

July 1, 2019

BACKGROUND

In 2015, the New York City Council (Council) and Mayor Bill de Blasio enacted legislation that created a mandate for the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) to author and implement a first-ever cultural plan for New York City. Local Law 46 included the creation of a Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) comprised of community members and cultural stakeholders appointed by elected officials to offer an external voice to DCLA in this process. At this two-year point after the 2017 release of CreateNYC, and in tandem with DCLA's report to Council and the Office of the Mayor on its progress and accomplishments as mandated by Local Law 46, the current 17 members of this committee share the following observations and recommendations with the Mayor, Council, DCLA, and our fellow citizens of New York City.

We commend the Council, Mayor Bill de Blasio, Commissioner Finkelppearl, and DCLA for establishing and implementing this initiative. CreateNYC has created a platform for the cultural community to gather, share experiences, and express needs across boroughs, communities, institutions, and practices. This process has generated a much-needed dialogue on the role that culture plays in our communities and the necessary strategies to maintain vibrancy and sustainability for artists and citizens alike.

Attempting to map culture in New York City—its benefits, economies, and inequities—is an incredibly ambitious project. The entangled polarity of extreme wealth mirrored by the affordability and development crisis many New Yorkers face places “culture” as both a savior and a culprit. It is not possible to have a conversation about culture without discussing sustainability and the unequal terrains in which resources are distributed in this city historically and, at present, both privately and publicly. It is also not possible to discuss the amazing accomplishments and potential of our city without acknowledging the disproportionate allotment of its benefits and burdens and the constant need for equitable redistribution. It is with belief in the necessity of understanding these entanglements that we offer the following recommendations. We thank our colleagues in the cultural community who have contributed their feedback for inclusion in our discussions.

OUTREACH PROCESS

The community outreach process led by Hester Street Collaborative and DCLA was deeply generative, positively received, and thorough. Within this committee and beyond, the feedback has consistently framed these events as the platform needed to offer meeting grounds for meaningful dialogue among stakeholders to construct coordinated ideas and strategies.

Within this success, the methodology adopted also yielded a number of limitations to the efficacy of CreateNYC, including but not limited to:

- initiating a broad conversation about culture and sustainability with no clear long-term capacity to continue that conversation effectively and at scale;
- initiating a broad conversation about culture without managing expectations within what DCLA is structured to achieve; and
- creating an initial document of aspirations without addressing how they would be implemented in the realities of a bureaucratic and political landscape.

SUCSESSES

Given these initial limitations, DCLA has worked diligently to produce methods of measurement, accountability, and visibility to develop actionable goals for the plan. We frame the following successes of the past two years as follows:

- **Diversity Plans:** The completion of diversity plans for the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) and institutions DCLA supports has been a positive and generative action as a result of CreateNYC. The feedback and goals outlined by Hester Street Collaborative's outreach with community members strongly stated the need for assertive efforts to create environments of equity, diversity, and representation at all levels that better reflect the constituency of New York City.

Questions that remain within this success include:

- how progress is measured;
 - how to address the differing bureaucratic burdens reporting and compliance mean for institutions of varying size and scale; and
 - how diversity may be interpreted differently depending on the intent and mission of an organization or the community the organization serves.
- **CreateNYC Leadership Accelerator (CUNY Partnership):** The Leadership Accelerator partnership with CUNY to integrate paths into the cultural field for local students is an example of a commitment to diversity, access, and equity translated into action. It is also an example of how resources can be structured to create mutual opportunities with community partners to realize the ambitions of CreateNYC.
 - **Increased Funding for Borough Arts and Artists:** The additional funding allocated to DCLA in the last three budgets approved by the de Blasio Administration and the Council has specifically provided increased funding for individual artists and borough arts organizations. These financial commitments have been substantial and help meet the strongly stated need for a broader geographic distribution of resources at the borough level so that communities can most effectively support local art and artists. Increased financial support for the differently abled and people with disabilities is part of this success story.
 - **Environmental Standards:** The roll-out of energy audits in CIG and city-owned buildings and the implementation of suggested mitigation and retrofits will greatly help reduce our carbon footprint and energy costs and is an example of DCLA working within its ability to turn ideals into commitments that also fit with broader stated governmental goals.
 - **AREA Program:** The opening of ArtBuilt Brooklyn—with 50,000 square feet of studio space for roughly 100 artists—is a significant milestone in creating new workspaces for artists.

CAC HIGH PRIORITIES FOR CREATENYC GOING FORWARD

Baseline Support

It is apparent to the CAC that the only path to providing longevity and viability for our cultural organizations and artists in New York is to extend a commitment of baseline funding to our institutions, which they depend on to deliver programs and services and engage artists.

Dedicated funding streams and new resources and commitments must be identified if the goals of CreateNYC and new initiatives are to survive. Without baseline funding, culture and the argument that equitable access to culture is a core value of our city will always be secondary to political interests and negotiations. We urge the Council, DCLA, and advocates in the cultural community to center efforts in pursuit of baseline funding for the intended purpose of achieving CreateNYC goals.

Department Staffing and Funds

Commissioner Finkelppearl and DCLA have worked diligently in the creation and implementation of CreateNYC. If DCLA is to provide greater visibility, accountability, and consistency, the department needs greater resources.

In order to achieve the goals articulated in CreateNYC and maintain the dialogue and commitment to the communities we serve, an increase in department staffing and funding is necessary to:

- ensure ongoing opportunities for community input and involvement;
- allow for greater access and transparency in DCLA decision-making; and
- provide ongoing analysis, data collection, and sharing with DCLA grantees and constituencies.

Intergovernmental Collaboration

CAC recognizes that DCLA is not an independent agency and its role as an advocate for the cultural community it serves is limited. By historical design, the agency's primary role is to make grants and allocate funding. Its funding is tied to election cycles, political negotiations, and economic ups and downs.

However, CreateNYC makes it clear that arts and culture are a primary driver for New York City's vitality, not only attracting visitors from around the world, but giving the City's 8.6 million residents an opportunity to experience the joy and wonder of the creative spirit, through personal expression and by engaging with the multitude of offerings by our cultural community. These opportunities are essential to our citizens' quality of life.

CAC strongly encourages the Office of the Mayor, members of the Council, and DCLA, as well as other City agencies and elected officials, to recognize the imperative of arts and culture in allocating resources to this sector. We recommend a review of the intergovernmental decision-making process, budget allocations, and accountability to ensure that parameters and guidelines allow for inclusion of cultural development that is measured, sustainable, accountable, equitable, and prioritizes the long-term livelihood of the cultural community.

CONCLUSION

CreateNYC has put forth a set of strategies designed to increase equity in New York City's support for culture, support artists and cultural workers from underrepresented groups, and invest in our neighborhoods. These strategies are guideposts for the City and its leadership to ensure that more of our residents and visitors are able to engage in cultural and creative activities and experiences. They will help artists and culture organizations expand infrastructure and resources necessary to create meaningful and impactful arts and cultural activities in every borough for years to come. This is a historic moment in which the residents of New York City have manifested the importance of arts and culture in their lives and have challenged us to reaffirm public support for our cultural life in a major way.

CAC members stand by the stated goals of CreateNYC and we hope to continue working with DCLA and our elected officials to ensure that CreateNYC reaches its full potential.

CreateNYC Citizens' Advisory Committee

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