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THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

BRIEFING PAPER OF THE HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION

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**COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS**

Hon. Jimmy Van Bramer, Chair

September 27, 2018

**OVERSIGHT: Culture Pass and Partnerships between New York City's Cultural
Organizations and Public Libraries**

INTRODUCTION

On Thursday, September 27, 2018, the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations, chaired by Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, will conduct an oversight hearing on *Culture Pass and Partnerships between New York City's Cultural Organizations and Public Libraries*. Witnesses invited to testify include the New York City ("NYC" or "City") Department of Cultural Affairs, members of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG),¹ the Brooklyn Public Library, Queens Library and the New York Public Library as well as various arts and cultural groups and organizations, academic institutions and other interested parties.

BACKGROUND

NYC Department of Cultural Affairs

The NYC Department of Cultural Affairs ("DCLA" or "Department"), the largest municipal funder of culture in the country, is committed to providing access to art and culture for all New Yorkers.² DCLA promotes access to the arts and ensures that the arts remain a central feature of civic and economic life in the City by providing support, advocacy and technical assistance to the City's cultural community.³ Non-profit cultural institutions and programs are one of the leading economic engines of the City; they generate billions in taxable revenue, provide unparalleled cultural and educational opportunities for both children and adults throughout the five

¹ As described further in this briefing paper, the CIG is comprised of 33 organizations that include art and natural history museums, historical societies, theaters, concert halls, performing art centers, botanical gardens and zoos. Member institutions operate as nonprofit organizations whose mandate is to provide cultural services to all New Yorkers. See Department of Cultural Affairs, *Cultural Institutions Group (CIG)* (last visited Sep. 24, 2018), available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dcla/cultural-funding/city-owned-institutions.page>.

² New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, *New York City Department of Cultural Affairs* (last visited Sep. 24, 2018), available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dcla/index.page>.

³ New York City Council, *Preliminary Budget Hearing Committee Report – Department of Cultural Affairs* (March 16, 2018), available at <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=AO&ID=58272&GUID=3a3e5a8d-d7b0-4d39-a51d->.

boroughs and are a major employer of tens of thousands of New Yorkers.⁴ Ninety-nine percent of DCLA's budget is funded by the City; however, only five percent of the Department's total budget covers direct agency expenses.⁵ The remaining 95 percent of the Department's budget supports the CIG,⁶ 33 member institutions that exist in a public-private partnership with the City,⁷ and up to 950 other arts organizations.⁸ DCLA and the organizations it works with have engaged in numerous partnerships with the City over the years.⁹ To formalize and bolster this commitment and history, in May 2015, the Council enacted legislation requiring DCLA to produce NYC's first comprehensive cultural plan, CreateNYC.¹⁰ Initially published in the spring of 2017,¹¹ and incorporating feedback from nearly 2,000 NYC residents, CreateNYC is a long-term blueprint for supporting arts and culture across all five boroughs.¹² CreateNYC also includes information on partnership opportunities between the library branches and arts organizations.¹³

NYC Public Libraries

Library services in NYC are provided through three independent systems: the Brooklyn

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*; see also Broadway World News Desk, *City Announces Over \$40 Million For Local Arts And Cultural Organizations* (Dec. 21, 2017), available at <https://www.broadwayworld.com/article/City-Announces-Over-40-Million-For-Local-Arts-And-Cultural-Organizations-20171221>.

⁹ New York City Council, *supra* note 3.

¹⁰ Local Law 46/2015

¹¹ New York City CreateNYC, *Create NYC: A Cultural Plan for All New Yorkers* (last visited Sep. 21, 2018), available at www.CreateNYC.org.

¹² New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, *Create NYC: A Cultural Plan for All New Yorkers* (last visited Sep. 21, 2018), available at https://createnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/CreateNYC_Report_FIN.pdf

¹³ For example, the basic framework for the CIG public-private partnerships between New York City and its 33 cultural institutions was established in the 19th century. The State of New York passed legislation that incorporated the institutions and authorized the City to build facilities and lease them and the city- owned parkland on which they sat to private institutions. The partnership stipulated that the City would provide these institutions with land, facilities, and funds for maintenance and security. The private institutions in turn would develop specialized cultural services and collections which would be available to the general public. DCLA continues to collaborates with various city agencies in providing services for New Yorkers in all five boroughs through programs like NYCxDESIGN (NYC by Design), a five-borough, multiday event that serves as an annual exposition to celebrate New York City's contributions to and embrace of design and help leverage the sector's enormous potential for economic growth, and funding organizations through the Cultural Development Plan.

Public Library (BPL),¹⁴ the Queens Borough Public Library (QL),¹⁵ and the New York Public Library (NYPL).¹⁶ These systems operate 217 local library branches throughout the City,¹⁷ including four research library centers in Manhattan.¹⁸ BPL and QL provide services in their respective boroughs, while the NYPL serves the boroughs of Manhattan, Bronx and Staten Island.¹⁹ Each public library branch offers free and open access to books, periodicals, electronic resources and non-print materials;²⁰ provides a variety of services and resources to the community²¹ and partakes in a wide range of initiatives, including partnerships with cultural institutions and DCLA.²²

Partnerships between Arts & Cultural Institutions & Organizations and Public Libraries

Under threat of becoming irrelevant in the digital age, the City's libraries have shifted from the traditional focus on circulation.²³ This includes the addition of weekend and evening hours, the hiring of more librarians and staff and the expansion of library catalogues of classes and services to include collaborations and partnerships with art organizations.²⁴ Such collaborations and partnerships include the following:

¹⁴ See Brooklyn Public Library (last visited Sep. 25, 2018), available at <https://www.bklynlibrary.org/>.

¹⁵ See Queens Borough Public Library (last visited Sep. 25, 2018), available at <http://www.queenslibrary.org/>.

¹⁶ See New York Public Library (last visited Sep. 25, 2018), available at <https://www.nypl.org/>.

¹⁷ NYPL includes 88 branch libraries in the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island, BPL consists of 60 branch libraries in the borough of Brooklyn, including a Business Library and Central Library, and QBPL consists of 65 service locations, including 61 community libraries, the Central Library, seven Adult Learning Centers and two Family Literacy Centers. See New York City Council, *Preliminary Budget Hearing Committee Report – Libraries* (Mar. 16, 2018), available at <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5875697&GUID=7372451F-9D08-46C3-96B8-A8E44D40D68B>.

¹⁸ These four research libraries are the: Library for the Performing Arts located at Lincoln Center, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture located in Harlem, Science, Industry and Business Library in Midtown, and the Steven A. Schwarzman Library (a.k.a. Main Library) at 5th Avenue and 42nd Street.

¹⁹ See Keith Williams, *Different Boroughs, Different Library Systems*, New York Times (Dec. 7, 2017), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/07/nyregion/different-boroughs-different-library-systems.html>.

²⁰ New York City Council, *supra* note 17.

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

CreateNYC Library Partnerships. Per CreateNYC, DCLA provided \$85,000 to each of the three library systems in fiscal year (FY) 2018 for programming that included:²⁵

- *Traditions in Transition*, which was hosted by the BPL. This partnership between the BPL and the Brooklyn Arts Council documented folk and traditional artists performing, demonstrating important traditional art forms from underrepresented cultural communities;²⁶
- *Notes from the Reading Life*, which was hosted by the NYPL. This partnership between the NYPL and the National Book Foundation consisted of a discussion series featuring “non-literary” celebrities including athletes, chefs and actors who discussed their connection to reading and identified a book they recommend to neighborhood residents, copies of which were provided to attendees;²⁷ and
- *What a Wonderful World*, hosted by QL. This partnership between the QBPL and the Louis Armstrong House Museum brought Louis Armstrong’s legacy to library branches throughout the borough through a series of cultural events surrounding the 50th anniversary of Armstrong’s recording of the song *What a Wonderful World*.²⁸

Public Artist in Residence Programs, which includes Bryan Doerries’s Theater of War. This partnership between BPL and DCLA, part of a larger Artist in Residence Program,²⁹ placed theater artist Bryan Doerries in residence with the NYC Department of Veteran Services, where his company, Theater of War, brought productions of Greek plays to local library branches and other venues across the city to explore trauma and build community connections.³⁰

Partnerships between Arts Organizations and Libraries. These partnerships included, for example, Spaceworks @ Williamsburgh, a partnership between BPL and Spaceworks at the

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ See Brooklyn Public Library, *supra* note 14.

²⁷ See New York Public Library, *supra* note 16.

²⁸ See Queens Borough Public Library, *supra* note 15.

²⁹ New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, *Public Artists in Residence (PAIR)* (last visited Sep. 25, 2018), available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dcla/publicart/pair.page>.

³⁰ *Id.*

Williamsburgh Library, which featured rehearsal space and visual art studios located on the second floor of the library and in the heart of Williamsburg.³¹ Public programming regularly invites the local community into the space.³²

Cultural Institution Group Co-Locations. Additionally, several cultural organization have established physical partnerships with libraries, where local branches have (or will have) a physical presence, or footprint, at the partnered cultural institution.³³ For example, the Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, one of the NYPL's four research libraries in Manhattan, is the oldest of these partnerships.³⁴ Two more locations receiving DCLA capital funding, which are currently in development, include a QL branch at the Queens Museum³⁵ and a BPL branch at the Brooklyn Children's Museum;³⁶ these co-locations will offer a unique "lending collection" that will allow patrons to check out items from the museum.³⁷

CULTURE PASS

Launched on July 16, 2018, Culture Pass is the latest CreateNYC partnership; it is a collaborative program coordinated by BPL, QL and NYPL that allows their cardholding patrons aged 13 and older³⁸ to visit cultural institutions throughout the five boroughs for free.³⁹ There are

³¹ See Brooklyn Public Library, *supra* note 14; See also Brooklyn Public Library, *SpaceWorks* (last visited Sep. 25, 2018), available at <https://spaceworksnyc.org/rehearsalspaces/williamsburg/>.

³² *Id.*

³³ See New York City Council, *supra* note 17.

³⁴ See New York Public Library, *Library for the Performing Arts* (last visited Sep. 25, 2018), available at <https://www.nypl.org/events/programs/lpa>.

³⁵ See New York City Council, *supra* note 17.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ Source: Mayor's Office of Legislative Affairs; See also Brooklyn Public Library, *supra* note 14; Brooklyn Public Library, *Musical Instrument Lending Library* (last visited Sep. 25, 2018), available at <https://www.bklynlibrary.org/locations/central/musicloan>.

³⁸ Culture Pass, "Frequently Asked Questions" available at <https://www.culturepass.nyc/faq>.

³⁹ New York Public Library, *Brooklyn, New York, and Queens Public Library Systems Launch Culture Pass Offering Free Access for Library Cardholders to City's Leading Cultural Institutions*, Press Release (Jul. 16, 2018), available at <https://www.nypl.org/press/press-release/july-16-2018/brooklyn-new-york-and-queens-public-library-systems-launch-culture>.

currently 41 organizations (up from 33 when the program started),⁴⁰ participating in the Culture Pass program; 25 are located in the borough of Manhattan, seven in Queens, five in Brooklyn, three in Staten Island and one in the Bronx.⁴¹

In order to make a reservation using Culture Pass, a NYC public library cardholder must visit the Culture Pass website (www.culturepass.nyc),⁴² select their library system and log in to the Culture Pass reservations system using their library card credentials, which allows them to browse for passes by date or venue and make a reservation.⁴³ Passes, which are only redeemable during hours that each venue is open to the public, may be retrieved shortly before the planned visit and, once retrieved, cannot be canceled.⁴⁴ Upon arriving at the venue, a valid ID that matches the name on the pass must be presented and the cardholder who reserved the pass must be present to redeem free entry.⁴⁵

Funding for the program is donation based, from both private donors—including The Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Charles H. Revson Foundation, The New York Community Trust’s Thriving Communities program and DCLA—and the participating institutions themselves.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

Cultural organizations and libraries across the country are experimenting with partnerships in an effort to expand the offerings they provide to patrons, and attract new users. NYC’s museums and libraries have similar missions and values that make them natural partners. Such partnerships

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ Culture Pass, Participating Organizations (last visited Sep. 25, 2018), *available at* https://www.culturepass.nyc/organization_

⁴² In addition to English, the Culture Pass website may be readily translated into 19 different languages. *Id.*

⁴³ Culture Pass, *Frequently Asked Questions* (last visited Sep. 25, 2018), *available at* <https://www.culturepass.nyc/faq>.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ Rebecca Lerner, *Culture Pass From New York Libraries Promises Free Passes to 33 Cultural Institutions*, *Forbes* (Jul. 17, 2018), *available at* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rebeccalerner/2018/07/17/culture-pass-from-nypl-promises-new-york-residents-free-passes-to-33-cultural-institutions/>.

benefit resource sharing, outreach to new audiences, access to experts and the potential for increasing goodwill and support between the organizations and the broader community. The Committee is interested in exploring the availability and needs of New Yorkers to (1) access such opportunities and resources, as well as to (2) promote arts and culture through partnerships between libraries and arts organizations, including the CIG. Additionally, the Committee will examine various cultural/library partnerships in NYC and explore how such partnerships may generate innovative programming and create new opportunities for outreach, including but not limited to Culture Pass.