **Education**

- Structured learning and development and arts in education- necessary for the a child's education and should be as mandatory as Math.
- Important point- Why is there no art in schools? More art teachers. It's in the DOE blueprint. Why is it not integral to curriculum? Grading for art?
- Support for after school programs.
- Visiting lectures- Artists go to public school and talk about art as a career. Artists need to be incentivized to be involved in school programs so that students see Art or Cultural Production as viable career options.
- Caribbean parents need to be involved in PTAs and demand art programs in public schools (one semester of music and one semester of art) as principals make decisions for individual schools.
- Employ local arts organizations to work in communities who raise awareness about the work and engagement of organizations like NYFA or Arts East New York.
- Art therapy for students
- SIAP study to leverage arts in schools.

### **Public Art and BIDs**

- Community beautification
- Brooklyn is changing with gentrification. Individual artists should be involved in the development process.
- Flatbush BID, community board, orgs, city agencies who invite new businesses into communities should include new artists
- There should be a lot more community input and local artist engagement in neighborhoods like Bed-Stuy which are rapidly gentrifying.

### **Training/Skill Building**

- Skill-sharing schools for youth...where? i.e. AXO, Crush Gallery, BAC
- Workshops exist for artists about money, selling artwork – but many are unaware about how to access?
- Talented youth, but no outlet – competition with prize money. How hip-hop developed.
- Can encourage other kids to pursue artistic interests and help foster competition.
- Coney Island has an arts program to teach art to seniors.

### **Networks**

- Strength in the Caribbean community, but lack of network. Caribbean Arts Matter.
- Tapping into existing assets. Recognize the value of our arts and culture and demand services and networks. Schools and community board networks (engage schools and the heritage of the neighborhood).
- Community asset mapping and resources sharing are necessary to leverage community talent.
- Clearinghouse to share resources with artists. Awareness, info dissemination and sharing is essential.

### **Business**

- Entrepreneurial point of view
- Business management workshop. Need to understand how to capitalize on art that is innately present within the community through food, clothing, music, dance etc.
- Identify facilities to showcase art
- Kids need to learn about how to use their creativity and learn art to access the market e.g. Winston Higgins from Optimalart taught kids how to screen print and encouraged them to do their homework alongside. Many students were interested as they wanted to start a clothing line- this was the incentive. Many of these students also did very well in school as a result of the interaction between art and academics.