

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS 1
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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September 26, 2023

Start: 10:27 a.m.

Recess: 1:23 p.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Chi A. Ossé, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Amanda Farías
Shahana Hanif
Rita C. Joseph
Francisco P. Moya
Sandra Ung

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Julie Menin

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS 2

A P P E A R A N C E S

Laurie Cumbo, Commissioner, New York City
Department of Cultural Affairs

Lance Polivy, General Counsel, New York City
Department of Cultural Affairs

Alton Murray, Deputy Commissioner, New York City
Department of Cultural Affairs

Lucy Sexton, New Yorkers for Culture and Arts

Gregory King, General Manager for Programs and
Partnership at Dance NYC

Fran Garber-Cohen, President of Regina Opera
Company

Kimberly Olsen, Executive Director of the New
York City Arts in Education Roundtable

Myra Hernandez, and I'm the Director of Programs
and Curriculum Development at Cool Culture

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Lisa Gold, Executive Director of the Asian
American Arts Alliance

Kate Madigan, Government Affairs Coordinator at
the Public Theater

H. Harvey, Director of Marketing at Hook Arts
Media

Martha Ayon, Government Affairs Consultant for
Museum Hue

Talia Corren, Co-Executive Director of the
Alliance of Resident Theatres New York

COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS 3

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Potri Ranka Manis Queno Nur, Arts Director and
Founder of Kinding Sindaw Heritage Foundation

David Shane, Director of Program Services at the
Alliance of Resident Theatres New York

1 COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

4

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning and
3 welcome to the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
4 Libraries and International Intergroup Relations.

5 At this time, we ask if everybody can
6 please phones on vibrate or silent mode. Thank you
7 for your cooperation.

8 Chair, we are ready to begin.

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: [GAVEL] Good morning,
10 everyone. I'm New York City Council Member Chi Ossé,
11 Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries
12 and International Intergroup Relations. Welcome to
13 our oversight hearing on administering DCLA's
14 Cultural Development Fund or CDF.

15 Today, the Committee will be hearing a
16 bill which is directly related to our hearing topic
17 which I have sponsored. It is Intro. number 1184, a
18 Local Law to amend the New York City Charter in
19 relation to requiring the Department of Cultural
20 Affairs to report annually on Department funding of
21 art and cultural organizations and institutions. More
22 about this in a minute.

23 We will also be hearing four resolutions
24 not directly related to our hearing topic. Reso.
25 number 509 sponsored by Council Member James Gennaro

1
2 and declaring April as Sikh Awareness and
3 Appreciation Month in New York City, Reso. number 639
4 also sponsored by Council Member Gennaro declaring
5 July annually as Muslim American Heritage Month in
6 the City of New York to celebrate the culture and
7 history of Muslim Americans and their contributions
8 to New York City communities, Reso. number 513
9 sponsored by Council Member Juline Menin declaring
10 June 3rd in New York City as World Bicycle Day, and
11 Reso. number 568 sponsored by Council Member Nantasha
12 Williams and designating May 10th annually as
13 National Pan-Hellenic Council Day in the City of New
14 York to recognize the contributions made to social
15 change by members of nine black sororities and
16 fraternities known as the Divine Nine. I'm going to
17 switch mics because I think this has some feedback on
18 it.

19 Let me welcome my Colleague, Council
20 Member Julie Menin to speak about her Resolution.
21 Council Member Menin.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you so much,
23 Chair Ossé, for holding today's oversight hearing on
24 DCLA's Cultural Development Fund and good to see you,
25 Commissioner.

I am here today to speak about my Resolution 513, which Chair Ossé spoke a little bit about. About 2 million New Yorkers embrace bicycles as a mode of transportation. My resolution would designate June 3rd as World Bicycle Day.

From 2011 to 2021, there was a growth of 104 percent in daily cycling in our city. Each year, more and more New Yorkers are relying on bicycles to commute to work, to go to the park, or just to go through our city streets. On a single day, there are over 550,000 cycling trips in the city according to the U.S. Census' American Community Survey. June 3rd is currently recognized by the U.N. as World Bicycle Day. The day is to encourage every person to use bicycles. As the United Nations note, the day can promote health, it can prevent disease, promote tolerance, mutual understanding and respect. I was proud to help push for a safer bike route over the Roosevelt Island Bridge which is in my District to ensure that people can ride their bikes safely. Together, we can peddle toward a future where cyclists can empower communities and our city. Sorry for the bicycle joke.

1
2 I really want to thank the Chair as well
3 as the Council Members who support this resolution,
4 and I want to thank Bill Drafter, Kevin Kotowski, and
5 from my team, my Chief-of-Staff, Jonathan Szott, my
6 Budget Director, Brandon Jordan, and Legislative
7 Aide, Jan Mendez-Garcia, for their support.

8 Thank you, Chair, for allowing me to
9 speak.

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you, Council
11 Member. I will now be reading remarks from Council
12 Member Gennaro on his Resolution. The Council Member
13 is unfortunately sick with COVID but has asked that I
14 deliver these remarks on his behalf.

15 Council Member Gennaro urges each of you,
16 Members of the City Council, to sign on to Reso. 639.
17 This resolution seeks to declare the month of July as
18 Muslim American Heritage Month in the City of New
19 York, a time dedicated to celebrating the rich
20 culture, history, and invaluable contributions of
21 Muslim Americans to our communities. New York City
22 stands as a symbol of diversity and unity, embracing
23 people from various backgrounds, beliefs, and
24 traditions. By designating July as Muslim American
25 Heritage Month, we have the unique opportunity to

1 showcase the influence of Muslim Americans throughout
2 history, shaping the social, economic, and cultural
3 landscape of New York City. This recognition is not
4 just an acknowledge of their achievements but also a
5 demonstration of our commitment to inclusivity and
6 equal representation. It will be an occasion to
7 foster understanding and promote dialogue between
8 different communities. Reso. 639 signifies our
9 collective commitment to recognizing the importance
10 of every community in New York City. Together, we
11 take this opportunity to promote tolerance, celebrate
12 diversity, and create an environment that embraces
13 all cultures and backgrounds.

14
15 On a related note, today, another Reso.
16 of Gennaro's, Reso. 509 will also be heard. Reso. 509
17 proposes to declare April Sikh Awareness and
18 Appreciation Month in New York City, a step forward
19 in celebrating the invaluable contributions of the
20 Sikh community to the tapestry of our great city. New
21 York City at its heart is a symbol of diversity and
22 inclusivity, a haven for individuals from all walks
23 of life, cultures, and faiths. Embracing and
24 understanding one another is what makes our City
25 truly extraordinary. The Sikh community with its rich

1 history and profound traditions has been an integral
2 part of our City's social and cultural fabric for
3 generations. By designating April as Sikh Awareness
4 and Appreciation Month, we send a powerful message
5 that we recognize and value the remarkable
6 contributions Sikhs have made to the prosperity and
7 vitality of our city. This Resolution is the
8 testament to our commitment to fostering an
9 environment of understanding and respect where every
10 citizen feels valued and appreciated for their unique
11 contributions. Council Member Gennaro implores each
12 of you to lend your support to Reso. 509 to stand up
13 for diversity and to celebrate the remarkable
14 contributions of our Sikh brothers and sisters.

16 Now, on to our oversight hearing which is
17 a very important one. For the past 20 years, the
18 Cultural Development Fund, or CDF, has been a pot of
19 money that the Department of Cultural Affairs draws
20 on to make competitive grant awards to arts and
21 cultural organizations. Exploring changes and
22 streamlining the CDF application process was brought
23 up in 2017 during the development of Create NYC, the
24 comprehensive cultural plan for New York City. In the
25 2019 Action Plan that supplanted Create NYC, one

1 identified strategy was to explore changes to DCLA's
2 grant programs to "offer more flexible and more
3 multi-year support." Last year, for the Fiscal Year
4 2023 funding cycle, some changes were, in fact, made
5 to the CDF application, review, and award process.
6 The result of that round of funding were announced on
7 December 15, 2022, when DCLA distributed over 58
8 million dollars in CDF grants to 1,070 cultural
9 organizations, the most funding to the largest number
10 of cultural organizations ever. DCLA Commissioner,
11 Laurie Cumbo, said at the time "our ongoing CDF
12 reform process helped advance first-time grantees,
13 smaller organizations, and those led by people of
14 color, a big first step in fostering greater equity."
15 Indeed, all of those outcomes were positive.

17 However, some leaders in the arts and
18 cultural community expressed concerns as well, both
19 about the grant-making process and about the outcomes
20 of Fiscal Year 2023 cycle. Now, we are in the Fiscal
21 Year 2024 cycle, the applications window closed on
22 May 9, 2023. Though awards have not been made yet,
23 applications for Fiscal Year 2025 will be available
24 in early 2024. By that time, the CDF awards for 2024
25 are made in the coming months. It may be too late to

1 make any adjustments to the Fiscal Year 2025
2 application process so any further steps in the
3 "ongoing CDF reform process" for Fiscal Year 2025
4 would need to be considered now. The bill that I have
5 sponsored would require DCLA to prepare an annual
6 report detailing DCLA's spending in support of arts
7 and cultural organizations and institutions as well
8 as DCLA spending on direct agency expenses. I'm
9 especially concerned about public reporting on the
10 distribution of CDF grants disaggregated by borough,
11 by arts genre, and by organization size as well as
12 how many grants of what sizes are being awarded to
13 BIPOC-led and BIPOC-serving organizations.

14
15 At today's hearing, the Committee hopes
16 to learn how the FY-24 application and panel review
17 process has gone this year and when awards are
18 expected. The Committee would also like to know what
19 additional reforms DCLA is considering for Fiscal
20 Year 2025 based on experiences last year and this
21 year. Additionally, the Committee looks forward to
22 hearing feedback from the arts and cultural
23 organizations that have been, that are, or that wish
24 to be CDF grantees and what their experiences have
25 been like in recent funding cycles. Those arts and

1 cultural organizations are the heart of our city, and
2 we want to support them in every way that we can.

3
4 Now, I want to acknowledge my Colleagues
5 on the Committee who are present, Council Member Ung,
6 Council Member Hanif, Council Member Joseph, and
7 online we have Council Member Moya and I think I also
8 saw Council Member Dinowitz who should be here or
9 come back here.

10 I would also like to thank my Staff and
11 Committee Staff for their work in preparing today's
12 hearing, May Vutrapongvatana, my Policy and Budget
13 Director, Christina Yellamaty, the Committee's
14 Legislative Counsel, Regina Paul, the Committee's
15 Legislative Policy Analyst, and Sandra Gray, the
16 Committee's Financial Analyst.

17 Now, I would like to address some
18 housekeeping items before we begin with DCLA's
19 testimony. Today is an in-person hearing with the
20 option of virtual testimony for the public of course.
21 The Committee will be accepting registrations for
22 testimony throughout the hearing. Anyone who is
23 attending in person and who wishes to testify in
24 person should see the Sergeant-at-Arms to fill out a
25 witness slip, can the Sergeant-at-Arms wave their

1 hand, even if you registered in advance online. Thank
2 you.
3

4 We will begin today's hearing with
5 testimony from DCLA followed by Council Member
6 question and answers then move to public testimony.
7 We will limit Council Member Q and A including
8 comments to five minutes, and, during the public
9 testimony portion of the hearing, witnesses from the
10 public will be limited to two minutes. As a reminder
11 to all of our witnesses, please state your name prior
12 to your testimony for the record.

13 The Committee will also be accepting
14 written testimony for up to 72 hours after the
15 hearing.

16 Let me ask our Committee Counsel to
17 administer the affirmation to the witnesses from DCLA
18 who may then begin their testimony. Christina, take
19 it away.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: Good
21 morning. Please raise your right hand.

22 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
23 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
24 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
25 questions?

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COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: Thank you.

You may begin when ready.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Good morning, Chair
Ossé, and Members of the Committee. I am
Commissioner Laurie Cumbo of the New York City
Department of Cultural Affairs here today to testify
in regards to today's topic, administering DCLA's
Cultural Development Fund, and I am joined today by
a number of my colleagues from the agency. I just
want to say I'm so proud to have so many of my CDF
team here. We are really excited, and it's been
great working with each of you crisscrossing New
York City. I was just with Council Member Ossé at
the Guggenheim where we were discussing climate and
its impact on the city, and I was with you,
Commissioner Ung, recently at the Queens Botanic
Garden, and I'm proud to say that my orchid is still
alive. CHAIRPERSON OSSE: They give you orchids?

Wow.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It's the event to be
at, and they give a small orchid to each person that

1 comes, and I'm thrilled that after almost six weeks,
2 it's still alive.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: That's impressive.

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Yes, it is. Council
6 Member Joseph, it's been a pleasure talking with you
7 about the African Burial Ground in your District and
8 looking forward to continuing to assist you.

9 Council Member Hanif, we have not done
10 anything since we brought Little Amal to Port
11 Authority so we have to make sure that we do that,
12 but that was really a great and memorable experience
13 to welcome asylum-seekers with art and culture in New
14 York City, and we look forward to doing so much more
15 of that.

16 Thank you for the opportunity to discuss
17 the Cultural Development Fund, which is one of the
18 primary ways that the City of New York invests in its
19 vibrant cultural community. In Fiscal Year 2023,
20 1,070 cultural organizations, record-breaking,
21 received more than 58 million dollars through the CDF
22 fund. This by comparison in Fiscal Year 2019, the
23 last full year before the pandemic, 985 groups
24 received 51.3 million in CDF support so we are proud
25 of our hard work in collaboration with you to have

1 increased the amount and distribution of this funding
2 for cultural programming in communities all across
3 this city.
4

5 Before I discuss the CDF reforms and
6 what's coming next for the program, I want to take a
7 moment to talk about this program, it's goals and
8 criteria a little more in depth. The CDF is a
9 competitive peer-evaluated grant process that
10 supports a broad multidisciplinary group of diverse
11 not-for-profit organizations providing cultural
12 programming for New York City residents. The hallmark
13 of the CDF is to support cultural programming that is
14 accessible to the public. While we continue to revise
15 the process to make it more equitable, public service
16 and impact remain the most significant criteria for
17 CDF applications. As stated in the guidelines, the
18 organization provides art and/or cultural programming
19 in the five boroughs of New York City during the
20 grant period with consideration toward accessibility,
21 affordability, and equity. Put simply, how does this
22 cultural program serve New Yorkers in a way that
23 truly invites them in, whether that's through reduced
24 financial barriers, multilingual programming, or any
25 number of creative ways that our cultural community

1 connects with its audiences. Next, we look at
2 organizational accountability, meaning if we invest
3 public funds in this organization, does it have the
4 capacity to deliver the programs it promises for New
5 Yorkers. These first two criteria account for 85
6 percent of an organization's score. The final
7 criteria is quality. Is the programming of a caliber
8 that will serve our residents well?
9

10 It's with these core principles that we
11 support over 1,000 cultural not-for-profits across
12 the city this year, more than any other agency in the
13 nation. Speaking as someone who founded a cultural
14 not-for-profit in Brooklyn, when we got that first
15 CDF grant, it was game-changing. To have this public
16 investment in your work as an arts group is such a
17 vote of confidence in your team and your programming.
18 Even if the grants aren't huge, it also opens the
19 door for other support because so many funders look
20 to the CDF panel process as the gold standard. I've
21 reviewed the substance of the CDF reforms in previous
22 hearings before the Council so I'll keep my summary
23 here brief.

24 The reforms to the CDF were the first
25 significant updates to the process since 2008 and

1 began with the Create NYC Cultural Plan released in
2 2017 that I was proud to vote on. When the CDF panel
3 process was suspended for two years during the
4 pandemic, it gave DCLA staff an opportunity to engage
5 with the field, conduct analysis, and plan how to
6 integrate these reforms when the application and
7 panel review process restarted in full for the Fiscal
8 Year 2023 cycle. In Spring 2022, we restarted the CDF
9 application process with the first set of pilot
10 reforms which included increasing investment in
11 historically marginalized communities, which was a
12 huge win. With the reforms, 125 new organizations,
13 I'm going to say that again, 125 new organizations
14 were funded, and 82 percent of POC-led groups saw
15 increased awards. This is groundbreaking. Greater
16 stability for grantees, especially smaller
17 organizations, we doubled the minimum grant award
18 from 5,000 dollars to 10,000 dollars and made
19 permanent a pandemic era policy of expanding
20 eligibility for multi-year awards to all grantees,
21 regardless of budget size. This was the first time
22 since 2008 when the CDF was created in its current
23 form that the minimum for awards was increased. We
24 greatly streamlined the application process with a
25

1 simplified digital application reducing the
2 administration burden on groups applying for funding.
3 Based on a survey of CDF applicants, we found that 89
4 percent of users felt the application was intuitive
5 to navigate, 94 percent understood how to answer all
6 questions, and 99 percent found the guidelines
7 helpful. We increased the panelist honorarium and
8 cast a wider net to recruit CDF panelists. We
9 expanded the profile of panelists from strictly
10 development staff to include a broader range of
11 cultural workers, board members, and artist. Mainly,
12 many Members of the Council helped to distribute our
13 call for panelists among their constituents, and we
14 are so grateful for your partnership because when the
15 Council partners with the Department of Cultural
16 Affairs, we're able to reach every corner of New York
17 City.
18

19 We are so proud that you were able to
20 assist us, and, because of your partnership, 47
21 percent of panelists were first-timers this year. A
22 sign that we're succeeding and attracting new talent
23 into this process. We look forward to your ongoing
24 support and collaboration in this effort.
25

2 These were the goals of the reforms
3 rolled out in the first half of 2022. When the CDF
4 grants went out toward the end of 2022 Calendar Year,
5 we saw the results. As the first competitive grant
6 cycle since the onset of the pandemic, we weren't
7 sure what the response would be in the new reforms,
8 but we had record number of applications, around
9 1,400, and a record number of grantees, 1,070, and 73
10 percent of these grantees received more funding
11 thanks mainly to the increases in minimum award sizes
12 along with the addition of new budget bands that
13 increased awards for the majority of grant
14 recipients. All groups are now eligible for multi-
15 year awards, a source of stable funding that was
16 previously available only to larger organizations.
17 The average awards for small groups with budgets
18 under 250,000 increased by 67 percent. As I mentioned
19 before, more than 82 percent of groups that identify
20 as being led or founded by people of color saw an
21 increase in their awards over the previous year, and
22 there was also an increase in the number of awards
23 for first-time applicants with 125 groups in this
24 category receiving funding versus just 47 in the
25 previous competitive grant cycle. While these early

1 results are promising, we continue to seek ways to
2 improve the process. We've heard from the sector. We
3 appreciate hearing from the sector. My amazing team
4 in the programs unit offered guidance and feedback to
5 every single applicant who sought it out. I've
6 listened to feedback on Culture at 3 and other sector
7 calls, and we've carefully reviewed the thoughtful
8 recommendations submitted by cultural committee
9 leaders and advocates. Based on this feedback, we
10 made a number of changes to the Fiscal Year 2024 CDF
11 panel process including an extra round of panel
12 conversation to allow more deliberation, the creation
13 of a Panel Advisory Committee featuring experts from
14 the field to help spread the word and recruit
15 panelists, the full implementation of the new digital
16 application which was streamlined and made the
17 process even more accessible. Last month, our
18 Programs Unit wrapped the panel review process for
19 the Fiscal Year 2024 Cultural Development Fund. For
20 this enormous task, our team of 10 convened 175
21 panelists for 35 review panels stretching over nine
22 weeks, during which time they reviewed 642 funding
23 applications involving an estimated 1,400 hours of
24 prep time. Again, my hat's off to this tremendous
25

1 team for this incredible accomplishment. As they
2 worked through these new applications, we also have
3 650 groups who will be in the renewal process this
4 year as part of our reform expanding multi-year
5 awards eligibility to the entire grantee pool
6 regardless of budget size. We look forward to
7 announcing the outcomes of our panel process later
8 this year.

10 I want to close by saying that our
11 partnership with the City Council is absolutely
12 central to our ability to support and serve our
13 City's cultural sector. I'm confident that working
14 together with Members of the Council and stakeholders
15 in the field we can continue to make the process even
16 better for the cultural organizations we support and
17 which, in turn, deliver amazing services and
18 programming in every corner of New York City. The
19 Council initiatives and Member items are a huge
20 benefit to arts groups and a huge source of equitable
21 funding thanks to the Coalition of Theatres of Color,
22 the Cultural Immigrant Initiative, and member items
23 in each District. We look forward to getting your
24 Fiscal Year 2024 designations in as early as
25 possible, in as early as possible, so we can get the

1 funds to grantees as quickly as possible. We also
2 look forward to working with you to spread the word
3 about the Fiscal Year 2024 CDF call for applicants
4 and panels early next year.

5
6 Thank you for the opportunity to testify
7 today. I'm happy to answer any questions that you may
8 have. I also want to thank all of the cultural
9 organizations and people that are here to testify. I
10 remember my time being here that I felt like I spent
11 so much time coming here to testify that I might as
12 well run for office and sit here all day, and that's
13 exactly what happened so I appreciate all of you for
14 giving of your time, your energy, preparing your
15 statements. I'm here to hear them, and I look forward
16 to hearing them following my testimony and the Q and
17 A with the City Council. I turn it back to you,
18 Chair Ossé.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you,
20 Commissioner, and thank you for your detailed
21 testimony, and I love to hear that there's progress
22 being made throughout this CDF process. It's such an
23 integral part of supporting our cultural community,
24 and it's always a work in progress in terms of our
25 wants to make it better, and I know that that's where

1 the heart lies within the Admin and most especially
2 within DCLA so let's dive in.

3
4 My first question that I wanted to ask is
5 do you believe that the arts and cultural
6 organizations for the most part are satisfied with
7 the Fiscal Year 2023 reforms and the application
8 process as it stands today?

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Can you repeat that
10 once more?

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Yeah. Do you find that,
12 or have you been hearing that most of the arts and
13 cultural organizations for the most part are
14 satisfied with the CDF reforms made in Fiscal Year
15 2023 as well as some of the reforms made in 2024
16 today?

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say that
18 overall that the feedback that we've gotten from many
19 organizations as we have said, and we're very proud
20 of it, 125 new organizations received funding for the
21 very first time. We are hearing from the field they
22 are very, very excited about the reforms and that
23 we've opened the process up so that more
24 organizations could apply that previously did not
25 feel that this application was one that reflected

1 them, and I do take personal credit along with my
2 team, when the City sees a founder and executive
3 director such as me founding a small African Diaspora
4 art museum, now Commissioner of cultural affairs,
5 many organizations feel this is my time to apply,
6 this Commissioner gets me, she understand the process
7 of applying, she recognizes that a 5,000 dollar grant
8 with all of the work that goes forward in putting
9 together a DCLA application would be better received
10 if it were 10,000 dollars versus 5,000 dollars. Also,
11 82 percent of BIPOC-led organizations received an
12 increase in their funding award so I would say that
13 many people that applied to this process are new,
14 they are very excited, many people saw an increase in
15 their funding award which was revolutionary, and
16 people were very thrilled with the application
17 process itself, and so, as I know from being an
18 awardee of this particular application process, I
19 know that in previous years that when maybe my award
20 was reduced or maybe I wasn't pleased with the
21 process, trust and believe I became louder than all
22 of the organizations combined that did get an
23 increase so you're going to hear from those
24 organizations who are also not perhaps pleased with
25

1 the way the process as they understand it has
2 unfolded. Any time you receive a decrease to your
3 award, you're not going to be enthused about it.
4 You're going to want to know what happened, but our
5 team at the Department of Cultural Affairs did an
6 extraordinary job of educating the field about the
7 reforms, about the fact that we were trying to
8 democratize and level the playing field for all
9 cultural organizations, but I'll just close by saying
10 this, these hearings, as far as I see them, are
11 really great opportunities for us to be able to come
12 together and to share what you're hearing, to share
13 what we're hearing because essentially we are
14 committed to the same thing, making this a fair,
15 equitable, and transparent process for all parties
16 involved. I know that as Chair of Cultural and
17 Libraries, you want to see a better process and that
18 to be a part of your legacy in terms of how you
19 improve the cultural field, and I share in that so
20 I'm looking forward to this hearing on that level in
21 order to be able to do that.

22
23 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I think the shared
24 understanding that we have in terms of what the main
25 critique about the reforms are is that some people

1 have seen a decrease in the grants that have been
2 given to them. Would you say that there are other
3 critiques that your office is hearing in regards to
4 some of the reforms or is that the main one that
5 you've been hearing?
6

7 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: The main feedback
8 that we've been getting in terms of critique, and I
9 would say it's more of a critique than a criticism,
10 is that organizations have asked about the safety
11 net, organizations have asked questions in terms of
12 why are they seeing a reduction, and those are really
13 the main challenges that many organizations are
14 grappling with, but any time you open up a process to
15 125 new organizations, when you then open up the
16 process to make it more accessible to more people,
17 when you raise the floor from 5,000 dollars to 10,000
18 dollars, you're going to see a shift, and this is
19 really what is being felt in democratizing the
20 process and making it more fair and equitable for
21 many of the organizations that are applying. We
22 recognize this. This is a work in progress, and so
23 we're going to continue to receive feedback, and
24 we're going to continue to adjust how the program is
25 administered. We don't want to have this finite

1 system that can't be altered or amended to better
2 serve and fit an ever-changing field.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I believe you just
5 answered this, but do you agree with some of these
6 critiques? If so, how can DCLA continue to address
7 these issues?

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We can always do more
9 with more.

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Of course.

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And I say we can
12 always do more with more, but I want to say that as
13 Commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs, I
14 am so proud of this agency, I'm so proud of this
15 Administration. Systematically, when I was in the
16 cultural field on the other side, sitting in these
17 seats right here, we always knew that when budget
18 cuts came, the arts were the first on the chopping
19 block, always, and this Administration turned that on
20 its head and made sure that the agency that was not
21 cut during times of budget was the Department of
22 Cultural Affairs because of the work that we do,
23 because we're revitalizing New York City, because we
24 are educating our young people, so this budget, the
25 last two budget cycles, not only were not subjected

1 to the PEG exercises, but on top of that, this
2 Administration made sure that we passed the largest
3 two Cultural budgets in New York City's history, and
4 so, as a result of that, we were able to fund more
5 organizations and to expand this process so I
6 understand this is a competitive review process. Over
7 80 percent of the organizations that applied to the
8 Department of Cultural Affairs were funded. That's a
9 huge percentage of organizations that are funded each
10 year so we're very proud of that. We recognize that
11 if you were not part of that 80 percent, you are not
12 going to be pleased with the outcome of that panel
13 review process, correct, but, at the same time, our
14 agency doesn't just send out a rejection letter and
15 say well, you didn't get funded. We're going to help
16 you put together a better application next year.
17 Every single organization that put in to say that
18 we'd like to understand why we were rejected, they
19 had the ability to have a phone call, they had the
20 ability to have an interview with the program officer
21 who is able to educate them on how to apply, how to
22 put forward a stronger application. They came
23 together in a very robust way to make sure that those
24
25

1 organizations that wanted to put forward a better
2 application were given that opportunity.
3

4 One of the things that's not a critique,
5 but it's something that people are pleased with in
6 the field is that previously organizations with
7 budget sizes that were larger were only granted the
8 opportunity for a multi-year grant. Now, those
9 organizations that received a 10,000-dollar grant,
10 even those organizations are now given the
11 opportunity to have a multi-year grant so the multi-
12 year is game-changing for the cultural community. It
13 means that every year you don't have to continue to
14 start from scratch and render a new application each
15 year. It means that each year for those three years
16 that you're awarded and we're trying to get all the
17 organizations into a three-year cycle for the multi-
18 year grants, it helps our agency, it helps the field,
19 it assists with getting money into the hands of the
20 organizations quicker, and we are really proud of
21 that.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Is there a public
23 breakdown of the award differences from Fiscal Year
24 2023 and Fiscal Year 2024 that's available to both
25 the City Council and maybe the public?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Do you mean in terms
of the amount of funding?

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I have that in my
testimony. By comparison, in Fiscal Year 2019, the
last full year before the pandemic, 985 groups
received 51.3 million dollars in CDF support.
Comparing that to in Fiscal Year 2023, 1,070 cultural
organizations received more than 58 million through
the CDF process so the comparison is, and we can't
really because during the pandemic we can't count
those years year-by-year because we were at a finite
amount of funding and the grants continued to be
allocated without an application or competitive
review process so we went from 985 groups to 1,070,
and we went from 51.3 million to 58 million in the
last fiscal cycle.

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I do remember that in
your testimony. I do understand that there were more
organizations that are receiving funding through CDF,
but in terms of individual organizations year after
year, is there a breakdown of say XYZ organization
received a grant in Fiscal Year 2023 and they also
received a grant in Fiscal Year 2024. Is there a

1 public breakdown of the funding from the first year
2 to the second year in terms of it's consistent, if
3 we've seen a change in funding, is there any
4 documentation on that for individual organizations
5 through the CDF process?
6

7 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Hi, Chair Ossé.
8 My name is Lance Polivy, and I'm the General Counsel
9 at the New York City's Department of Cultural
10 Affairs.

11 To answer your question, the Fiscal Year
12 2023 data is currently available broken down by
13 group and total amount of funding on Open Data. The
14 FY-24 funding has not yet been announced, but that's
15 the panel cycle that just wrapped up, and we look
16 forward to continuing to work through the final
17 steps and making a big announcement about all of the
18 groups that received that funding in the coming
19 weeks.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you for that.
21 When that data comes out, an organization could look
22 at that document and then the document from 2023 and
23 compare the funding that they received from both
24 years, correct. GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Yes, that's
25 correct.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. I want to
3 move on to equity in funding. BIPOC-led and BIPOC-
4 serving organizations historically have had more
5 difficulties securing stable and sufficient funding
6 from all of these sources, which I know that you are
7 aware of, Commissioner, in terms of your work in
8 making these reforms. Should there be funds and
9 grants either looped into the CDF process or
10 separately that target BIPOC-led and serving
11 organizations?

12 I can ask that question again if you need
13 me to.

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I was going to ask
15 you if (INAUDIBLE) I was trying to process. I was
16 going with you there.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: It's okay. Should there
18 be fund and grants either looped into the CDF
19 process, and I know that more is more and you can
20 always do more with more, but, in your opinion, do
21 you think there should be dollars and additional
22 grants looped into the CDF process or should it be a
23 separate type of process that targets BIPOC-led and
24 serving organizations?

25

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm very proud as we stated earlier that 82 percent of POC-led organizations saw increases in their awards from the last grant cycle, and so we're particularly proud of that because education is really the root of being able to fund more organizations. Our agency has made a lot of time and energy to educate, to provide more information, to help and support and create more competitive applications all across the board, and the result of that is that we are now seeing more POC-led organizations are receiving more funding than ever before. It's also goes in large part to the City Council. Your ability to advertise or to have panelists that are reflective of our communities, that has also the ability to impact funding as well. It's a shared goal. If we're able to have all of the City Council to further promote the panelists process and to get more panelists recruited in order to review the applications, that goes a tremendous way in terms of making sure that we have a more robust and diverse panel review process, and that's where you're going to be able to see the type of change that you would like to see in this process.

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Basically, you would say that the way that the CDF process is set up as it is today, there is an equity aspect in it in terms of funding and providing grants to BIPOC-led organizations.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Certainly. I mean it's definitely a desire of our agency, a goal, to see more equitable funding all across the City, but we do this in partnership with the City Council and that's why initiatives such as Theatres of Color that I was so proud to support, I was able to expand it with my colleagues from eight organizations to now over 50 organizations that are theaters of color are receiving funding. We were able to expand the CASA program from five CASAs to 17 CASAs. I was able personally as a Council Member to create the Art as a Catalyst for Change to be able to put art programming in afterschool centers in every community in which gun violence was impacted that community negatively so these are the things that we can do collaboratively to make sure that more POC-led organizations receive funding so the ability to support existing initiatives, the ability to expand existing initiatives, the ability to create

1 initiatives where you see that gap is where the real
2 magic lies. Your ability to create it, our ability to
3 administer it creates an opportunity for so many of
4 those POC-led organizations to flourish.

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Would you find it to be
7 beneficial if there were geographical distribution
8 guidelines of some sort, that is a given number of
9 percentage of awards that should be guaranteed for
10 each borough?

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I have thought and
12 considered that, right, and when you think about it
13 in terms of its implementation, we can only really
14 award grants through a merit-based process. That's
15 one. Two, if you're having fewer organizations in
16 each borough submitting applications, then we can't
17 fund those organizations above and beyond either what
18 they requested for their project so an organization
19 might be, let's say, for example, they might have
20 applied for 10,000 dollars to do a festival. If we
21 were to organize and create a new program so that
22 that organization that just applied for 10,000
23 dollars now receives 50,000 dollars because of the
24 geographic criteria that we've created but they are
25 only an organization that has an annual operating

1 budget of maybe 30,000 dollars, we would have to
2 change our whole criteria because we only fund 75
3 percent of a project's operating budget so 75 percent
4 of the funding for the project that you requested, up
5 to 75 percent, can be funded by the Department of
6 Cultural Affairs. We cannot support organizations
7 above and beyond their operating budget. There are so
8 many things that come into play in terms of how we
9 review applications. Geography is certainly important
10 and it's great to see that there's borough equity,
11 but we also have to make sure that there's borough
12 equity based off of population, we also have to have
13 borough equity in terms of the amount of
14 organizations that are applying. Just to give you
15 some criteria on that, we are really very close to
16 keeping within how many organizations are in each
17 borough and how much funding those organizations
18 receive. The way to create the level of borough
19 equity that you're looking for is really, again,
20 through the panel review process. If each Member
21 throughout the City Council can recruit members of
22 their community of the cultural field to be a part of
23 this process, we could do so much more. We could make
24 sure that we have every corner of the city well-

1 represented so we definitely need your help and
2 support in providing that space for panelists.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I know that we've been
5 in talks about this in the past, but let's definitely
6 be in lockstep about that during the CDF process,
7 just making sure that that's at the top of every
8 Member's mind so that they are putting forward
9 individuals to be on that panel review process
10 because I love how that does create more equity in
11 terms of geography and whatnot. Would love to
12 prioritize that through the next panel process.

13 I want to move on to ask what are the
14 demographics of the 125 first-time grantees?

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Give me one moment.
16 We do have that.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: For example, how many
18 were from some of the outer boroughs, how many were
19 BIPOC-led or serving organizations, how many were
20 small organizations.

21 Also, want to acknowledge Council Member
22 Farías who is here.

23 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Can you clarify the
24 question because I want to make sure that we're
25 providing for you...

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I know that in the past process 125 first-time grantees were awarded the CDF grant. I wanted to learn if there was a demographical breakdown on those 125 first-time organizations based on geography, where...

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I can give you geography. I cannot give you demographic right now.

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: In terms of if they're BIPOC-led or whatnot?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Right. 82 percent of the full amount of organizations in the CDF process received an increase. Now, of those 125, I can get that number for you at this hearing so give me a moment. Geography-wise, new applicants funded in Fiscal Year 2023, of the 125, four new organizations from the Bronx were funded, 40 new organizations from Brooklyn were funded, 62 new organizations from Manhattan were funded, 15 organizations from Queens were funded, and four new organizations from Staten Island were funded for the first time. 77 of the 125 organizations are BIPOC-led.

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Okay. Thank you so much for that info. How many of those were small organizations? Would you say all of them or?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We didn't look at it from the level of sizing, but I can get that for you.

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I think, referring to my last question on geographical breakdown and, of course, there needs to be some synergy between the Council and the Members on pushing for a more diverse panel in terms of where panelists are coming, but only four of those organizations being from the Bronx and Staten Island, like I'm sure that we are in agreeance here that there are plenty more organizations within the Bronx that are supplying great cultural work to the City of New York and the constituents that they serve. I think just having even that number and being able to know how many are coming out of those boroughs, comparing that to Brooklyn and Manhattan seems a bit unfair, right, so I think that we will definitely work with DCLA on making sure that there is more geographical diversity within the panel process and within those who are judging which organizations should receive those grants, and I want to make sure that my Colleagues in the Bronx are aware as well as Staten Island and Queens are aware that they have a say in pushing for members to be a part of the panel, but I think also

1 just having that communication on what this breakdown
2 looks like is really helpful.

3
4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I want to make a
5 correction actually to it that was just put forward.
6 It's actually 50 of the 125 are BIPOC-led, not 77.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Okay.

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I think what could be
9 really helpful in this from my year and a half now of
10 being Commissioner, so many of our BIPOC-led
11 organizations that we know of that we love, we all
12 collectively have to do a much more robust job at
13 preparing many of these organizations to apply for
14 the Department of Cultural Affairs. I'm sure you
15 experience this in your District. You see these
16 extraordinary cultural organizations, they're doing
17 incredible work, and then they sit down and meet with
18 you. They may not have their 501(c)(3) status. They
19 may not have a board of trustees. They may not be
20 incorporated. There are all these different things
21 that prevent so many of our organizations that are
22 doing the work, whether it's in a church basement,
23 whether it's a block party, whether it's a youth
24 program or something of that sort, and I know I
25 experience it a lot too, we have to do so much better

1 to help prepare those organizations to be in the
2 positions to apply. I know for myself when I founded
3 MoCADA, I went through the New York Foundation for
4 the Arts as my fiscal sponsor for a number of years
5 until I could get myself into a place of, because
6 once you get a 501(c)(3), you have to have a
7 bookkeeper, you have to have an accountant, you have
8 to be able to pay people, you have to be able to do
9 all of this infrastructure in order to be as well-
10 prepared as possible.

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Is DCLA providing any
13 of that service to organizations that would love some
14 of that intel or would love to learn about how to
15 become a 501(c)(3) or whatnot. I know that there are
16 many different organizations and non-profits that do
17 that, but is there any work that goes into that from
18 DCLA or from the agency itself.

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: There's the Mayor's
20 Office of Not-For-Profit Services that Council Member
21 Farah Louis created. There's also, in our office, I
22 would say personally, personally I probably do two to
23 three calls a week getting someone to that place of
24 understanding how to apply, but I would also say the
25 entire CDF unit, they do an extraordinary job of

1 talking with organizations that want to apply but
2 just never thought of how to apply, never heard of
3 Department of Cultural Affairs and sometimes, to be
4 honest with you, the Department of Cultural Affairs
5 may not be where you want to start. You may want to
6 start with your local arts council first, get your
7 feet wet, and to really learn how the arts council
8 processes work. I know I did that for a number of
9 years before I actually applied to Department of
10 Cultural Affairs and then, after that, the New York
11 State Council on the Arts.
12

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Is this information
14 located on the DCLA website, especially in terms of
15 like I think that information is extremely helpful
16 for some of these smaller organizations. Say you
17 don't want to apply to the CDF process first, is
18 there a breakdown of some of these local arts
19 councils that folks can find, maybe even a map that
20 exists on a website, does that exist?

21 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That does not exist.
22 I think that's an extraordinary idea to expand our
23 websites, and we could all expand our websites in
24 order to provide that, and there's not going to be
25 one-size-fits-all in this, but I do think that

1 creating an initial roadmap of how organizations
2 could do that would be great.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I 100 percent agree. I
5 think like a roadmap and all of the information that
6 you and probably the conversations that you're having
7 with these two to three organizations every week,
8 having that documented and being on a website or any
9 government document, I'm sure will make your job a
10 bit easier, maybe a little bit easier, maybe that
11 could be one call a week instead of two to three.

12 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Yeah, you just keep
13 going and you just keep going and you're like wait,
14 we should stop and put this somewhere.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Exactly, and refer
16 someone to a website that is clear, geographic-based
17 in terms of where their local arts council is, the
18 information of those individuals, I think that would
19 be a great idea to streamline a lot of the wealth of
20 information that you and members of this agency have.

21 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: My General Counsel
22 would like to add.

23 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Hi, Chair Ossé.
24 We have additional data on the 125 new organizations
25 that received funding in Fiscal 2023.

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Okay.

GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: 31 of the 125 organizations have operating budgets under 25,000 dollars so that gives you a sense of the smallest groups, and 46 of the organizations have budgets between 25,000 and 100,000. 76 of the 125 are under 100,000 dollars so you can really see that a majority of these 125 groups have operating budgets under 100,000 and really well under 100,000 who have been benefiting.

The other thing that I wanted to add in terms of your questions is about funding based on borough, and one of the fortunate things is because this is a grant-based process, it's really a meritocracy where we're looking at the applications based on the strength of each and every application to afford funding to the groups that are most deserving. What we're proud of is through creating this merit-based process as a benefit of the reforms that that has led to the democratization and it's also led to a very strong correlation between the number of groups that applied for funding and the number of groups that received funding so when it comes to increasing the number of applicants that get

1 funding from particular boroughs, we are so excited
2 to work with this City Council to try and push out
3 the application deadline to each and every Council
4 District because the numbers we have so far show that
5 if there were an increase in a particular Council
6 District by a bunch of applications, there would
7 probably be more groups in that District that got
8 funded.

9
10 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I hear you on that, and
11 I think we all could be doing a better job of getting
12 the word out on the opportunities that an agency like
13 yours provides to cultural organizations and working
14 in tandem with Members.

15 When you are putting the application
16 process out, say to the Bronx which only had four new
17 organizations receive CDF funding of the 125, can you
18 talk to me about what the breakdown of communication
19 with some of the members is, maybe what some of the
20 outreach is on getting the word out about the CDF
21 process, if there is any at all?

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Oh, there definitely
23 is a robust outreach process. We use organizations
24 such as our arts councils to get the word out. We
25 make sure that I, myself, as I've just stated, when I

1 go out publicly to speak about this process and I'm
2 crisscrossing the five boroughs each and every day,
3 we're utilizing social media, we're using webinars.
4 We are actively getting out there. We're sending
5 toolkits regularly to your offices to get that
6 information out. It's really a very robust process in
7 terms of what we do to get the word out on a regular
8 basis to make sure that we lift all boats in this
9 process. I would say that there's only but so much
10 that a Commissioner can do...

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I get it.

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And that's a lot,
14 right, but, at the same time, I would say our
15 partners in terms of our local arts councils but
16 really the partnership with the City Council is where
17 the real magic can happen as far as getting the word
18 out to those organizations that we may not know about
19 that you know you are in your District that's doing
20 incredible work. We do a series of CDF webinars that
21 are really very powerful, very informative, but in
22 every discussion place that I go to speak, arts
23 organization that I speak about, we encourage
24 individuals to apply, and that's the reason we had
25 almost 1,400 organizations apply, which was record-

1 breaking, is because of that level of robust
2 promoting.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: That's great. I
5 appreciate hearing that answer because as long as
6 there is that infrastructure, a lot of it does lie on
7 some other community partners or leaders that could
8 get the word out about this process, and I know in my
9 office we receive social media toolkits all the time.
10 We do share this one, of course, but I'm sure that
11 there are some that slip through the cracks.

12 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You could utilize
13 ours or you could utilize yours because your social
14 media star power exceeds mine, and I'm okay with it.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Maybe we could do it
16 together.

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm not sure if I'm
18 ready for that level of stardom, but I would
19 certainly consider it.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I have one more
21 question before moving on to a question from Council
22 Member Hanif. What were the demographics of
23 organizations who received multi-year funding?

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: All organizations
25 receive multi-year funding, all, so that's been 100

percent of the organizations. Lance will give you the real deal.

GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: In terms of the multi-year awards, what we did was we split groups into three different bands because this was the very first year in FY-23 that any group was receiving a multi-year award so one-third of the groups in FY-23 received a three-year award, one-third of the groups received a two-year award, one-third of the groups received a one-year award, but now as we get into FY-24, anyone being considered who's a new group is only being considered for a three-year award. We needed an on-ramp to get into this multi-year process, but everyone is now in a cycle where they will be reviewed for multi-year award.

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: They'll be reviewed, but it doesn't technically mean that they'll get a three-year award?

GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: I'll check with our programs team, but I believe that anyone who now going forward receives an award, if you're a new group, your first award will be for one year and then going forward you'll be eligible for a three-year.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Is that broken down in
3 your Open Data documentation as well?

4 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Yeah, it's in the
5 guidelines.

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Okay.

7 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: In the CDF
8 guidelines that are posted on our website.

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We needed a process
10 to get into multi-year or else, if we implemented
11 multi-year to everybody then we wouldn't see them all
12 for another three years so it has to be some get one
13 year, some get two, some get three, and then they all
14 start to operate so the multi-year process is for the
15 agency, it's for the entire agency regardless of
16 grant size, but we needed to ramp up to getting to
17 that place.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Okay, thank you. I'll
19 pass it on to Council Member Hanif for questions.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you, Chair Ossé.

21 Great to see you, Commissioner Cumbo.

22 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You as well.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Appreciate hearing
24 all of the numbers and just the changes from last
25 Fiscal Year to this Fiscal Year and just the coverage

1 of organizations and the statistics on how many POC-
2 led organizations are in the fold and, of course,
3 love hearing about the multi-year funding. That's
4 something that I've been hearing for years working
5 with cultural organizations, and I know that that is
6 at least one less stressor off of their back.
7

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Could you share
10 what the DCLA considers a small organization?

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Let me pause just to
12 get the exact budget size that we would consider
13 because it may be beyond budget size as well. It may
14 also be of the scope of the work or how many
15 audiences are served.

16 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Council Member,
17 the answer to your question is that one of the
18 terrific reforms that we implemented was changing
19 from a system in which we only had two different
20 groups, large groups and small groups, to one in
21 which we have six different budget bands, and in the
22 guidelines it describes how much you could be awarded
23 based on your budget band so that there is a lot more
24 detail and it can more closely match the size of the
25

1 organization and the appropriate award for the
2 organization.
3

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Okay, that's great
5 to know. That seems like it's an equitable parameter
6 versus size of staff or makeup so that's really good
7 to know and thank you for clarifying that.

8 I wanted to know a little bit more about
9 the panel review process. In addition to having this
10 broad reach across the boroughs, are you also seeing
11 that there are some parts of the City where we
12 applicants are not coming from or that there is a
13 need for arts organizations in these particular areas
14 and is DCLA advising on that front, or is the panel
15 giving any feedback on that front?

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's an excellent
17 question in terms of areas where we are looking for
18 deficits that we may have in terms of where our
19 panelists are coming from. I don't see in the talking
20 points information about exactly where we have those
21 deficits, but I know that we have panelists from all
22 five boroughs, and I think we may be able to get you
23 that information in terms of the borough breakdown
24 but not maybe by Council District.
25

1
2 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Council Member,
3 are you talking about the breakdown in terms of the
4 panelists and which communities they represent or the
5 groups that are funded and the communities that
6 they're serving?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I'm actually
8 grateful that the Commissioner the piece about the
9 deficits of panelists, but I was actually asking what
10 you just alluded to about organizations. Are you also
11 seeing that there are neighborhoods or pockets of
12 communities where applicants don't exist because
13 there are no arts organizations or emerging groups?
14 Is there any support going towards that deficit?

15 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: First, we can
16 provide a little more information about the question
17 that Commissioner Cumbo was answering about the
18 panelists, which is that this year for the very first
19 time we comprised a new initiative which was a
20 Panelist Advisory Committee, a group of experts from
21 the field to advise DCLA on how to do better outreach
22 to a broader and more diverse set of communities for
23 panelists so that was a really helpful tool and one
24 that we saw lead to dividends in FY-24 and we hope
25 beyond as we continue to refine exactly what that

1
2 Advisory Committee will do, but that was an explicit
3 action that we took to really try to double down on
4 increasing the equity within our panelists and the
5 diversity of panelists that we are recruiting.

6 In terms of services, we are thrilled to
7 partner with each of the Borough Arts Councils who we
8 hope have a detailed knowledge of the neighborhood
9 breakdowns of groups being funded, areas that need
10 additional arts programming, and that can help to
11 point out any deficits and find ways to support then
12 groups in those specific communities so the Borough
13 Arts Councils are very helpful.

14 The other tool that we have that we've
15 emphasized before that we're excited to continue to
16 work through is Commissioner Cumbo has a unique
17 perspective having been a prior Council Member on
18 what it's like to be a Council Member to engage in
19 your community, to know every nook and cranny, every
20 block of your District, and we are so appreciative
21 for the partnership that we got this past Fiscal Year
22 from the Council in terms of outreach to potential
23 applicants, to panelists, and we know that an
24 increased partnership in FY-25 can only lead to
25 further dividends in identifying how we could find

1 more arts organizations in your District that may
2 want to apply, and we would love to work with you and
3 all 51 Members on that so that we reach every corner
4 of the city.
5

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. I
7 appreciate that.

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Just to follow up, we
9 can get you the actual breakdown by borough and areas
10 where we feel that we need more help and support to
11 reach panelists to help review the applications so
12 that's a great suggestion in that way as well.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yeah, I'd love to
14 support with that. Thank you so much.

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I know you got some
16 folks.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Can you please explain
18 the timeline for the Fiscal Year 2024 CDF grant-
19 making? I know that applications were due on May 9,
20 2023, but what has been and will be the rest of the
21 schedule for this funding cycle?

22 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Thanks, Chair
23 Ossé. The remainder of the schedule for this
24 funding cycle is that the panels were convened in
25 the last spring and early summer, and there were

1 panels that reviewed applications. That panel process
2 is now complete, and so now comes the arduous task
3 for which we are so grateful to our programs unit at
4 the Department of Cultural Affairs of reviewing all
5 of the feedback, the data, the scoring, the comments
6 from those panelists to then establish what the
7 awards are going to be, to break them down by budget
8 band, and this is no easy task. We are so
9 appreciative and so grateful to the incredibly
10 talented team that we have, but that will take
11 another several weeks, and we hope that we will be
12 able to be making an announcement and sending out
13 award letters in the coming weeks.
14

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Do you have a specific
16 date?

17 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: No, we do not.
18 Not yet.

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Can you say what you
20 said again?

21 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Do we have a
22 specific date when the award letters...

23 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Oh, no.

24 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: So there isn't a
25 specific date every year?

1
2 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: No. Last year,
3 the award letters went out in November, and we hope
4 to be able to beat the timeline that we hit last year
5 this year. We were able to start things a little bit
6 earlier. We were able to take advantage of this new
7 online application through our Salesforce platform.
8 All of that helped to increase efficiency as well as
9 what we were explaining earlier about the multi-year
10 awards. Last year, we had to review every single
11 group. This year, there are some groups on either the
12 two- or three-year cycle from last year so we don't
13 have to re-review those groups, and that helps to
14 speed up our timeline.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Is there a reason
16 there's no hard deadline? Is that something that you
17 guys are working...

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: In terms of why we
19 don't have a hard day of when we're going to announce
20 this year?

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: When you let folks
22 know.

23 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I think it's really
24 what the General Counsel spoke of in that coming out
25 of the pandemic, there are so many new variables that

1 we are dealing with addressing in terms of like the
2 first one that we had to really deal with was the
3 implementation of the Salesforce. This new software
4 is new to the agency. It's something that we are
5 working with, but it allowed us to streamline the
6 process, but it was a whole new ballgame for us in
7 terms of implementing new software for the entire
8 field for our agency as well as our users who utilize
9 that process.
10

11 The other aspect of it is really what
12 Lance said, each year is going to get better once the
13 multi-year process continue to kick in. The fact that
14 we had 600 organizations that we had to review this
15 year. That number will probably drop next year to 300
16 so every year, because it's almost like we look at it
17 as third, third, third, and if we look at it as
18 1,000, the first we have to review all 1,000, the
19 next year we have to review 600, the year after that
20 we have to review 300, and then every subsequent year
21 we will be reviewing approximately 300 to 400
22 organizations and, while we're reviewing those 300,
23 400 organizations, we still have to read final
24 reports from the organizations that are in the multi-
25 year process so just because you get a multi-year

1 grant doesn't mean that we don't hear from you for a
2 year. It just means you're reporting back to us how
3 you utilized the funds that particular year, and that
4 still has to be reviewed so it's a new process. As
5 Lance stated, we are looking to beat the clock in
6 terms of what we were able to issue next year, but we
7 know on so many levels this upcoming Fiscal Year we
8 are going to get the application out sooner, the
9 deadline will be moved up so that that will be
10 sooner, we are going to be reviewing few
11 applications, we are going to have a full staff and
12 team, and we're going to be able to get funding out
13 the door quicker and more effectively along with the
14 City Council delivering their initiative decisions in
15 the end of June versus later in the year, and we're
16 going to be..

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I guess the reason I
19 ask and maybe why I'm concerned in terms of, and I
20 hope that this is something that the agency is
21 working on in the future in terms of having a
22 specific day when everyone is realizing whether they
23 received a grant or did not, is because I've heard
24 from especially smaller cultural organizations who
25 are budgeting year-round and even though their budget

1
2 may be an annual day sometimes, I think that given
3 the state of our city and country right now, budgets
4 are tight for a lot of these smaller organizations,
5 and I think having a specific day in mind of when
6 they will know about this money that is much needed
7 for their organization is something that I think will
8 alleviate some anxiety, some stress, and then also
9 allows them to plan a bit better for the new year so
10 I do hear that there is some acclimating on this new
11 process, this process that I think is helping a lot
12 of organizations, but I hope that we're working
13 towards a goal of having a specific time when these
14 organizations will know if they're receiving this
15 grant or not.

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We share that goal in
17 terms of making sure that we get funding out the door
18 as quickly as possible, and I would say that this
19 agency has done everything possible to try to realize
20 that goal.

21 I just want to be 100 percent real in
22 terms of you understanding. The implementation of
23 Salesforce cuts the application from a two-part
24 application to a one-part application, and that's
25 huge because we saw a significant drop-off in terms

1 of organizations that didn't know that there was a
2 part two they had to apply or just said you know
3 what, it's too complicated, part one, part two,
4 forget it so the ability to have that streamlined
5 process of one application is huge. That ability to
6 be able to have the applications reviewed earlier,
7 the ability to implement the multi-year, all of these
8 things are going to continue to streamline the
9 process so that we can get funding out the door
10 because we all want organizations to be able to plan
11 more effectively and to not have to take that risk of
12 beginning a program that they don't know if they're
13 necessarily going to get funded for. Again, I know I
14 sound like a broken record in this way, we are going
15 to do our part in partnership, but we also really
16 need the Council to, like this has to be the year
17 that when the budget closes, we know how many CASAs
18 each Council Member is designating, how many Su Casas
19 they are designating, how many Art as a Catalyst for
20 Change because if we know that..

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: It's all this one talks
23 about. I'm telling you.

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Can I get an amen
25 over here, right?

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: And my Budget Director
is here too. We get things in one time, right, May?

MAY VUTRAPONGVATANA: Uh, yeah.

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm not feeling the
confidence over here.

It's critical because let me just tell
you from both fronts I know now, one as an arts
organization but now as a parent, right. When I
signed my child up in September for afterschool,
that's it. I don't want to read any more emails, I'm
taking him out of the program to put him into that,
so if those arts organizations don't know in June,
July that they've gotten a CASA then they don't get
those two months to plan with the principal and to
work out those kinks and then to advertise the
program day one of September, whatever day we start
school, that that's the afterschool program my child
is going to be in. If those organizations are awarded
that CASA in November, I know from being an arts
organization, there are going to be two kids in the
afterschool program and we're administering this
large CASA grant to them so it's critical we get that
funding out the door to really have the impact that
we want it to have, and we do what we've gotta do,

1
2 you all do what you've gotta do, the art world is
3 going to be on fire because we're going to be so
4 streamlined, getting money out the door, and it's
5 going to be fantastic.

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: We're doing very well.

7 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We're doing well.

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: We could just always be
9 better, right?

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Always be better.

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: And I think that we're
12 voicing the concerns of what we're hearing.

13 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And I'm here for it.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: This may be related to
15 your last answer, but, as your time in the Council,
16 you obviously know that the programmatic
17 discretionary funding application is in January with
18 applications due in February on our side and most
19 awards are made by June, before the end of the Fiscal
20 Year. This process gives as Council Members and our
21 Staff time to review applications and organizations.
22 All of this that you know. Why does DCLA start the
23 CDF process later in the year? Is it because of us?

24

25

1
2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That would be such an
3 easy yes to take, but I took an oath so I'll answer
4 differently.

5 Due to the reforms and the implementation
6 of Salesforce, as I stated earlier, we opened
7 applications later this grant cycle so this was
8 really only because of the delays with Salesforce and
9 learning this new software. For Fiscal Year 2025, we
10 will work towards returning to a timeline similar to
11 our pre-pandemic grant schedule with applications
12 opening towards the start of the new year and panels
13 being held in the spring. Once we have our panels
14 happening in the spring versus the summer, that's
15 going to change the full process because if we get
16 them completed in the spring then those awards can be
17 made earlier, June and July, and will be more in sync
18 with the City Council, and that's our goal. We want
19 to be in sync and hopefully we can have an offline
20 conversation in terms of understanding your exact
21 deadlines and goals and our exact deadlines and
22 goals...

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Let's just make them
24 the same.

25 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right.

1 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Yeah.

2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Okay.

3 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Let's do it.

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I got you on record
5 saying that so we're going to just work in tandem and
6 hand-in-hand to make it possible.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Wonderful. You just
8 answered a lot of the questions I was going to ask.

9 Should a new system be implemented to get
10 awarded funds released much quicker to prevent
11 organizations from having to borrow money to stay
12 open and operate programs until the CDF money is
13 distributed, which puts great pressure particularly
14 on smaller organizations, and should more funds be
15 released upfront, and is that possible?

16 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We release 80 percent
17 of the award when the organization receives their
18 award letter so we get 80 percent...

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I didn't know that.
20 That's amazing.

21 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Isn't that great?
22 Look at that. We make sure that organizations get 80
23 percent of their funding upfront which is critical to
24 us. Like we said, we're going to continue to have
25

1 that sit-down so that we can get in sync with one
2 another so that we can get our funding out the door
3 at the same time as the City Council, and, again,
4 that 80 percent is critical, and we're going to just
5 continue to work towards that goal.
6

7 Now, the difference is is that for
8 initiative funding, it's 60 percent. That's why it's
9 even more critical for that funding to go in sooner
10 rather than later because it's 60 percent.

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Does DCLA provide any
12 support either within DCLA or through referrals to
13 small organizations that are short on funds?

14 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Our local arts
15 councils are really the sister to the work that we do
16 so our arts organizations such as the arts councils
17 within our portfolio are where many other
18 organizations go to for funding, but also the New
19 York State Council on the Arts is an incredible
20 partner where many organizations also go to for
21 additional funding.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Since the City does
23 recommend that organizations borrow money while they
24 wait for promised funds to come through, can the City
25

1 hypothetically provide interest-free loans to some of
2 these organizations?
3

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That I think is an
5 interesting concept, one that we haven't explored at
6 this time in terms of interest-free bridge loans, but
7 we can certainly look into that.

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Would that be something
9 you'd potentially be supportive of?

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I think there's a lot
11 more exploratory that, would I like the whole City
12 budget to go to the arts, yes, but there's a lot that
13 has to go into making a decision like that. The Fund
14 For the City of New York has been an incredible
15 partner for us on so many levels, and so interest-
16 free is something that, of course, is attractive, but
17 there are the mechanics and the realistic nature of
18 how something like that could be implemented that we
19 would have to explore and deliberate and weigh the
20 pros and cons of that.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. In your
22 testimony, you mentioned that in the Fiscal Year
23 2024, it was the first year where there was a full
24 implementation of a CDF digital application. Did DCLA
25 provide any accessibility support to organizations

1 who needed help navigating through the system? For
2 example, making sure online application is accessible
3 for people who are not well-versed in technology and,
4 if so, how did DCLA provide those services?

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We did an
7 extraordinary amount of work to make sure that this
8 process was accessible to the community. We have a
9 disability leader within our office who was able to
10 help us with the disability community. We also have
11 an entire team of CDF staff team that was able to
12 work with each organization through webinars to make
13 sure that this was a robust, transparent, and that
14 everyone who needed help or had issues with
15 accessibility that we were able to accommodate each
16 and every organization.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Did this new
18 application allow online applicants to track where
19 they payments are in the system and help them predict
20 more accurately when they will receive their funds?
21 For example, like a little timeline of when they
22 apply for their funds, a window of when they would
23 hear back, and then also when those funds would be
24 supplied to them if they received a grant?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm sorry. I missed
the beginning of your question.

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Does this new
application, this online application, allow
applicants to track where their payments are in the
system as well as to track where their application is
in the process so from when they submit their
application to when it's under review from the panel
to when they're receiving or not receiving funds to,
if they receive funds, when they're receiving those
funds?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It doesn't track in
that way, but it's not as if organizations move
through the system independently. It's not like once
you have submitted your application, it's not like,
let's say if there are 100 applications, it's not
like we would say to organization 69 your application
has been read and applicant 89 yours has not been
read. We kind of keep it all as one, and then when
the awards are made then we announce them all
collectively and together at the same time.

GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: There are a
couple of great resources. One is that during the CDF
webinars that we do, we go over an anticipated

1 timeline so that every applicant knows, they have the
2 guideposts of here's when the application's going to
3 open up, here's when they're due, and they can
4 understand all the key, here's when panels will take
5 place so that they have a sense of what the timing
6 will be for this process.
7

8 The other answer, and someone the
9 Commissioner has brought up before but I think their
10 praises just can't be sung enough is that each
11 organization that applies is automatically assigned a
12 DCLA program officer who is their contact throughout
13 the whole process, from start to finish, including
14 then afterwards they can then seek out a one-on-one
15 meeting with that program officer to better
16 understand either why they didn't receive funding or
17 to understand why their award was exactly what it
18 was, and they can go through the answers that they
19 submitted on the application, feedback from the panel
20 so that those groups get a better understanding of
21 what they could do better the following year so any
22 organization that is uncertain about where their
23 application is, if they have already signed their
24 grant agreement but they haven't received their
25 initial payment, they should feel like they can

1 always go to their assigned program officer, and that
2 person is the personalized version of an online
3 resource that they could punch into to find out where
4 it is.
5

6 In terms of their online payments, they
7 have an online payment account that they can check as
8 well so that's something that if they're not sure how
9 to check that, they should contact their program
10 officer who can give them all the information.

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Just an idea because
12 I'm all about making government better and optimizing
13 all of our time including that individual that does
14 one-on-ones with some of these organizations, think
15 about the same widget that like UPS uses, you order a
16 package, you get a tracking code, it's sent to your
17 email. What if there was the same type of thing on
18 your website through the CDF process in which some
19 applies for an application, they receive a code, they
20 were able to track the process in terms of when it
21 comes to a panel, just having more of a timeline
22 within their own understanding which I think would
23 alleviate some stress for them, maybe some
24 interactions that they have with DCLA as a whole as
25 well as reaching out to Council Member offices about

1 where their application is going, and this is
2 something that the Council should replicate, of
3 course, with our discretionary funding process
4 because we get all of these one-off requests of where
5 our application is, but I think streamlining it in a
6 digitized form in a program that already exists for
7 many different companies, even government websites, I
8 think could be a great service to this process.

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Let me just ask you
11 because I think that's brilliant. Is this something
12 that exists on the Council side yet?

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I'm saying this is
14 something we should be doing on the Council side as
15 well. The State Assembly and the State Senate do
16 something like this, but we definitely should be
17 doing this on the Council side, and I definitely
18 think that DCLA...

19 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Because if you can do
20 it, not to be like that, but if you could do it then
21 we could do it then we could do it collaboratively. I
22 feel like that should be like number two on the
23 agenda item in terms of some sort of tracker system.
24 It would definitely alleviate a lot of the anxiety
25 that many organizations have in that way but, of

1 course, we all know these are things that require
2 resources so we would have to look into it, but we
3 should look into it so at least we know what we're
4 looking into in terms of what the cost or
5 implementation could be.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: It does require
8 resources at first, and then it completely alleviates
9 additional labor that goes into what you do
10 throughout the year, right, in terms of, again, one-
11 off organizations reaching out to your agency, I know
12 DCLA isn't deeply staffed like some of the other City
13 agencies so I'm sure it takes some time for the
14 individual point person to have these one-on-ones
15 with many of the different cultural organizations of
16 the status of their application. I think once a
17 program like this is instituted, it's pretty
18 automatic in terms of folks that can track where
19 their application process is.

20 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Would love to sit
21 down and talk with you more about it. We just
22 implemented Salesforce, and we're still recovering,
23 but I like that you're pushing us to do more as we
24 should, and I look forward to definitely sitting down
25

1 the Council to really discuss how we could move that
2 forward.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Just an idea thrown out
5 there. Maybe you could be the first agency in the
6 City that does something like that. That would be
7 really cool.

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: It's great. Lance
9 just reminded me, and I'm sure those as we always say
10 for the folks in the back, they can definitely relate
11 to when you did your application back in the day,
12 you'd have to go to Kinko's, you'd have to figure out
13 to use their keycard thing..

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Go to where?

15 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Kinko's. It's a
16 printing company so you would have to go to Kinko's,
17 the line is crazy, it never works, you've gotta get
18 all these packets together then you get the packet
19 then you have to make a mad dash to the post office,
20 it has to be postmarked by midnight.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I don't understand
22 anything you're saying right now.

23 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I guess that's why we
24 can't relate right now because I'm just like so you
25 would have to go to the post office and get it

1 stamped by midnight, and the first line would be at
2 the post office for me in Brooklyn at Cadman Plaza.
3 In your local branch, so your local branch closes at
4 5. Cadman Plaza closes at 7 or 8. You miss those, you
5 have to go to 34th Street, and you have to go to 34th
6 Street by midnight, and, if you miss those deadlines,
7 you're really getting to the post office by about
8 11:50. Anybody that's in front of you is getting cut,
9 right, like I'm in front of this line like I know you
10 were waiting here but I need this 12 o'clock deadline
11 postmark, and then you would submit and then you
12 would just pray for the best that it got in, but we
13 have come a long way, and there's a much further way
14 we are going to go with the leadership of Chair Ossé.

16 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: In partnership with
17 Commissioner Cumbo.

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: There we go.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: And Lance.

20 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's right, to get
21 us right.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: You state in your
23 testimony that the three main criteria the panels can
24 look for accessibility of the org/programming for New
25 Yorkers, organizational accountability, and the

1
2 quality of the programming provided. Can you break
3 down on what factors you look for in order for an
4 organization to meet these criteria?

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Can you ask the
6 second part of the question again?

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Yes. Can you break down
8 on what factors you/the panels look for in order for
9 an organization to meet these criteria?

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Yes. We look at
11 organizational accountability meaning if we invest
12 public funds in this organization, does it have the
13 capacity to deliver the programs it promises for New
14 Yorkers so when we look at that organizational
15 accountability, we're really looking to see if the
16 organization has past experience, has outlined how
17 much staffing, what is a reasonable budget, have they
18 thought about these things in terms of implementing
19 the project, then we look at the first two criteria
20 and those account for 85 percent of an organization's
21 score so we really want to make sure that final
22 criteria is quality. Is the programming of a caliber
23 that will serve our residents well so it's really
24 important that we demonstrate and show that the
25 program is accessible, affordable, and that it's

1 providing equity for everyday New Yorkers.
2
3 Accessibility really refers to in so many different
4 ways where we're trying to move New York City as far
5 as making sure that all people, whether you're from
6 the disabled community, economically challenged,
7 whatever your religion may be, that this is an
8 accessible place for you. Affordability, can you
9 come? Are there opportunities for you to be able to
10 come to this program for free or at a reduced cost?
11 It's always so important for us that so many
12 organizations have free days, that they have reduced
13 ticket prices, pay as you wish, that they have
14 opportunities and spaces for the disabled to enjoy
15 the programming such as many from our autistic
16 community. These are the issues that are really
17 important to us in terms of how we judge or rather
18 review the applications that come to our office.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. I'm so
20 sorry. Is anyone else cold in here?

21 GALLERY: Yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Could we turn the heat
23 up in here?

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I'm comfortable but I
25 guess that's because I'm in the hot seat.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I'm a little cold.
3 Let's move on.

4 In your testimony, you said that there
5 was an additional round of panel conversation. Can
6 you tell us more about what is deliberated on during
7 this additional round?

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: This came out of the
9 field as a result of listening to the field, Culture
10 at 3 calls, and really recognizing that we wanted to
11 add a more robust aspect to the panel review process
12 so we added an additional round of deliberation to
13 make sure that the final outcome of the applicant
14 from the panel process was actually re-reviewed so
15 that people would make sure that this is exactly how
16 they lined up, that what they felt about that
17 organization was based more on the application and
18 the work and not maybe where that application was
19 reviewed at that time of day. When you review
20 applications before lunch or after lunch can affect
21 how you decide. If you've reviewed 10 applications
22 and now this is the 12th, you may have a little bit
23 of fatigue so we wanted to make sure that we created
24 an opportunity that after those deliberations
25 happened, that there was yet an additional round so

1
2 that people could look at the process from a more
3 objective view to say is how I felt at that moment or
4 how I reviewed at that moment how I truly feel about
5 this application in the aftermath. Lance can also
6 expand on that.

7 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: The final round
8 of discussions is because first there's an individual
9 review of that application. After an individual has
10 done their review, then the panel does a review of
11 the application. During the course of the day, and
12 the panel has robust discussion about each of the
13 applicants and their applications and so finally what
14 this additional round does is it allows the panel to
15 review the question, to think through did the score
16 reflect the discussion, and that's what this does. It
17 gives everyone an opportunity to go back and look at
18 the scores one more time and say is the score that I
19 gave during panel review reflective of the discussion
20 that we all had to make sure that each panelist can
21 learn from the perspective of the others who are in
22 the room.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: How long is each
24 application reviewed in this additional panel?

1
2 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: As that question
3 again.

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: How long is each
5 application reviewed in this additional panel?

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Give us one moment.

7 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: First of all, a
8 panel is convened for an entire day. They sit and
9 they're in a virtual Teams or Zoom room from about 10
10 o'clock in the morning until the end of the work day.
11 It allows for about one hour for each application.
12 There are additional six-minute discussion blocks to
13 go further into each application.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: One hour per
15 application?

16 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: During a panel,
17 the panel will review several different groups so
18 they can review eight groups. Individually, it's one
19 hour. Collectively, six minutes. These panelists,
20 they have to review hundreds of pages of materials to
21 come in and be fully prepared.

22 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I'm confused.
23 Individually, the panel reviews one application for
24 an hour? I'm confused.

1
2 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: On their own at
3 home, they're required to spend at least one hour
4 with each individual application then they come
5 together and collectively they do these six-minute
6 blocks for each application.

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Okay.

8 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: We pay panelists,
9 and that's one of the things that we're so proud of.
10 We were actually able to increase the total amount
11 that we pay each panelist through the reforms. By
12 doing that, what we enabled was to have a group of
13 panelists who would be able to come if they weren't
14 paid to go to work and to pay a fair wage for a full
15 day of engagement in this process was critical to us
16 as an agency. We knew that that would increase the
17 equity of the people that could serve as panelists,
18 and we're really proud that that came through.

19 One of the other expectations of
20 panelists by being paid more is that they're going to
21 spend a lot of time at home reviewing before they get
22 into the room. They don't show up and say which
23 applications are we looking at today. The expectation
24 is that they're going to have spent at least a full
25 hour looking at each application for each group that

1 they're going to be considering during the full day
2 panel.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Okay, so individual
5 panelists will receive an application and they'll
6 review that application from an organization for an
7 hour. Say that happens with the entire panel but with
8 different applications, correct, and then they all
9 come together with all of those different
10 applications for six minutes and decide?

11 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Per group, yeah.

12 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Okay. Is that enough
13 time, those six minutes?

14 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Yeah, so we have
15 one of our assigned program officers serving as a
16 moderator of virtually all the panels, and they do a
17 tremendous job of keeping everyone on task. You would
18 be amazed at how quickly the day flies. We'd love for
19 you to sit in on a panel at some point to see how
20 this all works and to see the choreography of having
21 it all come together. They are absolute wizards at
22 keeping the clock, keeping everyone moving because
23 there's no way they're going to let that day elapse
24 without everyone having had their opportunity for
25

1 full engagement and an adequate opportunity for their
2 application to be heard.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I understand that City
5 Council Staff previously served on the review panels
6 in a voluntary capacity. Why are they no longer
7 invited to do so, and is that invite still open?

8 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: You are more than
9 welcome to make recommendations for panelists to be a
10 part of this process. You can absolutely go to your
11 Community Board meeting, you can go to your Police
12 Precinct Council meeting, you can go to your church,
13 your synagogue, or your mosque and say the Department
14 of Cultural Affairs is looking for panelists to be a
15 part of this process to decide how funding is going
16 to be allocated in the City of New York. We
17 absolutely encourage that, but the nature of why that
18 question was asked, when I was a cultural leader, my
19 City Council Member would appoint me to serve on
20 panels. What we wanted to do was to move this process
21 to a merit-based process, right, so we wanted to make
22 sure that organizations that were going to be
23 reviewed were going to be reviewed solely on the
24 merit, on the discipline, of the quality of the work,
25 of the accessibility, right, and we wanted to do that

1 because so many organizations may not be as
2 politically astute as other organizations, and we
3 didn't want that to impact their application. If we
4 get 100 percent real about it, if a City Council
5 Member is able to tell their Budget Director I want
6 you to serve on this panel, that Budget Director is
7 obviously going to advocate for the organizations in
8 their District, right, and so if you're not from that
9 District or you're not in that Council Member's
10 purview, that's going to skew the application review
11 process because now you have someone that may
12 potentially because they have so much more
13 familiarity about their specific district, and
14 everybody wants their district to win that it becomes
15 challenging in a process where we want it to be
16 exclusively based off of the merit, and so we're
17 hoping that the Council as well as the field who
18 actually called for this to make sure that this is a
19 merit-based process, that it's exclusively the hard
20 work, the quality of the programming, the
21 accessibility of the organization that's coming
22 forward.
23
24
25

CHAIRPERSON OSSE: In the past, there have also been borough-based review panels for smaller organizations, is that still done?

COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Borough-based would happen more within your local arts council. We've decided to move, and it wasn't always exclusively borough-based, but we decided to move to a way of reviewing that's based off of discipline but also discipline and the size of the budget size of the organization because we don't want BAM going up against the smaller not-for-profit Creative Outlet Dance Company, right, so Creative Outlet and BAM shouldn't be competing at the same level for their award amount. We wanted to make sure that similar-sized organizations of a similar discipline are being reviewed by panelists who have expertise in that discipline as well as those smaller-sized organizations so we thought that that was more powerful in that way and more equitable to do it in a way that's by discipline and budget size because, if not, the bigger organizations are competing with the smaller organizations and, just because you're from the same borough, doesn't mean that you know about Something Positive African Dance Organization and

1 that you know about Mark Morris. It doesn't
2 necessarily mean that you know both or that you know
3 about, just because you're all in the same borough
4 doesn't mean that you know of all of the disciplines
5 within that borough so we wanted it to be more
6 discipline and size-based versus borough-based.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: According to your
9 testimony, 47 percent of the panelists were first-
10 timers. What training did they receive through DCLA?

11 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: They receive
12 extensive trainings through the Department of
13 Cultural Affairs. We do a webinar. We also do a
14 training for each of the panelists, and it's a very
15 robust training session to make sure that every
16 panelist is well-prepared and equipped and that they
17 meet the criteria of the New York City Department of
18 Cultural Affairs and that we make sure that they are
19 able to read the applications and to make the
20 determinations of which organizations should be
21 recommended for funding. It's a very robust process.
22 We're super proud that so many went through this
23 application review process in terms of how to be
24 prepared to review an application, and, as the
25 General Counsel said earlier, that they're expected

1
2 to do a lot of homework internally before they even
3 get to the application review day so it's a real
4 robust process and we're happy that so many
5 participated.

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I do want to raise this
7 because someone just called my office I guess because
8 they're listening to the hearing, and they said that
9 there wasn't any home time for the panel process. It
10 was six minutes with a countdown clock and then 30
11 seconds to write comments then a lunch break and a
12 return to the applications. They said that there was
13 no talking about each application again in a robust
14 way. Is that a critique that you've heard from
15 panelists or applications, or is that something that
16 is addressed through a staffer from DCLA who is
17 attending? What do you think of that comment?

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We appreciate that
19 type of comment. We appreciate the feedback. We
20 continue to look for ways to improve the process.
21 That was not a critique that we had received prior
22 to. It is in part though why we do have an additional
23 round so that that level of discussion can happen
24 through the process, but that critique had not been
25

1 brought to our attention previously and so I
2 appreciate it.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: What is the appeals
5 process? Is there an appeals process?

6 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: There is an appeals
7 process. I'm going to let Lance talk a bit more about
8 it from a legal perspective, but we certainly do have
9 an appeals process where organizations are able to
10 make an appeal if they don't agree with their award
11 amount or the fact that they were not funded, and we
12 meet with each and every organization who feels that,
13 but generally the appeal process is only if they're
14 not funded. We will open up the process if an
15 organization feels that the materials that were
16 required for review were not submitted as part of
17 their application so if there are materials that were
18 not submitted, that's one way that you could be
19 allowed to open up an appeal process, but I'll let
20 Lance speak more of the legalese on it.

21 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Of course.
22 Appeals are allowed for any organization that does
23 not receive any funding. If you do not receive any
24 funding, you can appeal on one of two grounds. The
25 first of which is if you believe the materials that

1 you submitted with your application were not
2 appropriately distributed to the panelists so, for
3 example, if there was a mistake and instead of your
4 materials a different group's materials were the ones
5 that were sent to the panelists or if you submitted
6 answers to all of the questions but only the first
7 half of your answers were distributed to the
8 panelists. The other grounds for an appeal is a
9 conflict of interest. If there were a conflict of
10 interest on the panel that were not disclosed at the
11 time, that's another ground for appealing a lack of
12 funding for an organization, so it's a very limited
13 process, and that's what it is.

14
15 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Is there a percentage
16 that you guys have or breakdown of folks who have
17 appealed and have received a CDF grant?

18 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: I don't have
19 those statistics in front of me, but I can tell you
20 that there are very few appeals because there are so
21 few that meet that criteria, and there are even fewer
22 that are granted because for us to not distribute the
23 correct materials or for there to be a conflict of
24 interest is very, very rare.

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: You mentioned the
3 safety net funding before and the CDF award letters
4 listed many different funding streams, safety net,
5 ZIP code, panel score. What do the different funding
6 streams mean, and how can organizations navigate the
7 funding system effectively to access them?
8 Specifically, what does safety net and ZIP code mean?

9 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We implemented safety
10 net as we were implementing the reforms. The reforms
11 were implemented in such a way that more
12 organizations were applying for funding, more
13 organizations were granted funding, and we also
14 raised the floor from 5,000 to 10,000 dollars which
15 meant that there was going to be a reduction that
16 many organizations were going to see as we tried to
17 equalize the funding pool to make sure that many
18 organizations, particularly those that were not
19 funded previously, have that opportunity to receive
20 funding so while that process was being implemented,
21 we didn't want to reduce funding at such a level that
22 it would be detrimental to that organization. We
23 wanted to allocate a level of safety net funding so
24 that organizations would have time to be able to
25 adjust and to figure out new ways to raise that

1 funding whether it's independently, foundations,
2 corporations, or changing their business model in
3 some ways to accommodate that so we wanted to make
4 sure that we gave organizations time and space in
5 order to be able to implement their programming in a
6 fair and equitable way to their constituents but
7 having that time to make that adjustment.
8

9 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I want to talk a little
10 bit about DCLA staffing. How many contracts does each
11 contract officer oversee approximately?

12 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: As it pertains to the
13 CDF process? 170.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Okay, and are there
15 enough DCLA contract officers to provide sufficient
16 feedback to CDF applicants who do not receive a grant
17 and want to know where the application fell short?

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I feel confident that
19 we have the staffing and the team to implement the
20 goals that we've outlined in today's hearing and we
21 have the staffing and the team to be able to move the
22 application process in a more streamlined way and to
23 be able to get applicants through that process in a
24 more effective and streamlined way. I believe that
25 that adjustment of reviewing the applications in the

1 spring instead of the summer is really where you're
2 going to see the real accessibility and money out the
3 doors quicker in a more robust way than ever before,
4 and I believe that we have the team to do it.

5
6 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Do you believe that
7 there are enough DCLA contract officers that provide
8 support to CDF grantees such as help with
9 distributing payments in a timely manner?

10 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I believe that we
11 have a robust team that has done extraordinary, work
12 and I have full confidence in this team and their
13 ability to move contracts and to get money into the
14 arts organizations that have applied for funding.

15 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: You think there's
16 enough staff for this process in terms of the amount
17 of contract officers that you have?

18 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: Of course. I mean...

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: You want more?

20 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We would always want
21 more, right, but we want to be realistic in terms of
22 saying we have a goal, I know we will meet our goal,
23 we've implemented Salesforce, we've got that going,
24 we have the multi-year process in play, that's
25 happening, we're going into the third year of that

1 cycle. Once we hit the third year of that cycle and
2 organizations are coming into the cycle in a way that
3 we only have to review 300 to 400 grants versus
4 1,000, that's going to make a dramatic difference,
5 and I'm very confident that with the team that we
6 have, Salesforce implemented, the ability to review
7 applications in the spring versus the summer, that's
8 really going to be game-changing, and I feel that we
9 have the dynamic team in order to do that.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: You mentioned earlier
12 that the Fiscal Year 2023 fiscal data is available. I
13 know from the cultural community have told me that
14 they could not find it on Open Source. Where we can
15 find the Fiscal Year 2023 data? Do you have like a
16 specific link or location that we could send out or
17 say on the record?

18 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: We're happy to
19 follow up with you after the hearing and provide you
20 the link, but it's available on Open Data.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Okay. Do you think it
22 would be helpful for a task force to be empowered to
23 review the CDF process and provide recommendations?

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I mean we have
25 implemented something very similar to what you're

1 discussing in order to review. This wasn't an
2 independent implementation so there is currently a
3 task force that is reviewing how we are implementing
4 the CDF process. The General Counsel can speak a bit
5 more to that, but, yes, that's in place. Do you want
6 to add to that?
7

8 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Chair, can you
9 please repeat the question?

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Yeah. I said should a
11 task force be empowered to review the CDF process and
12 provide recommendations just for a level of oversight
13 over the process in which it stands?

14 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: We are open to
15 feedback from wherever it may come. I would say that
16 the reforms that were implemented in Fiscal Year 2023
17 were the result of many listening sessions with the
18 community and with the field and that all of the
19 feedback that we received which informed the
20 recommendations at the center of the reforms were
21 critical to making this the best process possible. At
22 this point, we're focused on trying to implement
23 those reforms in the best way possible. We learned
24 lessons from FY-23 that we applied to FY-24, and I
25 know we're going to learn even more from FY-24 that

1 we'll apply to FY-25 so before we do our next full
2 report or listening cycle with the field in the way
3 that we did for the Cultural Plan, I think we want to
4 give these reforms a few years to see how they go,
5 but it is so helpful to always be hearing information
6 from the field and we welcome testimony today and we
7 look forward to hearing all of it.

8
9 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: What about the Mayor's
10 Cultural Advisory Committee? Could they play a role
11 in providing some of that oversight?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MURRAY: We are
13 reconstituting the advisory committee, changing a few
14 members out and adding a few new members, but on the
15 advisory committee for the CDF funding, there is
16 someone from the committee that serves on that task
17 force that oversees the process.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. Arts service
19 organizations are unique from other cultural
20 organizations. Arts service organizations do not
21 produce art but rather they provide a service to arts
22 and cultural organizations, yet they are often lumped
23 into the same pool of applicants and do not receive
24 the same amount of funding as their art/cultural
25 counterparts. In a sector survey, 65 percent of arts

1 service organizations reported a funding cut in CDF
2 this year. Do you know how many arts service
3 organizations applied and how many received cuts in
4 total?
5

6 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Chair Ossé, I
7 don't have the exact number of arts service
8 organizations that received cuts or received
9 funding. What I can tell you is that there are a
10 variety of types of organizations that apply for CDF
11 funding that are not just producing and presenting
12 organizations. Panelists are knowledgeable of the
13 field and they're able to evaluate applications from
14 all that apply, and so we have the tools, the
15 technical where how, and the ability to review all
16 applications including from arts service
17 organizations, and we look forward to partnering
18 with them more in the future.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Are arts service
20 organizations scored on the same rubric as other
21 organizations during the panel process?

22 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Yes, they are.

23 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Pardon?

24 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Yes, they are.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Do you think they
3 should be?

4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I think they should
5 be reviewed by their peers in the same way. While
6 they do do something that's a bit nuanced or
7 different from the other arts organizations in the
8 panel, I believe that they being reviewed by their
9 peers I think is also equally as important.

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: How, in your words or
11 in your recommendations, can arts service
12 organizations make their applications to be as
13 competitive in a field with programmatic
14 organizations?

15 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: I don't have any
16 particular recommendations for arts services
17 organizations as opposed to any others here today.
18 We're happy to follow up with more information, but
19 what I would say is that the best experts to help
20 each individual arts service organization is to
21 contact their assigned program officer to go through
22 their FY-23 application and soon enough to go through
23 their FY-24 application with their program officer to
24 really receive the feedback, to hear what the panel
25 was thinking and saying, and to give them tailored

1 recommendations for FY-25. We would love to see as
2 many arts service organizations as possible receiving
3 robust funding and being able to serve their
4 communities.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: But you three up here
7 build out the infrastructure that these program
8 officers are using, right, as a rubric to decide
9 which organizations are receiving funding or not. Is
10 there any ounce of wisdom that you would give to some
11 of these arts service organizations that?

12 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I would say we do
13 programmatic funding so that's a large part of what
14 the Department of Cultural Affairs is about. I think
15 it's really important for organizations as we spoke
16 about to hit the pillars to make sure that as they're
17 doing this level of service providing that it's
18 accessible, that it's equitable, that they're
19 reaching new audiences, that they are helping in the
20 way of servicing new communities, that there's
21 language accessibility, that there are different ways
22 that they are reaching the disability community, all
23 the ways that you can show that you are really
24 drilling down in terms of finding those new
25 communities or audiences that have never been

1 represented before or that need help or support in a
2 way that we haven't quite discovered. That's really
3 the kind of work that we want to do to make sure that
4 every corner of New York City is being serviced and
5 that some organizations are finding more innovative
6 ways to do that, but also that organizations are
7 taking into account the climate that we're living in
8 right now, that we are faced with so many different
9 challenges in terms of affordability, housing,
10 education, the challenges that we're facing in terms
11 of being a more humane nation in terms of meeting and
12 addressing and servicing our asylum-seekers and
13 making sure that they are part of New York City and
14 that they are welcomed so there are so many things
15 that we can do, but I would say the main thing is
16 really looking at the city and what the challenges
17 are that are facing the arts community in New York
18 City right now and finding innovative ways to address
19 it.
20

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I want to hear from you
22 if you think it would be possible and even something
23 that I wonder if you'd be on board with this, but do
24 you think that arts service organizations should have
25 their own category of funding because their work is

1 not the same as art producing, presenting, and
2 teaching organizations, and they cannot easily answer
3 the same questions on the CDF application?
4

5 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: I will say that I
6 appreciate you asking this question. This has not
7 been a concern that was raised to my attention up to
8 this point so I'll definitely, I'm sure you're asking
9 this because this is something that you're hearing
10 from the field that was not brought to my attention
11 so I look forward to looking more into it and hearing
12 more about this and ways, I mean we always want to
13 discover ways that we can further assist and support
14 the community and, if there's something that we're
15 doing that's not making or addressing the field in
16 the appropriate way, we want to know about it, we
17 want to discuss it, we want to remedy it so that we
18 can provide more effective service to those that come
19 to us for guidance.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I appreciate that. The
21 Mayor announced the 15 percent cut for all agencies.
22 Will this proposed cut impact the CDF process in any
23 way?

24 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: We just recently
25 received a PEG exercise letter maybe just within the

1 last week so we haven't quite reviewed how this is
2 going to impact our agency, but we are going through
3 very uncertain financial times right now, and there's
4 a level of uncertainty that we're all facing
5 currently, but we want to continue to move forward.
6 We're going to do everything we can to make sure that
7 the organizations that apply and come to us for
8 funding, that we are able to continue to provide a
9 robust level of support for art organizations, but,
10 at the same time, we also have to recognize the
11 financial uncertainty that we are walking into at
12 this particular time.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: I want to go back the
15 CDF process. Just a quick question. I've heard that
16 DCLA has refused to give applicants their panel
17 scores, and some of these organizations have reported
18 that it's hard to determine how much panel scores
19 impact their funding decisions. How much do panel
20 scores impact funding allocation decisions for DCLA?

21 GENERAL COUNSEL POLIVY: Panel scores are
22 a critical component of funding. After the reforms so
23 are the bands in which each organization lies. An
24 organization with an annual operating budget of
25 50,000 dollars or less is not going to be eligible

1 for a 200,000-dollar award no matter what so I think
2 these six new bands helped to create a greater degree
3 of certainty and then the scores that you receive
4 help to determine whether you're going to get an
5 award and what that award will be. Having these
6 guidelines with the bands and the anticipated
7 allocations I think really helps to give all our arts
8 organizations a better idea of what their funding
9 might be, and, yes, the scores are a critical piece
10 in determining where they will be within that band
11 and whether they will receive funding.
12

13 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: What is your vision for
14 CDF for the next three years, and how can it achieve
15 greater equity and sustainability for our cultural
16 ecosystem? That's the macro question.

17 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: That's my
18 dissertation right there. I would say that I'm really
19 pleased with the aspect of the multi-year funding to
20 give organizations more stability in terms of being
21 able to plan year-to-year with the multi-year grant.
22 I think that that was huge. I think that there's so
23 many things that I would like to see with CDF. I mean
24 I always put myself in the place of being a founder
25 of the Museum of Contemporary Africa Diaspora and

1 Arts and thinking in that space what it was that I
2 really wanted out of the CDF process, and the first
3 thing that CDF process did for me, which I really
4 kind of I would say in some ways the first thing that
5 I took for granted, especially when I traveled to
6 other countries, the fact that I was 22 years old,
7 out of graduate school with a Masters thesis on how
8 to build Brooklyn's first black art museum that I
9 could apply to the Department of Cultural Affairs to
10 say I want in on this cultural landscape of New York
11 City and I've got a thesis and I want to build a
12 multimillion dollar state-of-the-art black art museum
13 in Brooklyn, and I want the Department of Cultural
14 Affairs to fund this museum upwards of the 50 million
15 dollars that I have stated that it should be funded
16 at and I wanted it right then and that year. 25 years
17 later, the museum is moving into its first real, real
18 permanent home in that way, and it took a long time
19 to get there so the first thing that I'm proud of in
20 this CDF process is that it makes room and it makes
21 space for new ideas, new 22 year olds with graduates
22 theses that want to change the cultural landscape,
23 but just to be frank and honest, I think that the way
24 the process operates, we need to do more to develop
25

1 more public and private partnerships so that there's
2 a higher level of robust funding, and we need to have
3 more foundations and corporations (INAUDIBLE) funding
4 for those 22 year olds and those organizations who
5 created words like diversity, equity, and inclusion.
6 There are cultural institutions in New York City who
7 created BIPOC and POC, and some of them don't even
8 like that terminology, right. They were at the
9 forefront of creating the dynamics that we are living
10 in right now, and so I think the only way that we can
11 really do this is to create more public/private
12 partnerships in order to expand funding for the
13 entire City of New York. I feel that the foundation,
14 cultural, and corporate worlds work in their own
15 silos, and I feel like it's really important that we
16 come together because the crisis that the art
17 community is facing on a lot of levels is that
18 foundations and corporations change their funding
19 parameters and their views on a very regular basis so
20 many foundations, corporations, they're changing
21 their funding missions from the arts to many other
22 different fields, and I think that we should be in
23 tandem because we've built a pie basically of how we
24 fund culture in the City of New York, and it's
25

1 important that we know that we're dependent upon each
2 other for that pie and that we all have to do our
3 part in order to recognize that whatever the funding
4 new thing is that corporations and foundations are
5 saying that they now want to fund, it can all still
6 be through the arts. The arts are education, the arts
7 are healthcare, the arts are social justice, they are
8 all of those things, and so we need to be able to
9 partner in a more robust way to say we have to work
10 together, we have to expand this pie, we have to have
11 similar missions, and we have to be consistent with
12 those missions because we have created a multibillion
13 dollar industry in the City of New York that guess
14 what, everybody's existence is dependent upon this
15 existence together so we've gotta work together to
16 more collaboratively create that.

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Guess what,
19 Commissioner? That was my last question. You're
20 awesome. I'm so grateful for you in the role that
21 you're in. I'm sure you hear that often but you and
22 the folks at DCLA are doing just a fantastic job, and
23 I'm hoping that through this hearing and some of the
24 hearings that we've had prior, some of the advice,
25 ideas, my office is open to continue working on those

1 with you all, and I'm hoping to see some of those
2 come into fruition, but you're doing a fantastic job.

3
4 COMMISSIONER CUMBO: And you are also
5 doing a fantastic job, and I would say I appreciate
6 these hearings because a lot of good ideas come out
7 of them. I don't have the ego of like that's a
8 horrible idea because you said it, like you have
9 great ideas and you come forward with a lot of things
10 that we need to further collaborate on, and I look
11 forward to our part two offline so that we can
12 continue to have these conversations, but I want to
13 acknowledge Helene at this time. Helene has been the
14 CDF Programs Officer. I want to acknowledge her
15 especially because she brought this CDF process
16 through COVID, the pandemic, not operating in person,
17 still keeping this train running while we were facing
18 one of the most uncertain and challenging times. She
19 has also dealt with all of the challenges that we've
20 all dealt with with COVID but also having to take
21 care of her family at this time which is why she is
22 taking time away from this position in order to care
23 for her family, and so she has really kept this train
24 going and made sure that this process was more
25 robust, more equitable, and funding so many new

1 organizations for the first time is really a huge
2 part of her legacy so I just want to say thank you
3 for that all the work that you have done and continue
4 to do and continue to make sure that we are
5 implementing the best, most robust CDF process that,
6 as we continue to collaborate, this is really going
7 to be a model for the rest of the nation, and I want
8 to acknowledge Andrea. Andrea Louie is coming to us
9 as our new Program Officer for CDF. Many of you may
10 know her from the Asian American Arts Alliance. She's
11 our Assistant Commissioner, and I'm happy to have
12 both of our former and current CDF Assistant
13 Commissioners here today, and you all will be hearing
14 a lot more from them in their perspective fields so I
15 want to thank them. I want to thank the whole CDF
16 team for being here today, and I just want to give
17 y'all a round of applause. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. Christina,
20 take it away.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: Thank you,
22 Chair. We will now turn to public testimony.

23 Just a reminder, we will be limiting
24 public testimony today to two minutes each.

25

1
2 For in-person panelists, please come up
3 to the table once your name has been called.

4 Now, I will call our first in-person
5 panel. Lucy Sexton, Fran Garber-Cohen, and Gregory
6 King. You may begin when ready.

7 LUCY SEXTON: Sorry. Since my computer
8 just decided to die, maybe I could get my written
9 testimony back. Sorry about that. Thank you so much.

10 Thank you, Chair Ossé and Members of the
11 City Council, for this important hearing. My name is
12 Lucy Sexton. I'm with the Cultural Advocacy
13 Coalition, New Yorkers for Culture and Arts.

14 The reforms to CDF as we've been hearing
15 were aimed at advancing equity in City funding, and
16 there were many successes on this front. However, an
17 applicant pool of more than as was just heard 1,400,
18 an estimated 35 percent received cut or no funding
19 from CDF. Many of these groups that had long received
20 funding including many invaluable arts service
21 organizations and legacy organizations of color. The
22 fact that this news was delivered in late November,
23 halfway through the Fiscal Year, meant that those
24 organizations were unexpectedly plunged into deficits
25 for FY-23. DCLA stated that this was a pilot year for

1 the reforms, and the community suggested many ways to
2 reform the CDF process to better achieve the agency's
3 goals of equity. Too many of those suggestions were
4 not heeded, and the process continued largely
5 unchanged for the current year. The DCLA must first
6 and foremost have more money to run the agency. So
7 much of what injures smaller culturals and the sector
8 as a whole is due to lack of capacity. With very few
9 program officers handling, as we just heard, 170 each
10 of grantees, it's just not enough. With the funding
11 decision taking far too long and destabilizing the
12 sector by announcing grants far into the year because
13 they do not have the capacity to process them faster,
14 and with a lack of transparency that is exacerbated
15 by lack of staff capacity to provide data and
16 information in a timely manner. The DCLA must also
17 have proper oversight mechanisms by which the
18 community's concerns can be heard and the agency can
19 be held accountable in answering them. There is a
20 nominal Cultural Advisory Committee that can and
21 should be given a clear mandate via legislation from
22 the Council that would require regular meetings with
23 the agency that lead to accountable responses.
24

1
2 Finally, I join my colleagues in asking
3 for the following reforms to CDF. We ask the grant
4 schedule start earlier so the grant letters can go
5 out earlier. We ask that DCLA clearly explain the
6 available funding streams so we can navigate the
7 system. We ask that DCLA create a dedicated fund for
8 arts service organizations. We ask the panel process
9 be restructured. You will get more feedback from
10 people who are on the panel this year. It did not go
11 well. It was short-circuited. We ask that the appeals
12 process be reformed to make it more transparent and
13 accessible for any organization with a legitimate
14 grievance, especially ones that didn't receive any
15 CDF funding who were currently not allowed to appeal
16 as they'd received a couple thousand dollars in
17 Council Member discretionary.

18 I'll stop there, but the full list of
19 recommendations is in my written testimony. Thank
20 you.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you.

22 GREGORY KING: Greetings, Chair Ossé and
23 the Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Gregory
24 King, and I'm the General Manager for Programs and
25 Partnership at Dance NYC, a service organization

1
2 advancing the interests of the dance industry in the
3 metropolitan NYC area. We serve diverse constituents
4 and are supporting the nation's dance capital from
5 classrooms, parks and parkways, to living rooms,
6 studios, and stages.

7 Today, we acknowledge that there are
8 challenges to keeping New York City's dance
9 institutions functioning and capable of providing a
10 fair and equitable wage for its dance workers. I want
11 to be clear. Solutions to these problems require
12 funds like the CDF to responsibly distribute support.
13 To that end, we advocate for an earlier start to the
14 grant schedule with award letters by August 1st with
15 timely payouts. We advocate for the creation of new
16 separate budget lines for dance service and dance
17 education organizations to create specific inroads
18 and to not, I repeat, not compete with presenting and
19 producing entities. We advocate for restructuring of
20 the panel process to a) more successfully distribute
21 funding across the geographic landscape of the city,
22 b) include more time for discussions of applications,
23 and c) ensure that panels are more inter-
24 disciplinarily represented. We advocate for the
25 release of timely and accessible data on the

1
2 distribution of CDF funds awards to facilitate more
3 transparency. We advocate for the prioritizing of
4 communities and projects that are consistently
5 underinvested in the award process. This includes the
6 disabled, immigrants, and BIPOC projects. These
7 recommendations are built on our own experiences and
8 from a 2023 CDF Impact Survey that Dance NYC
9 conducted with Art NY which revealed in part that 26
10 percent of arts service organizations in dance
11 received decrease in funding and 31 percent of art
12 education organizations in dance also received
13 decrease in funding. Dance NYC will continue our
14 commitment to research with the soon-to-be-released
15 Dance Industry Census Finding.

16 I'll close by saying if we weaken our
17 cultural sector, we lose the heart of what makes the
18 city a beacon to those who uphold it, who visit it,
19 and aspire to be a part of it. We ask that you listen
20 to us and our arts and culture colleagues to create a
21 more sustainable and thriving sector. Thank you on
22 behalf of the dance workforce of New York City.

23 FRAN GARBER-COHEN: Good afternoon. Thank
24 you for considering my testimony today. I'm Fran
25 Garber-Cohen, President of Regina Opera, which offers

1 fully staged operas with full orchestra and English
2 supertitles in Sunset Park, an underserved and low-
3 income community as well as many free concerts in
4 public accessible spaces in Brooklyn. We rely heavily
5 on funding from the New York City Department of
6 Cultural Affairs. The funding that we receive through
7 the Cultural Development Fund allows us to provide
8 affordable professional level entertainment in
9 accessible venues for people who may not otherwise
10 attend live performances.
11

12 Today, I join my colleagues in asking for
13 some of the following reforms to the CDF. We ask that
14 the grant schedule start earlier so grant letters can
15 go out August 1st. That will assist us in planning
16 for the upcoming season, and then we ask that the
17 payments are made quickly to help us with cashflow.
18 We also request that the DCLA create a dedicated
19 funding stream for arts service organizations so that
20 they are not competing with arts producing and
21 presenting organizations. We ask that the DCLA re-
22 evaluate the budget-size tiers and awards amounts and
23 create new and narrower tiers so that organizations
24 are competing against peers of similar sizes and
25 award amount are better reflective of the relative

1 size of the organizations in the tiers. We ask that
2 the DCLA use an online tracking system so that
3 organizations can know where their funds are in the
4 process and can better predict when they will arrive.
5 The full list of my recommendations are in my written
6 testimony. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. Lucy, on the
9 Culture at 3 calls, what has been the general
10 feedback on the CDF process from call participants?

11 LUCY SEXTON: Basically the feeling is
12 that it destabilized the sector and, because it came
13 late, it really upended everybody who was sort of
14 anticipating that they might get what they sort of
15 had been getting the last few years. Of course, lots
16 of people were happy, lots of organizations that had
17 long gotten very low level of funding got increase
18 for the first time so that was great, but as Sophia
19 Harrison of Art's House School who got an increase,
20 but she said right at the beginning if you're going
21 to up the level of what the minimum grant is, if
22 you're going to expand the number of people who come
23 in you're going to need more money or it's going to
24 come from somewhere, and it did indeed come from
25 somewhere. It came from cutting organizations that

1 had long received it and were deserving it so I think
2 the main feeling was that it was destabilizing and
3 therefore the good things that it achieved couldn't
4 be celebrated as fully as it might have been because
5 others were injured?
6

7 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: What are some recurring
8 problems and concerns that you hear from participants
9 on Culture at 3?

10 LUCY SEXTON: We hear a lot about
11 transparency and data and ability to how are we
12 navigating this system, right, and while we really
13 appreciated the Commissioner instituting safety net
14 because baselines for some organizations were really
15 cut very low or zeroed out. We don't know is that
16 going to be there next year, what will be there next
17 year, what should we be advocating for, how are these
18 different decisions made so just wanting to have
19 more, and we heard today for the first time where
20 those 125 organizations were from, and we heard oh,
21 they were mostly from Manhattan and not even half of
22 them were organizations of color so this is the type
23 of data and information that we need to know and so
24 there's a certain frustration with that.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you for that,
3 Lucy. Mr. King, do you feel that arts service
4 organizations currently have a competitive chance at
5 receiving CDF grants.

6 GREGORY KING: Thank you for the question.
7 What's really interesting is I do believe there
8 should be a distinction. This idea of serving,
9 educating, presenting, and producing, and we're not
10 clear and intentional about ensuring that these
11 delineations are spoken about and spoken to in terms
12 of how the funding is distributed and allocated.
13 Commissioner Cumbo made reference to the fact that
14 the DCLA was, not intentional, that wasn't her words,
15 but something about this idea of them being an
16 organization that funds producing houses and it
17 shows. It shows in how the funds are allocated, and
18 so I do believe that service organizations are
19 sometimes pushed aside and marginalized, already
20 marginalized as dance being a marginal sector.

21 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: Thank you to
23 this panel. Our next panel will be Kimberly Olsen,
24 Christopher Leon Johnson, and Myra Hernandez. You may
25 begin when ready.

1
2 KIMBERLY OLSEN: Thank you to Chair Chi
3 Osse and fellow Committee Members as well as to the
4 Council Staff for your passion, your leadership, and
5 support for arts culture and arts education in New
6 York City. My name is Kimberly Olsen, and I'm honored
7 to be the Executive Director of the New York City
8 Arts in Education Roundtable. We are a grassroots
9 arts service organization working with thousands of
10 artists, educators, and cultural organizations each
11 year to improve and advance arts ed across the city.
12 The Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural
13 Development Fund are critical resources for New York
14 City's arts education community. For many
15 organizations in our membership, the impact of CDF
16 and cultural initiative funding enables organizations
17 to provide critical services to young New Yorkers in
18 every neighborhood across all five boroughs. We often
19 say at the Roundtable it starts with the arts, and
20 those afterschool programs, field trips, arts
21 partnerships, team programs, and more that are funded
22 by CDF seed and grow the next generation of arts
23 workers and audiences. I will say for our
24 organization in particular funding from CDF was the
25 first funding that we ever got when we became a non-

1 profit back in 1988, and that 5,000 dollars
2 transformed our organization, and for much of my
3 organization's history we were (INAUDIBLE) budget
4 under 250,000 dollars and only recently were able to
5 go beyond that threshold due in part to the first-
6 time multi-year funding we received through CDF last
7 year. With these pathways in mind, while the
8 Roundtable applauds the agency for taking these steps
9 towards centering equity, diversity, and
10 accessibility in its application process, we
11 acknowledge that this work is and will be ongoing and
12 should be responsive to the needs of the field as
13 well as to the students and constituents that we all
14 serve. I join my colleagues in asking for the
15 following reforms to CDF. We ask that the grant
16 schedule starts earlier so that grant letters can go
17 out August 1st to better align with school year and
18 fiscal year dates. We ask that DCLA clearly explain
19 available funding streams and how best to navigate
20 the system to be considered for them. Many within our
21 community are quite eager to learn about and be
22 considered for these streams, yet I so often get
23 emails that folks don't even know where to start and
24 could be a pathway for a partnership with arts
25

1 service organizations to better disseminate this
2 information. Lastly, I ask that DCLA create a
3 dedicated funding stream for arts service
4 organizations so that we are not competing with arts
5 producing and presenting organizations. Thank you so
6 much for your time and consideration.
7

8 MYRA HERNANDEZ: Good afternoon. I would
9 like to thank Chair Ossé and the Committee Members
10 for the opportunity to present testimony about the
11 Cultural Development Fund. My name is Myra Hernandez,
12 and I'm the Director of Programs and Curriculum
13 Development at Cool Culture. I am submitting this
14 testimony on behalf of Cool Culture and the community
15 of 50,000 families that access the City's rich
16 cultural resources through our arts and cultural
17 programs. With almost 25 years of BIPOC leadership,
18 Cool Culture was founded to correct the historic
19 disparities in how and which communities are able to
20 access cultural resources needed to ensure that they
21 can engage individuals and collectively and create a
22 practice. Our staff of 13 Cool Culture team members
23 are black, Latine, East and South Asian American,
24 LGBTQ+ and allies. Cool Culture's communities consist
25 of 50,000 families who reflect the cultural diversity

1 of our nation, 83 percent of our families are BIPOC,
2 47 percent speak a primary language other than
3 English, and the majority face economic injustice.
4 Over 1,000 educators and administrators from over 450
5 schools, early learning programs, and community-based
6 organizations and hundreds of cultural workers,
7 museum administrators, artists, and scientists from
8 90 of New York City's most celebrated museums,
9 historical societies, botanical gardens, and zoos.

11 I am here today to speak on behalf of
12 continued capital investment in arts and culture with
13 the added goal of moving towards achieving equity in
14 New York City's cultural funding. The presence of
15 robust cultural organizations and assets has been
16 proven to improve outcomes in education, mental
17 health, community strength, public safety, and aging
18 as well as decreased youth involvement with the
19 justice system. A landmark 2017 study by the School
20 of Social Policy and Practice at the University of
21 Pennsylvania examined New York City's neighborhood
22 cultural ecosystem and found that cultural resources
23 are significantly linked to a higher quality of life,
24 particularly in low- and moderate-income
25 neighborhoods across New York City that had the least

1 cultural resources. Along with these positive social
2 impacts, arts and culture have been critical to New
3 York City's economic recovery post-pandemic. Cool
4 Culture urges the City Council to make the following
5 recommendations. To make the existing Cultural
6 Advisory Council be a true oversight arm for DCLA,
7 that it be supported with legislation requiring DCLA
8 to meet with the Council several times a year, and
9 that those meetings be made public. That the panel
10 process be restructured to allow for diversification
11 of panel makeup with regard to representation across
12 boroughs to ensure geographic distribution and racial
13 diversity. A return to inclusion of Council Staff on
14 panels for better transparency, and to increase the
15 stipend to ensure a more robust and diverse panel.
16 That the appeals process be reformed to be made more
17 transparent and accessible for any organization with
18 a legitimate grievance. That DCLA use an online
19 tracking system so that organizations can know where
20 their funds are in the process and can predict when
21 they will arrive. Increase DCLA staffing and funding
22 to provide the agency with the bandwidth to provide
23 assistance to funding applicants and grantees to
24 allow for more transparency in the funding process
25

1 and currently only 6 percent of the DCLA budget
2 covers direct agency expenses. With the goals of
3 increasing equity, allow appeals from orgs that got
4 zero funding from the CDF and allow smaller unfunded
5 orgs get access to feedback on their application and
6 an opportunity to have a focused category fund to
7 fund additional funds for targeted orgs based on
8 budget size, BIPOC leadership, etc. towards equity
9 objectives.
10

11 Many worth cultural organizations face
12 challenges to our survival, especially those
13 organizations led by or serving black, indigenous
14 people of color, immigrant, LGBTQIA+, low-income,
15 disabled, and older New Yorkers, and we strongly urge
16 you to ensure the necessary support for arts and
17 culture and to include the priorities of cultural
18 organizations, particularly BIPOC-led institutions
19 that have deep relationships with historically
20 marginalized communities in New York City. This
21 support will enable Cool Culture and other arts and
22 culture community members to continue providing
23 critical programs as our communities struggle through
24 the City's recovery phase. Thank you.
25

1
2 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Good afternoon,
3 Chair. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson, and I
4 want to advocate for the resolution by Julie Menin
5 for a Bicycle Day. First off, we need to really
6 celebrate the success of the bikes that's been
7 occurring over the city with the bike lanes and the
8 multiple events that's been occurring because of
9 bicycles. I know that you, yourself, Brother Ossé,
10 been riding around all over New York City promoting
11 the bike agenda and I really love it, bro. I love it,
12 IG, what you do with your stuff, and I hope that
13 every person in the City Council votes yes for the
14 resolution for World Bicycle Day.

15 I'm going to say one more thing. I know
16 this is kind of off topic, but we have to give our
17 condolences and our get well soon to Jacob Priley who
18 was unfortunately hit by a car while riding a bicycle
19 on Union and 5th Avenue, and what we need to do, I
20 know this is going to be a long time is we need to
21 advocate for helmet mandates in New York City because
22 this is really needed. We give out too many helmets
23 to people to ride, but I think we need a mandate for
24 everybody to starting riding in New York City because
25 we can have a resolution all we want for Bicycle Day,

1 but, if we don't promote the safety, riding the
2 bicycle is not going to do anything. We can have a
3 World Bicycle Day, World Wheels Days, it doesn't
4 matter. We need to start promoting safety for riding
5 bicycles. I know you're the Cultural Chair so you
6 don't have no real oversight of it, but you have a
7 bully pulpit, you have a powerful bully pulpit, and,
8 Mr. Ossé, you should be pushing for a helmet mandate
9 in New York City. That's it. Thank you.
10

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: Thank you to
12 this panel. Our next panel will be Lisa Gold, Kate
13 Madigan, and H. Harvey.

14 LISA GOLD: Good afternoon, Chair Ossé.
15 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I'm
16 Lisa Gold, the Executive Director of the Asian
17 American Arts Alliance, a 40-year-old arts service
18 organization that works to ensure greater
19 representation, equity, and opportunities for Asian
20 American artists and arts organizations across all
21 disciplines.

22 I am here because I want to voice my
23 support for the Department of Cultural Affairs as
24 well as my support for your transparency bill. I echo
25 many of my colleagues requests for disclosure of

1 funding streams, a separate ASO funding stream, and
2 earlier award notices.
3

4 I want to say I applaud DCLA's efforts to
5 effect greater equity in the distribution of funds
6 and, of course, the number of small organizations
7 that received increases in their grant awards last
8 Fiscal Year. However, the actual dollar amounts need
9 to be made public in a timely manner so that the
10 agency can be held accountable to gauge the efficacy
11 of their reforms. With all due respect to Lance, I
12 just checked Open Data, and I could not find FY-23 on
13 the DCLA grantees so there's FY-12 through '22 but I
14 could not find FY-23. We know that 19 percent of DCLA's
15 budget is dedicated to the CDF, which is disbursed
16 among 1,070 organizations while over 51 percent of
17 the budget is allocated to 34 CIGs, not a single one
18 of which is AAPI-led or serving, and I did some math
19 which shows that AAPI-dedicated cultural
20 organizations are 0.73 percent of DCLA grantees while
21 our community represents 18 percent of the city
22 population, but I shouldn't have to do that math.
23 It's imperative that DCLA shares that information and
24 shares their data so that we can ensure that our
25 taxpayer funds are indeed equitably serving all of

1 our communities. Just full disclosure, we are one of
2 the ASOs that received a reduction in our grant
3 award, just wanted to share that.

4
5 KATE MADIGAN: Good afternoon, Chair Ossé.
6 Thank you so much for your time. My name is Kate
7 Madigan, Government Affairs Coordinator at the Public
8 Theater.

9 New York City is considered the cultural
10 capital of the world, and, as such, it is deeply
11 intertwined with many aspects of daily life and the
12 systems that support it. Cultural institution group
13 members and Cultural Development Fund recipients
14 often partner with each other with countless other
15 industries across the city including hotels,
16 libraries, community centers, homeless centers, and
17 more to create a more equitable and vibrant New York
18 City. This makes it all the more surprising that
19 cultural funding represents less than 1 percent of
20 the City's budget. It is no wonder that the field is
21 struggling to serve its communities and artists. The
22 Public Theater is a member of the Cultural
23 Institution Group and, speaking on behalf of CIGs, I
24 can say we were concerned when we learned about how
25 the changes to the administration of the Cultural

1
2 Development Fund affected many of our peers and the
3 artists and communities they support. We appreciate
4 that DCLA heard the feedback of the cultural
5 community about the need for multi-year grant
6 commitments and that, to some extent, this guided
7 aspects of their administration of the program.
8 However, the implementation of the plan stumbled when
9 there was not enough adequate consultation with the
10 affected party. We've seen this repeated in the FY-24
11 budget. Without warning, CIGs were told after the
12 budget was passed in July that it would have to
13 absorb a 5-million cut to its funding. Despite these
14 frustrations, we also understand that DCLA is being
15 forced to make tough decisions as it operates with
16 limited resources. They too are a part of the
17 ecosystem in which we all exist. This is all the more
18 concerning amidst the looming committal of 15 percent
19 PEG cut that has been proposed to take place over the
20 six to nine months. These cuts on top of the changes
21 CDF and CIGs have already experienced would be
22 devastating for many cultural organizations.
23 Particularly in this perilous moment, we see cultural
24 organizations being forced to cut staff and
25 programming as they struggle to stay afloat under the

1 great economic duress we face. When we all support
2 each other, the entire ecosystem thrives, but when
3 support is taken away, it quickly deteriorates. We
4 ask the Council to continue its focus on ensuring the
5 entire ecosystem has the support it needs. Thank you
6 so much.

7
8 H. HARVEY: Good afternoon and thank you
9 all for having me today. My name is H. Harvey, and
10 I'm the Director of Marketing at Hook Arts Media, a
11 non-profit arts and education organization based in
12 Red Hook, Brooklyn. For more than 30 years, we have
13 worked with New York City educators to reform an
14 educational system that has largely failed mostly
15 BIPOC students. We have helped open three transfer
16 high schools, designing culturally responsive arts
17 programs that increase student engagement, and
18 introduced students to pathways to higher education
19 and career planning. We serve between 700 and 1,000
20 young New Yorkers each year, the vast majority of
21 whom are BIPOC and are deeply subject to economic
22 injustice, and we disrupt gatekeeping in one of the
23 City's most lucrative, competitive, and gatekept
24 industries and, to offer some transparency, I am also
25 representing an organization that took a budget cut

1 this year. We've distributed more than 90,000 dollars
2 in stipends to emerging film-makers, again coming
3 from deeply economically unjust circumstances, and we
4 are grateful to the Department of Cultural Affairs
5 for supporting community arts, media, and education
6 for young New Yorkers. BIPOC and impoverished young
7 people often face disproportionate obstacles to
8 attain educational and career success, not the least
9 of which include the City's extreme cost of living in
10 addition to the cost of materials and training
11 programs, and it is the time to invest in the ever-
12 changing needs of the next generation of community
13 members, movers, and shakers, but I do join my
14 colleagues in asking for some reforms to the CDF
15 including we ask that DCLA clearly explain the
16 available funding streams within CDF and how best to
17 navigate the system to be considered for them. We ask
18 that DCLA created a dedicated funding stream for arts
19 service organizations so that they are not competing
20 with arts producing and presenting organizations. We
21 ask that DCLA re-evaluate the budget size tiers and
22 award amount and create new and narrower tiers,
23 particularly within the very broad 500,000 to 2.9
24 million dollar tier. We ask that DCLA use an online
25

1 tracking system so that organizations can know where
2 their funds are in the process and can better predict
3 when they will arrive. We ask that organizations
4 could accept or decline all but the first year of
5 multi-year grants and simply reapply in the outyears,
6 and we, of course, request increased staffing and
7 funding. We are in a very critical juncture in the
8 arts sector, and we should not be facing additional
9 and undue pressures. Thank you all.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. See you
12 tonight, right? MoCADA.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: Thank you to
14 this panel. Our last in-person panel will be Martha
15 Ayon.

16 MARTHA AYON: Thank you to the Chair, Chi
17 Ossé, and the rest of the City Council. My name is
18 Martha Ayon, and I'm the Government Affairs
19 Consultant for Museum Hue, a member-driven
20 organization dedicated to empowering black,
21 indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and all people of color
22 through research, advocacy, education, and community
23 engagement. I'm testifying on behalf of a coalition
24 of over 400 arts entities throughout our Hue Arts New
25 York City initiative, representing BIPOC art entities

1 across the five boroughs. We are not an agency, not a
2 union, but a collectively bargaining for greater
3 racial equity and arts funding. I join my colleagues
4 working across the creative disciplines throughout
5 the city in thanking the Committee for their
6 leadership. We fully support Chair Osse's bill
7 regarding distribution of arts funding. Arts
8 organizations like Weeksville Heritage Center in
9 Brooklyn, Clemente in Lower East Side, the National
10 Black Theater in Harlem, the Bronx Academy of Art,
11 Dance, Think Chinatown, and other community-centered
12 BIPOC cultural entities are often overlooked while
13 greater favor and funding is disproportionately given
14 to cultural institution groups, CIGs, and other
15 predominantly white institutions. What message is the
16 City sending when the white art spaces are far more
17 resourced to showcase and commission works by black
18 and brown artists who are often first nurtured,
19 mentored, and exhibited at insufficiently funded
20 black and brown cultural institutions. The success of
21 the DEAI in the arts shouldn't just be having black
22 and brown bodies in white spaces but the
23 sustainability and thrive-ability of black and brown
24 institutions. The arts funding in the City not unique
25

1 or an outlier in this nation's increasing racial
2 disparities for providing equitable financial support
3 for communities of color. We not long ago saw the
4 near closure of Weeksville in Brooklyn and the
5 ongoing struggles of the Sandy Ground in Staten
6 Island, two historical black communities and
7 institutions. To revive the City's arts and cultural
8 environment, we are looking to regrant equitable
9 funding to BIPOC entities across the city, provide
10 professional development, advocate for city and state
11 policies, and assist BIPOC arts entities in gaining
12 long-term spaces to operate. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you. Museum Hue
15 is a critical part of the Hue Arts Initiative which
16 addresses and recommends policy changes to bring more
17 equity for black, indigenous, Asian, and Latinx
18 artists and cultural organizations. What more does
19 DCLA need to do to ensure more equity for BIPOC
20 organizations through the CDF process? I know you
21 listed out some, but if you could reiterate for the
22 record.

23 H. HARVEY: Just to reiterate, we are
24 looking for more funding for more BIPOC arts groups
25 and institutions. We have felt that our organizations

1 or our groups have been underfunded for hundreds of
2 years, and at this point with the dwindling black
3 population in New York City it is imperative that our
4 black institutions are fully funded and also help
5 preserve the history of what African Americans have
6 done in New York City.
7

8 The other challenge that we're facing is
9 space. With an increase in pricing, our entities are
10 struggling to keep up with rent and also find space
11 to create art so we're looking not only to support
12 your bill but more work in expanding funding,
13 especially to tackle what has happened from COVID.
14 COVID has greatly our arts organizations, and we have
15 not been able to not only hire but also provide the
16 programming at the level before COVID.

17 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you.

18 H. HARVEY: Thank you so much.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: That wraps
20 up our in-person panelists. If we inadvertently
21 missed anyone who would like to testify in person,
22 please visit the Sergeant's table and complete a
23 witness slip now.

24 We will now turn to our virtual
25 panelists. Once your name is called, a Member of our

1 Staff will unmute you, and the Sergeant-at-Arms will
2 set the timer and give you the go-ahead to begin.
3 Please wait for the Sergeant to announce that you may
4 begin before delivering your testimony.
5

6 Our first virtual panel will be Talia
7 Corren, Potri Queno Nur, and David Shane.

8 Talia, you may begin when the Sergeant
9 starts your clock.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

11 TALIA CORREN: Good afternoon. My name is
12 Talia Corren, and I'm the Co-Executive Director of
13 the Alliance of Resident Theatres New York, also
14 known as ART New York. As an arts service
15 organization with a five-decade history, we are the
16 go-to resource for over 425 theater companies plus an
17 additional 150 individual artist members. ART New
18 York members live and work in every borough in New
19 York City, provide services to New Yorkers in every
20 ZIP code, and are a driver for jobs, economic
21 activity, and the cultural activity that defines our
22 great city. Furthermore, our members represent every
23 identity, from collectives of disabled artists like
24 CO/LAB and Epic Players to multilingual and
25 culturally specific companies like Pregones/Puerto

1 Rican Traveling Theater and Ma-Yi. Artists,
2 administrators, audiences, and communities of every
3 experience are served by ART New York. We partner
4 with both private and public funders to operate
5 regrant programs that redistribute much-needed funds
6 to many of the city's smallest and most emergent
7 organizations. We operate subsidized office,
8 rehearsal, and performance spaces in three locations
9 across Manhattan and Brooklyn, and our workforce
10 development and professional education services
11 encompass everything from training theatrical ASL
12 interpreters to sexual harassment training to support
13 for building your first board and succession
14 planning. Our services are vital to the still-ongoing
15 recovery of our sector. Furthermore, ART New York and
16 our related network of art service organizations
17 including our friends at Asian American Alliance for
18 the Arts and Dance NYC who you heard from previously
19 are proud to be partners to the DCLA and amplifiers
20 of taxpayer investment in the arts. ASOs act as a
21 multiplier for public investment, ensuring that
22 organizations, theater makers, artisan, and audiences
23 across the ecosystem benefit from this City's
24 commitment to a vibrant and healthy arts sector. When
25

1
2 ASO funding is cut, the impacts are felt throughout
3 the field, often impacting those organizations most
4 in need of the stabilizing impact of our work.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

6 TALIA CORREN: The support of this
7 Council, the Administration, and the DCLA that the
8 ASO organizations are recognized for the vital role
9 we play. Thank you so much for your time.

10 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: Potri, you
12 may begin when the Sergeant starts your clock.

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

14 POTRI RANKA MANIS QUENO NUR: Good
15 afternoon, everyone. (INAUDIBLE) honoring
16 Commissioner Laurie Cumbo and Council Member Ossé for
17 this event that we have today (INAUDIBLE). My name is
18 Potri Ranka Manis. I am the Arts Director and Founder
19 of Kinding Sindaw Heritage Foundation. This is a 30-
20 year-old organization that was founded by (INAUDIBLE)
21 and Filipino who was trying to assert, reclaim,
22 preserve the indigenous heritage of the Southern
23 Philippines. This is the only remnant of our
24 civilization going back to the 14th century and
25 reminders that we have very strong ties with USA that

1 is not very much acknowledged. Through our art, we
2 would like to put it out in our production. Dance,
3 theater, martial arts, and also related to the rest
4 of the diaspora of the immigrants and people of color
5 in Queens and the rest of the boroughs. We're trying
6 our best to be present in the milieu of artist, of
7 art and culture in New York City. We are still very
8 much invisible. We know very much the Filipino is in
9 the streamline of being actors and artists, most
10 produced non-Filipino history (INAUDIBLE) so we work
11 on mental health. Our repertory and workshops, we
12 reach out to the communities and bring mental health,
13 wellness, and presence of who are we Asians in
14 relation to our history and..

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

17 POTRI RANKA MANIS QUENO NUR: Time is off?

18 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: You can finish.

19 POTRI RANKAM ANIS QUENO NUR: Okay.

20 Together with my colleagues today who witnessed, the
21 panel process, we request DCLA to have a panel
22 process with minimum clearance of panel meetings as
23 has been the case previously to allow for proper
24 discussion, consideration, and vetting. The diversity
25 panel makeup with regards to distribution across

1
2 borough racial diversity, return to inclusion of
3 Council Staff on panels to reflect system on check
4 and balances. Funding stream, we would like to have a
5 reform on clearly defining funding streams, looking
6 at art services which is non-producing organization
7 need to have their own funding stream application
8 criteria as their service is not public presentation
9 the panelists can see. Create more budget bands to
10 prevent organizations with very different budgets
11 being compared. Multi-year grants, organizations cut
12 more than 40 percent in their multi-year grant should
13 have other funds that they can apply for, the way
14 safety net worked this year. Transparency on the
15 decision of single and multi-year grants allocated,
16 renewal application for multi-year grants simplified.
17 The goals of increasing equity, allow appeals from
18 organizations that got zero from CDF regardless of
19 whatever they received in the discretionary dollars.
20 Allow smaller unfunded organizations get access to
21 feedback on their application. Cultural equity funds,
22 opportunity to have focused category funds toward
23 additional funding for target organizations.
24 Increasing (INAUDIBLE) count to fully show
25 organizational program. More money for the

1 (INAUDIBLE) increase staff. Addressing transparency
2
3 in the process of decision-making. Advance
4 communication with the organization about funding
5 decision. We can work towards a timeline for applying
6 that is more in line with the programming and fiscal
7 year. Thank you so much. The rest of my testimony
8 will be submitted in the written form and thank you
9 for bearing with me in my, I'm not a first English
10 language speaker as an indigenous woman.

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: David, you
13 may begin when the Sergeant starts your clock.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

15 DAVID SHANE: Thank you so much. My name
16 is David Shane, and I'm the Director of Program
17 Services at the Alliance of Resident Theatres New
18 York. ART New York provides services for over 425
19 theatre companies and a growing number of individual
20 artists, and our members live and work in every
21 neighborhood of New York City. They are employers and
22 arts workers, they are key economic drivers for the
23 city, and they produce work for a variety of
24 culturally specific communities as diverse as our
25 city.

1
2 As Chair Ossé has already mentioned
3 today, arts service organizations have a unique role
4 to play in the City's cultural ecosystem, and I
5 thank him for (INAUDIBLE) the concept of establish a
6 separate funding category for ASOs in the CDF
7 process, which is a reform I join others here today
8 in requesting. ASOs have a unique view of the
9 challenges facing the sector. For the performing arts
10 sector, the COVID crisis is far from over. Audiences
11 have adopted new habits and are not attending the
12 theatre at 2019 levels, and increased expenses for
13 labor and resources has led some to make the
14 difficult decision to cut programming that has been
15 vital to thousands of New Yorkers. Because these
16 challenges are as acute as they've ever been, it's
17 incredibly important that partnership with City
18 government is transparent, consistent, and clear so
19 in addition to recommending a dedicated funding
20 stream, I'd like to highlight the importance of
21 transparency in the funding process so that hundreds
22 of theatre companies who depend on CDF to provide
23 their services to New Yorkers can have clarity about
24 how they access those funds. We think that hearings
25 like this one are a valuable first step, and I echo

1 the request that the Cultural Advisory Council be a
2 true oversight arm for DCLA and that it be supported
3 with legislation requiring DCLA to meet with the
4 Council several times a year and that those meetings
5 be made public. We also call for the timely release
6 of accessible data about applicants to and awards
7 made through the CDF process.
8

9 ART New York is honored to be a valued
10 partner to thousands of art workers across our city,
11 and we look forward to working closely with the
12 Department of Cultural Affairs and the Council to
13 support the sector moving forward. On behalf of our
14 board and staff and the thousands of arts workers we
15 represent, we are grateful for this Council, the
16 office of Council Member Ossé, the Speaker's office,
17 and Commissioner Cumbo for their time and
18 championship, especially in this moment of
19 uncertainty for our field. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL YELLAMATY: That
22 concludes this panel. I'll just do a last call for
23 those who registered to testify on Zoom, Frampton
24 Tolbert (phonetic), Sherrill Warfield (phonetic), and
25 Amanda Sowen (phonetic).

1
2 If we inadvertently missed anyone who
3 would like to testify virtually, please use the raise
4 hand function in Zoom.

5 Seeing no one else, I'd like to note that
6 written testimony which will be reviewed in full by
7 Committee Staff may be submitted to the record up to
8 72 hours after the close of the hearing by emailing
9 it to testimony@council.nyc.gov, and I'll turn it
10 back to the Chair for closing statements.

11 CHAIRPERSON OSSE: Thank you, everyone.
12 This hearing is adjourned.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date September 28, 2023