Recommendations for DCLA on revision of funding application process

Prepared by a sub-committee of participants in the CreateNYC event at JACK that was held on March 13, 2017

If a goal of DCLA is to be a part of increasing equity in the arts field, we recommend addressing the following issues:

- The DCLA funding application is so time-consuming that many small non-profits lack the capacity to even apply, much less put together a competitive application. In the DCLA's own diversity study, it showed that the diversity lies largely in small arts organizations, so DCLA effectively hinders its own attempts to support a more diverse field by making it difficult for small organizations to apply.

Our recommendations:
- **Revise the application** so that an organization is able to complete it in three to five hours. Currently, the info session *alone* is three hours long, and that's before even beginning the application. One way this could be accomplished is to enter into a "common application" agreement with other funders, following the model of the "Common App" for college admission that 700 colleges and universities use.

- **Increase DCLA program funding for operations/administration** – not just public programming. Many small organizations can't get past the first 3 - 5 years because of lack of capacity and lack of grant support for operating expenses.

Specific recommendations for revision of the application/review process:
- Eliminate the obligation that the applicant carry out *all* the projects included in the original application if DCLA funds at a lower level than requested. e.g. If an applicant has applied for $20,000 for two projects and receives $5,000, then the obligation to carry out both of those projects should be proportional to the amount received, and perhaps only one project is required to be completed.
- In materials for the application review panel, DCLA should not include the dollar amount that each organization had been granted in the previous fiscal year. This number can be misleading, as, for example, the organization could be applying for two projects in this year, and only applied for one last year. It ends up biasing the panel towards a number that is similar to last year's number, even though the panel knows nothing about last year's application.
- Applicant score should be in direct correlation to % of funds allocated (see LMCC's process)

Other proposals:

Seed grants of $50,000 or more for startup arts organizations:
In today's real estate climate, so few arts organizations are able to get off the ground, because founders can't afford commercial market rate rent. We see the cultural arena in New York continually re-invigorated by new arts organizations, and as once-small arts organizations become larger and more focused on mid-career artists, we need new spaces for emerging artists. If arts organizations stop being formed because of real estate pressures, what kind of desert for emerging artists will we have in ten years? We recommend that the DCLA commit significant funding opportunities for organizations in their first or second years of existence, as seed grants either administered by DCLA or by local arts councils.

Work with local arts council to eliminate the requirement that an artist applicant both live and present work in the same borough. This requirement means, for example, that a theater company whose members live in Brooklyn but whose show is being presented in Manhattan can't apply for funding through the local arts councils, preventing so many artists from tapping into municipal funding sources.

Establish multi-year funding grants for organizations. This would lead to applicants being able to focus more of their time and energy on the activity for which they've applied for funds.

More equitable distribution of NYC dollars. Boroughs like the Bronx and Staten Island are severely underfunded in comparison to other boroughs. If not enough applicants are coming through, see the proposal above to simplify the application process for small arts organizations/groups.

Exit strategy if a recommendation is made to reduce funding considerably – some sort of easing out of funding over time.