

## **Museum of the Moving Image Cultural Plan Public Forum Notes**

Museum of the Moving Image (MoMI) conducted a partnership project in which we developed and executed a workshop to secure the insights and suggestions of public housing residents (approximately 60) to inform the Cultural Plan. The participants were a blend of community leaders (Tenant Association Presidents) and residents, including a large (around 20) group of teenagers.

The workshop was the evening of March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 at Museum of the Moving Image.

### **MoMI's Relationship to NYCHA developments**

The Museum serves the residents of Queensbridge and Ravenswood through film and education programs held on and off-site. Our Education programs deliver creative arts afterschool programs for youth at community centers serving the Queensbridge/Ravenswood population and programs at the Museum to further engage teens from the Queensbridge/Ravenswood community. Also, as part of the Art As A Catalyst For Change initiative, we also present after-school courses in which students work on projects related to the impact of gun violence on their communities.

In September 2014, we began to serve the broader NYCHA community through our film programs. The Museum joined with Tribeca Film Institute, the Hip-Hop Education Center and Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House to present a screening of *Nas: Time is Illmatic* a film chronicling the life and career of rapper Nasir Jones, who grew up in Queensbridge Houses. Many connections were forged through this project including a strong relationship with the president of the Queensbridge Tenants Association, April Simpson. As a result, in winter 2015 the Museum presented two additional programs: *Hands Up: Six Playwrights, Six Testaments*, featuring a live performance followed by an open forum on community and policing and *New Black Shorts: Eight Short Films from the African Diaspora*, addressing complex issues of faith, family, race, sexuality, and self-image that are part of the African diasporic experience.

In Fall 2015, the ongoing partnership with Queensbridge and Riis, along with conversations with Andre Cirilo (former Brooklyn Deputy Director for Community Operations, NYCHA) inspired the launch of a new hip-hop film series, *Made You Look: Documenting the Art, History, Power and Politics of Hip-Hop Culture*, a further collaboration with the Hip-Hop Education Center. *Made You Look* features powerful films that examine hip-hop's evolution from the streets of 1970s New York to the present day. Screenings are followed by discussions with filmmakers and community leaders, facilitated by the Museum. The Museum continues to offer the popular series, *Made You Look*, as well as develop new programs in collaboration with its partners at Queensbridge, community leaders, and with NYCHA representatives. In all cases, the Museum presents programs that are culturally relevant, presented off-site as well as at the Museum, and include opportunities for dialogue.

The first new offering, *The Saturday Series @ Queensbridge*, is a community curated screening and conversation series to be held at Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House every third Saturday. The selected films will be offered free of charge and be followed by community conversations facilitated by the Museum and members of the community. The first films to screen in this series will be *The Birth of A Nation (February)* and *Moonlight (March)*. This series is developed and presented in collaboration with The Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House, The Queensbridge Tenants Association, and 696 Build Queensbridge.

Later in the year, the Museum plans to expand its work with the launch of The Projects, a series exploring the use of film and television in popular culture that represents life in public housing. The Projects is being developed by the Museum's Director of Community Engagement and Associate Curator of Film with cooperation from two NYCHA offices. The Projects will include programs on-site at the Museum and at as many as four other community centers across the five boroughs of New York City. Museum members and NYCHA residents will be invited to all events. Each screening will include an introduction by a resident and/or community leader and a Q&A with residents, community leaders, scholars and filmmakers, facilitated by the Museum.

#### Workshop

- An introduction to NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Plan and planning process
- Participants were invited to go to a table of their choice based on preferred discussion topic.
- Each table had a discussion facilitator who led the participants in discussions of concerns and suggested solutions while taking notes
- The discussion facilitator then worked with the participants to narrow suggestions down to three top themes that they write down as they speak
- At the end of the workshop, a representative of each table presented their top three suggestions

#### **Deliverable: Main findings from the NYCHA residents' suggestions for the Cultural Plan:**

The participating NYCHA residents maintain that they don't fear displacement but do fear gentrification – "Our neighborhood could change around us, forgetting us. Our neighborhoods would no longer be ours." They seek support for cultural preservation – programming that celebrates the cultures, cultural forms and histories of the long-standing residents of their neighborhoods. This is a common motif in low-income communities facing demographic change.

The NYCHA residents also value arts education – this is true of the teenagers as well as the adults and seniors. They would like to see arts education in every school in every grade as well as after school.

Their articulated desire for after school programs is related to another desire we've heard expressed by other NYCHA residents – to see their dormant community centers activated by

cultural programming. Federal divestment has led to many of these sites' being shuttered. NYCHA does program some of the sites through partnerships with NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, NYC Department for the Aging or through a lease to stand-alone non-profit organizations that occupy, manage and program the site. These arrangements may or may not provide cultural programming.

The participating NYCHA residents also wish to be connected to local cultural organizations. One asserted that her development is located blocks away from Flux Factory and that, until that evening, she had never known that it existed (she was seated next to a staff member of Flux Factory). The NYCHA tenant leader explained that common strategies – email and social media – don't work for NYCHA residents. They prefer engagement strategies that are analogue and/or high-touch. They recommended that local cultural organizations post printed fliers in community centers, laundromats, hair and nail salons, local schools, churches and community board meetings. They recommended forging in-person relationships with NYCHA tenant leaders.

Related to this desire to be connected to local cultural organizations was the desire expressed by the NYCHA residents to have a cultural institution of their own that reflected their community's history, peoples and culture. DCLA and Museum of the Moving Image reflected subsequently that the participating NYCHA residents did not feel that any existing cultural organizations served this purpose. With that said, the NYCHA residents maintained that they did not feel connected to any of the participating cultural organizations.

DCLA remain respectful and interested in the NYCHA residents' desire for their own cultural institution. But we also recognize that we must work together to ensure that existing cultural organizations must work to serve these residents in such a way that they come to feel that these organizations are, in fact, theirs. Museum of the Moving Image Director Carl Goodman said as much in his closing remarks, giving his email address to all of the participants and asking them to reach out to him directly to advise him on how the museum may best serve them.