

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

Of the key stakeholders identified, it is the New York City government whose opportunities for scaling up a philosophy and practice of access and equitable participation for disabled people are most urgent. The 25th anniversary of the ADA in 2015 is an occasion to acknowledge the role government has played in addressing accessibility gaps for disabled people across the nation.

It is also a time for government at all levels—City, State, and Federal—to act on new opportunities for expanded and new policy, programs, and funding to advance inclusion and access in dance and culture—and every sector.

The opportunity for change is especially timely in New York City. The work aligns with the mayoral administration's commitment to addressing inequality and dovetails with key ongoing City initiatives, including, first, a diversity initiative launched by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) in 2015 that encompasses disability; second, the department's cultural planning for New York City, a requirement for which was legislated by the City Council in 2015 (New York City Charter, Local Law § 2015/046, legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=1853941&GUID=15689E9B-3860-4882-B9D3-F67A4C896AAC); and new investment and activities in the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to universalize arts education in the public schools.

Spotlight on Cultural Planning

The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs' (nyc.gov/html/dcla) demonstrated commitment to diversity, as well as its participation and support of this work, sets the stage well for a cultural plan DCLA will complete on or before July 1, 2017, taking seriously the findings of this report and—as Simi Linton puts it, the “vantage point of the atypical.” Importantly, Dance/NYC’s work calls out for the plan to address access not only for audiences but also for artists and other cultural workers. To that end, it proposes thirteen steps DCLA may use as it undertakes planning.

- Engage representatives from the disabled community in the cultural affairs and citizens' advisory committee engaged in the cultural planning, as well as the community outreach process established for the plan; ensure that all aspects of the planning process, facilities, and communications are usable by all;
- Employ a disability expert designated to both planning and implementation;
- Prioritize identifying and solving for accessibility needs and meaningful integration as part of planning foci on the availability and distribution of cultural activities throughout the city; affordable housing and affordable long-term and temporary studio, office, and rehearsal space; and the creation of public art in public space;
- Prioritize a role for the disabled community in achieving additional planning mandates, from addressing the relationship between cultural activities and social and economic health and welfare in the city to incorporating cultural activities into community development, economic development, and land use planning processes and policies; seek opportunities to advance employment of disabled artists;
- Assess the viability of establishing an international center for disability arts and other blue sky opportunities to advance the city as a global cultural capital;

- Identify opportunities to improve grantees' inclusion and access work (for instance, through planning requirements and technical assistance), as well as targeted capital investments in facilities and technology, including website development and overall communications;
- Develop protocols for increasing capital and program awards made annually for art making by and/or with disabled artists;
- Undertake a parallel internal plan to improve DCLA's physical and communications environments, and workforce development and training;
- Wherever possible, leverage learning from the DCLA's ongoing diversity initiative, which includes a survey instrument to capture disability and other demographic data on the cultural workforce, existing grantee applications and reports, Dance/NYC research and additional field research on disability to support planning recommendations;
- Use the planning opportunity to develop benchmarks and mechanisms for regular "state of inclusion and access" reports on the field to guide future interventions;
- Address opportunities to adapt government practices to increase inclusion and access in the arts that have been modeled effectively in other regions, for instance, by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts; explore government partnerships at every level, including the New York State Council on the Arts and NEA's Office for Accessibility;
- Coordinate with the Department of Education to increase arts education and cultural activities for disabled students and explore partnership opportunities with Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities to serve disabled New Yorkers; and
- Explore opportunities to demonstrate leadership through cross-sector collaboration, including program and service development with arts and disability organizations.

Working with Neighbors: New Jersey Offers a Case Study for Use in the City's Cultural Planning

The New Jersey State Council on the Arts' work to advance access among its grantees serves as one model that could be adapted and extended by State and City governments nationwide, and which DCLA may consider through cultural planning. Currently, the New Jersey State Council:

- Requires funded organizations to perform an accessibility assessment and develop, and have in place a three-year board approved accessibility plan before funding is authorized, which could be modified by DCLA to meet inclusion and access goals;
- Includes a disabled person on every review panel approving accessibility plans, a requirement for every council-funded organization on a three-year rolling basis, which could be similarly applied to review panels organized by DCLA;
- Partners on the Cultural Access Network project with New Jersey Theatre Alliance. Services and initiatives include ADA planning support, technical assistance and training, online resources, mini-grant programs, and an awards program. The programs of Cultural Access Network Project are guided by a volunteer steering committee representing arts patrons, state and county officials, arts administrators, and managers from organizations serving people with disabilities. A similar partnership between service and cultural groups is envisioned as a priority outcome of cultural planning.