



New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Committee on Finance

Oversight Hearing: Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector

Monday, February 9, 2026, 1:00PM - 250 Broadway, 8th Floor, Hearing Room 1

Testimony Presented by NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Assistant Commissioner for Program Services Audrey St. Clair

Good afternoon, Chair Williams and members of the Committee. I am Audrey St. Clair, Assistant Commissioner for Program Services at the Department of Cultural Affairs. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on today's topic: Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector. I am joined today by DCLA's General Counsel Lance Polivy and other colleagues from the agency.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, our city's cultural community faced tremendous challenges related to the affordability crisis. Real estate that was affordable and easy to come by was already a distant memory. Working artists, who are often double-rent-burdened by paying for both housing and studios, were constantly in search of space they could work, create, and present in. All too often, cultural spaces closed for good, artists left the city or stopped practicing their work so they could make their monthly rent.

The warning signs were already flashing red when the pandemic hit, and all of these problems were only made worse by its widespread and unprecedented impacts. Organizations that had found a way to be nimble and stay open suddenly had to shutter indefinitely. Artists began to leave the city in greater numbers – a trend borne out by the Center for an Urban Future's new report. And our creative sector, which is so crucial to what makes our city vibrant, dynamic, and welcoming – was pushed to the brink.

Only the massive aid programs rolled out throughout the pandemic - along with the remarkable work, sacrifice, and commitment of our cultural community - saved our creative sector from disaster. Nonprofit venues received federal aid through programs like the SVOG, and the city launched programs like City Artist Corps to support working artists – also with federal aid. But even as the most acute impacts of the pandemic faded, the affordability crisis has only intensified. Groups are struggling to attract the same audiences they did pre-pandemic. Federal aid has dried up, federal arts funding is at risk, and private philanthropy is shifting its focus. We're proud that city support for culture has remained robust throughout these challenging times – but as the Center for an Urban Future's report states, DCLA alone cannot address the tremendous challenges our sector is facing. We need our city's artists and institutions to continue creating work, engaging New Yorkers, and delivering for our communities the kind of uplift, joy, and vibrancy that only culture can create. But it's going to take collaboration across a wide range of sectors to offer the support our cultural community needs to thrive.

Through DCLA support for cultural programming, institutions, capital needs, and more, we've been able to partner with a wide range of communities to ensure that access to the arts remains a right, not a privilege for New Yorkers. We support affordability in the cultural sector from every angle, offering major support for

cultural organizations so they can continue delivering services to New Yorkers. Through our record-high investments through DCLA, we're also funding access, affordability, and subsidized programs so that New Yorkers can engage with and experience our unparalleled cultural assets.

The Cultural Development Fund, which I oversee at DCLA, provides grant funding to approximately 1,100 cultural nonprofits each year. This represents the agency's broadest reach into and support for the cultural life of communities across the city. And affordability is baked into the CDF process. The first criterion our CDF panelists use to evaluate applications is "Public Service & Impact," which looks at whether an organization provides programming "with consideration toward accessibility, affordability, and equity." Evidence may include, among other things, "reduced financial barriers with relative affordability by using discount programs, scholarships, sliding scale prices, or other subsidies." As a result, CDF is a major driver of cultural affordability and accessibility across the five boroughs: in the latest cycle, 96% of all CDF grantees are either offering their programs free of charge or offering some kind of discount to make the activity more financially accessible. 40% of grantees do not charge for their services at all. From audience access to affordable artist studio space, programs supported through CDF include:

- **Theatre Development Fund** - which operates the famous red TKTS Booth in Times Square - expands access to performing arts through discounted tickets, arts education for students, community partnerships, and affordable costume rentals for nonprofits.
- **BronxArtSpace** supports Bronx-based artists through paid residencies and provides free, drop-in community art classes fostering hands-on creative engagement for all ages.
- **International Studio and Curatorial Program** offers subsidized studio space and professional development to New York-based artists.
- **Maker Park Radio** operates a free community radio station offering training, resources, and public programming that amplifies Staten Island's local arts and culture.
- **Octavia Project** engages Brooklyn teens in free, five-week summer programs using science fiction, writing, and technology to build confidence and leadership skills.
- **Cool Culture**: Provides free cultural access passes and programming to tens of thousands of underrepresented families with young children across NYC.
- **Dance Entropy** operates Green Space, offering affordable, 24/7 studio rentals accessible to artists across all movement disciplines.
- **New 42nd Street** partners with NYCHA to provide free tickets to New Victory Theater performances for public housing residents.
- **UpBeat NYC** delivers free, bilingual after-school and summer music education to South Bronx youth through long-term, skill-based instruction.
- This year, we've also maintained a 15% increase in funding for the **local arts councils** in each borough, funding that goes to hundreds of individual artists, collectives, and small nonprofits across the city.

Through the agency's relationship with the 39 members of the Cultural Institutions Group, we further affordability and access for both visitors and artists alike.

- Last year, DCLA worked with **the American Museum of Natural History** and the Human Resources Administration to create a new, free membership program for SNAP recipients. While New Yorkers can access AMNH with suggested admission, the new membership opens opportunities for audiences to experience the full breadth of the museum's offerings, including special exhibitions, free of charge.

- This year, **MoMA PS1** announced it had received private funding to offer free admission to all visitors. Other members of the CIG offer free or suggested admission at various times. The **Bronx Museum** is entirely free, the **Met Museum** offers suggested admission to city residents, and places like the **NY Aquarium** offer free admission at regular times throughout the week.
- One of our newest CIG members, the **Louis Armstrong House Museum** in Queens, recently partnered with the Mayor to announce free tours for Black History Month, which took place this past weekend.

In addition to these efforts to welcome as many New Yorkers as possible, the CIG has a number of programs aimed at creating affordable opportunities for artists to work and create:

- **Flushing Town Hall** offers free use of their space to support new, emerging, and mid-career performance artists to develop projects.
- **BAM's** Professional Development Program provides professional development training and deeply discounted subsidized theater and rehearsal studio rental to nonprofit Brooklyn arts organizations
- **New York City Center** offers subsidized studio space for non-profit dance and music rehearsals.
- **The Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning** and **Snug Harbor Cultural Center** both offer discounted rehearsal spaces, residencies, and studio spaces.

Through the agency's capital program and in partnership with our fellow city agencies, DCLA has also made major strides in integrating arts organizations into city-led developments. This not only creates housing and assets that meet community needs for locally-based cultural engagement and hubs. They also provide cultural groups and artists with stable, long-term space to create and connect with residents. Examples include:

- o IndieSpace Hell's Kitchen will be a 5,500-square-foot space designed to serve the indie theater community. This facility, integrated into a larger HPD development, will be a long-overdue home for itinerant artists—one that is welcoming, high-quality, accessible, and, most importantly, affordable.
- o We recently broke ground on the Brownsville Arts and Culture Apartments, a mixed-use development in Brooklyn with affordable housing and a multipurpose arts space. The facility will provide a new, permanent home for Purelements, a Brooklyn-based arts organization that cultivates young artists through pre-professional dance training and arts-in-education programs. In partnership with the nonprofit ArtSpace, it will also house space for a number of local Brooklyn arts and cultural groups.

Affordable and accessible cultural space for The People's Theater, 651 Arts, Belongo, and more are also in development or recently opened.

DCLA's beloved Materials for the Arts program has been a huge resource for cultural groups and arts educators since it was established in 1978. MFTA has 5,000 member organizations across the five boroughs, including arts nonprofits, public schools, and city agencies who receive materials free of charge that allow them to stretch budgets and offer free and affordable arts programming to New Yorkers across the city. In just the last month, MFTA has provided nearly \$240,000 worth of free supplies to member organizations. Groups received on average just over \$500 in free supplies per visit. This translates directly into organizations and educators who can bring low cost and free cultural programming to communities around the city. A few examples of MFTA donations from just last month include:

- **Gibney Dance** picked up a baby grand piano for their rehearsal spaces.
- The **New York Latin American Art Triennial** received a Singer Sewing machine for their fiber arts creative projects.
- **Triskelion Arts**, a small Brooklyn performance space, acquired castoff carpet from the Pace Gallery in Manhattan.
- The **Brooklyn Academy of Music** got a cache of bright red fabric from a pop up store in midtown and reused it in a sold out event as part of the Next Wave Festival.

When it comes to giving artists and arts workers the materials they need to create programs that are affordable and accessible, MFTA has a tremendous impact.

A newer program at DCLA that was launched specifically to help smaller organizations and creative businesses navigate the affordability crisis is NYC Create in Place. Launched in December 2024, Create in Place serves as a centralized support system focused on cultural real estate and infrastructure, offering technical assistance, interagency coordination, and public resources to help cultural nonprofits and creative small businesses stabilize, access, and expand space. To date, Create in Place has provided support for more than 80 organizations across all five boroughs, expanded collaboration among 16 city agencies, and successful interventions. These include playing a key role in preserving the wild project on the Lower East Side, which purchased its longtime home thanks, in part, to support from Create in Place. Following the successful effort to safeguard the wild project's home, Governor Hochul announced the creation of the NY SPACES program, investing \$10 million to support similar efforts to safeguard art spaces statewide. Create in Place represents a meaningful response to affordability pressures and a significant step toward stabilizing New York City's creative ecosystem.

We're proud of our robust, stable support for the cultural sector, and our many programs and initiatives that strive to meet the moment and offer flexible, innovative solutions to the cost of living crisis in New York. But as the CUF report makes clear, we will need to work with public, private, and nonprofit partners to push forward the far-reaching efforts we need. I thank you for the opportunity to testify today on this important topic, and we are happy to answer any questions you might have.



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Brad Hoylman-Sigal, Borough President

Testimony of Manhattan Borough-President Brad Hoylman-Sigal Before the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations on Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector

February 9, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Williams and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

As Manhattan Borough President, I represent a borough that anchors New York City's cultural economy – from the Broadway and Lincoln Center to the Jewish Museum to El Barrio to the Studio Museum to the Museum of the Chinese in America. I could go on!

And I don't have to tell you this community is under attack.

Already, compared to peer nations, the United States invests significantly less public funding in the arts. In Germany, roughly 80% of arts funding comes from public sources (roughly €174 or \$207 per capita). France spends over €4 billion annually on national cultural subsidies (roughly €58 or \$69 per capita). But U.S. federal arts funding amounts to only around 4 dollars per capita each year!

To compound this, the Trump administration is desecrating our cultural institutions, one after another, cut after cut. Thousands of previously approved NEA grants were abruptly canceled or rescinded. Now Trump wants to affix his name to the Kennedy Center, and is demanding the Smithsonian restructure in his political image.

At such a dangerous moment, local government must step up.

The creative sector employs 326,000 New Yorkers, a larger workforce than the finance and insurance sectors combined. It is one of our city's core economic engines and a defining competitive advantage. In fact, the density of artists itself feeds directly back into our economic vitality. It enables a gallery and museum ecosystem to flourish in a way that only a few peer cities can match. Research published just last year shows that authors strongly increase their publication output after moving to New York City *because* of the presence of publishing houses and other authors. The creative sector is the reason talent moves here, the reason tech giants expand here, and the reason tourists fill our hotels.

And yet, artists are being priced out of our city.

As you are well aware, a recent report from the Center for an Urban Future showed that New York's share of the national creative workforce has fallen from 9.3% to 8.6% since 2019. Adjusted for cost of living, creative workers here earn 23% less than the national average. This is an unsustainable trend; reversing it will require the city's focused attention and investment.

Addressing affordability begins with expanding housing supply, and I commend the Council for advancing legislation to do exactly that. The City must also move proactively to convert underutilized public assets into affordable artist workspace and modernize benefits structures to meet the needs of a growing freelance workforce.

The return on this investment is measurable. Research from the University of Pennsylvania shows that in lower-income neighborhoods, cultural assets correlate with a 14% reduction in child abuse and neglect, an 18% increase in student achievement, and an 18% reduction in serious crime. Cultural infrastructure *IS* civic infrastructure. We must treat it that way.

Beyond the data, there is a stark human reality: in difficult moments, we gather in our theaters, galleries, and museums. They become the safe harbors where movements are born, where communities are built, and where our collective resilience is forged. We need them now more than ever.

That is why today, I am announcing that I am dedicating the entirety of my FY27 capital funding allotment to affordable and accessible arts and cultural projects.

We are calling this initiative the Manhattan Multiplier for Arts and Culture.

The Manhattan Multiplier will leverage Borough President capital funds with private and philanthropic matches, prioritizing projects that expand access, preserve affordability, and strengthen long-term cultural infrastructure.

The operative question is: how can we turn ~\$50 million of taxpayer dollars into \$75 million from private philanthropy?

Applications are open at bpbhs.com/budget through February 19. I encourage you and your communities to apply!

If New York intends to remain the cultural capital of the world, we must support that culture with commensurate resources and policy.

Thank you for your time and for your stewardship of New York's artistic and cultural legacy.



**Testimony to the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
Libraries & International Intergroup Relations
Christopher Durosinmi, Director, Government & Community Affairs
Wildlife Conservation Society
February 9, 2026**

Thank you, Chairwoman Williams and members of the Committee for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. My name is Christopher Durosinmi, Director of Government and Community Affairs at the Wildlife Conservation Society, and a member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG). The CIG is a coalition of 39 organizations charged with stewarding some of New York City's most important publicly owned cultural assets across all five boroughs. Our institutions serve as neighborhood anchors, educators, and economic drivers. Together, we form a core part of the cultural infrastructure that supports New York City's economy, workforce, and quality of life. New Yorkers gather in our spaces because they are welcoming, trusted, and deeply connected to their communities.

The Wildlife Conservation Society operates the Bronx Zoo, New York Aquarium, Central Park Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo, and Queens Zoo. Through these institutions, WCS advances wildlife conservation globally while delivering education, workforce development, and community engagement locally. Our parks are not only destinations for visitors. They are essential community resources, particularly in neighborhoods that have historically faced barriers to access and opportunity. For example in FY25, 69% or over a half a million NYC residents who attended the Bronx Zoo came for free or discounted admission.

A central component of this work is WCS's Community Access Program (CAP), which provides complimentary access to our parks and programs for seniors, young people, individuals with disabilities, individuals experiencing homelessness, and community-based organizations. Through partnerships with CBOs and city agencies, including the New York City Department of Homeless Services, the New York City Administration for Children's Services, and the New York Police Department, WCS has distributed over 30,000 free tickets and hosted community days that include educational activities, meals, and family programming in 2025. These efforts ensure that New Yorkers can experience and benefit from the city's cultural assets regardless of income.

In addition to CAP, WCS offers multiple pathways to free or reduced-price access for New York City residents and special populations. For example, the Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium provide Free Wednesdays, offering free admission tickets that become available online each Monday for the upcoming Wednesday. Visitors may reserve tickets for up to four guests, with the option to upgrade at a reduced cost.

The Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium also provides free weekday admission year-round to all New York City public, private, and parochial grade schools, supporting more than 253,000 students and chaperones in the past year through school and camp visits. We also extend complimentary access to NYC undergraduate students, who may receive free Limited Admission using a dedicated promo code with proof of eligibility.

WCS is proud to honor those who serve our country through free admission for active U.S. military members and veterans, along with discounted access for family members and guests. These initiatives ensure that



service members and their loved ones can experience our parks as a place of recreation, learning, and community.

WCS also participates in major city partnerships such as the Urban Advantage Program, which has provided free General Admission and access to paid exhibits for students and teachers since 2004. The Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium remain the most sought-after destinations within the program, welcoming thousands of students, their teachers, and families each year for no-cost STEM enrichment experiences.

Additionally, through the City's IDNYC municipal identification program, WCS has offered free memberships to first-time cardholders since 2015. IDNYC plays a critical role in serving all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, and provides an essential access point for vulnerable communities including unhoused individuals, justice-involved residents, and youth.

WCS also supports unique community partnerships such as Community Mayors Inc., for whom the Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium host an annual free outing serving approximately 1,000 children with special needs from across the five boroughs. These children are escorted through the park by members of the NYPD, FDNY, Department of Sanitation, and others, and receive complimentary access to an attraction of their choosing.

In addition to in-person learning and access, WCS Education brings our programming to the public through free online science learning resources for teachers, students, and families. These digital offerings extend the reach of our mission beyond park gates and ensure that learning remains accessible to all.

Beyond access initiatives, WCS plays a significant role in preparing young people for future careers through education and workforce development, introducing students to biodiversity, climate science, animal care, and conservation. These early experiences often serve as an entry point into STEM learning and career exploration.

With support from the City Council, WCS has expanded its STEM Career Lattice, a paid and tiered workforce development model serving young people ages 14 to 24. WCS now supports more than 1,900 youth annually across volunteer, internship, and part-time employment opportunities at all five parks. Since its launch in 2018, participation has nearly tripled, reflecting both demand and program effectiveness. In 2025 alone, youth earned more than \$5.5 million in wages and stipends, demonstrating the program's role in providing meaningful income alongside career preparation. Career Lattice participants reflect the diversity of New York City.

WCS also leads SCI Network NYC, a coalition of eight science-based cultural institutions that collectively provide high-quality paid STEM internships for New York City youth. In 2025, SCI Network institutions hosted 1,141 interns across more than 60 types of internships in fields such as animal care, horticulture, science research, education, and conservation advocacy. These internships function as career launchpads, with 75 percent of participants expressing interest in pursuing STEM careers and 77 percent indicating interest in working at a cultural institution in the future.

Together, the Career Lattice and SCI Network NYC demonstrate how sustained City Council investment enables cultural institutions to deliver measurable workforce outcomes while advancing equity and access. These programs connect young people to paid opportunities, professional networks, and career pathways that benefit both the participants and the city's broader economy.



Continued Council support will allow WCS and our cultural partners to sustain this progress, deepen community impact, and ensure that New York City's cultural institutions remain accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of the communities they serve.

Thank you for your continued support.

Lucy Sexton

Executive Director

New Yorkers for Culture & Arts

lucy@ny4ca.org



February 9, 2026

Testimony for the NYC Council Hearing on Affordability in
the Arts

1 PM

My name is Lucy Sexton, I lead the citywide cultural advocacy coalition New Yorkers for Culture & Arts. Thank you to all the members of this committee, and thank you Deputy Speaker Chair Williams for citing the Create NYC plan, which underscores that affordability is has been a systemwide issue impacting our sector and artists' lives for decades.

I'll start with cultural organizations. This year's Cultural Development Fund funded many new organizations, but did so at the cost of cutting and zeroing out many cultural

organizations that have long been funded and have provided invaluable programming to New Yorkers. Art's House Schools, led by Sophia Harrison, has provided affordable dance music and arts classes to low income families in Coney Island---and received funding from the city to do it---for 17 years. This year for the first time they received zero. This is unacceptable. **There must be a way to provide stable baseline funding to organizations like this who have a proven record of serving their communities with excellence. We can't hire people if we don't know if we will have funding year to year.**

It also makes it clear that the current funding for DCLA is insufficient to the need----we need increased support to ensure that DCLA can accommodate the increased number of organizations applying. **We need stability in order to hire and retain workers, produce and commission artists, and provide consistent cultural programming to our city's youth, elders, and families.**

There are also policy initiatives which can transform the ability of artists and culture workers to live and work in our city. First:

remove the ban on occupation specific housing which currently makes it impossible to build artist – preference housing. CMs Bottcher and Powers introduced legislation to do this last fall. We now need Council Members to reintroduce advance and pass this bill.

Second, we need to address health insurance and benefits. One of the policies suggested by the Mayor’s Theater and Live Performance Industry Council, on which I served, was for the city to do a study on what it would take to create a city backed health plan providing portable benefits for artists and affordable group rates for cultural orgs. The Mayor’s Office for Media and Entertainment just completed a modest study looking at similar programs in other cities. The Council should move forward in funding a real study and plan to build this. There are several large foundations that are ready to partner.

The impact on the field if arts and culture workers and other gig workers had access to portable benefits. And if cultural organizations could pool resources to buy more affordable

health insurance for their staffs, it would allow them to hire and retain staff, and devote more resources to their programming.

Thank you for this hearing and for addressing the chronic affordability issues which have weakened our sector to a breaking point.



Good afternoon.

Deputy Speaker Williams, Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify.

My name is Jilian Cahan Gersten, and I am the Chief Development Officer at the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

The Museum wholeheartedly endorses efforts supporting affordability in New York City’s arts and cultural sector and urges the City Council to continue advancing access to cultural institutions for all New Yorkers.

Since 1997, the Museum of Jewish Heritage has served as a vital educational and civic resource, welcoming visitors from across the five boroughs and beyond. Our mission is to educate diverse audiences about Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust, while confronting the enduring dangers of unchecked antisemitism and other forms of hate. At a time when misinformation and intolerance are on the rise, our work is not only historically important but deeply relevant to the current moment in our city.

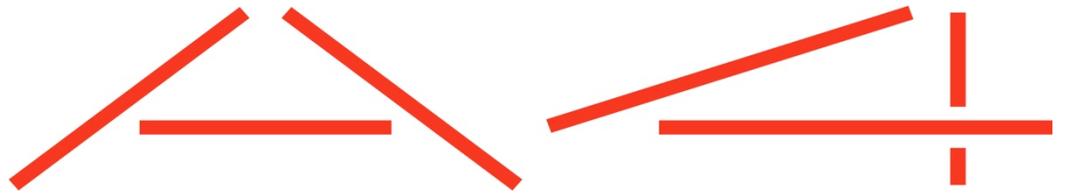
Affordability is central to our ability to fulfill our mission. Cultural institutions like ours must remain accessible to students, educators, families, and lifelong learners regardless of income. We proudly provide free admission to Holocaust survivors, NYC educators, NYC Department of Education K-12 students, members of the military, and first responders. In addition, we are open to the public free-of-charge every Thursday from 4:00 to 8:00 PM, welcoming New Yorkers who may otherwise be unable to visit and ensuring that cost is never a barrier to learning. Moreover, we operate a robust Free Tours program, which provides NYC public and charter school students with engaging, evidence-based Holocaust education for free and—as needed—with subsidized bussing. Through this program, we welcomed over 18,000 public and charter school students through our doors in the last school year and expect to exceed that number this year.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage is an essential part of New York City’s cultural and educational ecosystem. Continued City investment in affordability initiatives – which includes supporting arts and culture as resources for all New Yorkers – allows institutions like ours to remain open, welcoming, and impactful, particularly for communities that have historically faced barriers to cultural participation.

We thank the members of this committee and the entire New York City Council for your leadership and continued support of arts, culture, and education. Your commitment to affordability ensures that New York City remains a place where history is remembered, lessons are learned, and cultural institutions are accessible to all.

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**Public Testimony
Oversight Hearing – Ensuring Equity and Access
in the Arts
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and
International Relations
February 9, 2026**

Deputy Speaker Williams, Members of the City Council, and friends from the Department of Cultural Affairs, thank you for holding this hearing.

My name is Lisa Gold and I am the Executive Director of the Asian American Arts Alliance, a District 4-based, 43-year-old nonprofit service organization that works to ensure greater representation, equity, and opportunities for Asian American and Pacific Islander artists (AAPIs) and arts organizations of all disciplines across this great city. We are the only organization in the country that serves this role. I am also a member of the Cultural Equity Coalition, a facilitator of the Culture at 3 call, and was named to Mayor Mamdani’s Transition Committee on Arts & Culture.

We’ve all heard about the recent Center for an Urban Future² report ringing alarm bells about the loss of artists in NYC and the crushing issues facing NY creatives. With studio and rehearsal space, housing, healthcare, and childcare out of reach, how are artists to survive?

Now add to that lack of opportunity due to racial bias and limited English proficiency and it becomes almost impossible. In the AAPI community, 1 in 4 New Yorkers live in poverty—nearly twice the rate of white New Yorkers. And 48% have limited English skills making it even harder to access the help they need.¹

Asian Americans make up almost 18% of the City’s population, with almost 47% living in Queens! Yet we have no AAPI-led CIG, no Queens borough arts council, and our community is perpetually underfunded by the Department of Cultural Affairs.

**ASIAN
AMERICAN
ARTS
ALLIANCE**

In FY25 AAPI organizations received only 5% of CDF funding so without a CIG, that's less than 2% of cultural funding for the AAPI community, yet we make up 18% of the City population. And of the grants we did receive, they were, on average, 28% less than the mean grant amount.

We need to stabilize our institutions—my own org has 7 people working in a 20 x 13- foot space. Our desks literally touch each other! I love what Anne del Castillo's Create in Place is attempting, but we need it on a massive scale. We need cultural spaces in every affordable housing development and in our city building. We need your commitment to saving the soul of New York, our artists and our cultural organizations.

Thank you.

1 Asian American Federation, <https://www.aafederation.org/our-work/research/>

2 Center for an Urban Future, Creative New York, <https://nycfuture.org/research/creative-new-york>



**Entertainment
Community Fund**
Formerly The Actors Fund

February 9, 2026

Re: Oversight Hearing on Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector - Testimony

Good Afternoon Deputy Speaker Dr. Nanasha Williams and Members of the Committee,

My name is Daniel Arnow and I'm here on behalf of the Entertainment Community Fund and our subsidiary, Actors Fund Housing Development Corporation. We are a national human services organization that provides support, including affordable housing, for everyone in the performing arts and entertainment community. We are here today to talk about the need for affordable artist housing.

Arts and culture are New York City's most valuable asset, and arts workers are the engine of our creative economy. Yet findings from the recently released Center for an Urban Future's Creative New York report present a grim reality that we as a community, and particularly policy makers, must confront. New York City's resident artist population is declining for the first time in decades. Nearly all the City's creative industries have not recovered to pre-pandemic levels. And the City's share of national creative jobs and the nation's artists is declining.

These are bad indicators, compounded by the fact that New York City has built zero units of artist housing in over a decade. Over the same time, we have seen more than 4000 units of artist housing built across the country, including hundreds of units Upstate. By way of example, our organization recently completed a 152-unit artist housing development in Los Angeles.

The good news is the Center for an Urban Future's report has provided a clear set of actionable recommendations the City can act on to help shore up our fragile arts and cultural ecosystem, including the creation of new affordable artist housing.

One of the barriers that has stalled progress is a concern that artist housing could violate fair-housing laws. Yet we know an artist preference in affordable housing is allowable at the federal level. Building upon that, in 2022, the Fair and Equitable Housing Office of New York State Homes and Community Renewal (NYS HCR) released an Artist Preference Policy. The policy addresses concerns around demographic imbalance, lays out an approach to promote diversity, and determined that an artist preference is allowable so long as a set of conditions is satisfied to achieve the desired outcome. It is now time for New York City to follow suit.

When thoughtfully implemented, an artist preference can help address longstanding economic barriers that have limited participation in the arts economy, particularly for BIPOC communities. CUF's analysis from a statewide survey also found that New York City's artists are more racially diverse, more likely to identify as LGBTQ+, and more likely to be low-income than the City as a whole. The report also makes clear that this crisis is not evenly distributed. Artists of color are at growing risk of displacement. After adjusting for the cost of living, all artists here earn less than the national average--but the gap is widest for artists of color, who earn less than their white peers in

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nearly every creative field.

We also support legislation introduced by former City Council Members Erik Bottcher and Keith Powers that would allow the City to provide an artist preference without violating the human rights law which prohibits against discrimination on the basis of occupation. If enacted, this legislation will help spur the development of more affordable housing for artists.

People often ask why affordable housing for artists? We often respond with stats on the economic impact of the arts, how artists incubate innovation and attract talent across sectors or how cultural assets help to strengthen communities. These are all true. But let's not forget that artists are also small businesses, they are immigrants, they are experiencing homelessness, they are living with a disability, teaching our children, serving us food, and work across all industries.

Unlike most low-income populations, access to affordable housing is particularly critical to stabilizing arts workers because their income is typically episodic and fluctuates from year-to-year and month-to-month. Artists often have many sources and types of income (employment, self-employment, non-employment/other sources), which makes it difficult to qualify for affordable housing lotteries. As a result, arts workers may experience source of income discrimination when trying to access housing and marketing agents have reported that it takes significantly longer to process artists' housing applications and verify income for compliance purposes.

To ensure that artists can afford to live and work in New York City, we need housing policies that reflect the unique needs of our creative communities. This includes expanding affordable artist housing and ensuring that artists have access to affordable workspaces that allow them to thrive in our city. These targeted solutions would not only support individual artists but also help sustain the broader cultural and economic ecosystem of New York City.

In closing, we urge the Council to pass the Artist Housing Bill and to embrace policies that make housing more accessible and affordable for all, particularly those in the arts. We look forward to working with the Council to ensure that our city remains a place where creativity and culture can flourish.

Thank you for your time and giving us the opportunity to speak on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Daniel Arnow
Executive Director
Actors Fund Housing Development Corporation



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- Hello, I am Dan Point, the President of AFM Local 802, the union that represents nearly 6,000 musicians across New York.
- I want to start by thanking the Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations, Council Member Nantasha M Williams, as well as the rest of the committee for holding this vital hearing.
- Whether on a Broadway stage, in a Bushwick studio, in a Bronx dance hall, or on a Queens soundstage, artists, musicians, and performers are integral to NYC's unique culture and its economic power.
- As the President of Local 802, I understand and appreciate the powerful and vital economic engine that is our city's creative sector.
- Unfortunately, that economic engine has started to stall.
- The COVID-19 pandemic hit the creative industry especially hard. Live performances were among the first activities to be shut down and one of the last to return.
- As a result, many performers and artists pivoted to entirely new careers.
- Local 802, for example, saw our membership rolls significantly shrink.
- But despite the damage COVID-19 caused, the affordability crisis has kept artists away, even as the city's overall recovery has progressed.
- To be frank, we have reached a breaking point for NYC artists.
- Even though creative economy workers here earn higher nominal wages than their peers elsewhere, after adjusting for the cost of living, they earn about 22.6 percent less than the national average—a gap that has widened from 15 percent a decade ago.
- Neighborhoods that have served as “creative hubs” have seen a marked decline in artists:
- Since 2018, the artist population has fallen 5 percent in Bushwick, 17 percent in Harlem, and 18 percent in Chelsea and Hell's Kitchen, as median asking rents have jumped more than 30 percent.
- **As dire as the problem has become, the solution remains relatively simple: the City must support creative arts unions as they build worker power, expand affordable housing, strengthen tenants' rights, and continue initiatives like Mayor Mamdani's Executive Order to take on Junk Fees.**
 - On affordable housing, the city can and should build 5,000 artist-preference housing units in NYC by 2030.
 - Luckily, City Council Members Powers and Bottcher recently introduced an Artists Housing bill to address the need for more housing, and I urge the city council to pass this bill.
- This administration and the City Council have already taken steps to address the affordability crisis gripping our city. It is my hope that work continues so that NYC remains a cultural and artistic beacon for the country and the world.

- Thank you all.

Deputy Speaker Williams and distinguished members of the City Council Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Dohini Sompura, Director of Government and International Affairs, and I am providing testimony on behalf of The American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) for this Oversight Hearing exploring the affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector.

Founded in 1869 by the State of New York, AMNH is one of 34 members of New York City's Cultural Institutions Group (CIG). CIGs are charged with maintaining some of the most important New York City owned cultural entities throughout the five boroughs and these institutions are vital economic engines that power tourism, employment, and commerce in addition to providing cultural, educational, and workforce development programming to New Yorkers.

Access to the Museum remains a defining part of the AMNH's public mission. AMNH is one of the few cultural institutions in New York City that continues to uphold a pay-as-you-wish admission policy for New York State residents. This policy allows local visitors to pay as little as one penny for General Admission, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent New Yorkers from visiting the Museum. In a city where the cost of living can make cultural participation inaccessible for many, AMNH's commitment to pay-as-you-wish admission plays a critical role in maintaining the Museum as a truly public institution, welcoming students, families, and lifelong learners from all economic backgrounds.

In addition to this policy, the Museum provides free admission to all New York City public school and camp groups, ensuring that students across the five boroughs can engage meaningfully with science, culture, and discovery regardless of their school's financial resources. The Museum also offers complimentary memberships to New York State recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), providing year-round access to ticketed exhibitions for families and individuals who might otherwise face barriers to visiting. Additionally, AMNH participates in a range of citywide and community-based initiatives that distribute free tickets to New York City residents, further strengthening the Museum's role as an inclusive institution committed to education, equity, and public engagement.

Discoverer Membership

AMNH remains deeply committed to advancing access and inclusion for underserved and underrepresented communities, a priority under the Museum's strategic plan. Last year, in collaboration with New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA), the Museum launched the Discoverer Membership, a

complimentary membership to New Yorkers who receive in-state SNAP benefits. The Discoverer Membership includes general Museum admission and admission to one ticketed exhibition or show per visit for the Discoverer Member and up to four of their guests. As a first step to promote this program, the Museum partnered with the Department of Transportation’s Summer Streets and the Human Resources Administration’s Public Benefits Fair to sign up SNAP recipients, in addition to conducting targeted outreach and marketing. To date, the Museum has enrolled more than 5,000 households and issued over 18,000 tickets, nearly half of which include admission for a child or student. The Discoverer Membership is a key component of the Museum’s broader community engagement strategy, designed to reduce barriers and ensure access for all New Yorkers.

Free Programming for Students, Teachers, and Families

NYC School and Camp Groups

NYC children in school and camp groups are admitted free—including to special exhibits, Monday–Friday. In FY25, over 250,000 schoolchildren, teachers, and chaperones visited the Museum as part of a school or camp group; more than 200,000 were from New York City, visiting free of charge through the School Visits to the Museum Program. In FY24, the Museum began the pilot Beyond Elementary Explorations in Science (BEES) program, a week-long residency field trip program for NYC elementary schools, with priority given to Title I schools, held in the Museum’s Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation, which offers “school-in-a museum” week-long learning experiences for students and their teachers, provides curricular resources to teachers, and provides transportation resources for schools, in addition to providing families of BEES students with complimentary vouchers to visit the Museum.

Urban Advantage

The Museum provides families of nearly 90,000 middle school and elementary school NYC students who participate in Urban Advantage—a model science education program developed in partnership with the Department of Education and eight cultural organizations in New York City— with reusable “Class Trip” vouchers for each teacher, reusable vouchers for students and up to three additional family members, reusable vouchers for teachers for each teacher to pre-plan visits, “School Community Trip” vouchers for Parent Coordinators, and bus allocations to support family trips. In FY25, Urban Advantage reached 86,430 elementary and middle school students and 915 teachers in 296 schools across all five boroughs in New York City.

CUNY Students

The Museum provides free admission to students in the City University of New York's (CUNY) Honors College Program and to students in the education programs at York College, Brooklyn College, and Medgar Evers College, as well as to teachers undergoing graduate studies in CUNY.

Discovery Days

Since 2014, AMNH has been proud to partner with the New York City Council to offer families in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments opportunities to participate in the AMNH Discovery Days Program. The program was developed to serve communities who might not normally consider visiting or may feel disenfranchised to visit a museum due to a variety of social factors (costs, language barriers, physical/geographic access, and/or limited access to formal education). The program is designed for families from NYCHA developments to visit the Museum and interact with Museum educators and staff; explore exhibition halls; and experience the ways in which the Museum is an educational resource. AMNH hosts eight Discovery Day sessions throughout the academic year, welcoming as many as 100 individuals per session. Free transportation to and from the Museum, as well as a light breakfast are provided. Each family also receives vouchers to encourage a return visit to the Museum with up to four family members. Vouchers have proven to encourage families to visit the Museum again and to use the tools and techniques they learned during Discovery Day to further explore the Museum on their own. In FY26, the City Council under the Speaker's Initiative allocated \$100,000 to support this program.

Cool Culture

AMNH is one of several cultural institutions participating in Cool Culture, a program offering free general admission to participants at federally funded day care and Head Start programs and their families. Although general admission is already free to New York City residents, the Cool Culture program provides additional access to under-represented groups to institutions like ours with the goal of redistributing cultural resources, increasing cultural participation, building community, and addressing cultural equity. More than 15,000 people participated in this program in FY25.

Culture Pass

AMNH passes for free general admission plus access to the Museum's large-format film are available through the City's public libraries' Culture Pass program. Each pass is good for up to four family members.

Three-quarters of all the passes are made available to libraries located in economically challenged zip codes. In addition, the Museum participates in the NYC Department of Education Cultural Pass Program, which provides free general admission for school teachers. In FY25, more than 3,000 tickets were issued through this program and as of October 2025, over 6,000 tickets have been issued for the current fiscal year.

IDNYC

AMNH participates in IDNYC, the City's free municipal identification card. The Museum provides free one-year memberships for one adult and up to four children and the membership provides free general admission plus tickets to our giant-screen film. In FY25, nearly 2,600 memberships were given to IDNYC cardholders, and about 8,000 tickets were issued to members and their families.

AMNH is deeply committed to providing accessible, affordable, and meaningful experiences for New York City residents. We value our partnership with the New York City Council and look forward to collaborating further to explore additional opportunities that expand access, strengthen community engagement, and ensure the Museum continues to serve as a resource for all New Yorkers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



140 58th St Brooklyn Army Terminal, Building B- Suite 7G/I Brooklyn, NY 11220

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Esther Robinson

Executive Director, ArtBuilt

Before the New York City Council

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Chair Nantasha Williams

February 9, 2026

Re: Long-Term Affordable Creative Production Space

Good morning Chair Williams and Members of the Committee.

My name is Esther Robinson, and I am the Executive Director of ArtBuilt, a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing long-term affordable workspace for artists and arts-based businesses in New York City.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

The affordability pressures facing creative producers across this city are real, pervasive, and urgent. Rising rents and short-term lease structures are eroding the production capacity that underpins New York's global cultural leadership.

The future of our city's creative capacity is at a critical juncture. Without long-term commitments to the spaces where work is made, we risk becoming a city that consumes culture rather than creates it — a city of spectacle rather than production.

Ten years ago, through a public-private partnership with the New York City Economic Development Corporation and the Department of Cultural Affairs, ArtBuilt developed 50,000 square feet of long-term affordable production space at the Brooklyn Army Terminal.

It is the largest nonprofit long-term affordable creative workspace developed in New York City in the past 30 years.

Today, 120 artists and arts-based businesses operate there. They hire. They fabricate. They export. They contribute to New York's manufacturing and cultural ecosystems.

The model works.

What does not work is attempting to build 30- to 50-year production infrastructure on a 10-year lease.

Workspace needs are perennial. Rents escalate. But banks and financing partners will not invest in major infrastructure build-outs on a 10-year lease. They require longer terms to secure their capital.

When leases are capped at ten years, we block access to the very financing that would allow us to build durable, long-term affordability.

The result is a cycle of short-term workarounds, undercapitalized infrastructure, and repeated lease renegotiations instead of durable cultural production capacity.

This is a structural barrier — and it is one the City has the power to address.

Policy Recommendations

ArtBuilt respectfully urges the Council to support the following actions:

- Establish a 20-year lease framework for qualified nonprofit cultural production operators on appropriate City-controlled assets.
- Pair extended lease terms with dedicated City capital funding for leasehold improvements and infrastructure stabilization.
- Convene a working group with NYCEDC, DCLA, Council leadership, and nonprofit operators to design a scalable model for long-term production affordability.

With extended lease terms, nonprofit operators can unlock private financing, invest in infrastructure responsibly, and stabilize rents over decades rather than years.

This is not theoretical. We have already demonstrated that it works when City leadership, public assets, and private capital align.

We can continue reacting to affordability crises one lease at a time.

Or we can build durable infrastructure that ensures New York remains a global hub of creative production.

In my testimony today, I referenced a letter to the incoming President of NYCEDC requesting a meeting to advance this 20-year lease framework. I respectfully invite Council leadership to support that effort so that, together, we can move from discussion to durable action.

New York does not lack creativity.

It lacks long-term structural commitments to the spaces where creativity is made.

We can build a model that lasts.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Esther Robinson
Executive Director, ArtBuilt
esther@artbuilt.org
917-523-3019

New York City Council Letterhead HERE

[Date]

[Incoming President's Name]

President & CEO
New York City Economic Development Corporation
1 Liberty Plaza
14th Floor
New York, NY 10006

Dear [President's Name],

As you begin your leadership of NYCEDC, we write to express our strong interest in working with you to strengthen New York City's creative and production economy.

New York's identity as a global production capital — in visual arts, performance, film, design, fabrication, and hybrid creative industries — is central to our economy and our global brand. Yet recent findings, including those from the Center for an Urban Future's *Creative New York* report, indicate that our creative workforce is shrinking and that affordability pressures are undermining our production base.

This is a citywide issue. Across boroughs, small-scale production firms — often under ten employees — face lease instability and rising costs in both commercially-owned and City-controlled spaces. These businesses supply Broadway, film, fashion, fine art, and design. They are part of the economic lifeblood of New York.

We recognize that NYCEDC operates within real constraints: portfolio solvency, revenue requirements, and job creation metrics. At the same time, we believe there is a significant opportunity to align lease structure, capital strategy, and economic development goals in a way that strengthens both NYCEDC's portfolio and the City's production capacity.

Current lease terms — generally capped at ten years — often prevent outside capital from investing in projects that would otherwise stabilize small-scale production firms. Because lease duration does not align with standard capital amortization timelines, nonprofit and mission-aligned operators are forced into one-off financing structures rather than durable, scalable models.

We believe New York can innovate here.

Specifically, we urge NYCEDC to explore:

- Establishing a 20-year lease framework for qualified creative production operators on appropriate City-controlled assets
- Pairing longer lease terms with dedicated City capital for leasehold improvements to reduce risk and leverage outside investment

- Piloting blended capital models that attract mission-aligned and private financing to support affordability
- Creating durable pathways for small-scale production firms to access long-term space through qualified intermediary operators

With the right lease structure and capital alignment, affordability can be financed rather than absorbed — attracting new capital to City-owned assets while strengthening production capacity across boroughs.

We respectfully request a meeting in the coming months with you and your senior team, together with a small group of arts and production leaders — including Esther Robinson, Executive Director of ArtBuilt and Randi Berry, Executive Director of IndieSpace— to explore how these concepts might be advanced in partnership.

We look forward to working collaboratively to ensure that New York remains not only a marketplace for culture, but a city that builds the world's creative future.

Sincerely,

[Council Member Name]
[Title]

[Additional Signatories]

ARTHUR MILLER FOUNDATION

FOR THEATER EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JAIME HASTINGS

TRUSTEES

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LYNN NOTTAGE

CHIKÉ OKONKWO

DIANE PAULUS

ANTHONY RAMOS

LIEV SCHREIBER

SHERIE RENE SCOTT

CINDY TOLAN

NIK WALKER

Testimonial Letter for the New York City Council Oversight Hearing on Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector, Hon. Dr. Nantasha Williams February 9, 2025

Thank you to Deputy Speaker and Chair Dr. Nantasha Williams and the City Council for your efforts to ensure affordability in the arts and culture sector, and particularly in arts education, across New York City. I serve as the Executive Director of the Arthur Miller Foundation, an independent, grassroots non-profit organization honoring the legacy of the American playwright, Arthur Miller, and his New York City public school education, by increasing equitable access to quality theater education for New York City public school students. In-school theater instruction provided by a full-time, certified theater teacher, and included as an integral part of a comprehensive K-12 public school education, ensures access to all students regardless of economic status.

The Arthur Miller Foundation (AMF) accomplishes this mission by certifying and supporting teachers to build sustainable in-school theater programs. AMF currently supports 140 full-time theater teachers in NYC Public Schools, accounting for **50% of current full-time public school theater teachers in New York City. These teachers reach 70,000 students in all 5 boroughs of NYC.** Over the course of 3 years, theater teachers receive dedicated support to build sustainable in-school theater programs through mentorship, cultural partner residencies, classroom materials, theater tickets for students, and ongoing professional development. In addition to providing the only support of its kind to NYC theater teachers, AMF breaks down affordability barriers by funding free experiences for teachers and students including theater residencies with prominent NYC cultural institutions, which bring teaching artists into the classroom for 8-10 weeks, and theater tickets to attend Broadway and Off-Broadway productions.

In January 2025, the National Endowment for the Arts' released the results of its decades-long study, *Snapshots of Arts Education in Childhood and Adolescence: Access and Outcomes*, demonstrating that access to in-school arts education significantly enhances **social emotional learning and development**, including peer social support and perseverance in pursuit of a goal. Access to in-school arts education also directly correlates to **higher test scores, GPAs, and graduation rates.**

The following are recent quotes from NYC public school students who have been impacted by the teachers in our programs:

“Theater class taught me how to be brave.”

“Theater has taught me to use my voice to facilitate change, challenge injustices, and inspire action.”

“Theater class taught me how to empathize with other people.”

“Theater classes taught me how to overcome any challenges life may throw at me.”

In order to do our part to continue providing equitable, affordable access to cultural experiences for public school theater students across NYC, we sincerely request that New York City Council considers the vital importance of in-school arts education programming through the Arts Office and by hiring certified, full-time theater teachers. Please help us ensure that theater education is prioritized and considered a right — not a privilege. Thank you for your time.



Jaime Hastings

Executive Director

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs & Libraries
Honorable Nantasha M. Williams, Chair
February 9, 2026 Hearing

Thank you to Chair Nantasha Williams and the City Council for your support of arts and culture, and the vital role that these play in our city's character and economy. I commend the council and this committee for holding this hearing on the important topic of affordability in the sector, as this issue is both complex and urgent. The arts and the diverse cultures of our city are essential components that make up the fabric of New York; without them, our city would be unrecognizable. As widening wealth inequality ravages the lives of so many New Yorkers, especially those who are already marginalized, we should have a moral imperative to directly address key affordability issues, otherwise we risk the city losing its central character. People travel from all around the globe to experience our city's world-class arts and culture, so it is simply good economic policy to ensure that we make the city more livable for working artists.

My name is Keith Kaminski, and I am proud to call NYC my home since 2001. My entire career of the past 25 years has focused on arts education and being part of creating opportunities for young people in the arts citywide. I have had the privilege of collaborating with hundreds of artists of all disciplines and backgrounds, and I am a practicing multidisciplinary artist myself. I currently serve as Deputy Director ArtsConnection, one of the city's longest-standing arts education nonprofits, and I serve on the board of directors of the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable.

My testimony today will focus on critical issues within the nonprofit arts education sector. Hundreds of nonprofits like ArtsConnection employ thousands of Teaching Artists, typically as part-time hourly employees. Teaching Artists are all actively practicing artists who utilize their professional expertise and personal art practice to bring high-quality arts instruction to public school students across the five boroughs. When the city cut arts in public schools in the 1970s due to the financial crisis, passionate and entrepreneurial artists began finding ways of filling the chasm left in arts education. This work not only ensured public school students had access to the arts as part of their education, but also became a model for how professional artists could directly impact their communities and logistically how these kinds of collaborations could be structured to ensure success for all.

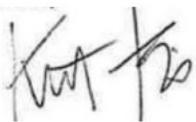
Currently, the work of Teaching Artists in schools is largely managed by nonprofit organizations like ArtsConnection, who secure Multiple Task Award Contracts (MTAC) with the city through NYC Public Schools in order to deliver services. It takes an incredible amount of time and resources to complete a contract proposal, and then organizations typically wait more than a year and sometimes in excess of two years to move through the review process. MTAC contracts are essential for nonprofits to provide service in NY Public School, and as documented in my 2022 graduate thesis research for CUNY Baruch College, this has become a huge burden to nonprofits both administratively and financially. The contract review process lacks clarity and transparency and is urgently in need of a complete overhaul. Nonprofits are already struggling to survive,

especially under the increasing cuts and attacks from the current federal administration, so contract procurement reform is itself a much-needed step toward ensuring that nonprofits can continue to provide essential services to New Yorkers. Making the contracting process more efficient is also clearly in the best interest of taxpayers and the city government, since streamlining processes will decrease the burden on city workers who handle contracts administration and vendor management.

Additionally, the current cycle of MTAC contracts originally had set a five-year term. (In the case of Arts Connection, this was 2018 through 2023.) In November of 2022, we were informed that the city made a blanket decision to exercise the option to extend all contracts by three years instead of allowing nonprofits to submit new proposals. While contract holders have periodic opportunities to request increases to their approved unit rates, the amount of such increases is minimal and is significantly bound by the contract terms. The mandatory three-year extension meant that nonprofits were locked into their approved service units and their associated rates for eight full years without the opportunity for meaningful adjustments. As inflation and operating expenses have skyrocketed during this period, margins for nonprofits have become even narrower. At ArtsConnection, the contracted unit rates cover less than half of the actual cost of delivering services, so we are already engaged in substantial, ongoing fundraising efforts to ensure we can serve our schools, teachers, and young people. Not having the opportunity to renegotiate the terms of our contracts at the time when we were expecting (i.e. three full years later) has had a devastating effect on our work, resulting in layoffs and reductions in programming.

The mandatory contract extension has also meant that many nonprofit contract-holders have not been able to increase rates of pay for their Teaching Artists. Without being able to meaningfully increase unit rates during the now eight-year period, wages for Teaching Artists and other nonprofit workers have stagnated. The [NYC Arts in Education Roundtable's 2025 compensation study "Paying for Professionalism"](#) highlights the challenges both Teaching Artists and the organizations that employ them face, including the significant gap in rates of pay that drives the lack of sustainability for working artists. The city's decision to exercise the mandatory three-year contract extension has had cascading effects that have placed perhaps the greatest burden on Teaching Artists, the front-line workers who provide direct service in schools and communities. We want to be able to pay professional artists a living wage so that they can continue to work and thrive in NYC and contribute to our city's richness, but we cannot do so under the current circumstances, which is deeply frustrating.

We must come together in this moment to ensure that NYC remains affordable for working artists, one of our city's great resources. If we do not act decisively and soon, artists will continue to flee the city for more affordable locations, and our city will not recover from this loss. Thank you for your attention and consideration,



Keith Kaminski (they/he), kaminskik@artsconnection.org

Clemente Luna Testimony

NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations
Oversight Hearing: Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector

Good afternoon Chair Williams and members of the Committee.

My name is Clemente Luna. I'm the Director of Institutional Giving at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. In my role, I secure funding for BAM's community programs, education initiatives, and evaluation strategies, all of which help us understand how we are showing up for our artists, our audiences, and our community.

When we talk about affordability in New York, we're talking about equity. We're talking about who gets to stay and who gets pushed out.

At BAM, we work with seven unions every day, and we are deeply committed to fair wages and a well-supported workforce. But even when people are paid fairly, the cost of living in this city is forcing difficult choices. Artists, stagehands, teaching artists, and staff who once lived nearby are now commuting more than an hour each way - or leaving the five boroughs altogether.

That churn has consequences. Culture depends on continuity. Artists build careers over time. Institutions build trust over decades. Audiences grow through repeated encounters. When affordability breaks that continuity, the impact is lasting.

This matters because arts and culture are not a marginal sector in New York City. Culture is part of our economic power and civic infrastructure. Today, the city's creative and cultural industries employ more than 326,000 New Yorkers across the five boroughs. Before the pandemic, the sector generated roughly \$110 billion in local economic impact and supported about \$30 billion in wages.

Nearly six years after the pandemic began, the sector remains about 6 percent below pre-pandemic employment levels, with particularly sharp losses among dancers, actors, and musicians — the very artists whose careers depend on proximity and continuity.

Public and private support for the arts has been in decline for decades. In response, there is often an implicit expectation that cultural institutions should simply change their business models to survive by relying more heavily on earned revenue or exclusivity.

When culture is forced to operate primarily on market logic, art becomes more expensive to make and harder to access. Artists without independent wealth are pushed out. Audiences narrow. And cultural institutions are asked, unintentionally, to become complicit in the same affordability crisis that is hollowing out our communities.

At BAM, we believe that art is a public good and belongs in everyday life, not a luxury reserved for the few. That belief shows up in how we serve our audiences.

Each year, tens of thousands of New Yorkers engage with BAM's free programming. Through Senior Cinema, we offer a monthly free film program that serves thousands of older adults annually. And through DanceAfrica - our longest-running program, which celebrates its 50th anniversary next year - more than 40,000 people gather annually at our free outdoor bazaar, drawing communities from across the five boroughs and the broader tri-state area. DanceAfrica is a living example of cultural continuity — intergenerational, community-rooted, and deeply New York.

CK Testimony - Continued

More recently, through Teen Space, we've begun intentionally centering young people in our neighborhood. BAM sits between four high schools and along the daily after-school paths to several major train lines. Teen Space creates a free, safe place for Brooklyn teens to gather, socialize, and make meaning together that is grounded in performance, art, and creative expression.

If New York is to remain a place where culture is made - not just consumed - affordability must be treated as cultural policy. That means stable public investment, support that keeps pace with real costs, and alignment between cultural funding and housing strategies.

Because equity in the arts isn't only about access. It's about who gets to stay long enough to shape our shared civic life.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to share what we're seeing every day.

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

Committee On Cultural Affairs, Libraries And International Relations

Nantasha M. Williams, Chair | Members: Crystal Hudson; Farah N. Louis; Virginia Maloney; Chi A. Ossé; Althea V. Stevens; Sandra Ung

HEARING: Monday, February 9, 2026 | 1:00 PM 250 Broadway – 8th Floor – Hearing Room 1

AGENDA ITEM: T2026-0832 – Oversight: Affordability in New York City’s Arts and Cultural Sector

Hearing: Affordability in New York City’s Arts and Cultural Sector

Submitted by:

- Rasu Jilani, Executive Director, Brooklyn Arts Council
- Jesús López-Jensen, Executive Director, Bronx Council on the Arts
- Moe Yousuf, President & Chief Executive Officer, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council
- Jamaine T. Smith, Executive Director, Staten Island Arts

1. Opening: Culture, Affordability & Public Service

Chair Williams, members of the Committee—thank you for the opportunity to testify.

We come to you today as the **New York City Borough Arts Councils Collective**, representing Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island. Each of us leads the official arts council for our borough, designated and contracted by DCLA to serve artists, small cultural organizations, and the public.

We acknowledge that our collective does not have representation from Queens and we will come back to this shortly.

We are not just here to talk about affordability in abstract terms.

We are here because the **affordability crisis is directly impacting the people who create and sustain New York City’s cultural identity**—and because the City needs strong, community-rooted institutions to carry out an affordability agenda that reaches everyone.

We believe that culture and the arts are **not side issues** in this conversation. They are **essential infrastructure** for stability, cohesion, economic vitality, and belonging in our neighborhoods.

But that infrastructure is vulnerable—and so are we.

2. The Arts Councils Are Essential Public Infrastructure

Arts Councils were established because the **City cannot do this work alone**. We serve as **trusted intermediaries between artists and City systems**—especially for those historically excluded from public funding. Each year, we regrant millions of dollars, directly support thousands of artists across all five boroughs, and amplify impact through the cultural programming these artists bring to their communities.

We are **not just regrants**. We are **service-based institutions** that:

- Provide one-on-one technical support to thousands of artists each year
- Conduct multilingual outreach
- Process microgrants faster than City systems can
- Advise on compliance, access, and eligibility
- Coordinate cultural emergency response (e.g. the Red Hook Fire Fund in Brooklyn)
- Partner with City agencies to embed artists in public housing, elder care, schools, and more

Over the past two years, we have built a **formal cross-borough collective**. We meet twice a month, strategize together, and recently held a three-day retreat with DCLA, NYSCA, and private funders to align around shared goals. This is unprecedented coordination—and it's working.

But to deliver what the City needs, we need a **restructured relationship** that reflects our role as essential partners—not temporary grantees.

3. Artists at the Center of the Affordability Crisis

As a collective of Arts Councils, we see the same systemic pressures across every borough: artists facing housing insecurity, mounting debt, and the constant financial instability of working without benefits or a reliable safety net. But when we look at our 2025 Manhattan data, we see these pressures have reached a critical breaking point that threatens the cultural fabric of the entire city.

Our data at LMCC serves as a "smoking gun" for this crisis, proving that the financial floor for local artists is effectively collapsing.

- **The Vanishing Middle Class of the Arts:** Our internal tracking shows a massive reliance on our funding in "Low Income Zip Codes" (including 10027, 10029, 10031, and 10035). For these artists, a council grant is not "extra" funding—it is foundational. Our records show that for many individual applicants, while their total project expenses reach into the thousands, their confirmed outside income is often zero. We are effectively the only thing keeping these projects, and these artists, in their neighborhoods.
- **The Loss of Creative Space:** We have seen a significant shift in where art is happening. Our 2025 data shows that artists are increasingly priced out of traditional theaters and galleries. They are now almost entirely dependent on public infrastructure—NYCHA community centers, public parks, and libraries—to host their work. Without these public

"safety net" venues and the grants to activate them, cultural life in Manhattan would be reserved only for those with extreme economic privilege.

- **A "Gig" Economy with No Safety Net:** The vast majority of our 2025 applicants are individual artists and small collectives, not large institutions. These creators are navigating a world of wildly fluctuating project-based income without benefits. Our data shows that even with limited resources, these artists are providing a staggering public service—reaching expected audiences of thousands of New Yorkers—while personally absorbing the rising costs of production and cost-of-living increases.

However, it is not just the artists who are at risk, it is the Arts Councils ourselves. We cannot effectively anchor the city's creative workforce when we can't be guaranteed multi-year regranting contracts or increases in administrative support, leaving our own operations in a state of constant uncertainty.

This is not sustainable—for artists or for us.

4. What We Need to Stabilize This Partnership

We're asking the City Council to work with us—and DCLA—to evolve the City's model.

We are not asking for a favor. We're offering a **better delivery mechanism** for the City's cultural and affordability goals.

We recommend:

- **Recognize and invest in the NYC Borough Arts Councils** as a vital citywide infrastructure like CIG's and CDF, but with a distinct category. Cultural equity across the five boroughs demands an ecosystem that meets people where they are—with our councils serving as trusted, hyperlocal intermediaries.
- **Multi-year contracts (3-5 years)** or a dedicated baseline allocation for each borough council
- **Operational funding beyond regranting**, including staff, outreach, compliance, navigation, and multilingual services
- **Resolve the funds disbursement timeline.** Late allocation of city funds may force councils to take bridge loans, effectively making us lenders to the City. This is unsustainable and creates additional financial risk.
- Maintaining access to CDF and other competitive funds while building structural stability

And finally, we call on the Council to **resolve the vacancy in Queens**, which remains without a borough arts council. We've been holding space at our table for a missing partner. This absence weakens our collective capacity—and weakens the City's delivery ecosystem. Let's fix that, together.

Closing: A Partnership Worth Investing In

We are proud of what we've built across the boroughs.

We are committed to this city and to the artists who bring its neighborhoods to life.

But we cannot keep operating from a place of precarity—patching together unstable budgets to deliver essential services.

If the City wants a serious affordability strategy, it must **invest in the cultural workers at the center of it**, and the borough arts councils who support them.

We are here. We are organized. And we are ready to partner—with you, with DCLA, and with our communities—for the long term.

Thank you.

Building for the Arts (BFA) expands access to the performing arts through three key programs: Theatre Row, the American Playwriting Foundation, and Music and the Brain.

NEW LIGHTING SYSTEMS WILL SAVE HUNDREDS OF OFF- AND OFF-OFF BROADWAY COMPANIES A TOTAL OF MORE THAN \$2M IN THE FIRST 10 YEARS OF USE.



CIERRA CASS
DIRECTOR OF
THEATRE
PROGRAMS AND
PARTNERSHIPS,
THEATRE ROW

Introduction & Mission

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Cierra Cass, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Building for the Arts NY, Inc., the nonprofit organization that created, owns, and operates **Theatre Row on Manhattan's storied 42nd Street.**

Our mission is to expand access to the performing arts. Every program we run, and every investment we make, is designed to ensure that artists and audiences, especially those historically excluded from cultural spaces, can participate fully in New York City's creative life.

Theatre Row as Essential Affordability Infrastructure

For nearly fifty years, Theatre Row has been **one of the city's most important engines of affordability for the performing arts.** At a time when rising costs threaten the survival of NYC's arts organizations, Theatre Row remains one of the last centrally-located places in Manhattan **where independent artists and small companies can afford to create new work.**

Each year, more than 300 theatre companies and 3,000 artists rely on our five Off- and Off-Off Broadway theatres, rehearsal studios, and offices. These companies include disability-justice organizations, culturally specific theatres, youth ensembles, emerging artists, and community-based groups who are often under-resourced or under-represented.

Why Shared Creative Space Matters Now

Over the past several years, many performing arts companies in our city have been forced to sell their spaces or end their leases due to untenable financial pressures. **Maintaining a full-time facility is no longer viable for many organizations.**

Theatre Row exists to fill that gap.

We provide a collaborative, shared, accessible home where companies can rehearse, perform, and build community without maintaining their own performing arts facility, which can be a financial burden that is simply not sustainable for many small-to-medium-sized performing arts companies. Theatre Row is a creative crucible—one that helps sustain New York City's status as a global capital for culture.





How Theatre Row Makes Creating Art More Affordable

Affordability is not theoretical for the artists who walk through our doors. It is the difference between producing a show and postponing it, between taking a creative risk and scaling back, between staying in New York and leaving the city altogether.

Theatre Row reduces barriers through:

- **Subsidized theatre rentals for non-profits**
- **Discounted rehearsal space**
- **Workshops, readings, and community partnerships**

These supports return hundreds of thousands of dollars in value to artists every year.

That includes our Companies in Residence such as Theater Breaking Through Barriers, Pan Asian Rep, Keen Company, and NYC Children's Theater, as well as community-based groups such as North American Indigenous Center of NY + Eagle Project, Black Theatre United, National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene, and youth and family programs such as the Rev. Ronda Holiday Literacy Extravaganza for families in temporary housing.

All these groups bring new voices, new audiences, and new perspectives to the stage—strengthening the cultural fabric of our city and underpinning NYC's performing arts ecosystem.

Lighting Systems Upgrade: A Direct Affordability Intervention

One of the most significant production expenses for small companies is lighting. **Our current effort to replace outdated theatrical lighting systems with modern, sustainable LED equipment is a direct affordability intervention.**

Currently, our outdated systems force companies to rent lighting equipment from outside vendors—often \$1,500 per week—just to realize their designs. For nonprofits operating on shoestring budgets, that cost is prohibitive. While we make our systems available for only a small maintenance fee, we don't have well-functioning equipment to offer, so most creators can't take advantage of those savings without sacrificing artistic vision and production quality.





But an FY26 capital allocation from the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, together with New York City Council and Manhattan BP, is changing that. Thanks to your support of our proposal last year, we are now working with NYC DCLA to upgrade lighting in three of our five theatres. This year, we are requesting an additional **\$408,000 in DCLA capital support** to complete the remaining two.

Once finished, these lighting systems will:

- **Save more than \$212,000 every year for companies/artists** presenting at Theatre Row
- Reduce energy use and maintenance costs and make Theatre Row a greener facility
- Ensure artists can realize their creative visions without expensive equipment rentals

This is one example of how we translate our arts access mission into concrete, measurable affordability for the creators who need it most.

Why Continued City Support Matters

Theatre Row is essential cultural infrastructure. It is one of the few remaining spaces where artists can afford to take creative risks, where new voices can be heard, and where the next generation of theatre-makers can build careers without leaving the city they call home. **If New York is to remain the creative capital of the world, we must invest in the places that make creation possible.**

Continued support from the City—especially through DCLA capital funding—ensures that access to the arts remains a shared civic resource, not a privilege. And **when you help sustain shared creative spaces, you exponentially broaden the impact of that support**—reaching artists and groups who would not otherwise be able to tell their stories.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to sustaining New York City’s cultural ecosystem. I look forward to continuing this work together.

Cierra Cass, Director of Theatre Program and Partnerships, Theatre Row
cierra@theatrerow.org



Company-In-Residence New York City Children’s Theater performs “The Pocket Park Kids.”



February 9, 2026

My name is Candice Anderson, Executive Director of Cool Culture, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the community of 50,000 families that access NYC's rich cultural resources through our arts and cultural programs.

Under BIPOC leadership for more than 25 years, Cool Culture has worked to ensure that families of color and other historically marginalized families facing poverty in New York City have access to the cultural resources necessary to thrive. Through joyful cultural experiences, artistic expression, and collective advocacy, Cool Culture partners with schools, early childhood centers, and cultural institutions to open doors to marginalized communities, encourage families to preserve their cultural heritage, and influence the systems shaping their lives and communities.

25 Years of Strengthening Health & Wellbeing – Mind, Body, Spirit and Civic Engagement

Through our flagship **CityWide program, 50,000 families** with children from birth to age 8, enrolled in the NYC's system of early childhood programs and Title I Public schools, receive free admission to over **90 museums**, zoos, botanical gardens, and science centers across the city. Working in partnership with **450+ educators**, each year, caregivers and children visit these sites more than 180,000 times, supported by multilingual resources we create to help extend learning from classrooms into homes and communities. An integral part of our work is our signature Family Festivals, which we co-create with museums and are free to the wider public. These festivals offer fun, exploration, various arts forms, and creativity for everyone to enjoy.

Complementing CityWide are wraparound programs that are rooted in the neighborhoods where families reside or attend school. Key initiatives such as **Culture & Connection: Listening Tours** launched this year, to bring cohorts of families together to speak to their specific interests and desires for artful neighborhoods and communities where they and their children can thrive. **Cool Culture Clubs** focuses on families' exploration of arts and cultural spaces in their neighborhood and across NYC to strengthen bonds among family members and neighbors

While **Parent Power for Cultural Equity** equips parents, grandparents, and caregivers to advocate for equitable policies and arts funding, build stronger bridges between educators, families, and cultural institutions, share stories that deepen community understanding, and lead local organizing efforts across NYC. Taken together, Cool Culture programs offer families not only the opportunity to delve into creativity and leadership together in collaboration with educators, artists, cultural centers, and institutions.

I would like to thank the Committee on Cultural Affairs Libraries and International Intergroup Relations for the opportunity to provide you with some insight into Cool Culture's work to address the needs of children and families throughout the five boroughs; to share our best practices and successes; and to speak to how equitable access to **arts and cultural resources are essential to families and communities as we bear witness to the intersecting impacts of systemic racism and the current political climate.**

CreateNYC & The Need for Cultural Equity and Access

In historically marginalized communities, families and children face the stark reality of underinvestment in arts and culture, while more privileged communities benefit from systemic inequities.¹ Legislation requiring New York City to produce its first-ever comprehensive cultural plan was sponsored by the City Council and signed into legislation in 2015, and the CreateNYC Plan published in 2017. **In the process of creating the first-ever CreateNYC Cultural Plan, tens of thousands of New Yorkers named cultural equity and inclusion as their top priorities and expressed a desire to access culture within their own neighborhoods.**²

In response to the goals of CreateNYC, funding allocated to DCLA has provided increased funding for individual artists and borough arts organizations.

However, **the city's antiquated model of funding the arts was established in the 1800s, and has perpetuated and reinforced racial inequities** in who has access to cultural resources; and **far more bold action is needed to address the extreme disparities it has reinforced.**

- At the request of Cool Culture, IBO conducted an analysis of a decade's worth of DCLA funding. The IBO report, [Painting the Town's Budget: An Overview of Department of Cultural Affairs Expense Funding 2017 - 2026](#) found during that time period, **while funding as increased overall, CIG payments consisting of 39 cultural organizations located on city property made up 60% of DCLA spending on average** (ranging from 58%-64%)—**inclusive of funding provided by City Council, while CDF grants which support more than 1,000 cultural organizations, made up 20% on average** (ranging from 18%-22%)
- A Chicago-based study commissioned by The MacArthur Foundation examined the relationship between the arts and neighborhood capacity and community life, and found that **initiatives led by small arts organizations connected to local social networks significantly impact the wellbeing of communities.** They provide: access to new and existing resources to be shared by residents, opportunities to learn new skills, a gathering space for residents of differing socioeconomic status, and for cross cultural dialogue and a structure for meaningful social interaction, and to build positive social relationships.³
- Most recently, Parent Power for Cultural Equity (PP4CE) a collaboration between parents in BedStuy, Cool Culture and the CUNY Public Science Project published [Creative Pathways in BedStuy: A Participatory Study on Access, Intergenerational Creativity, and Cultural Equity](#) identified four key findings: **(1)** Art is everywhere in Bedford Stuyvesant, but access isn't equitable **(2)** Art is intergenerational connection and cultural memory, **(3)** Gentrification has shaped where art lives and who it's for **(4)** Bedford Stuyvesant families hold bold freedom dreams for the future. Concluding with a set of five recommendations, **the residents prioritized imagined free intergenerational art centers, community healing hubs, performing arts spaces, playgrounds, youth-owned creative spaces, and public art that celebrates everyday families.** PP4CE was envisioned by Cool Culture Executive Director, Candice Anderson, and facilitated by cultural strategist Robyne Walker Murphy with Britney Moreira, Ph.D. candidate, CUNY Public Science Project, CUNY Graduate Center.

Cool Culture strong urges the City Council to work with the Administration to:

Build on the CreateNYC's Plan to Create More Equitable Cultural Funding

¹ In NYC, the largest 139 cultural groups received 82 percent of all revenue, while 1,807 with budgets under \$1 million received 6 percent. [Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy](#), Helicon Collaborative, July 2017.

² [Create NYC a Cultural Plan for All New Yorkers, 2017.](#)

³ [Leveraging Assets: How Small Budget Arts Activities Benefit Neighborhoods](#), MacArthur Foundation, Diane Grams and Michael Warr, 2003.

- **Revisit and radically reimagine the existing antiquated funding model so that DCLA and the administration play an active role in redressing historic inequities in government funding, and to support BIPOC organizations that play essential roles in their communities.**
- **Create a baseline budget item for BIPOC arts entities with guaranteed support in the annual budget every year, in the same way the CIG is a baseline budget item.**

We strongly urge you to ensure the necessary support for arts and culture and to include the priorities of cultural organizations, particularly BIPOC-led institutions that have deep relationships with historically marginalized communities in New York City. This support will enable Cool Culture and other arts and culture community members to continue providing critical programs as many communities struggle through the city's recovery phase.

I know you are facing incredibly difficult choices as you try to address the great and pressing needs of communities. As members of the Cultural Affairs Committee, we are incredibly grateful to your advocacy on behalf of the NYC Arts and Cultural sector, which plays a central role in addressing these needs.

Additionally, **we welcome the chance to meet with you or your staff to share more details and discuss how our work aligns with your priorities for families, arts engagement, and community well-being.** Thank you for your time and leadership.

Sincerely,
Candice Anderson
Executive Director

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

Committee On Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations

Nantasha M. Williams, Chair | Members: Crystal Hudson; Farah N. Louis; Virginia Maloney; Chi A. Ossé; Althea V. Stevens; Sandra Ung

HEARING: Monday, February 9, 2026 | 1:00 PM 250 Broadway – 8th Floor – Hearing Room 1

AGENDA ITEM: T2026-0832 – Oversight: Affordability in New York City’s Arts and Cultural Sector

Chair Williams, Members of the Council, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Mauricio Delfin, and I am testifying on behalf of the Culture & Arts Policy Institute, which I co-direct with Gonzalo Casals.

We are here today because affordability in New York City’s cultural sector cannot be addressed by funding levels alone. Funding matters, of course. But affordability also depends on how the City governs culture: how it designs policy, targets interventions, and evaluates whether those interventions are working. In other words, it depends on whether the City is equipped to run cultural policy as a serious, evidence-driven public function.

At the center of that work is the Department of Cultural Affairs. If DCLA is expected to lead an affordability agenda for artists, cultural workers, and cultural organizations, then it must be equipped to operate as an evidence-driven policy agency.

Right now, it is not.

Today, DCLA is asked to make high-stakes decisions about program design, equity, and impact without a permanent, in-house research and data unit—the kind of capacity that other core City agencies take for granted. As a result, the City is often forced to rely on anecdotes, lagging proxies, and fragmented information, rather than a clear, timely picture of who is being served, who is being left out, and what outcomes public programs are actually producing.

But the City cannot build an effective policy on anecdotes.

And DCLA cannot design serious affordability interventions—whether in workforce support, cultural space, or neighborhood stability—if it cannot measure needs, track results, and adjust course based on evidence.

This is not a technical issue.

This is a public accountability issue.

A serious research, evaluation, and data function would allow DCLA to identify disparities across organizations, workers, neighborhoods, and disciplines—and to direct public investment more equitably. It would allow the agency to adapt programs in real time, rather than waiting years for the consequences of misalignment to become visible. And it would strengthen the credibility of cultural policy in the budget process, where evidence increasingly determines what gets funded and what does not.

This is what it means to rebuild DCLA for the 21st century.

Enterprise-grade data capacity is not a luxury. It is cultural infrastructure.

It is the infrastructure that makes equity measurable, effectiveness verifiable, and innovation possible.

It is also what enables collaboration.

Affordability for artists and cultural workers does not reside solely within DCLA. It intersects with housing, workforce development, public health, immigration services, small business support, and neighborhood investment. But DCLA cannot collaborate effectively across agencies if it cannot share, integrate, and analyze information across municipal systems. Without that capacity, cultural policy remains isolated from the broader policy ecosystem that actually shapes affordability in people's lives.

To make this real, we recommend that the City establish a permanent research, evaluation, and data division within DCLA, focused on four core functions.

First, interagency data sharing and data governance, so cultural policy can actually connect to housing, labor, health, and economic development systems.

Second, continuous sector-wide monitoring of organizations, workers, cultural space, and funding flows—so the City is not flying blind or relying on outdated snapshots.

Third, applied policy research tied directly to program design and budget formulation—so evidence informs decisions before money is spent, not just after.

And fourth, public-facing transparency through regularly updated data products—so the sector, the Council, and the public can see what is happening, what is working, and where gaps remain.

This division must be staffed with dedicated expertise in research, data governance, and policy analysis, supported by interoperable systems and formal data-sharing agreements with relevant agencies. In other words, it should function as governance infrastructure—not

as a temporary project, not as an add-on, and not as a consultant-driven effort that disappears when the contract ends.

And this brings me to a final, essential point.

If DCLA collects information from the sector—as it already does through grantmaking, contracting, and compliance—then it also has a responsibility to comply with the City’s Open Data Law and share appropriate information publicly. This is not just about transparency for its own sake. It is about service delivery, coordination, and accountability.

Civil society and philanthropy cannot partner effectively with the City if they cannot see the contours of need. They cannot align investments. They cannot fill gaps. And they cannot help strengthen service delivery for artists and cultural workers if the City’s knowledge remains locked inside agency systems.

Public-facing data also enables democratic oversight. It allows this Council, the sector, researchers, and the public to understand whether City investments are reaching communities equitably, whether programs are delivering results, and whether policy goals are being met. And it ensures that cultural policy is held to the same standards of evidence, performance, and accountability that the City expects in other areas of public life.

In closing, we urge this Committee to treat research, evaluation, and open data capacity at DCLA as part of the affordability agenda and of the City’s cultural governance infrastructure.

If the City is serious about affordability, it must also be serious about policies that are measurable, equitable, responsive, and accountable. And that begins by equipping DCLA with the permanent, enterprise-grade policy capacity that a 21st-century cultural agency requires.

Thank you.



Testimony to City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations Affordability Hearing

Given to the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations on February 9, 2026

Good morning. My name is Raquel Du Toit, and I serve as Executive Director of Dance/NYC. We serve and represent the estimated 6,000 dance workers and 1,700 dance entities of our city. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Dance contributes roughly \$300 million to New York City's economy annually, but the workers behind that impact are struggling to remain here. Since 2019, New York City has seen an 18.8% decline in the number of dancers. When adjusted for cost of living, NYC dancers earn almost \$7 less per hour than their peers nationwide, and nearly a third worked 5 or more dance jobs in a year just to survive.

For these workers, rehearsal space is both essential and critically unaffordable. Our 2023 Dance Industry Census found that dance workers consistently named affordable space as one of their top five needs. In that year, rehearsal space rates averaged at \$70 an hour— more than twice the average dance worker wage of \$22 an hour. And while space is important to all art forms, dance faces particular barriers— less than a third of rehearsal spaces in 2023 were high quality for dance, with many using flooring that is not conducive to dance.

Amidst this critical period of need, Dance/NYC is facing the loss of major foundation funding for our \$1 million Rehearsal Space Subsidy program. We subsidized more than 143,000 rehearsal hours, allowing 4,800 dance artists to rent rehearsal spaces at \$10 an hour or less. This program is not peripheral— it is infrastructure. When we lose it, the field loses capacity, organizations lose talent, and artists lose pathways to stability.

We urge the Council to join us in providing direct support for space subsidies. By investing in affordable workspace, we can start to build a city where working-class dance artists can afford to stay and thrive.

Thank you for your leadership and the opportunity to testify today.

Oversight - Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector
NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations
Testimony on behalf of Dancewave, Inc.
Presented by Nicole Touzien on February 9, 2026

Chair Williams and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Dancewave, where I serve as Executive Director.

For 30 years, Dancewave has provided inclusive and empowering dance education to New Yorkers across all five boroughs. We use dance as a vehicle for transformation. By providing space for individual social and emotional growth through movement-based programming, we help foster increased social cohesion and wellbeing.

Last year alone, Dancewave:

- Provided 3,300 direct service hours of free multicultural dance programming in NYC Public Schools, older adult centers, and community centers
- Supported 300 high school students in gaining college admissions while pursuing careers in the arts
- Awarded \$130,000 in scholarships, ensuring equitable access for 1,000 youth and adults in recreational, pre-professional, and professional programs

We accomplish this work through the strategic, values-aligned stewardship of limited resources. With a dedicated team of 12 full- and part-time administrative staff and 40 of seasonal, part-time education program staff, Dancewave engages an outsized audience of approximately 25,000 individuals annually.

Like many nonprofits, we maximize the impact of every dollar entrusted to us. While there is pride in what nonprofit organizations accomplish with limited resources, the expectations placed on our sector are unrealistic and reinforce systemic inequities that disproportionately burden community-based organizations.

While I am deeply proud of our impact, I submit this testimony to highlight key affordability challenges facing Dancewave and the broader arts and cultural sector, and to urge the Committee to consider policy and funding solutions that will sustain the organizations that are the lifeblood of New York City.

DYCD Reimbursement Delays

Dancewave receives support from the City of New York through City Council discretionary funding, the Department of Youth and Community Development

Oversight - Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector
NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations
Testimony on behalf of Dancewave, Inc.
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(DYCD), and the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA). In Fiscal Year 2026, approximately 20% of Dancewave's income will come from city funding.

DYCD's reimbursement-based funding structure is widely recognized as complex and significantly delayed. Dancewave is currently awaiting reimbursement for services provided two years ago, totaling \$50,000.

This reimbursement model creates serious cash flow challenges and undermines financial forecasting. It also consumes substantial staff capacity. On average, completing DYCD paperwork to accept and request reimbursement for a \$25,000 discretionary grant costs Dancewave approximately \$4,000 in staff time.

This administrative and financial burden limits our ability to expand services, reduces employment opportunities for artists and arts workers, and diverts resources away from direct service to New Yorkers and towards navigating inefficient bureaucratic processes.

MTAC Registration Delays

Dancewave provides services to NYC youth through its registration as a vendor with NYC Public Schools, supported in part by DYCD, DCLA and City Council discretionary funding.

Through the Multiple Task Award Contract (MTAC) process, vendors receive a five-year contract with NYC Public Schools, allowing increased visibility to schools, streamlined procurement, and opportunities for larger partnerships. Working with NYC Public Schools allows Dancewave to serve historically under-resourced communities while helping schools address curricular and staffing gaps. Each year, Dancewave partners with more than 50 schools, generating approximately one-third of our annual income.

Dancewave is currently navigating the MTAC re-registration process following the expiration of our most recent contract. Similar to DYCD, the MTAC process is overly complicated and subject to severe delays. As outlined in the attached Arts in Education Roundtable report, the current structure makes it impossible for vendors to maintain continuous contract status, resulting in disruptions that harm both the providers and young people we serve.

Because the contract registration process is anticipated to take more than 18 months, Dancewave must now ask already overextended school administrators to

Oversight - Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector
NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations
Testimony on behalf of Dancewave, Inc.
Presented by Nicole Touzien on February 9, 2026

complete a separate and complex bidding process to continue accessing our services. When administrators are unable or unwilling to navigate this additional process, students lose access to programming and Dancewave cannot provide employment for the 40 teaching artists and education staff who rely on this work.

These inefficient contracting processes strain limited organizational resources, reduce service delivery to New Yorkers, and place artists and arts workers at significant financial risk.

Costs of Living Outpacing Funding Increases

Dancewave is one of more than 3,000 arts and cultural organizations that the City of New York relies upon to provide essential services to residents. The creative sector is a major economic driver, contributing more than \$110 billion in economic impact and supporting roughly 300,000 jobs across the city.

Dancewave alone invests more than \$1 million annually in employing artists and arts workers who contribute to and stimulate the local economy.

Despite the sector's enormous economic and social impact, City investment has not kept pace with inflation or rising operational costs. DCLA's \$300 million budget is spread across approximately 1,000 organizations and continues to lose purchasing power in the face of escalating costs.

Dancewave's Cultural Development Fund multi-year award represents approximately 5% of our total income. While deeply appreciated, stagnant funding levels will continue to produce diminishing returns as New York City's affordability crisis intensifies.

Recommendations

I respectfully urge the Committee to consider policy and funding solutions that address the chronic under-resourcing and persistent contracting and payment delays that undermine affordability for NYC's artists and arts workers. New York City's future depends on a vibrant and sustainable creative sector. Supporting arts and cultural organizations in delivering services and retaining artists is not only a cultural imperative but an economic one.

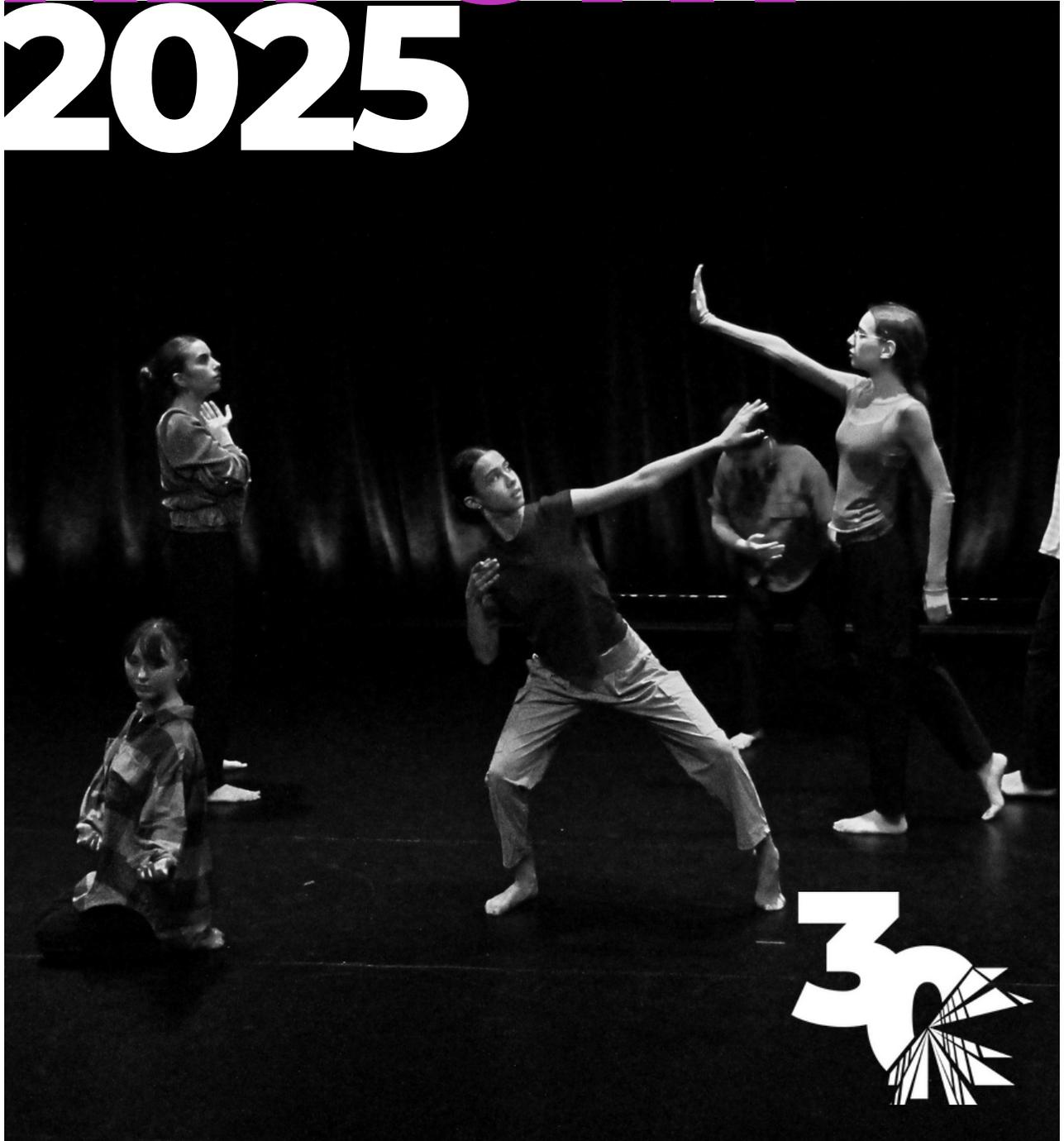
Thank you for your time and consideration,

Nicole Touzien
Executive Director, Dancewave

DANCEWAVE

IMPACT REPORT

2025



ABOUT DANCEWAVE

We believe in youth empowerment, whole-person development, and a community-oriented dance experience accessible to all.

We use dance as a vehicle for expression, community building, self-reflective transformation and active citizenship. Central to our work is Dancewave's unique culture model, which strives to subvert oppressive systems through responsive and equity-driven programming.

OUR 2025 TEAM



Phoebe Ballard



Hallee Bernstein



Ajé Brown



Lindsey Jennings



Meredith Katibah



Marissa Kuczkowski



Meropi Peponides



Kalinda Santor



Jessie Sector



Kristen Stout



Serenity Taylor



Sophie Tibiletti



Nicole Touzien

MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

As we mark Dancewave's 30th anniversary in 2025, the Board of Directors is honored to celebrate three decades of meaningful impact, artistic excellence, and community connection. This milestone reflects the dedication of our administrative and teaching staff, whose commitment allows Dancewave to engage 25,000 individuals annually with accessible and transformative dance experiences.



**TODD L.
SPILLANE**
Board Chair

With multilingual and intergenerational programming, innovative artist support services, flexible and free tuition pathways, and year-round, seven-days-a-week access to the Dancewave Center, the organization continues to evolve in response to the needs of our diverse community.

We extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who participates in our programs, contributes financially, or champions our work from afar. Your support ensures that the joy, connection, and opportunity of dance remain within reach for all.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Nicole Best



Rachel Brush



Tiffany Mellard



Dagmar Nedbal



Kinjal Parekh



Livia Reuss



Vanessa Williams



Mackenzie Yedlin

ARTISTIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

Allie James | Monique Smith | Nola Sporn Smith
Krystal Mackie | Malcolm McMichael | Tiffany Mellard (Chair) | Maleek Washington

OUR IMPACT

Dancewave connected with an international community of nearly **25,000** individuals in 2025.



Nearly
\$100,000
in youth scholarships
awarded



500
young artists trained
at the Dancewave
Center



250+
hours of pre-
professional
performance training
logged with
professional artists



300
high school students
started their college
journey at Dancewave
Through College and
Beyond



100
no-cost programs
hosted in schools and
community centers



3,300+
hours spent supporting
cultural literacy through
our Community
Residencies



\$30,000
in rehearsal subsidies
awarded to **over 600**
local artists



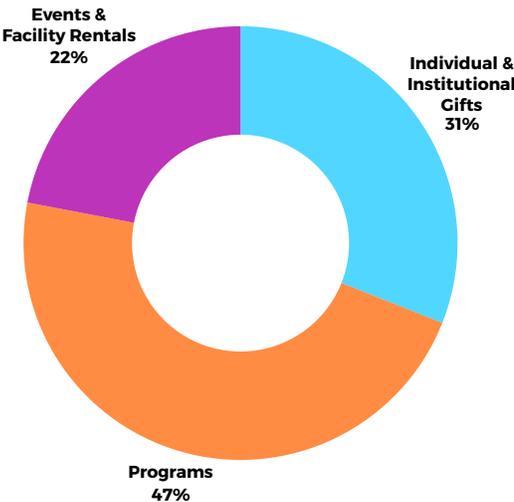
75
free or low cost classes
hosted through our Class
Share Program earning an
average of \$1,800 per
teaching artist

FINANCIALS

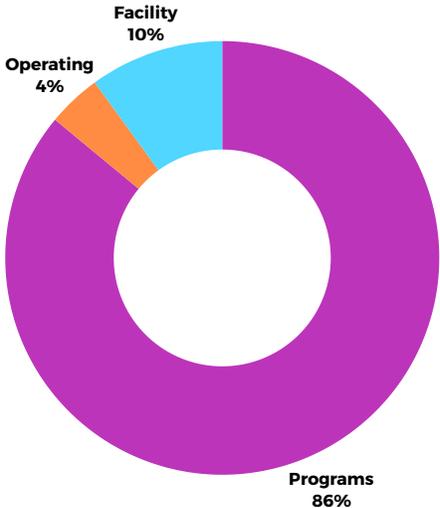
Dancewave strives to live its mission, vision, and values at all levels of the organization. We allocate our financial resources carefully and strategically to maximize community impact. Dancewave prioritizes equitable access for all participants, providing fee-based programs that employ flexible and free tuition options. No one is ever turned away for lack of funds.

Thanks to the organization's excellent fiscal management, Dancewave has emerged strong following the COVID-19 pandemic. Dancewave seeks to grow and diversify its financial portfolio with mission-aligned partners to ensure continued sustainability and success. To learn more, please get in touch with leadership@dancewave.org

INCOME



EXPENSES



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Cornelia T. Bailey Foundation | DanceNYC | Doolittle Foundation Trust | Find Your Light Foundation | Genesis Inspiration Foundation | Harkness Foundation for Dance | The Hyde and Watson Foundation | The Janey Fund Charitable Trust | Jody & John Arnhold | Marianne and George F. Markham Foundation, Inc. | The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation | 1834 Project | Youth Inc.

And a vibrant network of 180+ individuals whose charitable contributions make our work possible

We thank you for your continued support of a more inclusive and vibrant dance community.

As we reflect on the last 30 years, we are reinvigorated in our mission to bring accessible arts education to the people of NYC and beyond. We are well into our three-year Strategic Plan that has helped guide our work boldly forward in this new era!

Our plan enables us to better advance our mission, vision, and values by:



Deepening Our Commitment to Equitable Access

Increasing access to a wider segment of participants from low-income and marginalized communities



Increasing Community Investment in our Work

Improving fundraising efforts and coalition building to bolster our ability to provide free and low-cost programming



Amplifying Advancement Opportunities

Increasing opportunities for professional development via networking and whole person-focused arts training

Arts in Education **R****UNDTABLE**

In December 2024, the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable surveyed arts organizations regarding their experiences with the NYC Public School's Multiple Task Award Contract (MTAC) process. Prompted by continued feedback from cultural organizations experiencing difficulty obtaining, renewing, and obtaining extensions for contracts with NYC Public Schools, we administered a survey to streamline community feedback so that we can better understand trends in the field related to how the MTAC process is impacting arts organizations and their ability to provide educational opportunities to students.

As of January 2025, [NYC Public Schools lists at least 82 organizations](#) with arts-related MTAC contracts for R1129 (Arts Education Services) and R1180 (Professional Development Services for Arts Education). The attached survey was shared with the Roundtable's mailing list (6,850-strong) and shared with additional organizations via the weekly [Culture @ 3 calls](#), a weekly call with NYC cultural organizations that grew in response to the city's shutdown due to the pandemic. We received 23 formal responses to our survey, with an additional 15-20 organizations reaching out to share information via email or Zoom.

This report summarizes our findings and offers recommendations on how to improve the MTAC process. The survey results reveal significant challenges for arts organizations in securing and maintaining MTAC contracts, which are essential for providing arts education programs in NYC public schools. Overall, delays in the MTAC process result in lost revenue and disruption to arts programming for students. For organizations with decades-long experience providing arts education services in NYC Public Schools, lengthy contract renewals and extensions processes are causing undue administrative burden to schools and fracturing existing relationships. The Roundtable hopes that we can continue to work with our partners in NYC Public Schools to reform in line with the broader contracting reform happening across the city, eliminating months (if not years) of lapsed service and red tape.

"After engaging in an MTAC process for about 9 months, we were asked to cut our budget so we'd be paying our teaching artists just above minimum wage... We love providing high caliber teaching artists to our schools and ensuring a high level of service, and the pricing change in particular didn't seem sustainable to us." - Organization Representative

"We are asking the DOE for what the overall process looks like because, 18 months in, it's still unclear." - Organization Representative

What is an MTAC?

An MTAC is a specialized type of contract mechanism used by NYCPS to identify vendors qualified to work in schools and to set contract terms for professional arts (and other) services.

Schools can buy services from vendors with an MTAC without launching a competitive procurement process, which would be required for all contracts above the \$25,000 small purchase limit.

MTAC contracts enable arts and cultural vendors to partner with a school on contracts over \$25,000. Non-contracted arts vendors have an overall cap of \$25,000 they can do with a given school per year. The arts vendor can have individual projects within the school but the projects total cannot exceed \$25,000 (for non-contracted vendors). After \$25,000, vendors will need an MTAC (Multiple Task Award Contract) contract to partner with schools.

Common Challenges

- **Unresponsive NYCPS Personnel:** Many organizations cited difficulty in obtaining timely responses from DOE procurement analysts and other relevant staff. Emails and phone calls frequently go unanswered, leading to significant delays. This lack of communication makes it difficult for organizations to track the progress of their applications or address any issues that may arise.
- **Lengthy and Opaque Process:** The MTAC process is perceived as overly complex and time-consuming, with unclear timelines and expectations. Organizations report significant frustration with the lack of transparency and communication throughout the application and negotiation stages.
- **Financial Negotiation Hurdles:** Organizations encounter difficulties with the financial negotiation stage, including pressure to lower pricing structures, a lack of initial transparency regarding acceptable price ranges, and protracted rounds of revisions and resubmissions.

Delays in Contract Renewals, Extensions, and New Contracts

- **Renewals:** Organizations seeking contract renewals report significant delays, with some experiencing wait times of up to 28 months. Even when organizations proactively engage with NYCPS well in advance of their contract expiration dates, they often encounter unexpected delays.
- **Extensions:** Similar delays are reported for contract extensions, with wait times of up to two years. This timeframe often exceeds the one-year advance notice period that organizations are supposed to receive for contract extensions.
- **New Contracts:** Organizations applying for MTAC contracts for the first time also experience lengthy processing times, ranging from 15-18 months or longer.

Other Notable Issues

- **Impact on Underserved Schools:** Delays in the MTAC process disproportionately affect schools with little to no arts instruction that rely on these organizations to provide essential arts education programs in line with state learning requirements.
- **Administrative Burden:** The extensive documentation and information required for MTAC applications create a significant administrative burden for cultural organizations, diverting resources from their core mission of providing arts education.

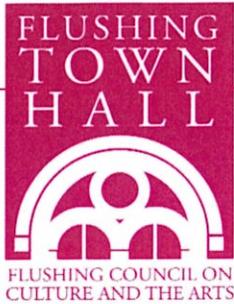
- **Limited Guidance and Support:** Organizations expressed a need for clearer guidance and support throughout the MTAC process, including more transparent communication, streamlined application procedures, and readily accessible resources.

Recommendations

- **Improve communication and responsiveness within the NYCPS' Office of Procurement:** Implement measures to ensure timely responses to inquiries from arts organizations and provide regular updates on the status of their applications.
- **Simplify and streamline the MTAC process:** Review and revise the application and negotiation procedures to reduce complexity and redundancy, especially for organizations seeking extension or renewal with long-standing history of partnership.
- **Establish clear timelines and expectations:** Provide organizations with specific timelines for each stage of the process and ensure that these timelines are adhered to as closely as possible.
- **Increase transparency in financial negotiations:** Provide organizations with clearer guidance on pricing expectations and ensure a fair and efficient negotiation process.
- **Develop a dedicated support system for arts organizations:** Create a centralized resource center or help desk that can provide guidance and assistance throughout the MTAC process.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Dedicate resources to ensure that renewals and extensions are processed efficiently and well in advance of contract expiration dates. NYCPS should establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that staff process MTAC awards, extensions and renewals so that service gaps are avoided.

Conclusion

The MTAC process presents significant challenges for NYC arts organizations, hindering their ability to provide quality arts education programs to students. By addressing the issues identified in this report, NYC Public Schools can create a more efficient and supportive system that empowers arts organizations to fulfill their mission and enrich the lives of NYC students.



City Council Hearing – Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries
Affordability in New York City’s Arts and Cultural Sector
February 9, 2026
Testimony – Flushing Town Hall

*Ellen Kodadek
Executive & Artistic Director*

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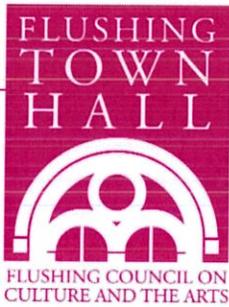
Good afternoon, Chair Williams and members of the committee – thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important topic.

My name is Sami Abu Shumays, deputy director at Flushing Town Hall, one of the smaller CIGs based in Queens; I also sit on the steering committees of the Latinx Arts Consortium of New York (LXNY) and the Cultural Equity Coalition of New York (CECNy). I am joined by my colleague Natalie Bedon, the Manager of our Queens Cultural Mapping Initiative.

Affordability in the arts and cultural sector is a multifaceted problem. Most obviously, we have a broad affordability problem for everyone in New York City; that affects artists as much as everyone else. In terms of housing, I don’t like to separate “artists” from the general population, because in my mind, everyone is an artist or a potential artist, but it is affordability, not talent, that holds many people back. Housing solutions specific to artists will inevitably privilege those artists who already have some recognition, will force severe competition for a small number of slots, and will play into the artwashing dynamic where developers are allowed to create more unaffordable housing for regular New Yorkers by creating special units for artists or community space for arts organizations. So I don’t favor it – the arts community needs us to solve the affordability problem for everyone.

However, there are other facets to the affordability problem, and I’d like to highlight some of these by referring to a report that Flushing Town Hall has just published. In 2024, the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) commissioned us to undertake a cultural mapping of Queens which had several goals: For us to learn about more of the artists and small arts organizations based in the borough – which would help support our regranting programs; for us to learn about the challenges artists and arts organizations face; and for us to crowdsource solutions to these problems from the arts community itself. Over the course of 2024-2025 our two community coordinators held 157 one on one interviews, 5 town halls and 7 artist meetups, and conducted a detailed survey that received 95 responses. On the basis of this data we put together a 65 page report, created a digital map of Queens’s arts assets, and have more to come from the second year of funding.

I’ll turn it over to Natalie, who was one of those community coordinators in year one, promoted to manager of the initiative now that we’ve received funding for a second year from NYSCA.



[Natalie]

City Council Hearing – Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries
Affordability in New York City’s Arts and Cultural Sector
February 9, 2026
Testimony – Flushing Town Hall – p. 2

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One of the main findings of our report is that “Affordable Space is a critical Constraint” at every level of the arts ecosystem - “the ongoing challenge of limited access to physical space for work, creation, exhibitions, and performances remains a persistent issue.” “When asked about the greatest priorities for improvement in the cultural sector, 95% of survey respondents selected improved access to affordable spaces. Our recommendations are to:

- Advance the re-purposing of vacant or underutilized buildings
- Support the creation of affordable studio spaces
- Provide increased support for existing organizations already providing studios, residencies, exhibitions, and performances

Other affordability challenges are less obvious, but just as impactful, particularly around transportation and organizational capacity.

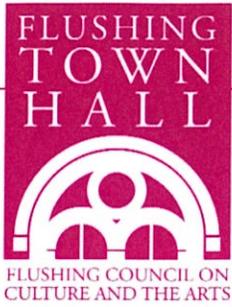
Queens’ 109-square-mile geography presents fundamental challenges to cultural connectivity. As New York City’s largest borough, Queens, suffers from large gaps in public transportation, with many neighborhoods classified as “Transit Deserts” requiring multiple transfers and lengthy commutes. Regions without available transportation also have fewer cultural resources, creating inequities in arts access across the borough. Our recommendations are to:

- Pilot shuttle services and ride-sharing programs for cultural events
- Develop hyper-local cultural hubs in underserved neighborhoods
- Foster Cross-neighborhood collaborations

Finally, the lack of adequate funding for cultural organizations in Queens, and the huge problems with funding structures – outdated reimbursement and project-based models for funding, lack of consistent support year-to-year – create numerous downstream problems, including a lack of stability in organizations, a lack of adequate staffing, an over-reliance on unpaid and underpaid labor, and unsustainable burdens on organizations and staff. Hence only those who already possess sufficient resources (time, money, energy) can afford to create or work at these organizations, resulting in fewer opportunities for artists as well as audiences and community members. Our recommendations are to:

- Provide more cultural funding resources to areas of Queens that suffer from these gaps, such as Southeast Queens and the Rockaways
- Prioritize multi-year general operating support over project-based grants
- Shift to upfront payments rather than reimbursement models
- Invest in leadership development and mentorship programs
- Support peer learning and training for volunteer coordination.

*Flushing Town Hall (1862) is a New York City landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
In 1996 the facility became an officially designated cultural institution in the City of New York.*



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City Council Hearing – Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries
Affordability in New York City’s Arts and Cultural Sector

February 9, 2026

Testimony – Flushing Town Hall – p. 3

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[[Back to Sami](#)]

More detailed information on these challenges and recommendations are contained in *The 2025 Queens Cultural Mapping Report: Diversity, Resilience, and the Power of Community*, just published. I’ve attached executive summaries to our testimony, and we’ll be sending out full copies of the report to all your offices in the next few weeks. In addition, we’ll be hosting a panel conversation about the report on March 25th, and we hope you’ll be able to attend.

Thank you very much for your attention to this urgent matter!

Scan to Read:
The 2025 Cultural Mapping Report



The 2025 Queens Cultural Mapping Initiative

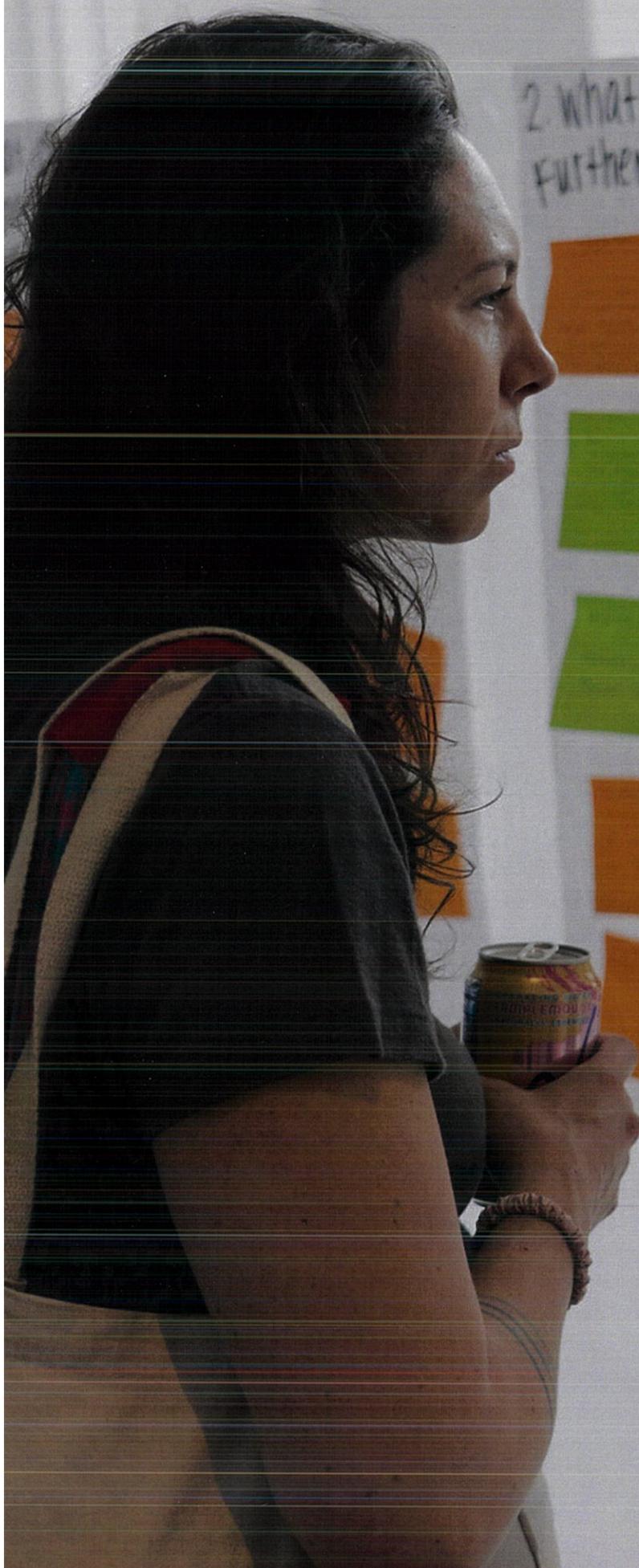
Diversity, Resilience, and the Power of Community



NEW YORK
STATE OF
OPPORTUNITY.

**Council on
the Arts**

2 What services/resources could further support your work?





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**Council on
the Arts**

DEVELOPED BY FLUSHING COUNCIL ON CULTURE AND THE ARTS, INC. DBA **FLUSHING TOWN HALL** WITH GENEROUS SUPPORT FROM **THE NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS WITH THE SUPPORT OF GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL AND THE NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE**

COVER ART: VIVARTA ARTS – GARBA AROUND THE GLOBE BY AKSHAT KAUL
PROJECT TEAM ART: BY ELLIOT COWAN

Introduction

Flushing Council on Culture and the Arts dba Flushing Town Hall (FTH) was invited by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) to lead a new project: the Queens Cultural Mapping Initiative. This effort aims to document the borough's rich and diverse artistic landscape, highlighting the cultural contributions of its communities while addressing pressing challenges, especially in under-resourced areas with limited access to funding, transportation, and consistent arts programming.

Flushing Town Hall launched this project with several core goals:

- Develop a comprehensive report capturing the strengths, needs, and barriers within Queens' creative community
- Build a borough-wide digital map showcasing arts and culture spaces
- Increase visibility for Queens' creative community—both locally and citywide—making it easier for artists and organizations to discover new collaborators, exhibition and performance spaces, and professional opportunities
- Strengthen networks among artists and organizations through events like arts community town halls
- Inform future Flushing Town Hall programs that directly respond to the insights gathered (e.g., our two new professional development workshops)

In mid-2024, Flushing Town Hall hired two community coordinators, Natalie Bedon and Amara Thomas, to undertake this project. Over the course of a year, the cultural mapping team conducted 157 one-on-one in-depth interviews with artists, community members, and cultural leaders, attended local arts and culture events, hosted five arts community town halls, and seven artist meetups.

In Spring 2025 we designed and implemented a survey of the arts community to supplement the data collected through interviews and meetings, which received 95 responses.

The cultural mapping team produced this report, combining insights from the interviews and survey responses across Queens' arts and culture community. In this report we feature the voices of dozens of these Queens community members that shaped the key insights and helped inform the recommendations provided. We extend our deepest appreciation to the community members who shared their expertise, experiences, perspectives, and hopes with Flushing Town Hall.

This report includes five key areas of reflection and opportunity for the cultural community in Queens: the cultural & geographic context, borough infrastructure, funding landscape, staffing, and space. Each theme is explored in detail below with survey data, quotes, and case studies. We have developed a set of recommendations at the end of the report that offer pathways forward to a more vibrant and sustainable cultural sector in Queens. The Flushing Town Hall team hopes that these findings will inspire new perspectives, deepen understanding, spark collaborations, and galvanize collective change across the borough and beyond.

We gratefully acknowledge the funding support of the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the expertise of the residents, artists, and community and cultural leaders who provided their perspectives for this research, as well as Dr. Jennifer Benoit-Bryan of SMU Data Arts for her expert review and valuable feedback, which strengthened the clarity and rigor of this report.

About Flushing Council on Culture and the Arts dba Flushing Town Hall



Flushing Council on Culture and the Arts was founded in 1979 to serve the rapidly diversifying communities of Queens, NY with culturally-responsive programming that reflected the many cultural heritages of immigrants from around the world, and a vision to promote mutual understanding. We have always been multi-disciplinary—presenting music, dance, theatre, and visual arts, and in our first decade we partnered with hundreds of organizations across Queens on our programs. In 1990, Flushing Council on Culture and the Arts moved into the 1862 historic landmark Flushing Town Hall and transformed it into a cultural center with a 308-seat theater and an art gallery. In addition to concerts, exhibitions, and other public programs, we have a long history of offering Arts Education programs to schools and senior centers, and services to artists and arts organizations in Queens. Since 2021 we have been a partner with the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) offering regrants to Queens-based artists and organizations; and since 2023 we have been a regrant partner of the Howard Gilman Foundation as well. We are a member of NYC’s Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) and a Smithsonian Affiliate.



Executive Summary

PHOTO BY KINDING SINDAW

The Queens Cultural Mapping Initiative, led by Flushing Town Hall in partnership with the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), represents a comprehensive examination of the Queens cultural landscape in "The World's Borough." Queens, home to residents from over 120 countries speaking more than 160 languages, is one of the most culturally diverse places in the world. Its arts community reflects this richness through constant cross-cultural collaboration in music, dance, and visual arts. Cultural institutions and community groups ensure accessibility with multilingual, culturally relevant programming, while local artists' ties to their countries of origin and global networks make Queens' creative ecosystem both deeply local and globally connected.

Through 157 one-on-one interviews, a community survey, five arts community town halls, and seven artist meetups, this initiative documented both the extraordinary strengths and persistent challenges facing Queens' diverse creative community. Four critical values of cultural work in Queens, five types of challenges facing cultural organizations in Queens, and five strategic recommendations emerged from this research.

Key Community Benefits of Cultural Organizations in Queens

Filling Gaps and Responding to Community Needs

Queens is one of the most diverse places in the world. This diversity creates a wide range of community needs and gaps in access, visibility, and opportunity. Many founders and artists in Queens initiate their work to address these unmet needs, whether in arts education, cultural programming, or community support. By listening to their communities and adapting to pressing challenges, these organizations transform adversity into opportunity, creating platforms that amplify voices, provide resources, and strengthen Queens' rich and multifaceted cultural ecosystem.

Joy, Healing, and Empowerment

In Queens, cultural work provides both personal satisfaction and collective transformation for the borough's diverse communities, including its large immigrant population. Participants and organizers describe joy, pride, and fulfillment from seeing their artistic and community efforts take root in neighborhoods across the borough. Beyond enjoyment, cultural engagement offers healing, helping individuals process migration experiences, navigate cultural transitions, and build resilience. It also fosters self-expression and confidence, creating spaces where people can explore identities and connect with others. Through these practices, cultural work empowers individuals and strengthens communities, sustaining long-term commitment to both artistic and social projects in Queens.

Heritage, Creativity, and Inspiring Future Generations

Queens is home to an extraordinary diversity of cultures with hundreds of distinct traditions. Preserving and transmitting these cultural practices motivates many local organizations, ensuring that languages, dance, music, and other artistic forms are carried across generations. At the same time, due to the unique mix of people in the borough, cultural work in Queens fosters experimentation, innovation, and creative growth, providing opportunities for mentorship, skill development, and artistic exploration. By combining intergenerational engagement with creative empowerment, these initiatives strengthen cultural pride, build community cohesion, and help sustain and expand Queens' cultural vitality for generations to come.

Community Building and Collaboration

In Queens, cultural initiatives often thrive through collaboration, bringing together large institutions, small community organizations, independent artists, and local collectives. These partnerships create opportunities for resource-sharing, mentorship, and joint programming, fostering social bonds and networks of mutual support across neighborhoods. By combining the reach of established institutions with the innovation and grassroots connections of smaller groups, these initiatives strengthen community ties and amplify the impact of creative work throughout Queens.

Critical Challenges Facing Cultural Organizations in Queens

Geographic Isolation Reinforces Barriers

Queens' 109-square-mile geography presents fundamental challenges to cultural connectivity. As New York City's largest borough, Queens suffers from large gaps in public transportation, with many neighborhoods classified as "transit deserts" requiring multiple transfers and lengthy commutes. Regions without available transportation also have fewer cultural resources—which tend to situate in more accessible locations—creating inequities in arts access across the borough.

Infrastructure Gaps Limit Coordination and Collaboration

Queens is the only NYC borough without a dedicated arts council. The Queens Council on the Arts transitioned from its traditional role in 2022, leaving a leadership void in advocacy, strategic planning, and resource coordination. Many community members remain unaware of this change, continuing to seek support from an organization that no longer provides comprehensive services. While organizations like Queens Rising, Indie Space, Flushing Town Hall and the initiative Arts.Culture.Queens work to fill this gap, awareness of these resources remains limited across the borough's diverse communities.

Funding Contexts Constrain Growth

Nearly half of survey respondents identified funding access as a primary concern. The funding landscape is structured in ways that are particularly challenging for smaller cultural organizations: limited availability of grants relative to demand, reimbursement models requiring organizations to front costs, dominance of project-based over general operating support, barriers for non-501(c)(3) organizations (25% of respondents), and conflicting application deadlines. Service organizations face the additional challenge of competing for the same grants they promote to their communities.

Staffing Challenges Undermine Sustainability

Many cultural organizations in Queens are understaffed with more than a third we surveyed operating without any full-time employees, while another 30% have only one full-time staff member. This results in unsustainable workloads where leaders manage everything from programming to grant writing to community engagement. Organizations rely heavily on volunteer labor—nearly two-thirds use volunteers for program delivery—but this creates additional management burdens without guaranteed consistency. The result is widespread burnout, lost institutional knowledge through turnover, and missed opportunities for community engagement.

Space Scarcity Limits Creative Potential

When asked about future priorities, 95% of respondents selected improved access to affordable spaces as essential. Space is a concern at every level of the arts ecosystem from artist studios to administrative offices to exhibition and performance space. Costs are consistently high and availability is limited.

Strategic Recommendations

Address Geographic Isolation

- Pilot shuttle services and ride-sharing programs for cultural events.
- Develop hyper-local cultural hubs in underserved neighborhoods.
- Foster cross-neighborhood collaborations and shared staffing models.

Invest in Borough Infrastructure

- Establish a single centralized Queens arts council to administer all regrants for Queens.
- Build centralized digital platforms for resource sharing.
- Expand networking opportunities and targeted outreach efforts.

Shift Funding Structure

- Prioritize multi-year general operating support over project-based grants.
- Shift to upfront payments rather than reimbursement models.
- Expand eligibility to include fiscally sponsored and unincorporated groups.
- Provide grant writing support and explore common application systems.

Strengthen Staffing & Capacity

- Invest in leadership development and mentorship programs.
- Foster peer learning networks among executive and staff leaders.
- Support training for effective volunteer coordination.

Expand Access to Affordable Space

- Repurpose vacant buildings into flexible community cultural spaces.
- Create affordable studio spaces with sliding-scale pricing.
- Support existing organizations providing space and residencies.



ART BY ANTONIA A. PEREZ

Queens' Arts and Culture: The Path Forward



PHOTO BY BECCA VISION NYC

Queens' cultural sector has such extraordinary vibrancy, impact, and future potential. **The borough's global diversity creates natural opportunities for innovative cross-cultural programming and artistic collaboration.** However, fully realizing this potential requires coordinated investment in infrastructure, sustainable funding models, adequate staffing, and accessible space. The recommendations outlined above offer pathways toward a more equitable and sustainable cultural ecosystem. Success will require collaboration among artists, organizations, funders, and policymakers to address these interconnected challenges systematically.

The findings presented here represent not just challenges to overcome, but opportunities to build something unprecedented: a truly equitable cultural ecosystem that honors Queens' diversity while providing the infrastructure necessary for artistic excellence and community engagement. **The path forward requires commitment, collaboration, and the recognition that investing in Queens' cultural sector is investing in a more vibrant and inclusive future for all New Yorkers.**



COMMUNITY TOWN HALL AT QUEENS MUSEUM



Queens' cultural sector has such extraordinary vibrancy, impact, and future potential.

FLUSHING TOWN HALL

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For information or questions about the Queens Cultural Mapping Initiative, contact Project Manager Natalie Bedon at NBedon@flushingtowhall.org

PHOTO COURTESY OF VIVIAN GREEN AND DANCE ENTROPY INC.



**IndieSpace Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural
Affairs & Libraries**

Hon. Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams, Chair

Monday, February 9, 2026

Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams and Members of the Committee. My name is Randi Berry, and I am the Executive Director of IndieSpace. IndieSpace is a community organizer and service organization dedicated to supporting New York City's lower-income artists, cultural workers, and small-budget arts organizations, particularly through funding and access to affordable, stable rehearsal and performance space, which remains one of the greatest threats to the sustainability of our cultural sector.

As a Service Organization, our work undergirds the cultural ecosystem and ensures that artists who may not have the capacity to receive support from philanthropy or government are not lost in the shuffle and left without any safety net. IndieSpace was created in response to a reality many arts organizations know all too well: that soaring rents, speculative development, short-term leases, and opaque real estate practices are pushing arts organizations out of neighborhoods and, increasingly, out of the city altogether.

Indie venues operate on razor-thin margins. Unlike commercial tenants, they cannot absorb sudden rent spikes, broker fees, or costly build-outs. Many are housed in former industrial spaces, basements, or shared facilities—often without long-term security. When a lease is lost, an organization doesn't just relocate; it frequently closes - representing lost jobs, lost community programming, and lost cultural infrastructure that cannot be easily rebuilt.

To directly address these challenges, IndieSpace operates a free real estate consultancy program for arts and cultural organizations. Through this program, we work one-on-one with organizations to:

- Navigate commercial leasing and renewal negotiations
- Understand zoning, use, and permitting requirements
- Identify affordable spaces and viable ownership pathways
- Build long-term strategies for stability and permanence

This program is offered at no cost because most small arts organizations cannot afford legal or real estate expertise—yet they are routinely expected to negotiate complex leases in one of the world's most expensive real estate markets. Our goal is not just to help organizations survive their next lease, but to secure space that enables them to plan, grow, and serve their communities long-term.

There are also many ways for the City Council, DCLA, and Service Organizations to partner to solve this pressing issue.

- We can reexamine the definition of use for Community Facility spaces to prioritize smaller budget arts organizations and other non profits over for profit medical use.

- We can require cultural carve-outs in commercial to residential conversions that already need creative ideas for the unusable core.
- We can allocate housing for historically excluded artists who are often disqualified from the Housing Connect lotteries because of their fluctuating income and numerous 1099s and W2s.
- We can reinstate the acquisition program at DCLA to leverage the NY Space Fund that Governor Hochul has just announced.
- We can work with Community Boards to be sure community-based arts and culture and non-profits are not left behind with the new ULURP approval process.

Creation cannot happen when artists are spending their time fighting eviction, scrambling for space, or deciding whether they can afford to stay in New York City at all. Stable, affordable space is foundational to mental health, economic stability, and artistic excellence.

I thank the City Council for holding today's oversight hearing and for investing in programs and organizations like IndieSpace to help preserve and expand affordable cultural infrastructure—particularly for small, independent, and community-rooted organizations.

IndieSpace stands ready to work with the City Council to ensure that New York City remains a place where artists can not only perform, but stay, build, and belong.

Randi Berry
Executive Director
IndieSpace



Leonard Jacobs
Executive Director

Courtney Ffrench
Artistic Director

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February 9, 2026

The **Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning (JCAL)**, founded in 1972, is a multidisciplinary arts center based in the diverse community of Southeast Queens. Our mission is to offer quality visual and performing arts programs and to provide accessible education programs to encourage participation in the arts.

As the only member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) in Southeast Queens, JCAL is an unrivaled cultural anchor. JCAL is also the only Queens CIG to operate landmark 19th-century buildings in two distinct locations. The **Jamaica Arts Center** offers 45,000 square feet of galleries, rehearsal studios, arts spaces, and a studio theater; and the **Jamaica Performing Arts Center (JPAC)** is a 400-seat auditorium.

JCAL's **performing arts programs** include local and international musicians in our **Thursday Night Jazz** and **Riddim Section** concerts; emerging BIPOC theater makers in our **Meet the Playwright** series, and our 17-year-old **Making Moves Dance Festival**, one of six annual tentpole events. JCAL also produces a **Weekend of West African Dance** in February; a **Strength Courage & Wisdom** celebration of Women's History Month in March; our **Queens International Children's Festival** every May; and screenings and talkbacks for **Juneteenth** as well as **Be You** for Pride every June.

Paid **Visual Voices** fellowships for BIPOC curators, paid **ARTWorks** fellowships for BIPOC artists, and JCAL's annual **Open Call** illustrate our visual arts commitment. JCAL also partners with **Terminal 6** at JFK, **Resorts World NYC** at the **Red Wall Art Gallery**, and **Greater Jamaica Development Corporation's Greater Nexus** co-work space on multiple exhibitions a year.

In education, JCAL offers weekly classes and community partnerships with the City Council's **CASA/SU-CASA** programs. Much of JCAL's work is supported by the **Cultural Immigrant Initiative**, and as a new member (thank you, former Speaker Adams) of the **Coalition of Theaters of Color**.

JCAL served over 200 artists and our onsite attendance topped 56,000 in Fiscal Year 2025. We served and welcomed youth, seniors, and individuals in and from Districts 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, and 31. Thank you, **Deputy Council Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams**. Thank you, Council Members **Ung, Lee, Gennaro, Krishnan, Won, Hankerson, Schulman, Wong**, and **Brooks-Powers**, for your present and future support.

Today's committee meeting centers "Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector." What is five-alarm-fire critical and factual is that "affordability crisis" is not a slogan. Mayor Mamdani has said our artistic and creative class is fleeing, and he's right—driven out by the cost of living here. As arts champions, the Council sees the threat, especially to historically underfunded groups like JCAL.

Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning
Jamaica Arts Center (161-04 Jamaica Ave.)
Jamaica Performing Arts Center (153-10 Jamaica Ave.)
718-658-7400
www.jcal.org



Here are additional facts to contextualize the risk. NYC's arts and cultural sector includes over 1,800 nonprofit theaters, zoos, dance companies, botanical gardens, music groups, historic and preservation societies, and visual art studios. Separate from the 39 CIG members, over 1,000 groups receive support through DCLA's Cultural Development Fund (CDF). Our sector collectively generates \$110 billion in annual economic impact—13% of economic activity. Few sectors deliver such monumental benefits on such a tiny expenditure of public dollars: DCLA's Fiscal 2026 funding makes up roughly .23% of the City's budget.

CIGs are an immense force for fiscal and social good. We employ over 15,700 full- and part-time employees, including nearly 6,000 union members, plus 6,000 more full- and part-time artists, educators, and per diem staff. We educate our children. We serve our communities. We are foundational to the City economy. We respect Wall Street, but Wall Street means nothing to New York City without the arts and cultural sector.

For CIGs, the affordability crisis is crystallized by the structure of our public-private partnership with the City. While CIGs don't pay rent, and while City Hall traditionally covers utilities, we pay for everything else.

At JCAL, with a Fiscal 2026 operating budget of \$3.34 million, full- and part-time salaries comes to half—\$1.76 million. Health insurance premiums (mostly GHI) cost \$16,000 a month. Janitorial service for two buildings, \$138,000 a year. Pensions, insurance, liability for staff, public, and two buildings, \$41,000 a year. Maintaining terrible HVAC systems due to City procurement policies, \$40,000 a year. Security and alarm systems, \$35,000 a year. Mandated elevator inspections, \$27,000 a year. One December storm cost JCAL \$6,000 in snow removal for *one day*. Computers die. Pipes bust. Our operating costs go up, up, and up.

JCAL's cost to operate and staff—*modestly*—exceeds our ability to raise private support. Still, through capacity-building investments from key philanthropies like the Mellon Foundation, JCAL is less dependent today on City government, as a percentage of overall budget, than before COVID. In an affordability crisis, those gains are eaten up immediately. There's no getting ahead, no maintaining. There's only falling behind.

Delivering programs, maintaining old buildings—it's one endless slaughter in an affordability crisis. Rats on Jamaica Avenue decide to nest under the grates of the Jamaica Arts Center. *There's no grant for that*. And anyway, is rat mitigation affordable? Ask us, and we'll say no. Ask the exterminator and he'll say there's an affordability crisis. (By the way, JCAL prioritizes M/WBEs and Queens-based businesses, always.)

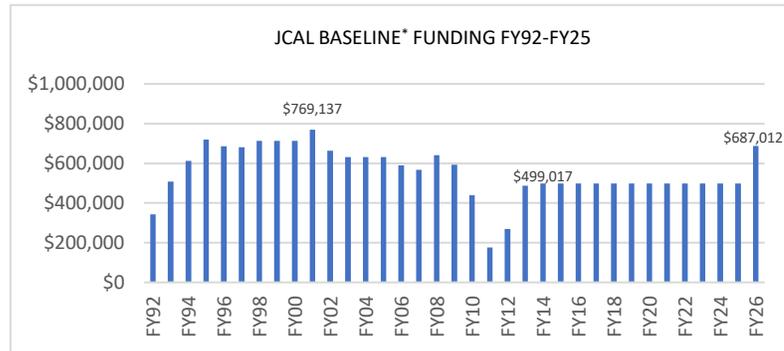
The cost of food in the store, the cost of transportation to get to the store, or to work, or to anywhere, let alone the cost of healthcare and rent—it isn't *spinning* out of control. It has *spun*. Thank you, in other words, for this important forum. Arts and cultural groups come to you each year, showing how our work helps the City. Each year, you—our champions—respond. Because you know the affordability crisis is real.

Here's the bottom line for JCAL.

In Fiscal 2001, JCAL operated the Jamaica Arts Center with baseline support of \$769,137. One building. In Fiscal 2026, JCAL operates the Jamaica Arts Center and Jamaica Performing Arts Center with baseline support of \$687,012. That's two buildings. Talk about an affordability crisis.

OMB hates to admit it, but inflation is real. Here's what else is real: \$687,012 doesn't pay to staff and operate two buildings in the way that \$769,137 paid to staff and operate one building 25 years ago.

If the City fails to address the affordability crisis, the City's arts and cultural sector will fail. JCAL will fail right along with it. Perhaps sooner than later.



Deputy Council Speaker Williams, JCAL is deeply grateful for the generous increase in general and program support received in Fiscal Year 2026 to start remedying this situation. Thank you for seeing JCAL. Thank you for seeing how the affordability crisis costs JCAL—and all arts and cultural groups in our City. Thank you for acknowledging how the uncontrolled cost of living reduces everybody’s mission from service to survival.

Queens performing arts centers, including those at Laguardia Community College, Queens College, and Queensboro Community College, all have one full-time employee. Since 2020, JPAC has had zero. Please baseline the one-time support that you were critical in putting into JCAL’s Fiscal 2026 budget and help us invest in a full-time general manager in Fiscal Year 2027. That would help to mitigate our affordability crisis.

Again: the affordability crisis is not a slogan. In view of this, I offer the following suggestions to the Council:

- 1) 10% increase for Coalition of Theaters of Color (CTC) and Cultural Immigrant Initiative (CII), the latter o prioritize small- to medium-sized CIGs and CDF recipients specifically.
- 2) 10% increase in each CASA allocation, to \$22k—the first raise if 20 years (if ever).
- 3) Recognize that DCLA’s slow administration of CASA/SU-CASA serves neither the public nor the Council’s goals. Forcing arts groups into debt while awaiting City dollars creates an affordability crisis.
- 4) Fully fund DCLA. If fiscal restraint makes it a challenge, ease DCLA’s administrative burden and redirect CII and CTC to borough arts councils. Invest in them as economic drivers and tools of affordability.
- 5) Reform DCLA; adopt the Parks model with one Deputy Commissioner per borough, with a focus on community partnerships that maximizes the City’s investments in the sector.
- 6) For small CIGs, call on the Mamdani administration to baseline DCLA’s “Met allocation” and mandate transparency around the formula used to calculate this support.
- 7) For small CIGs, ease the financial burdens imposed by the Cultural Institutions Retirement System.
- 8) Index the baselines of all City-supported arts and cultural organizations to inflation. If you can’t face the cost of living, that means there’s still an affordability crisis.
- 9) Define property warehousing as a year of vacancy and adjust the tax code to incentivize long-term leases agreements with cultural nonprofits and NGOs more broadly. Incentivize generously and force the affluent to do their fair share in addressing the affordability crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity.

Leonard Jacobs
Executive Director



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LxNY: Latinx Arts Consortium of New York Testimony

February 9th, 2026

New York City Council – Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries
Oversight Hearing: Affordability in New York City’s Arts and Cultural Sector

My name is Eva Mayhabal Davis and I’m here today speaking as the Project Manager for the LxNY: Latinx Arts Consortium of New York, an intersectional network of over 50 Latinx-serving cultural organizations across New York City.

Affordability in New York City’s cultural sector cannot be reduced to rent or ticket prices. For Latinx-serving organizations, affordability determines whether culture can function as a public good, whether immigrant communities can fully participate in civic life, and whether New York remains a city shaped by lived cultural practice rather than symbolic branding.

Immigration is foundational to New York’s cultural ecosystem. Immigrant communities are not just audiences. They are the artists, cultural workers, organizers, and caretakers who sustain neighborhood-based cultural life. This is why people come to New York, not only for flagship institutions, but for the cultural vitality rooted in communities.

Latinx-serving organizations operate at the intersection of culture, affordability, and civic infrastructure. Across our network of more than 50 small and mid-sized organizations, affordability is inseparable from access across language, income, immigration status, and geography. This work requires labor and infrastructure that funding systems rarely account for: multilingual engagement, intergenerational programming, and long-term trust-based relationships. These are not add-ons. They are core operating functions.

A central challenge facing the sector is the **false separation between artists and the organizations that make their work possible**. Artists depend on small and mid-sized organizations for subsidized space, technical support, administrative infrastructure, commissioning pathways, and audiences. When these organizations are destabilized, artists are displaced, even when direct artist funding exists.



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This is where **CUF Recommendation 8** is critical. Rather than treating capacity-building as a new or siloed intervention, the City should recognize and invest in the **existing intangible civic infrastructure** already carried by community-based cultural organizations: their expertise, trusted networks, and embedded public service functions. An affordability agenda for culture cannot live within a single agency, because culture functions as a **public utility** that directly affects housing stability, education outcomes, workforce development, public health, tourism, small businesses, and civic trust.

New York City has successfully advanced this model before, most recently through the pandemic era **City Artist Corps**, in which DCLA partnered City Council offices, and community anchor organizations to mobilize and present artists citywide. This approach also has deep precedent in the **CETA Artists Project**, which employed more than 500 underemployed artists in community-based work and remains the largest government-supported artist initiative since the WPA. These examples demonstrate that investing in cultural organizations as civic infrastructure is not experimental policy. It is a proven public model.

Latinx cultural organizations also function as informal workforce incubators and support systems for immigrant artists navigating precarity, language barriers, and limited access to benefits. This labor is essential, yet largely unfunded and unrecognized.

If New York City is serious about cultural affordability, it must adopt an ecosystem lens. Supporting immigrant-rooted, culturally specific organizations **is not niche advocacy**. It is an investment in the civic infrastructure that allows culture, community, and democracy to function together.

Thank you.



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Contact:

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LxNY Steering Committee:

Arnaldo J. López — Pregones / Puerto Rican Traveling Theater

Charles Rice-González — BAAD! Bronx Academy of Arts & Dance

Cynthia Carrión — El Museo del Barrio

Libertad O. Guerra — The Clemente Soto Velez Cultural & Educational Center

Marlène Ramírez-Cancio — BAX / Brooklyn Arts Exchange

Melody Capote — Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute



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Mino Lora — The People's Theatre

Rafael Sánchez — Repertorio Español

Sami Abu Shumays — Flushing Town Hall

Sandie Luna — ID Studio Theater

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Eva Mayhabal Davis, Project Manager

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Lincoln Center

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Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts Oversight: Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector February 9, 2026

Thank you, Chair, Deputy Speaker Williams and members of the Committee. My name is Leah Johnson, Executive Vice President and Chief Communications, Marketing, and Advocacy Officer for Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

New York City's cultural landscape is at an inflection point. Artists and creative workers are struggling to live here, audience behaviors are changing, and there is growing financial strain on cultural organizations with funding sources falling behind rising costs. To ensure the city remains the world's creative capital, we must address arts and culture as a non-negotiable investment in public infrastructure.

Cultural organizations and the creative workforce are the beating heart of New York City. Annually this sector generates \$110 billion in economic activity, 13% of the City's economy. In 2024, the Lincoln Center campus alone contributed \$4.5 billion in economic impact welcoming 4.2 million annual visitors. For every dollar invested in the arts, there is a \$3 return to our economy.

To maintain the cultural vibrancy of New York City, we must:

- Provide affordable access to the arts for New Yorkers
- Make it possible for artists to live and work, and present, and
- Sustain the organizations and institutions that connect audiences with the arts locally and represent New York City on the world stage

At Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, we believe artists carry us forward and everyone deserves access to transformative arts experiences. We are committed to:

- Free and low-cost access to the arts for New Yorkers. Last fiscal year there were over 500 free performances across the Lincoln Center campus. During our *Summer for the City* season alone, we welcomed over 600,000 visitors over the 9-week majority free festival inspired by the vibrancy of New York City.
- Providing artists with time, space, and support in which to hone their craft, experiment without production constraints, and share their artistry through multiple Fellowships and full-time Artist-in-Residence programs. And
- Partnering with fellow arts organizations and civic leaders to support the wider field and work together to devise innovative solutions to our most pressing challenges.

Without bold and creative solutions, we risk losing the artists and arts organizations that make New York City the cultural center of the universe. Arts and culture is not a luxury, it is necessary civic and social infrastructure and core to a citizenry that thinks critically, engages civically, and navigates complex differences with empathy. The arts are essential.

Respectfully, thank you again for your time.

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts
Oversight: Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector
February 9, 2026

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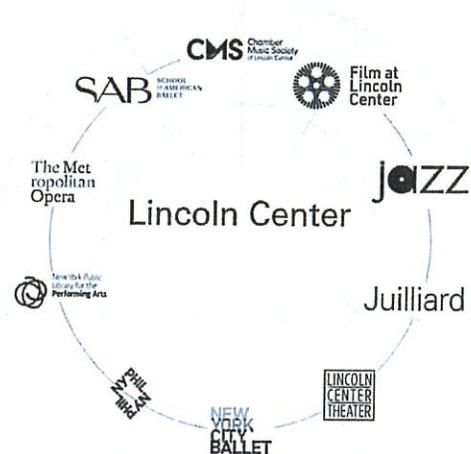
LINCOLN CENTER

Lincoln Center strives to be a place where all New Yorkers are welcome and can see themselves reflected, and where artists can develop bold, new initiatives that stretch the boundaries of artmaking and the role of culture in our communities through Creativity, Curiosity, and Connection. Over 4 million visitors from New York City, the country, and the world visit Lincoln Center annually.

Home to eleven resident nonprofit arts and arts education organizations, Lincoln Center is a leader in the performing arts, a learning crossroads for students of all ages, and a vibrant publicly accessible open space.

We are also home to TATIANA By Kwame Onwuachi - Afro-Caribbean inspired dining ranked #1 restaurant by the New York Times and host to the Big Apple Circus, an independent long-term rental.

Lincoln Center is the nation's largest performing arts center located on 16.3-acres. Together we present artistry from around the world and serve as a space where different art disciplines across the performing arts co-exist in a single campus. The Lincoln Center campus is a destination that welcomes all—where every visitor, whether a native New Yorker or New Yorker for a day, can find inspiration, artistic innovation, and community in the creative achievements realized on campus.



LINCOLN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS PRESENTS: INNOVATIVE TICKETING ALL FREE & CHOOSE-WHAT-YOU-PAY

All seats for select *Lincoln Center Presents* performances are available for Choose-What-You-Pay starting at \$5. This is one way Lincoln Center helps make the arts accessible to as many New Yorkers as possible.



LEADERSHIP INSPIRED BY ARTS AS A PUBLIC GOOD



DR. MARIKO SILVER, PRESIDENT & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER:

Previously held the same role at the Henry Luce Foundation and served as the president of Bennington College. During the Obama administration, she served in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as Acting Assistant Secretary and Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Policy. She serves on the boards of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Council on Foreign Relations, and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

LEAH C. JOHNSON, CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS, MARKETING & ADVOCACY OFFICER:

Chairs The Trust for Cultural Resources of the City of New York and serves as a trustee on the boards of the Museum of the City of New York, NYC Tourism + Conventions, and New York Public Radio. Johnson has also worked across the private and government sectors, including Special Assistant to Deputy Mayor Bill Lynch and Press Secretary for Mayor David Dinkins' Reelection Campaign.



SHANTA THAKE, EHRENKRANZ CHIEF ARTISTIC OFFICER:

Joined in 2021 to carry Lincoln Center's artistic vision further as a place that uplifts artists. She spearheads all artistic and programming activities. She is the co-Director of globalFest. Previously spent 13 years at The Public Theater where she oversaw the growth of Public Works, The Shakespeare Initiative, Joe's Pub, Under the Radar, and Public Forum.

INVESTING IN NEW YORKERS

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (LCPA) prioritizes an expansive view of global artistic excellence and complements existing programs across our campus and the civic life of the city at-large. These presentations are dedicated to making the arts available to the widest possible audience, and all programs are FREE or Choose-What-You-Pay.

Snapshot of Programs:

- **Arts Education:** Investing in inspiring the next generation of teaching artists, Next Gen Changemakers, Young Artist Pipeline, Middle School Audition Bootcamp, and more
- **Access to the Arts:** Passport to the Arts, Big Umbrella Festival, Relaxed Performances, Moments
- **Lincoln Center Presents:** Summer for the City, Legacies of San Juan Hill, American Songbook, ¡Vaya! Latine Social Dance, Art of Wellbeing, and more
- **Artist Development:** Artists-in-residence, Visionary Artist, Collider Fellowship, Kenan Fellowship, Access Ambassadors and Avery Fisher Artist Program

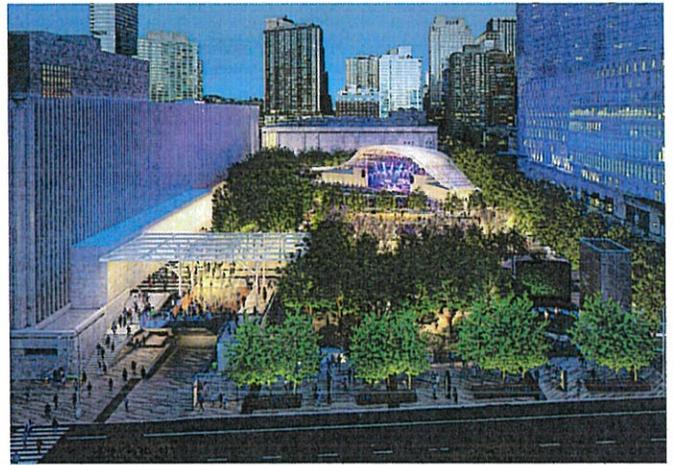
CREATING A SENSE OF WELCOME WITH COMMUNITY - A NEW WEST SIDE ENTRANCE

Removing Amsterdam Avenue wall to open Lincoln Center to the west and create a new vibrant community park, world-class amphitheater, and multiple flexible spaces for art and play. Construction begins in early 2026 and opening for Summer 2028.

Unprecedented participatory planning process with 6,200 insights from New Yorkers, including NYCHA Amsterdam Houses, Amsterdam Addition, local artists, LaGuardia High School and the five high schools at Martin Luther King, Jr. Educational Campus.

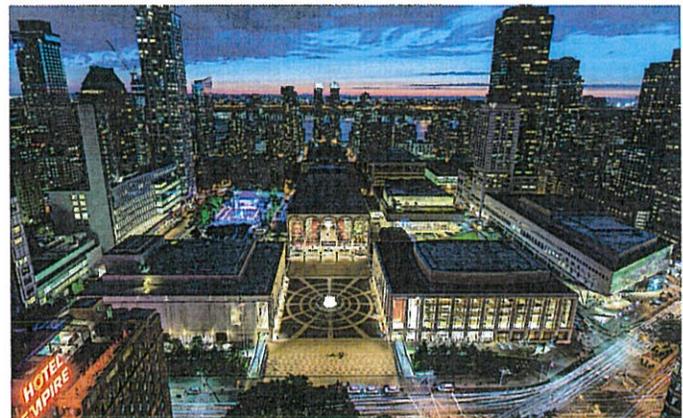
Design Team:

- Hood Design Studio, landscape architect
- Weiss/Manfredi, design architect
- Moody Nolan, architect of record



CAMPUS ECONOMIC IMPACT: NEW YORK CITY

- \$4.5 billion in total annual economic impact in 2024
- \$17.7 million return to city
- 27,200 total jobs supported by the Lincoln Center Campus (direct and indirect)
- 4.2 million annual audiences and visitors from NYC, the US, and abroad
- \$210 million in visitor spending in surrounding Lincoln Square Neighborhood
- 84% Of surveyed NYC visitors to Lincoln Center Campus said that "cultural attractions including Lincoln Center were important in their decision to maintain a residence in NYC"
- Culture in New York City is an economic engine generating \$110 billion = 13% of New York City's economy
- Time Out magazine ranked NYC the best city in the world and its editors' credited arts and culture to achieving this #1 ranking





Written Testimony for the
New York City Council Committee on
Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup
Relations

February 8, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michael S. Rosenberg, and I am President and CEO of New York City Center, a 2,250 seat theater in midtown Manhattan and a proud member of the CIG.

Affordability is not an add-on for our institution; it is why we exist. City Center was created because Mayor Fiorello La Guardia believed our building should be “a temple for music, dance, and theater” for the average working New Yorker. And he made affordability real, not rhetorical: tickets on opening night were \$1, and curtain times were moved earlier, so working people did not have to choose between earning a paycheck and seeing a performance. That founding idea matters because affordability pressures are now reshaping the entire cultural sector.

The Center for an Urban Future’s Creative New York report in 2025 makes clear that New York’s cost of living is pushing creative workers and cultural organizations to the edge, and that rising costs can drive ticket prices beyond what many New Yorkers can manage.

At City Center, we turn affordability into action. Fall for Dance offers every seat for \$30, including fees. Our Access Club provides \$28 tickets to nearly every performance for New Yorkers ages 40 and under. The commitment to affordability that can only come from the non-profit sector is demonstrable, while the Broadway League shows the average household income at \$276,000 in 2025, City Center’s audiences had an average of \$160,000.

Affordability also includes the people who make live performance possible. We support 316 union jobs across the building, and in our non-union administrative staff we have committed to ensuring fair compensation by benchmarking our base salary against the MIT Living Wage Calculator, which in New York State is \$57,345. We create pathways to these jobs through apprenticeships, fellowships, and job exposure for young people and families.

For the City to make a strong shift towards centering affordability, the arts must play a key role in that conversation, from the artists we support, to the audiences we serve, to the workforce we employ. We can only continue this important work with your partnership and support.

Thank you for your leadership.

Michael S. Rosenberg | President/CEO
New York City center

New York City Center
130 West 56th Street
New York, NY 10019
Contact: MRosenberg@NYCityCenter.org | 212-763-1214

Arts in Education NYC ROUNDTABLE

New York City Arts in Education Roundtable

Written Testimony: Oversight - Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector

Hon. Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams

Monday, February 9, 2026

Thank you to Deputy Speaker Williams and the City Council for holding today's hearing. My name is Kimberly Olsen, and I am proud to be the Executive Director of the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable. We are a nonprofit service organization working to improve and advance arts education across NYC. Congratulations on becoming Chair of Cultural Affairs — we're so excited to work with you in this new role!

In NYC, arts education in school and community settings is delivered in partnership by in-school arts teachers and cultural organizations who employ Teaching Artists. A workforce at least 10,000 strong — Teaching Artists are practicing, professional artists that teach and integrate their art form, perspectives, histories, and skills into a wide range of learning settings. They can be found in schools, senior centers, libraries, justice/incarceration settings, hospitals, veteran's centers, afterschool sites, and more.

According to the Roundtable's 2025 report, [“Paying for Professionalism: A Report on New York City Teaching Artist Compensation & Employment”](#), Teaching Artists are clearly an essential and actively engaged part of New York and often are among the most diverse parts of the cultural workforce. Yet, the report findings underscore significant challenges related to stagnant wages, limited access to benefits, and delays in government contracting — ultimately impacting the sustainability of the profession overall.

Increased Cost of Living and Stagnant Wages

Teaching Artists in NYC face significant financial challenges, with many earning incomes that are alarmingly low relative to the city's cost of living. The median individual gross income for Teaching Artists in 2023 was between \$35,000 – \$50,000, which is consistent with findings from the Roundtable's 2018 report — despite a 28% increase in the cost of living over the past seven years according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Furthermore, 68% of Teaching Artists reported a household income under \$75,000, falling below the median household income in NYC of \$76,577 in 2023. 79% of respondents did not feel their Teaching Artist work sufficiently supported living in or near NYC.

“The structure of hourly teaching artist pay and juggling multiple part-time teaching artist jobs is not something I can afford to sustain into the next decade of my life.”

— 25-to-34-year-old Teaching Artist

Limited Access to Essential Benefits

Access to critical benefits, particularly medical insurance and retirement plans, are lacking across the field. While 88% of Teaching Artists reported having health insurance, only 6% received it through an employer. Barriers to providing benefits include limited and inconsistent funding, the part-time and/or seasonal nature of the majority of Teaching Artist positions, and insurance carrier restrictions that often require a minimum number of weekly work hours for medical coverage. These structural barriers make it challenging for

employing organizations to offer robust benefits, yet piloting a portable benefits program or a pooled insurance program for smaller organizations could help alleviate some of these barriers.

“I'd like to work just as a Teaching Artist. The one thing that is preventing me from going there entirely, is the fact I do not get health insurance.... I will need to leave my profession of 22 years in order to have children so I can get proper insurance.

— 35-44 year old Teaching Artist

“Working [as] a Teaching Artist is increasingly unsustainable for me. [The field needs] to figure out a structure that makes it sustainable... to stay in the field, I need health insurance, job security, and retirement benefits. Without those, I am looking to leave the field.

— Brooklyn-based Teaching Artist

Need for Efficiency in Government Contracting & Sustainable, Multi-Year Funding

We can't talk about affordability without talking about the broken government systems threatening affordability and livelihood of this workforce. For employing organizations engaged in contracts with city government agencies, persistent delays in payment and the reimbursement-model of contracting can greatly impact an organization's cash flow and financial stability — ultimately having a trickle-down impact on Teaching Artist compensation. NYC Public School's Multiple Task Award Contract (MTAC) is a prime example. Arts organizations with decades long experience working with NYCPS are waiting 15, 18, up to 28 months for their contract to be renewed — resulting in lost revenue, disruption to arts programming for students, and ultimately lost income for teaching artists. Furthermore the financial negotiation stage of this process increasingly puts pressure on the arts organization to lower pricing structures and subsequent TA wage limitations. As one organization put it:

“After engaging in an MTAC process for about 9 months, we were asked to cut our budget so we'd be paying our teaching artists just above minimum wage... We love providing high caliber teaching artists to our schools and ensuring a high level of service, and the pricing change in particular didn't seem sustainable to us.” -

Organization Representative

The Roundtable hopes that we can continue to work with our partners in the City Council and across government agencies to address some of these real, but fixable challenges that stand in the way of affordability for NYC's arts education workforce. Thank you for your attention and consideration.



Feb 10, 2026

To the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries,

Thank you for holding this hearing on affordability issues as they affect the arts and culture sector.

I am a co-founder of a small nonprofit performance collective based in Brooklyn, which has been operating since 2011 to create original works with people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, with an emphasis on works by people of color. We are proud to have seeded the field of experimental performance with artists who have gone on to major off-Broadway and Broadway productions, and continue to make innovative live performance that is accessible to all.

From the beginning of our existence, we have always prioritized paying artists as equitably as possible, understanding that this has a direct bearing on who is able to participate in our work. We also understand that these issues, at scale, determine who is able to participate in arts and culture in this city, and have always been committed to doing our part, even as a small nonprofit, to compensate our artists.

Yet, in the past 5 years, our company has struggled to keep up with the skyrocketing costs of living in this city. Between spring 2022 and now, we have raised our fees and salaries by 20%, and yet, when indexed to the cost of living, we are now dealing with the reality that we are able to pay our artists less than 5 years ago. We have been told by some of our frequent collaborators that they simply can't afford to work with us anymore - that to participate in one of our productions is now too much of a financial loss for them to incur as they struggle to meet their everyday needs. These artists, many of whom have significant film, television and theatre credits on their resume are giving up work in their chosen field to work as drivers for Lyft or serve at popular restaurants because that will yield a better weekly paycheck than many jobs in the arts. And while we firmly believe in the dignity and value of all work, we believe it is a problem that the arts sector is losing talent to other industries over our lack of ability to keep up with wages.

The results have been stark - New York City has lost 4.4 of its creative workforce since 2019¹, due in large part to lack of work and rising costs of living. This issue is not limited to small nonprofit theatres. Organizations whose total budgets are between 5 and 20 times ours are only paying marginally more in weekly salaries than we are. Major theatrical institutions have also struggled to keep pace with rising operational costs and have cut down programming, resulting in a stark contraction in work opportunities for performers, directors, designers, technicians and more.

¹ Creative New York Report, accessed 2.10.26 - https://nycfuture.org/pdf/CUF_CreativeNY_Report_9.pdf



Another contributing factor is that funding that is accessible to small nonprofits has not kept pace with rising costs, resulting in nonprofits struggling to maintain their programs and operations with functionally less money each year. While we are grateful for the increase to the baseline in Cultural Funding that occurred last year, we urge you to consider tying budgets to the cost of living index, to give small nonprofits like mine a fighting chance to continue to compensate our workforce fairly. We also urge you to consider funding programs to rebuild the creative workforce, similar to the Creatives Rebuild New York initiative that launched in 2021-22. Programs such as this, that assure stable employment and health insurance, can tip the scales for artists struggling to make ends meet, and provide a blueprint for funders, service organizations and others across the field to emulate.

We are grateful that this administration has expressed their appreciation and support of the arts and hope to be able to work together to implement much needed relief for artists across the performing arts and beyond, so that the creative sector in our city can grow and thrive.

Sincerely,

Meropi Peponides
Co-founder

TESTIMONY OF JESSICA BAKER VODOOR
PRESIDENT & CEO
SNUG HARBOR CULTURAL CENTER & BOTANICAL GARDEN
CIG VICE CHAIR FOR STATEN ISLAND

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
**Oversight Hearing of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries
and International Intergroup Relations**
Oversight Hearing: Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector
February 9, 2026

Good morning, Chair Williams and members of the Committee.

My name is **Jessica Baker Vodoor**, President & CEO of **Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden** on Staten Island, a proud member of the Cultural Institutions Group, where I serve as Staten Island's CIG Vice Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the affordability crisis confronting the arts and culture sector, and to share how Snug Harbor takes on these challenges—particularly in a community as under-resourced as the North Shore.

The December 2025 Center for an Urban Future report outlines the severity of the crisis:

- New York City's resident artist population has declined by 4.4% since the pandemic.
- Creative workers now earn **23% less** than the national average, compared to 15% less ten years ago.
- Insurance, utilities, and rent have surged dramatically.
- Artists and young people are leaving New York for more affordable cities around the country and abroad.

This exodus threatens our creative economy and the identity of New York itself. Arts and culture generate **over \$110 billion annually**, employs **325,000 New Yorkers**, and fuels a tourism engine that adds another **\$74 billion** to our city. The health of this sector is not optional—it is foundational.

Snug Harbor's Commitment to Free and Accessible Arts & Culture

Snug Harbor combats affordability barriers by providing deeply accessible programming for the public—much of it free—thanks to consistent government support:

- **New York City's only free botanical garden**, open 365 days a year.
- An 83-acre campus of green space adjacent to environmental justice communities.

- **517,000 visitors in FY25; 335,000 attended entirely for free.**
- Nearly **55,000 NYC public school students** served through education programs, many from Title I schools.
- Workforce development training for **over 10,000 emerging adults** in environmental stewardship.
- Artist residencies that provide space, stipends, and curatorial support.
- **39 subsidized artist studios** offering affordable workspace.
- Free performances and programs with partners such as Alvin Ailey, Jazzmobile, African Film Festival, and Orchestra of St. Luke's.
- Cultural festivals including Juneteenth, Pride, New York Soul Food Festival, and events celebrating Puerto Rican, Arab-American, Pakistani, and Polish heritage, plus free family programs like **SprinklerFest** and **Pumpkin Smash**.
- With City Council support, free admission to the **Chinese Scholar's Garden** for Staten Island residents.
- Heritage Farm accepts **SNAP/WIC**, provides discounts for seniors and NYCHA residents, and donates **5,000 pounds of fresh produce** annually to food pantries.

Government support is what makes this level of free programming possible.

Endorsing CUF Recommendation #6: Establish a Pooled Insurance Program

I want to highlight and strongly endorse **Recommendation #6** in the Center for an Urban Future report: **"Establish a pooled insurance program for venues and cultural nonprofits."**

Insurance is one of the most destabilizing affordability challenges facing cultural institutions, and Snug Harbor is no exception. Our general liability insurance premiums for our 83-acre campus have **tripled in the last three years**. At the same time, **health insurance premiums for our staff have escalated to unsustainable levels**, forcing painful decisions that have impacted the quality of coverage we can provide.

These increases bear no relationship to our operational reality or claims history, and yet they consume a growing share of our already strained budget. Crucially, as insurance costs balloon while funding remains flat, the pressure falls disproportionately on the programs we strive to keep free for the public. Rising insurance costs directly threaten our ability to sustain the breadth of community-serving, no-cost programming that defines our mission.

For these reasons, Snug Harbor urges the City Council to **explore policy legislation that would allow Cultural Institutions Group members caretaking City-owned land and buildings access to the City's self-insurance pool**, similar to the coverage mechanism used for City parks. A coordinated or pooled insurance structure—whether city-administered or city-supported—would dramatically reduce volatility, increase stability, and ensure that institutions like ours can continue serving under-resourced communities without sacrificing staff benefits or public programming.

This single policy intervention would materially strengthen the entire cultural ecosystem.

A Call to Action

Speaker Menin's cultural leadership across multiple crises, as well as the presence of so many artists serving on this Council—including CD49's own Council Member Kamillah Hanks—reflects a deep understanding of our sector's importance. I am also encouraged by Mayor Mamdani's commitment to cultural equity and am honored to serve on his Transition Committee for Arts and Culture.

The Center for an Urban Future's roadmap of ten policy recommendations would preserve and expand New York's creative vitality. I urge the Council to adopt these recommendations boldly—**especially Recommendation #6**—and commit to ensuring that New York remains a city of creators, innovators, and community-centered cultural institutions.

Thank you for your time and your continued commitment to equitable cultural access across the five boroughs.

Jessica Baker Vodoor

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February 9, 2026 Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries hearing

Good afternoon. My name is Dina Rosenthal, and I'm the Executive Director of the Staten Island Children's Museum. Thank you, Chair Williams and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to speak today, and welcome to the new members of the Council.

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What is a children's museum and why do they matter? They introduce children to culture not just as something to look at, but as something they actively create. At the Staten Island Children's Museum, children learn through hands-on, interactive play in 12 exhibits that helps them understand the world around them. Learning looks different at different ages. Little ones can role play the people in their community such as firefighters, park rangers, and construction workers. Grader schoolers can realize something simple such as insects aren't something to be afraid of, or as complex as understanding how green screen technology works. All children create visual art, explore movement through dance and performance, make music, and engage in collaborative play. These experiences build curiosity, confidence, and problem-solving skills early, when it matters most. For many families, a children's museum is the first stop on the cultural pipeline. It's where children learn that museums, arts, science, and civic spaces are places they belong.

The Staten Island Children's Museum serves working families, with 90 percent of our audience coming from Staten Island and Brooklyn, mirroring Congressional District 11. About half of our visitors are families coming on their own time, and 40 percent are school children who rely on us during the week through school visits and after-school partnerships. As this administration focuses on affordability and supporting working parents, SICM already functions as a trusted partner for the City.

Each year, we host the largest Pre-K Enrollment Fair in New York City, serving more than 1,000 families for free, in collaboration with nonprofit partners and City agencies that provide direct resources to working parents. Families show up because they trust the space, and the City succeeds because it reaches them where they already are. We also partner with NYC Emergency Management to host the citywide kickoff of National Preparedness Month, helping families prepare for emergencies in ways that are practical and designed for children.

SICM is affordable, easy to access, and open when working families need us: weekends, school breaks, and after-school hours. We are not just a cultural institution. We are part of the City's family-support infrastructure. Continued City investment in SICM and in culture across New York City is an investment in families, early childhood development, and the long-term strength of our neighborhoods. Thank you for your time.



The 92nd Street Y, New York
1395 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10128

**Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries
Oversight – Affordability in New York City’s Arts and Cultural Sector
Monday, February 9th, 2026
The 92nd Street Y, New York**

Thank you to the New York City Council, Chair Nantasha Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries for the opportunity to share testimony on affordability in New York City’s arts and cultural sector. My name is Ariel Savransky and I am the Director of Government and Community Relations at The 92nd Street Y, New York (92NY), a nonprofit cultural and community center in Manhattan.

92NY’s Mission and Reach

Since 92NY’s founding more than 150 years ago, we have offered services for children, families, and individuals across New York City. Each year, more than 700,000 people of diverse racial, religious, ethnic, and economic backgrounds come to 92NY to enjoy and create the arts and literature, engage their minds through lectures and classes, and strengthen their bodies through fitness and wellness programming.

Through a wide array of educational programs, community outreach initiatives, and affordable performances, 92NY strives to make the arts accessible to individuals of all ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural identities. By offering scholarships, subsidies, and opportunities for NYC public school students to attend events at 92NY, we work to ensure that cost is never a barrier to participation.

Whether through collaborations with local schools, partnerships with underrepresented artists, or a deep commitment to diversity in programming, 92NY continues to advocate for a more equitable and accessible arts landscape.

NYC Council initiative partnerships:

We are grateful for our partnership with the NYC Council allowing us to provide:

- **Eight free Cultural After-School Adventures (CASA) programs** in schools throughout the city, which have included residencies in:
 - Hip-hop , instrumental arts, visual arts, percussion, and more.
- **One SU-CASA program focusing on choral arts instruction at the Roosevelt Island Senior Center** (Since FY19)
 - Teaching Artists report that participants are enthusiastic not only about singing, but also about discussing the music, reminiscing, and sharing personal stories.

Programs for public school students:

For more than 35 years, 92NY’s School Engagement in the Arts (SEA) has provided sustained, high-quality arts education to New York City public school students who would otherwise have limited or no access to the arts.

Programs include:

- In-depth classroom visits from professional teaching artists
- Innovative curriculum design embedded into the school day
- Interaction with 92NY mainstage artists from around the world
- Access to professional internships and early career opportunities

Our reach:

- **More than 9,000 students and teachers in over 400 classrooms across more than 80 public schools citywide – a more than 100% increase from last academic year.**

We offer a **comprehensive, sequential K–12 arts education model** that is unmatched in New York City. Moving beyond short-term enrichment, our programs provide **multi-week residencies (some up to 18 weeks)**, sustained classroom engagement, and **direct access to professional artists and live performances at one of the city’s leading cultural institutions**.

This approach reflects the City’s stated priorities around sequential arts education, student engagement, and equitable access to cultural resources, and demonstrates 92NY’s long-term commitment to learning and impact. Just as importantly, 92NY is **committed to maintaining long-term partnerships with schools** allowing us to grow alongside school communities as their needs evolve.

Our work is grounded in a simple belief that access to the arts should not depend on a student’s zip code or a school’s budget. 92NY partners closely with principals, teachers, and arts liaisons to understand the financial realities facing schools and communities. As a result, **most of our programs are partially or fully subsidized and cost is never a barrier to participation. We work closely with schools to determine pricing plans that are feasible and will never turn a school away due to inability to pay.**

In FY26:

- Approximately 92% of our partner schools are Title I
- More than 70% of participating students come from families living in poverty.

Without public support, the depth and continuity of these programs would not be possible.

FY27 Focus: Expanding Equitable Access

In Fiscal Year 2027, 92NY is focused on expanding equitable access to arts education through several key programs.

Elementary/Middle School: Discovery Series

At the elementary and middle school level, our Discovery Series introduces students to global music and dance traditions through in-class lessons with professional teaching artists and live performances in our historic Kaufmann Concert Hall.

- Each participating classroom receives:
 - Four to eighteen in-school lessons
 - Tickets to two live performances
 - Original teaching materials and student activity books
 - Professional development workshops for classroom teachers.

This year alone, **we are reaching approximately 6% of New York City public elementary schools. Participation has grown by 35% over the past year**—from 143 classrooms to 193 classrooms—and **our goal is to reach 10% of elementary schools citywide** as sequencing expands.

High School: Broadway Spotlight

At the high school level, we are responding directly to student and educator feedback through the new Broadway Spotlight program, a 10-week residency launched in FY26 in partnership with Kaleidoscope Dreams, the foundation founded by Alicia Keys. **For many of these students, this is their first experience attending a Broadway production**—an opportunity that would otherwise be financially out of reach. This program opens the world of Broadway to students not just as audience members, but as creators—exploring storytelling, performance, design, and production.

In its first year, Broadway Spotlight is serving 900 students from 13 public high schools across the city, most of them Title I schools.

- Program components include:
 - Participation in 10-week residency
 - Attendance at Broadway matinees, including *Hell’s Kitchen* and *&Juliet*.
 - Post-show talkbacks with artists, with opportunities for students to help facilitate conversations.

- Creation of original final projects inspired by what students have seen and learned.

Free initiatives: Concerts Schools Project and the Christopher Lightfoot Walker Literature Project

These free initiatives for high school students remove cost barriers entirely while cultivating lifelong engagement with the arts. Programming provides students with:

- Access to live concerts, author readings and writing workshops
- Artist Q&As

Looking ahead:

Looking ahead, New York City Council support is essential to sustaining and expanding this work. **With continued investment, 92NY aims to reach 18,000 students by Fiscal Year 2028**—doubling our impact while ensuring that affordability is never a barrier to participation.

Programs for children, families and individuals

In addition to programs for public school students, 92NY offers a variety of arts and cultural education programs for children, families and individuals. We offer **need-based financial assistance for all programs** for children and adults and we encourage those who need scholarships to apply. We are committed to ensuring equity and access in the arts and making our programming accessible to a diverse 92NY community.

Programs include:

- Music education for all ages and skill levels
- Dance classes ranging from ballet and modern to hip-hop and swing
- Visual arts classes, including drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, and digital arts
- Theater and performing arts education, including acting and improvisation
- Adult learning classes in literature, history, philosophy, and languages

We also offer **programming for older adults through our Himan Brown 60+ Program**, providing opportunities for community engagement and enrichment. Members can access numerous in-person, online, and hybrid programs each week, including lectures, writing workshops, and studio art classes.

Conclusion

92NY is committed to investing in long-term, high-quality partnerships that bring arts education directly into schools, support working artists, and ensure that the next generation of New Yorkers sees themselves reflected in—and empowered by—our city's cultural life. This is central to our mission. We look forward to continuing to work with the NYC Council to ensure that all New Yorkers can access high quality arts and culture programming.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ariel Savransky

Director, Government and Community Relations

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Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams & New York City Council's Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries

The Broadway League, the national trade association for the Broadway theatre industry, supports the Artist Housing Bill.

Our members include the theater owners, operators, producers, and presenters, who collectively employ thousands of artists and arts workers across New York City.

The impact of Broadway is enormous. Our industry generates \$14.7 billion in annual economic activity for New York City, and last season we had almost 15 million people attend Broadway shows, driving business for restaurants, hotels, transportation, and small businesses throughout the city. Broadway also supports a workforce community of more than 100,000 people, many of them union professionals whose livelihoods depend on a healthy and sustainable theatre industry.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of our audience members participate in audience development and access programs, including the Passport Program, Broadway Bridges, Kids' Night on Broadway, Broadway Week, the TKTS Ticket Booth, and many more. As example, since 2021, the Passport program has distributed 268,353 Broadway tickets through service organizations serving lower-income New Yorkers for under \$44. Broadway Bridges has made over 160,000 tickets available for \$10 to New York City Public Schools. These initiatives expand access to live theatre and open doors so that New Yorkers from across the city can experience Broadway.

Broadway itself is not immune to rising costs. Every Broadway show is essentially its own startup company. Each production is a new, high-risk venture trying to create something original and magical, with no guarantee of success. Production expenses have soared, margins have become razor thin, and we have seen a troubling number of shows close over the past few seasons. At a moment when Broadway is working to remain viable and competitive, ensuring that artists can afford to stay in New York is essential.

The heart of the Broadway community is its artists and arts-related workers. Performers, musicians, stage managers, designers, technicians, ushers, dressers, and countless others make Broadway possible. For Broadway to thrive, these workers must be able to live in stable and affordable environments. Despite earning high and competitive wages and benefits in the commercial theatre industry, many arts workers are being pushed out because of the rising cost of living, especially housing. Affordable housing for artists



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is critical to the health of our industry; without this community, our shows simply cannot happen.

Manhattan Plaza, the largest, most innovated artist housing building in the world, was created here through the efforts of the unions, theater owners and producers, and City government. That vision, born in the 1970's, helped preserve Broadway during a pivotal moment in the city's history. We believe that same spirit of collaboration is needed again now.

For these reasons, The Broadway League strongly supports the Artist Housing Bill. We are grateful to former Council Members Keith Powers and Erik Bottcher for their leadership on this issue and for introducing legislation that recognizes the essential role artists play in our city's economy and cultural life

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and for your continued leadership on behalf of our city's arts community.

Jason Laks
President
The Broadway League



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My name is Penn Genthner, and I'm the Director of Development for The Classical Theatre of Harlem. I'd like to open by saying thank you to Chair Nantasha Williams and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries. I'd also like to thank Borough President Hoylman-Sigal, Speaker Menin, and Council Members Abreu and Salaam, whose generous support enables us to bring Broadway-scale plays to working-class families uptown *for free*.

As our government considers the value of cultural allocations when negotiating its budget for the next fiscal year, we would like you to consider the many ways in which our work and that of our peers creates opportunity and community that pay public funding back many times over. A grant to an organization like ours does not just buy a free play for 30,000 New Yorkers. Through our work with community nonprofits like Uptown Grand Central, we can leverage our gatherings for the economic development of our neighborhood by bringing in vendor tents offered for free to local microbusinesses selling Harlem-made food, fashion, and crafts. Hospitals and universities also take tents at our productions, connecting with the audiences we draw and offering valuable information on free and low-cost family healthcare. We share production infrastructure like the lighting and sound systems we bring to the park with our peer cultural groups, creating opportunities to perform for Jazzmobile, the Harlem Chamber Players, Harlem Opera Theater, and Young People's Chorus of NYC during daylight hours. In all, this activity generates over \$615,000 in economic activity for the surrounding neighborhood each summer, while keeping Marcus Garvey Park a safe, family-friendly, and prosperous environment throughout the month of July.

The Classical Theatre of Harlem's year-round programming fills stages at the Alhambra, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Harlem School of the Arts, Harlem Stage, the Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance, the Red Rooster, and the Renaissance Harlem Ballroom. Our bilingual teaching artists provide invaluable communications and collaboration skills to the large immigrant population at The Boys & Girls Club of Harlem, Dream Center Harlem, Mott Hall High School, New Design Middle School, P.S. 194, and Wadleigh Performing Arts High School.

All of this is to say that every dollar spent on New York's deeply interconnected cultural economy resounds to the benefit of businesses, community organizations, and their constituencies across the City. It is no coincidence that every moment we can look to from history as exemplary of good government, from Democratic Greece, to Republican Rome, Parliamentary England, and America's New Deal, has been a time when leaders recognized and invested in the arts as a vehicle for community building, public safety, economic development, education, and more.

Thank you again to our many friends on the City Council who already know this, and work with us to keep the Renaissance fresh in Harlem year after year. I hope my words can be of use and encouragement in your important work.



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Testimony Submitted by The Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural & Educational Center

February 9th, 2026

New York City Council – Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries
Oversight Hearing: Affordability in NYC’s Arts and Cultural Sector**

Good morning. My name is Libertad Guerra, Executive Director of The Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural & Educational Center on the Lower East Side.

The Clemente was founded more than thirty years ago at the intersection of affordability, access, and representation. Our model was never built around exclusivity or box office revenue. It was built on the belief that culture is a public good, and that immigrant and working-class communities deserve sustained access to cultural life without cost being a barrier.

Stewardship Plus Cultural Production

Today, we carry that mission through the stewardship of a City-owned building, but we are not simply a property manager.

We operate this building as shared civic infrastructure while also producing original research, artist commissions, exhibitions, festivals, and public humanities programs. Within this ecosystem, we sustain deeply subsidized studios, rehearsal and performance spaces, and administrative homes for artists, small cultural organizations, independent producers, and community initiatives.

Keeping these spaces affordable often depends not on dedicated operating support, but on institutional sweat equity: absorbing deferred maintenance, operational strain, and unfunded labor in order to prevent displacement and preserve access.

Free Access and the Real Cost of Affordability

More than 80 percent of Clemente-produced programs are free, including festivals, exhibitions, performances, and educational events. But this public-good model has structural consequences. Because our work is not box-office driven, we have limited leverage for traditional membership or individual giving models that assume disposable

income. In our case, affordability actively constrains revenue even as it expands public benefit.

Citywide Cultural Coordination in Practice

Through our multi-year *Historias* initiative, co-presented with the Latinx Arts Consortium of New York, we already operate a distributed, citywide cultural framework aligned with a five-borough cultural moment. We coordinate partners across boroughs, commission artists, and maintain shared research and digital infrastructure, carrying the backbone labor that allows smaller organizations and artists to participate meaningfully, while also partnering with major establishment organizations like MoMA and the MET.

This backbone work is essential, but it is not structurally funded.

Creative Workforce Pathways Without Infrastructure

We also operate as a de facto workforce development and educational clearinghouse. Our ecosystem regularly hosts interns, fellows, apprentices, and student researchers across theater and large-scale event production, public humanities research, gallery & facilities management, fabrication, and installation. These are skilled roles that are not easily automated or displaced.

But this comes at a high capacity cost. Supervising, training, and integrating early-career talent requires time, continuity, and infrastructure. Too often, cultural organizations are expected to absorb short-term, parachuted internships without the investment needed to turn this knowledge capital into structured pipelines: longer-term placements, paid opportunities, curriculum alignment, and mentorship models that actually lead to careers.

Closing: What Is Missing

The through-line is clear. Institutions like The Clemente are already delivering the outcomes envisioned in today's cultural and workforce agendas, but without institutional conditions that make them durable and scalable.

Cultural institutions like ours often become points of trust and stability, particularly during periods of fear or uncertainty. This role is essential to civic health, yet it remains structurally invisible in affordability frameworks.



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A reframed affordability agenda would recognize culturally specific organizations stewarding City assets as civic infrastructure, and would account for the real cost of free access, shared stewardship, and the invisible labor that sustains cultural life in New York City.

Without that reframe and investment, cultural organizations will continue to be asked to carry public responsibility without public conditions that make it viable.

Thank You



Testimony to the
Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries

Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector
February 9, 2026

Dear Chair Williams and Members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries:

Founded in 1804, The New York Historical conveys the stories of the City and nation's diverse populations, expanding our understanding of who we are as Americans and how we came to be. Our mission is to collect, preserve, and interpret—for the broadest possible public—material relevant to U.S. history, and to serve as an accessible community resource for audiences traditionally underserved by cultural institutions. Accordingly, The New York Historical is committed to ensuring all New Yorkers have access to cultural institutions at every level. We offer the following free and low-cost programs to fulfill this aim:

SCHOOL PROGRAMS leverage our expansive collections and path-breaking exhibitions to enhance social studies education. Field trips invite classes to the Museum to explore our galleries, while classroom-based social studies enrichment workshops dispatch Museum Educators equipped with replica artifacts and documents across the five boroughs. NYC public schools receive discounts or waivers on an as-needed basis, and in response to recent feedback from school administrators about tightened budgets, The New York Historical has undertaken targeted fundraising to offer even more of these programs free of charge over the next two school years.

The **ACADEMY FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY** is a week-long residency that engages local sixth-graders in deep exploration of ancient Athenian democracy and its interpretation and evolution in the U.S. using object-based inquiry. The Academy is offered free of charge, inclusive of transportation costs, to all interested schools. To further enhance the accessibility of this unique program, it is offered on-site at the Museum, in classrooms around NYC, and virtually. A new digital curriculum, launched in fall 2025, also provides teachers with year-round free access to the program's civics content and teaching pedagogy.

TEEN PROGRAMS enhance history and civics learning for local high school students while helping them develop in-demand career skills. In particular, our Student Historian High School Internship Program provides participants with valuable research experience using our collections and creating public-facing digital projects alongside professional staff. All interns receive a \$700 stipend upon successful completion of the program. In addition, our free Tech Scholars courses provide shorter-term opportunities to develop digital humanities skills, including web design, game design, and podcasting.

TEACHER PROGRAMS introduce educators to our vast collections and empower them to bring museum education-based strategies into their own classrooms. The New York Historical offers a full calendar of virtual and in-person open-enrollment workshops, custom professional learning workshops, and multiple in-depth professional learning communities. These programs are offered for free or at a low cost to ensure no teachers face barriers to entry. Furthermore, with The New York Historical's status as a certified sponsor of New York State CTLE hours, participation in our programming is applicable towards maintaining professional certification from the State as well as the NYC Department of Education. We also serve educators in all five boroughs with lesson plans and digital curricula, all available free of charge at nyhistory.org/curriculum-library.

The **DIMENNA CHILDREN'S HISTORY MUSEUM** extends The New York Historical's educational work to early childhood learners, empowering them to engage with local history through games, maps, artifact replicas, media pieces, and more. The Children's Museum's galleries and full schedule of family programs—such as artmaking workshops, historical reenactments, Family Book Club, and age-appropriate exhibition and gallery tours—are freely accessible with museum admission.

Our **MASTER OF ARTS IN MUSEUM STUDIES PROGRAM**, developed alongside and offered through the City University of New York's School of Professional Studies, ensures that New Yorkers do not just benefit from the arts and cultural sector, but also have pathways to join its workforce. Scholarships are available to students, especially those who are from historically underrepresented groups or who can demonstrate a professional commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. The program blends flexible online classes with a hands-on practicum component at the Museum to provide a comprehensive educational experience while accommodating individuals whose many existing responsibilities may not allow for a traditional academic experience, including those with full-time employment.

Lastly, The New York Historical offers **PAY-AS-YOU-WISH FRIDAY EVENING HOURS** in addition to admissions discounts for seniors, students, and active military personnel and free access to patrons of NYC's public libraries through the Culture Pass program. We recently expanded this offering into a full series of evening programs featuring live music, themed cocktails, and comedy presentations to promote engagement with the contents of our galleries and the history and culture of NYC more generally.

Conclusion

Ensuring that all New Yorkers have affordable access to the rich artistic and cultural resources our city has to offer is fundamentally aligned with our institutional mission, and The New York Historical remains grateful for the City's investment in our work. Funding from the City Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs ensures that our programs remain sustainable and accessible to the public, and we thank you and your fellow City Council Members for your exceptional service.

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

T2026-0832 Oversight - Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector

February 9, 2026

Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker Dr. Williams, committee members, and staff. My name is Patrick Willingham, and I am the Executive Director of The Public Theater. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

From its founding, The Public Theater has stood for access. Joseph Papp created The Public as an embodiment of democratic theater, establishing spaces on Astor Place and the Delacorte Theater in Central Park with the belief that Shakespeare and great storytelling belong to everyone, regardless of income or background. From its earliest days, The Public has existed to remove barriers to the arts and to reimagine what free programming can mean for New York City.

Free Shakespeare in the Park remains one of our most visible and beloved examples of arts access in action. Just this past summer, 62,317 New Yorkers attended 35 free performances. This is not simply affordable theater: it is civic engagement. People from across neighborhoods, generations, and backgrounds come together and experience a shared sense of belonging.

Beyond the Delacorte stage, The Public actively brings theater into communities across the city. For the past fifteen summers, our Mobile Unit has traveled to parks, community centers, and correctional facilities in all five boroughs, breaking down both economic and geographic barriers to the arts. Last summer, the Mobile Unit toured a bilingual Spanish and English Shakespeare adaptation of MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING. More than 16,404 New Yorkers attended free performances across all five boroughs during the five-week tour. Building on this momentum, the Mobile Unit will return in June with Shakespeare's AS YOU LIKE IT, reaching returning sites as well as new communities.

In 2012, we launched Public Works, collaborating with eight longstanding community partners rooted in every borough, serving populations as diverse as youth and high-school students in the South Bronx, seniors in Brownsville, veterans exploring emotional healing, immigrant families in Sunset Park, individuals with justice system histories at Fortune Society, and domestic workers citywide. Together, these partners form a multigenerational community of citizen artists united not by professional training, but by a shared belief that creativity belongs to everyone. Each year, Public Works offers nine months of free weekly classes and workshops including, acting, movement, storytelling, and bilingual arts, serving over 300 community members annually across all five boroughs, approximately 60 of whom are high school-aged students. Monthly cross-community potlucks and gatherings further strengthen these connections, bringing together an average of 80–100 participants at a time to share meals, build relationships, and foster a lasting sense of belonging beyond individual classes. Our community partners include: Brownsville Recreation Center (Brooklyn), Casita Maria Center for Arts & Education (Bronx), Domestic Workers United (citywide), The Fortune Society (Queens), Military Resilience Foundation (citywide), DreamYard (the Bronx), Children's Aid Society (city-wide), Center for Family Life in Sunset Park (Brooklyn).

We've established a close partnership with the Hunts Point Alliance for Children to create the Hunts Point Children's Shakespeare Ensemble. It is a year-long after-school program introducing 4th through 6th graders in the South Bronx to the works of Shakespeare. The program fosters meaningful connections among students while developing essential communication and creative skills through the study and performance of Shakespeare's plays. Over eight months, students work twice a week with professional Teaching Artists to explore texts, develop characters, and bring the stories to life. The program culminates in a fully staged production performed first in their community and later on a Public Theater stage. Programs like Hunts Point Children's Shakespeare Ensemble are critical because it helps create a pipeline that nurtures children from a young age and supports their growth into the next generation of artists.

Creating theater is not only for the people, but by and of the people. These programs demonstrate how free, high-quality theater strengthens communities, fosters dialogue, and ensures that New York City's cultural life remains open to everyone.

At The Public, affordability and access are not add-ons: they are our foundation. When the arts are accessible, the city itself becomes more connected, more imaginative, and more just.

However, free programming is a right we must actively fight for if the artists and cultural workers creating it are struggling to survive. New York City is becoming more expensive by the minute, and many artists face persistent challenges securing health insurance, stable housing, and reliable income. Since the pandemic, The Public has been on the frontlines working to remove these barriers and support the artists who make our work possible.

Over the past five years, The Public has piloted a range of direct payment and income-support programs for artists, recognizing that financial stability is essential to sustaining creative work. We have also participated in statewide initiatives such as Creatives Rebuild New York, a three-year, \$125 million investment in the financial stability of New York State artists and the organizations that employ them. CRNY provided guaranteed income and employment opportunities for 2,700 artists across the state, working to alleviate unemployment, sustain creative work in partnership with communities, and enable artists to continue living and working in New York under less financial strain. In 2023 and 2024, The Public partnered with artists-in-residence Ife Olujobi, Ryan Haddad, and Julian Goldhagen. The CRNY residency enabled The Public to create the time, space, and resources needed for playwrights Ife and Ryan to focus on writing as their primary paid occupation. Programs like these demonstrate the profound impact that income stability can have on both artists and the cultural ecosystem as a whole.

The Public also offers robust New Work Development initiatives that provide holistic support to artists at every stage of their careers. Last year, The Public's early career working groups continued to model collaborative approaches that support artists at critical moments in their development. The primary goal of each program is to create meaningful pathways for both artistic and professional advancement, while helping artists sustain a viable livelihood.

- The Emerging Writers Group provides artistic and professional development opportunities for writers at all stages of their careers while fostering a web of supportive artistic relationships. Writers are offered a two-year fellowship supported by a stipend. The writers

that participate are particularly those without professional representation or graduate school training. The playwrights participate in a bi-weekly writers group led by our New Work Department and featuring master classes with established playwrights. Their fellowship culminates in our Spotlight Series, an industry-invited showcase of work developed during the residency. To sustain this program restructured the programming, increased stipends from \$7,500 to \$10,000 for the writers to meet the impacts of inflation and relieve the financial burden of participating in the program and coordinated networking opportunities with artistic partners and organizations across the city to deepen strengthen the relationships of these emerging writers.

- Similar to the Emerging Writers Group, Joe's Pub supports a cohort of six early-career musicians through Joe's Pub Working Group. Joe's Pub and The Public provide administrative support, physical space, and curatorial services, while cultivating a community atmosphere wherein those artists can create and sustain new and developing work.
- In our New York Voices program, The Public commissions at least three musicians, providing resources to develop new work and the tools needed for a culminating performance. These performances are designed to lead to extended runs in markets across the country, expanding artists' access to new audiences and revenue streams. In addition, the program offers finishing funds as needed to ensure each project is fully realized and to increase artists' long-term viability as touring musicians.
- The Public also hosts Artists-In-Residence, providing them with a home to practice their craft while receiving a full-time, sustaining salary. Past residency positions have supported disability rights activist Gregg Mozgala and his company, The Apothetae, as well as Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Suzan-Lori Parks.

We also strongly support the, "Launch a Creative Pathways and Talent Pipeline Initiative across NYC public schools and CUNY" recommendation in the Center for an Urban Future's report and is already invested in this work. The Public Theater and The City University of New York's partnership invests in nurturing generations of arts leaders whose presence will help diversify the field. The partnership, which focuses specifically on Hunter and Brooklyn College's undergraduate theater training programs, includes a suite of activities aiming to build a robust workforce development program. As part of their eight-month paid fellowships, each fellow is engrained within specific Public Theater departments in each student's chosen discipline, providing them with robust professional development and network-building opportunities to help launch their careers and offer resources to fellows to build a portfolio of work.

Affordability in the arts must include the artists and cultural workers themselves. Stable income allows artists to focus on creating new work, building community, and fully owning their artistic contributions rather than simply surviving from project to project.

For this reason, The Public strongly supports many of the recommendations outlined in the Center for an Urban Future's report, particularly the creation of portable benefits for artists and cultural workers. We also support the call to generate dedicated, recurring revenue for the arts. Even with steadily increasing cultural budgets, New York City's arts ecosystem remains vulnerable to fiscal swings, including federal funding cuts, even as the number of cultural nonprofits continues to

grow. Establishing predictable, recurring revenue streams, such as those tied to tourism, cultural districts, or other dedicated funding mechanisms, would significantly improve long-term stability and align investment with the economic, social, and quality-of-life benefits that arts and culture generate citywide. The Public strongly supports many of the recommendations from the Center for an Urban Future report, particularly the creation of a dedicated, recurring revenue stream to benefit artists and institutions alike. The Public Theater alone invests more than \$10 million annually to produce its free programming, fellowships, classes and direct artist support. Rising costs driven by inflation, insurance, and production expenses drive up costs and put the sustainability of our organization and these programs at risk. Without increased stability and public investment, the very programs that define New York City's commitment to cultural access grow more vulnerable each day.

The Public Theater stands ready to partner with the City to advance these recommendations and continue our commitment to providing the exceptional free or low cost live theater and music to the people of the City of New York. Together, we can help ensure that New York remains a place where artists can thrive, communities can connect, and culture remains truly accessible to all.

Thank you for your time and dedication to the people of New York City,

**Patrick Willingham, Executive Director,
The Public Theater, pwillingham@publictheater.org**



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TREASURER

Joseph Delfausse

NYC Council Hearing- Affordability crisis in NYC for Artists and the Cultural Sector – February 9, 2026 at 1PM

Dear Members of the Committees on Finance and on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations, I am Francine Garber-Cohen, President and Producer of the Regina Opera Company, which has offered year-round, fully-staged operas and ticketed and free concerts in Southwest Brooklyn for 56 years.

At these performances thousands of Brooklyn residents, over 2/3 of whom are Senior Citizens, are able to meet other music lovers - getting them out of their homes where many live alone, helping to combat the scourge of loneliness and feelings of isolation. Music is Medicine! But this Medicine is getting more expensive each month.

Attendance for the ***ticketed*** events, and the resulting income, is decreasing, while attendance at our free events is increasing. As a result, we are presenting more free events and spending more of our funds to accommodate this need. Regina Opera represents the rest of the Cultural Sector of NYC.

People who attend our performances feel better after the shows, but our musical artists are suffering. For many artists NYC is no longer a place to live and work. They can't afford rent, the costs of lessons, coaching, and rehearsal studio space, so they move out of the city. The small amount that they earn from singing does not cover their living costs. Additional grant to arts organizations will help, as will affordable artists housing, offering reduced price transportation through MTA, and a reduction in income taxes.

We at Regina Opera have suffered from the loss of singers and staff who moved out of NYC, including our Stage Director who moved to California to live with family since the costs for rent, food, and insurance were becoming unmanageable. Some singers have also moved to Suffolk County and to rural areas where rent is less. This is a loss to the NYC economy because they are now spending their dollars elsewhere. Investment in the Arts is an investment in New York City.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francine Garber-Cohen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fran Garber-Cohen, President, Regina Opera

**Testimony by Deeksha Gaur, Executive Director, Theatre Development Fund
To The NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries
Oversight Hearing: Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector**

February 9, 2026

The Value of Affordable Theatre

“If you can't afford the ticket, then you can't see the thing and you can't feed your dream.” – Andrew Durand, Actor

I write as Executive Director of Theatre Development Fund (TDF), a nonprofit dedicated to removing the financial, physical, and invisible barriers to attending the performing arts for all New Yorkers. Headquartered in Council District 3, we serve constituents in all 51 Council Districts as the nation's largest arts service organization dedicated to making the performing arts affordable and accessible for all. Our programs connect historically underserved communities with transformational arts experiences by lowering financial barriers to access, and by working in deep collaboration with local organizations and theatrical producers to make the performing arts accessible to those we serve, including veterans, students, older adults, people with hearing and vision loss, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and more. With over five decades of experience in audience building, we use a collaborative approach, working with local organizations to pilot and scale programs where communities are welcomed to see shows on their own terms, in an environment that is safe, judgment-free, and attentive to their needs.

The social benefits of attending live performance have the capacity to improve healing and strengthen community resilience. Equitable, recurring access to the performing arts has a direct correlation to the health of our nation's citizens. A study in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* showed that monthly attendance reduces depression in people over age 50 by 48%. Americans for the Arts has also compiled findings from a review of extensive research, demonstrating that youth who have arts-rich experiences are more likely to stay in school and four out of five are more likely to vote.

Affordable access to the arts is at the core of everything TDF does. Since 1968, we have made the arts affordable for New Yorkers and visitors by offering deeply discounted admission to diverse audiences. The iconic TKTS Booths in Times Square and Lincoln Center are known around the world for same-day discounts to live performances throughout the City, while our flagship TDF Membership program offers deeply discounted tickets for performances on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and Off-Off-Broadway to educators, nurses, union members, retirees, and more. Our education, access, and community programs serve more than 50,000 New York City residents

each year with free tickets, robust accessibility accommodations, and other tailored support. Beyond attendance at the theatre, our Costume Collection has provided affordable costume rental services to nonprofits, schools, community groups, and more for over 50 years.

Providing affordable arts experiences supports the industry, keeping shows open today and inspiring the artists of tomorrow. Driven in large part by our flagship TKTS Booths, TDF was responsible for 13% of all Broadway admissions during the 2024-25 season and connected more than one million people to over 1,800 productions across New York City's five boroughs. I encourage you to hear directly from some artists for whom access to the arts inspired their career in this video: <https://tinyurl.com/tktsimpact> (transcript included below).

This empirical and anecdotal evidence drives us to grow our programs, encouraging regular attendance at the theatre to extend the benefits of arts participation. For example, in the next season, we are expanding our groundbreaking Autism Friendly Performances program to present monthly sensory-friendly and adaptive Broadway performances at 50% the cost of a standard Broadway ticket. Opportunities like this throw open the doors to the theatre and make it clear that the arts are for everyone.

TDF plays an outsized role as connector between communities and culture. I would like to express our sincere thanks to the members of the New York City Council for your many years of support. The City Council's deep commitment to the full diversity of its constituents meaningfully impacts our capacity to deliver accessible programs year-round. I am deeply grateful for consideration of our FY2027 requests, including:

- \$100,000 in renewed support from **Autism Awareness Initiative**, providing free admission to TDF's Autism Friendly Performances on Broadway for students attending District 75 programs at New York City public schools;
- \$110,000 in renewed and increased support from **Veterans Community Development Initiative**, gathering former members of all military branches at free Broadway performances; and
- A first-time \$100,000 allocation from the **Speaker's List** to ensure TDF may continue making theatre affordable and accessible to all.

TDF champions access to the performing arts for all New Yorkers. An investment in TDF is an investment in ensuring accessible, affordable pathways to sustained participation as an essential part of civic practice and societal health. Thank you for the City Council's good, necessary work on behalf of New York City residents and its kind consideration of continued support for TDF.

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

CELIA KEENAN-BOLGER

Have I ever purchased tickets at TKTS? Ask me how many tickets I've purchased at TKTS.

JERRY MITCHELL

TDF allows inclusion. It allows everyone to enjoy theater. And that's so important because you have no idea where the next theatrical genius lives.

ANDREW DURAND

If you can't afford the ticket, then you can't see the thing and you can't, you know, feed your dream. It creates the dreams, it feeds the dreams.

FRANCIS JUE

I remember vividly standing in line at TKTS in 1981 and getting a ticket to see Amadeus. And it changed my life.

NORM LEWIS

Very first time I ever bought a ticket at TKTS was my first trip to New York back in 1987. We got these tickets that were available for this Les Mis show at a discount price. And it was the night that changed my life. It was that night on my birthday in 1987 that I wanted to come to New York and become a Broadway performer.

JOHN GALLAGHER, JR.

My very first Broadway show was courtesy of the TKTS booth. I was about 11 or 12. My mom took me and my sister Joni on a bus trip from Wilmington, Delaware. And we landed on a revival of Once Upon a Mattress, starring Sarah Jessica Parker. And like instantly fell in love, knew that it was something I wanted to come back and do and see again and again and again.

JERRY MITCHELL

My first experience with TDF, the TKTS booth in Times Square, I was 17. I had never seen a Broadway show. I bought tickets to see The Wiz. I still to this day remember that first Broadway show. And I could have never gone without TDF because I didn't have any money. I'm very grateful to TDF. Yeah, it gave me access.

REBECCA NAOMI JONES

I think affordable tickets can change someone's life in so many ways. I think they can be, maybe most importantly, exposed to ideas and questions and theories and opinions that they wouldn't necessarily have been exposed to.

CELIA KEENAN-BOLGER

I moved to the city as a musical theater up-and-comer. If you were an Actors' Equity member, you could join TDF. And I remember I saw this play called Skylight that totally

changed the way that I thought about what Broadway was. And I don't know that I would have found my way to plays on Broadway if it had not been for TDF.

REBECCA NAOMI JONES

I have a really good, strong, happy memory of my mom just having the TDF membership and just like getting the little brochure, booklet-y thing, and just like getting really excited to see what was on tap.

FRANCIS JUE

TDF memberships are a lifeline for me. I think one of the great things about TDF is it democratizes theater.

ANDREW DURAND

It's so important that theater can be enjoyed and accessed by everyone. The fact that TDF is providing the platforms for that to happen is invaluable.

NORM LEWIS

Having the access to live theater is an amazing thing.

FRANCIS JUE

TKTS at TDF supports the expansion of people's imaginations, expands their capacity for empathy, for their understanding of the world around them and who they want to be.

JERRY MITCHELL

I am living proof that having access to a discounted ticket can fulfill a dream. It completely impacted my life in a huge way.

JOHN GALLAGHER, JR.

I really feel quite strongly that I would not be where I am. I would have never started doing theater without coming to New York and seeing that Broadway show.

THE ARTS BELONG TO ALL OF US.

Since 1968, TDF has been dedicated to removing the physical, financial, and invisible barriers to attending the performing arts. With more than five decades of experience in audience building, we work in deep collaboration with historically underserved communities, forging pathways to transformational arts experiences that inspire empathy, empower, and lead to healthier and more fulfilling lives.

Every season, our programs reach over 1 million New Yorkers and visitors with free and deeply discounted access to live theatre, dance, and music performances.

11,000

public school students from all five boroughs attend FREE theatre and dance education programs. TDF is the sole arts provider in 68% of the schools we serve.

15,000

tickets distributed at no cost to 128 partner organizations throughout the five boroughs.

10,000

audience members impacted by autism attend TDF's welcoming and inclusive Autism Friendly Performances.

4,800

seniors from NYC public and charter high schools sign up for FREE TDF Memberships through our Graduation Gift program.

2,700

veterans and active-duty service members attend Broadway shows at no cost during Fleet Week and throughout the year.

30,000

audience members purchase deeply discounted tickets for accessible seating, as well as audio described, open captioned, and ASL-interpreted performances.

"For 15 years TDF has enriched both the emotional and intellectual lives of my students. When they attend the theatre, they see possibilities and their worlds open up. Not only do they become theatregoers, they learn to think in new ways while still remaining true to themselves. TDF transforms lives."

- LILY VERO WELSH, DRAMA TEACHER, THE FLUSHING INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

For more information, visit www.tdf.org or email Jaime Totti, Director of Development at jaimet@tdf.org

tdf

February 9, 2026

Dear Chair Williams, and the NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations,

I am writing to underscore how critical support for The Kitchen is in responding to the acute affordability crisis facing artists and cultural workers in New York City.

Founded in 1971 as an artist-driven collective, The Kitchen today reaffirms and expands upon its originating vision as a dynamic cultural institution that centers artists, prioritizes people, and puts process first. Programming in a kunsthalle model that brings together live performances, exhibition-making, and public programming under one roof, The Kitchen empowers its audiences and communities to think creatively and radically about what it means to shape a multivalent and sustainable future in art. The Kitchen seeks to cultivate and hold space for wild thought, risky play, and innovative and experimental making, encouraging artists and cultural workers alike to defy boundaries and sending them into the world to remake art history and catalyze creative change.

However, spaces like The Kitchen are becoming fewer and farther between. Rising rents, escalating operating costs, and shrinking margins for nonprofit cultural organizations have made it increasingly difficult to sustain experimental, artist-centered institutions. As affordability challenges intensify, many of the very spaces that incubate new ideas, support emerging artists, and reflect the city's diverse communities are disappearing. This displacement is not only economic: it is social, creative, and civic. This loss strips New York of the rich cultural fabric that has historically made it a global beacon for the arts, and when artists cannot afford to live and work here, the city risks losing the experimental energy, critical discourse, and creative labor that define New York as a global cultural capital.

Affordability is not only a housing issue, it is a workforce and cultural equity issue. Artists and cultural workers are facing unprecedented barriers to living and working in New York. Studio rents, rehearsal space, storage, childcare, healthcare, and basic living costs have outpaced incomes in the nonprofit and creative sectors. When artists and cultural workers are forced to leave the city, New York loses not just talent, but the experimental energy, public discourse, and creative labor that fuel its identity and economy.

In times of economic uncertainty and downturn, cultural institutions like The Kitchen are essential civic assets, and supporting the organization is a direct intervention in this emergency. For decades, it has provided artists with space, visibility, and resources at pivotal moments in their careers, often before the market or major institutions recognize their value. In an era when affordability determines who gets to participate in cultural production, institutions like The Kitchen ensure that access to creative platforms is not reserved for the economically privileged.

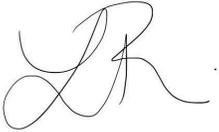
Preserving The Kitchen is therefore not only about preserving a single organization; it is about safeguarding the ecosystem that makes New York a cultural capital. It is an investment in equity, in innovation, and in the city's ability to remain a place where artists from all backgrounds can live, work, and contribute to public life.

This commitment is deeply personal to me. As the daughter of an artist, and as someone who comes from a family of organizers, I have witnessed firsthand the systems of alienation that emerge when cultural workers are priced out, under-resourced, and structurally sidelined. I have seen how easily creative communities, particularly those already navigating precarity, can be displaced from the very city their labor animates.

New York's creative capital should never be marginalized; it must remain at the center of the city's civic and economic imagination. Investing in The Kitchen is an investment in sustaining that center—protecting space for risk, experimentation, and cultural leadership at a moment when it is most under threat.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to the future of New York's artistic community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, cursive letters that appear to be 'LR' followed by a flourish.

Legacy Russell
Executive Director & Chief Curator
The Kitchen

Hello, my name is Carla and I'm a member of IATSE Local 798 Makeup Artists & Hairstylists, we're the union workers behind the scenes for film, tv, theater, and commercials made in New York. Speaking for myself, I've personally seen the toll this economic slowdown has taken on New Yorkers. A lot of people have been out of work, and affordable housing helps to keep a talented workforce here so that we can again have a thriving arts economy that attracts tourists, supports small businesses, and generates millions of dollars in taxes for New York State. Please support the "Arts Housing Bill" to keep our local workforce strong. Thank you

Written Testimony for Mon Feb 9 2026 1pm Hearing on Artist Affordability; City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Relations, Deputy Speaker Dr. Nantasha Williams

Good morning, I am submitting written testimony as I was unable to find affordable childcare to allow me to attend in person. My name is Karesia Batan, a Queens-based dancer, Founding Executive Director of Queensboro Dance Festival, a mom to 2 toddlers, and Chair of Arts and Culture Committee on Queens Community Board 2. While affordability to live and work sustainably in NYC is not unique to the arts and culture sector, the lack of holistic, eco-systemic support and investment in our sector has left us behind in city priorities. The Center for Urban Future reports a decline in the artist population in NYC, and we feel this directly within our Queensboro Dance Festival community, which serves about 200 Queens artists and reaches 10,000 audience members annually. We have been losing dance artists each year, moving to international cities as they say it's simply too difficult to afford rent or find stable work here, layered on top of the extra hurdle for our immigrant artists' lack of access to equitable funding and immigrant artist services. When we lose artists, we lose cultural representation. We lose artistic voices that often share the stories of many New Yorkers. NYC loses income, as our sector is an undeniable economic driver responsible for over \$110 billion dollars of economic activity in NYC. Arts organizations, the majority of which are small budget orgs and independent entities that often deliver the greatest impact directly to our neighborhoods, are barely surviving on shoestring budgets year to year and losing cultural spaces due to rising costs. In my home district 26, our over 120 arts studios and organizations are highly vulnerable due to the recent massive rezoning, where there have been no direct arts and culture protections or investments in the OneLIC Neighborhood Plan. Arts and culture is vital to healthy, thriving communities and should be treated as a standard element of city planning. We are not in a silo and neither is our contribution to NYC; we are health, education, public safety, environmentalism, social justice. I respectfully ask our Chair and City Council to create more developer incentives for the creation and preservation of affordable artist housing and cultural spaces, more equitable funding allocated to smaller budget arts orgs and creation of public art sites from not just DCLA but from more interagency coordination, and investment in a full service, comprehensive Borough Arts Council for Queens just as the other boroughs have, which has not been remedied for going on 6 years now. Thank you and we look forward to working with our elected officials.

Hello, my name is Krista Montgomery and I'm a member of IATSE Local 798 Makeup Artists & Hairstylists, we're the union workers behind the scenes for film, tv, theater, and commercials made in New York. I have recently been trying to move into the city in order to have more work opportunities. I come from a small town in Appalachia, and the cost of living is very low there. Slowly, I have made my way into New England but I know I need to be within the city to work more consistently.

I have been looking for affordable housing for about a year, and have even applied to the New York affordable housing website. So far, I have had no luck, and am now even considering living in a van in order to be closer to the city and the work I desperately need. The slowdown within the entertainment industry has made me terrified that I will not be able to afford housing.

I do not want to bite the bullet and just sign a lease with any available apartment out of desperation, knowing I may not be able to afford rent, plus utilities and my daily living expenditure needs. Affordable housing within NYC has directly impacted me in so many ways. The stress of knowing I need to be closer to the city in order to have more opportunities, yet simultaneously knowing I may be broke or unable to pay my rent is exhausting.

I have spent my entire life as a part of production crews, helping to create attractions, films, television shows and commercials. I love what I do, who I work with and the ability to help tell stories with amazing people. I cannot see myself in any other field of work, and I am hoping that NY supports the Art Housing Bill so people like me can afford to live closer to the work we love.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Krista Montgomery

Hello, my name is Laura Pugliese, and I'm a member of IATSE Local 798 Makeup Artists & Hairstylists, we're the union workers behind the scenes for film, tv, theater, and commercials made in New York. I've personally seen the toll this economic slowdown has taken on New Yorkers. People have been out of work, cashing in savings, and struggling to make ends meet.

Livable wages have not increased to match a rising cost of living in this city which has increased astronomically. Affordable housing helps to keep a talented workforce here so we can have a thriving arts economy that attracts tourists, supports small businesses, and generates millions of dollars in taxes for New York State. Please support the "Arts Housing Bill" to keep our local workforce strong. Thank you for your consideration.

"Hello, my name is _maria C. Scali_____ and I'm a member of IATSE Local 798 Makeup Artists & Hairstylists, we're the union workers behind the scenes for film, tv, theater, and commercials made in New York. Speaking for myself, I've personally seen the toll this economic slowdown has taken on New Yorkers. A lot of people have been out of work, and affordable housing helps to keep a talented workforce here so that we can again have a thriving arts economy that attracts tourists, supports small businesses, and generates millions of dollars in taxes for New York State. Please support the "Arts Housing Bill" to keep our local workforce strong. Thank you"



From: Maria C. Scali | MariaScali.com [REDACTED]
Subject: Housing draft
Date: February 10, 2026 at 5:38 PM
To: andrewsotomayormakeup@gmail.com

Member of Local 798, representing approximately 800 union artists in the NYC area, along with many additional artists working in fashion, retail, media, and other non-union creative sectors.
Affordable housing directly affects the caliber, diversity, and sustainability of the creative workforce able to remain in the city.
Artists are increasingly being pushed out due to rising rents, resulting in a loss of skilled professionals who contribute to the city's economy and cultural identity.
Leaving the city is not a practical or affordable solution:
Increased transportation costs, including congestion pricing.
Rising public transportation fares.
Artists carry heavy equipment and frequently work late-night, early-morning, and irregular hours, making long-distance commuting difficult and unsafe.
The question raised: Is leaving the city truly affordable when work logistics and transportation costs make it unsustainable?
Rents have significantly increased, with major spikes occurring:
After 9/11
Again following the COVID-19 pandemic
Even artists who can currently afford rent are increasingly worried about long-term stability:
Concerns about retirement affordability
Fear of future displacement
Uncertainty about where aging artists will be able to live
The creative industry is still recovering from the pandemic, and was further impacted by a major industry strike, creating prolonged financial instability for many artists.
Not all artists qualify for unemployment benefits, and those who do often receive approximately \$400 per week pre-tax, an amount that is not sufficient to cover the cost of living and housing in the city.
Without favorable housing policies, the city risks losing both emerging and established artists, weakening its creative industries and cultural ecosystem.
Emphasizes the need for sustainable, favorable, and affordable housing solutions that support:
Working artists across industries
Long-term residents
Aging members of the creative workforce
mnm

Maria C. Scali
Makeup Artist



Representation
Elisa Valentina Agency

<http://www.elisavalentinaagency.com/artists-talent/makeup/783920/maria-c-scali>

IG: @mariascali

Rachel Ramos Toledo [REDACTED] NYC NY 10024

Good afternoon.

My name is Rachel Toledo, and I am a professional makeup artist and a member of IATSE Local 798 since late 2018. I work in the arts and film industry here in New York City.

My job often requires me to be on set as early as 5:00 a.m., which means leaving home well before that time, catching crew vans, and traveling across the city. As a New Yorker who does not own a car, it is essential for me to live in a central, accessible location. Financially, however, that necessity has made my life increasingly difficult.

In 2020, I moved into a small 350-square-foot apartment. Over the five years I lived there, my rent was increased by more than \$1,000. During that time, there was also an eight-month industry strike, during which I was unemployed — yet I paid my rent on time every single month.

In February 2026, my landlord attempted to raise my rent another \$300. Because my credit score had dropped slightly during the strike — despite my perfect rental payment history — I was told I would need to pay an additional \$3,000 to a third-party guarantor service just to stay. I was also only offered a one-year lease, because the landlord planned to raise my rent another \$300 the following year. This made no sense and offered no stability.

I then applied to five different apartments across New York City. I was rejected by all of them — even though I earned well over 40 times the rent, even though I had letters from my property manager confirming my on-time payments, and even though I have worked consistently in my field. As a freelancer, securing housing has become nearly impossible.

Today, at 52 years old, I am living in my parents' apartment. Despite earning a six-figure income, I cannot secure or afford housing in the city I work in. I do not have children to support, and yet I still cannot support myself here. This is unacceptable.

What is happening to New York City?

We are being priced out.

We are told, “If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere.” But it should not be this hard to make it here — especially for the people who help make this city what it is.

Artists bring people to New York. Broadway drives tourism. The film and television industry brings billions of dollars into this city. It is difficult to name an iconic movie or show without New York as its backdrop — and it is artists and crew members who create those images and that revenue.

I am asking you to support policies like the Artist Housing Bill so that the people who make this city vibrant, creative, and economically successful can afford to live here.

Please help make New York City more affordable for the artists and workers who make it such a beautiful and inspiring place to live and visit.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

RE: Oversight Hearing on Affordability in New York City's Arts and Cultural Sector

February 9, 2026

My name is Sari Nordman. I am an artist and a teaching artist working in New York City's public schools. I strongly believe that the arts are essential to our humanity. They cultivate democratic values, generate joy and foster a shared sense of dignity. The arts also provide vital entry points into complex subjects, encouraging empathy and critical thinking.

At the same time, affordability has become an increasingly urgent challenge. My transportation, food, maintenance and insurance costs rise each year, while my pay has not kept pace. I received approximately a 3% raise in 2024; prior to that, my last increase was around 2017. As a gig economy worker, my income has declined significantly since 2021, and there are now far fewer teaching opportunities—despite teaching remaining my primary source of income. This precarity is not unique to New York City; it reflects a broader crisis within the arts and cultural sector.

It is also important to acknowledge that New York City derives much of its economic vitality from tourism, and people come here because of the arts and culture. If artists and cultural workers can no longer afford to live and work in the city, the very essence of what makes New York vibrant and globally significant is at risk. Meaningful change is needed so that artists and cultural workers can continue to sustain their practices in a city that depends on their labor and creativity.

Sincerely, Sari Nordman

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: maron Barthelsson

Address: _____

I represent: Symphony space

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MBR Brad Hoy/Mann-Sigal

Address: _____

I represent: MPP

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lance Polivy DCLA

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____



Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brittany Bellinger

Address: 495 Flatbush Ave

I represent: Museum Hue

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ESTHER ROBINSON

Address: 80 58th St Brooklyn NY

I represent: ART BUILT

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LVAY SEXTON

Address: 64 Bleeker St 10012

I represent: New Yorkers for Culture & Arts

Address: same as above

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Connie Butler

Address: _____

I represent: Mama PS1

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Patrick Millingham

Address: _____

I represent: The Public

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Angela L Johnson

Address: _____

I represent: IATSE LOCAL 798

Address: Makeup ARTIST & HAIR Stylists

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jamaine Smith

Address: [Redacted] Philadelphia PA 19157

I represent: Staten Island Arts

Address: 25 Hyatt St, Ste 200, SI NY 10301

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mohammed Yousuf

Address: 125 Maiden Lane, NYC 10038

I represent: Lower Manhattan Arts Council

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JESUS LOPEZ-JENSEN

Address: 2700 E TREMONT AVE, BRONX, NY 10461

I represent: NYC BUROUGH ARTS COUNCILS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/19/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rasa Jilani

Address: _____

I represent: Brooklyn Arts Councils

Address: 10 Lafayette Ave BK

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1470 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: William Hubner

Address: [REDACTED] 10024

I represent: TWU Local 764

Address: 545 W 45th St. 10036

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1470 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/19/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Leah Okin

Address: 545 W. 45th Street, 10036

I represent: TWU Local 764, TATSE

Address: 545 W. 45, 10036

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0832 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ron Gentliner

Address: _____ NYC 10034

I represent: The Classical Theatre of Harlem

Address: 1800 Amsterdam Ave. NYC 10031

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: FRANCINE GARBER-COHEN

Address: 599 E 7 ST BKLYN 11218

I represent: REGINA OPERA COMPANY

Address: 599 E 7 ST (1A) BKLYN

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maren Berthelsen

Address: _____ NYC 10014

I represent: Symphony Space

Address: 2537 Broadway NYC 10025

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Leah C. Johnson

Address: 70 Lincoln Center Plaza

I represent: Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Clemente Luna

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn 11238

I represent: BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC

Address: 30 LAFAYETTE AVE, BROOKLYN, 11217

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Durosini

Address: [Redacted] Bklyn 11233

I represent: Wildlife Conservation Society

Address: 2300 Southern Blvd, Bronx

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MIKE ROSENBERG, PRESIDENT

Address: _____ 2/9/26

I represent: NYC CENTER

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MAURICIO DELFIN

Address: _____

I represent: CULTURE & ARTS POLICY INSTITUTE

Address: 33 MESSEROLE AV.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ARIEL SAVRANSKY

Address: _____

I represent: 92nd St Y

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JILLIAN GERSTEN

Address: _____

I represent: MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hassiam (speaking with Russell) Muhammed

Address: _____

I represent: NEW 42

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Russell Grant speaking with Hassiam

Address: 229 W 42nd St

I represent: NEW 42

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: EVA DAVIS

Address: _____

I represent: Latinx Arts Consortium of NY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/7/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RACHEL TOLEDO

Address: _____

I represent: LOCAL UNION 748

Address: 70 WEST 36 ST SUITE 4A

NYC NY 10019

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: David Freudenthal

Address: _____

I represent: Carnegie Hall

Address: 881 7th Ave New York NY 10019

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SAMI ABU SHUMATS

Address: _____ WOODHAVEN, NY.

I represent: FLUSHING TOWN HALL

Address: 137-35 NORTHEM BLVD FLUSHING 11354

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2-9-26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Natalie Bedon

Address: _____ Rago Park

I represent: Flushing Town Hall

Address: 137-35 Northern Blvd Flushing

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dina Bara Manu

Address: _____ Douglas Ave

I represent: Self

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aaron Boska

Address: 2900 Southern Blvd Bronx NY

I represent: New York Botanical Garden

Address: same

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brittany Bellinger

Address: _____

I represent: Museum Hue

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ELI DVORKIN

Address: 80 8th AVE NY NY

I represent: CENTER for AN

Address: URBAN FUTURE

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dina Rosenthal

Address: _____ 1031

I represent: SI Children's Museum

Address: 1000 RICHMOND TERR, ST NY 100

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Daniel Arnow

Address: _____

I represent: Actors Fund Housing Dev. Corp.

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Randi Berry

Address: 4815 28th Avenue Astoria NY 1103

I represent: IndieSpace

Address: Same as above

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael S Rosenberg

Address: [Redacted] Maplewood NJ

I represent: New York City Center

Address: 150 W 56th Street 10019

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DAVID FREUDENTHAL

Address: _____

I represent: CARNEGIE HALL

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: HASSIEM MOHAMMAD

Address: [Redacted] NEW YORK, NY 10034

I represent: NEW 42

Address: 229 W 42nd ST New York, NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Connie Butler

Address: _____

I represent: MOMA PSI

Address: Long Island City

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DJ McDonald

Address: [Redacted] RK

I represent: Dance Dance

Address: 455 FDR Dr NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. AVTS Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 02/09/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Raquel Dutot

Address: [Redacted]

I represent: Dance/WYC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Audrey St. Clair (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 31 Chambers St, 10007

I represent: NYC Dept of Cultural Affairs

Address: 11

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: LISA GOLD (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: ASIAN AMERICAN ARTS ALLIANCE

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Noël Jacobson (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: IATSE Local 79's

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RISA SHAW

Address: 520 8th Ave Suite 219 10018

I represent: A.R.T./New York

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 2/9/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kimberly Olsen

Address: _____ LIC 1109

I represent: NYC Arts in Education Roundtable

Address: 520 W 8th Ave NYC 10108

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms