

NEW YORK CITY CULTURAL AGENDA FUND
Policy Recommendations for the New York City Cultural Plan
March 2017

Background

Established in 2014, the New York City Cultural Agenda Fund is a collaborative of foundations that helps to strengthen the City’s arts advocacy network and advance cultural policy and equity. The Fund’s activities include: grantmaking to fortify the arts advocacy network and cross-pollinate policy-related efforts; technical assistance programs; and convenings to review current cultural research and encourage practical application of findings.

Issues

Despite New York City’s status as a global cultural capital that houses a rich diversity of artistic communities, deep inequities in the City’s cultural sector persist:

- A small number of agencies receive the bulk of City funding, leaving a variety of groups and communities under-resourced.
- The cultural workforce does not represent the diverse demographics of New York City.
- The City still lacks a central arts advocacy organization that has the ability to inform, organize, and mobilize the sector to advocate for its interests and advance equity.
- The City’s funding is distributed inequitably with a minority of groups taking the majority of grant dollars.

Policy Recommendations

We recommend that DCLA advance cultural equity¹ in New York City by including the following policy priorities in the cultural plan:

- I. Promote high quality and sequential arts education for every child in every grade in our city’s public schools.**
 - a. Incentivize the delivery of arts education in those neighborhoods that are arts-poor as demonstrated by research from the Center for Urban Research at the City University of New York through grant programs and policies that will lead to more equitable arts education distribution citywide.
 - b. Conduct a rigorous study of how much money it would take to implement State standards for arts education.
- II. Commit to promote and reflect equity in City funding to arts and cultural groups.**
 - a. Implement a formula or protocol for funding distribution that guides the Department’s portfolio to better reflect the demographics of the City.
 - b. Respect the leadership and agency of arts groups and their ability to self-govern by transferring title of facilities to the “City-owned” agencies themselves.
 - c. Ensure that any DCLA budget increases generate funding for groups that diversify the Department’s grants portfolio.
 - i. Specifically, change the Cultural Development Fund (CDF) grant process to encourage arts activities in every neighborhood by using the new Social

¹ By “cultural equity,” we mean fairness in opportunities – such as access to information, financial resources, or programming – for cultural organizations, workers, and participants.

Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP) report findings to prioritize investments in lower-income neighborhoods with few cultural assets (e.g., Corona, South Jamaica, East New York).

- d. Carve out a special pool of funds from existing grant programs that are specifically reserved for groups that are mission-focused on advancing cultural equity.
- e. If the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) structure must be retained, expand it to ensure representation from culturally-explicit institutions by and for underrepresented groups, such as Asian communities (e.g., the Museum of Chinese in America).
- f. Hire a researcher on staff to evaluate ongoing grant programs, assess key issues in the field, and ensure progress towards more equitably distributing funding.

III. Incentivize and facilitate capacity building to advance equity.

- a. Work with the Office of the Public Advocate and/or the Commission on Human Rights to institutionalize capacity building and technical assistance support that guides cultural groups in understanding cultural equity and advancing it in their operations and programming (e.g., Seattle’s Office of Arts and Culture’s racial equity training program).
- b. Ensure that the agency’s staff and consultants participate in the same equity trainings and capacity building curricula that the cultural groups do.
- c. Measure and track the leadership staff and board demographics of applicant groups, and progress towards using diversity criteria in funding decisions.
- d. Ask groups if they have an equity implementation plan in grant applications.
- e. Join the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) to participate in a national learning community committed to advancing racial equity at the local government level.

IV. Invest in local capacity and leadership that advances historically under-resourced neighborhoods as civic clusters of cultural activity and social wellbeing.

- a. Increase investment and activity in lower-income neighborhoods that SIAP identified as having the lowest levels of cultural assets (e.g., Corona, Cypress Hills, South Jamaica, Williamsbridge-Olinville) through partnerships with libraries, local civic associations, business improvement districts, NYCHA resident associations, and immigrant-serving organizations.
- b. Build upon the strength of SIAP-identified “civic clusters” (e.g., Bedford-Stuyvesant, Flushing, Hunts Point, Washington Heights) through increased investment to expand the reach and influence of these clusters.
- c. Evaluate and – if found to be successful – expand the Building Community Capacity program to deepen work in existing neighborhoods and/or expand the program to new neighborhoods, likely following *a* and *b* above.
- d. Commission an independent study of so-called “naturally occurring cultural districts” around the city and the impact of the “informal” cultural assets that sustain them in order to make recommendations for better tracking these assets and supporting their growth and sustainability.

V. Work with legal experts and relevant government officials and agencies (i.e., City Council and HPD) to remove legal barriers to developing affordable housing for

artists and codify a process by which affordable housing specifically for artists can be developed under the current law.

VI. Support the creation and operation of a citywide arts advocacy organization.

VII. Continue to make agency staff visible and available to constituents on a regular basis.

- a. Regularly convene the field on key issues to foster the development of strong cultural networks.
- b. Formalize the cultural plan-related, topic-focused office hours as a monthly agency offering.
- c. Offer a “State of NYC Culture” address every year to report on and promote to the general public the progress made toward the goals of the cultural plan and the priority objectives for the year ahead.