

POLICY BRIEF:

Arts and Culture for a Just and Equitable City

Arts and culture can provide the **inspiration, tools, and capacity** needed to unify New York City into a more just and equitable city for all. This time of transition and possibility calls for a leap of imagination to realize a vision for the city that cares about our neighborhoods, insists on equality, and embraces our civic energy. We need to dream big, feel connected, propose bold new ideas, and engage the city in an inclusive transformation. Because cultural change precedes and embodies political change, arts and culture are an essential part of this progressive agenda. While the past decade has seen the arts as a city strategy for economic development they have been sorely underutilized as a force for a more progressive city.

Arts and culture engage our humanity in creating the city we deserve. Stories, images, and music speak to and clarify our deepest values, sustain and strengthen community identity, and support critical thinking and problem solving. Creation is inherently liberating, helping us see that something else is possible. It recognizes, affirms, and elevates the lived experiences of those often left out of civic engagement. Through imagination and creative action we can reconfigure our social and economic relationships, shift power, and make change.

While we support the full range of creative expression, this brief focuses on recommendations that maximize the role of arts and culture to advance the transition agenda. A just and equitable New York City needs culture at the table.

I. CREATE CROSS SECTOR STRATEGIES: Integrate arts and culture across policymaking and practice including, but not limited to: safe streets and transportation, arts education, juvenile justice, childhood development and family reunification, education, immigration, sustainability, and community development.

Art builds community and that community creates change through collective impact—the engagement of multiple actors to a common agenda for solving complex social problems. Artistic process, properly utilized, plays a critical role in generating collective impact by connecting seemingly disparate stakeholders to work together to identify issues, envision solutions, build capacity, and transform people and communities.

Examples: Groundswell is a leading New York organization dedicated to the use of public art as a tool for social change. New Yorkers Against Gun Violence and American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) were challenged with how to engage multiple stakeholders in a multi-faceted campaign. By employing Groundswell’s collaborative mural-making model they were able to change what people know about upcoming gun control legislation, increase capacity by developing teen spokespeople on the topic, change how people feel about Crown Height’s Broward Park, and build community among various stakeholders. The youth met with anti-gun violence leaders, Crown Heights Mediation Center, police officers, elected officials, and families who had lost loved ones to gun violence. The youth acquired the leadership and art mastery skills to address the partners’ multiple goals. After the mural was complete, a number of teens joined AFSC as interns on the gun legislation work. Elected officials used the mural dedication as a press conference and organizing opportunity. AFSC incorporates the mural images in their educational materials still used today. Community groups and public schools in East New York,

Brownsville, and Washington Heights partnered with Groundswell to replicate the anti-gun violence efforts in their own neighborhoods.

Another example is the Center for Urban Pedagogy's Making Policy Public program, which uses graphic design to demystify complex policy issues. The partnership between CUP, a designer, and an advocate results in posters that are used as resources around diverse issues ranging from domestic workers rights, to rules and regulations for street vendors, to redistricting.

Recommendations

- Identify a point person at each city agency who is responsible for moving forward arts and culture as an integrated part of their agency's agenda.
- Create an interagency working group to facilitate collaboration between agencies to use arts to address specific programmatic and policymaking goals.
- Designate a position within City Hall to convene, facilitate, and support arts-related interagency collaboration.
- Include artists and cultural organizations in strategy discussions about the future of the city and use art and design to better communicate and deepen understanding of complex policy issues.
- City Council members should identify cultural liaisons from the field and community boards should have cultural committees.
- Identify and support opportunities for collective impact where arts and culture can play a generative role, such as the Groundswell mural project in Crown Heights. Commit to demonstrating this impact through research and metrics.

2. INSPIRE PARTICIPATION: Build arts and culture into civic participation across the city to reach those who have been historically disenfranchised and to stimulate civic dialogue and action across difference.

In a city that is highly segregated there are few opportunities to actively come together across race and class to make change. Community members can also feel disconnected from decision-making, unable to have a say in the city's agenda or to participate in a meaningful way. Arts and culture are essential sources of empathy, respect, and connection, allowing us to see ourselves as part of a shared experience. We become the authors of our histories, unlocking civic energy. This is critically important during hard times when people can become isolated and disenfranchised.

Examples: In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, more than 100 artists volunteered at the Park Slope Armory "special needs" shelters, providing inspiring performances and workshops and organizing the wellness center infrastructure that made these programs possible. The wellness center engaged the residents in reclaiming their dignity, shifting them from victims to creators. Dance Theater Etcetera played a key role in Red Hook and the Sandy Storyline and Groundswell continue to provide a vehicle citywide for people to share their stories. Arts and culture also played an important role to heal and unify the city after 9/11. They are now being integrated into the process of participatory budgeting by the Arts & Democracy Project, to broaden its reach, deepen its engagement, and encourage creative and inclusive forms of participation.

El Puente's Green Light District is a ten-year effort to transform the Southside of Williamsburg "from a past as one of the most environmentally and economically challenged neighborhoods in New York City into a 2020 future as a healthy, safe, culturally rich, and civically engaged

community.” This happens through a holistic program that brings together arts and culture, community gardening, school reform, and environmental justice. Recently, youth at El Puente used the arts to amplify their own stories as part of their campaign against stop and frisk. Through this work El Puente provides opportunities to connect newcomers to the neighborhood with longtime residents around the shared goals of making the neighborhood one where they can all live and thrive.

Recommendations

- Include arts and cultural leadership, methodologies, and partnerships in a new citywide Office of Civic Participation.
- Include arts and culture as an integral part of the city’s relief, recovery, and ongoing resiliency strategies.
- Support creative civic participation strategies through sustained partnerships and ongoing mechanisms such as an artist corps or artist in residence programs.
- Increase community access and use of public spaces (such as libraries, parks, and streets).

3. CULTIVATE COMMUNITY CAPACITY: Revitalize New York City from the neighborhood up by supporting community leadership, cultural hubs, and vital social networks.

Community-based organizations are responding to greater needs with fewer resources. They are the front line of local leadership and resiliency, but often lack the time and infrastructure to respond to the sometimes onerous requirements of a city bureaucracy. Community-based organizations have to navigate a complex labyrinth of agencies to organize community gatherings and performances in public space, lead local sustainability efforts, or improve underutilized facilities.

Arts and culture are an essential part of the cultural vitality and capacity of New York City neighborhoods. It’s where we incubate the ideas of the future and strengthen the local infrastructure and leadership that supports us in good times and bad. Arts and culture enhance the ability of community members to take leadership in solving local problems, to mobilize, and to amplify their voice. Milly Hawk Daniel of Policy Link, a national economic and social justice institute, reminds us of the key role that arts and culture play during hard times: “The propensity to see art and cultural expression as ancillary to survival makes us forget how essential art and culture are to sustaining community, history, and livelihood.”

Examples: The POINT is dedicated to youth development and the cultural and economic revitalization of the Hunts Point section of the South Bronx. Their Village of Murals, the first stop on the South Bronx Greenway, enhances the community’s access to the Bronx River while creating new opportunities for arts and the environment. With support from the Department of Transportation, The POINT commissioned neighborhood artist and activist Sharon de la Cruz to paint a mural that bridges a community divided by an expressway. De La Cruz, who started at The POINT as a teenager and returned after receiving a Fulbright, exemplifies the leadership development that is integral to The POINT, El Puente, and Groundswell.

The POINT and El Puente are members of Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts New York (NOCD-NY), a citywide alliance that connects neighborhoods across the five boroughs. Naturally occurring cultural districts spring up organically in their neighborhoods, tapping into and strengthening local clusters of creative assets. These districts are geographically and structurally diverse, self-organized through community-generated action, and cultivated by a

diverse range of participants. They join cultural centers, arts organizations, artists, community groups, small businesses, creative manufacturers, and schools to strengthen local economies and build the social networks that make communities resilient. NOCD NY members also include Chinatown History Project, Fourth Arts Block, Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center, Queens Museum of Art, and Staten Island Arts, amongst others.

Recommendations

- Support the creative vitality of every neighborhood in New York City by providing equitable recognition, funding, and financing for diverse neighborhood cultural hubs, networks, and organizations.
- Create a City Council staff position to act as a resource to Council members in supporting small organizations and neighborhood-based culture in their districts to ensure that they have the same access to city resources and technical support that larger institutions enjoy.
- Make citywide programs easier to participate in for small organizations. Reduce bureaucratic barriers to working with the city (i.e. SAPO, DOT Public Plaza Program, DCA Capital requirements).
- Support neighborhood cultural incubators and creative manufacturers.
- Support opportunities for neighborhood efforts and community networks to connect with one another, coordinate their efforts, and scale up through collective action.

4. FURTHER CULTURAL EQUITY: Prioritize equitable distribution of opportunities and benefits related to arts and culture.

Arts and culture in New York City has also been a tale of two cities, reinforced by cultural hierarchies and an inequitable distribution of resources across boroughs, cultures, race, and class. In 2010, 40% of all arts dollars went to just five New York City cultural organizations.¹ The transition and the City Council's bill for a comprehensive cultural plan offer opportunities to take stock of how resources are distributed across the city and take proactive steps to further cultural equity and include those who have been historically excluded.

- Select a Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner who will prioritize cultural equity in the goals and programs of the agency, and identify leadership that reflects the diverse demographics of the city.
- Develop funding criteria for excellence that recognize and reflect New York's diverse communities and cultures and has a broad definition of culture
- Develop a unified cultural plan for NYC that prioritizes cultural equity with adequate funding support and a leadership role for community-based cultural groups.
- Increase cultural funding to 1% of the city expense budget.
- Make the Internet fully accessible to all New York City communities.

Conclusion

What does New York City look like when it reflects the full diversity and vitality of its people and neighborhoods? We need to work together and harness every resource that we have at hand – data, policy, community knowledge, civic energy, and creativity – to achieve a fair, equitable, and sustainable city. We need to be able to imagine a city where we can live

¹ From *Municipal Arts Society Arts Digest 2012*, drawing on data from the Cultural Data Project.

meaningful lives in thriving communities and build the relationships and public will to get us there. Arts and culture make a powerful contribution toward these goals. By fully engaging our creativity we can truly become, One City Rising Together.

INITIAL SIGNATORIES

List in Development

To add your signature, visit: <http://miniurl.com/5T7S>

ORGANIZATIONS

ArtHome
Arts & Democracy Project
Asian American Arts Centre
Bangladesh Institute of Performing Arts
Bowery Arts + Science
Bronx Council on the Arts
Buckminster Fuller Institute
Center for Arts Education
Center for Media Justice
College Access: Research & Action
Councilmember Brad Lander's Office
Dance Theatre Etcetera
Downtown Arts
East River Academy, Rikers Island
ECE PolicyWorks
Educational Video Center
El Puente
Fifth Avenue Committee, Inc
freeDimensional, Zero Capital
Global Action Project
Groundswell
Hester Street Collaborative
New York Chinatown History Project
Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts New York (NOCD-NY)
Ocean Bay Community Development Corporation
Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow
Ping Chong + Company
Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District
PolicyLink
Pratt Center for Community Development
Staten Island Arts (formerly COAHSI)
Sustainability Strategies
The Field
The Foundry Theatre
The Laundromat Project
The POINT CDC
The Public Science Project of The Graduate Center, CUNY
Transportation Alternatives
Urban Bush Women
Voices UnBroken

World Up

INDIVIDUALS

Affiliation noted for identification purposes only

Bill Aguado, Cultural Equity Group
Fay Chiang, Project Reach
Jan Cohen-Cruz, Public: A Journal of Imagining America
Rachel Falcone, Sandy Storyline
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Rachael Fauss, Citizens Union
Mindy Thompson Fullilove, MD, Columbia University
Tamara Greenfield, Fourth Arts Block
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Matthew Hopkins, Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation
Rob Krulak, New York Live Arts
Josh Lerner, Participatory Budgeting Project
Todd Lester, World Policy Institute
Rabbi Ellen Lippmann, Kolot Chayeinu/Voices of Our Lives
Andrea Louie, Asian American Arts Alliance
Randy Martin, NYU
Meghan McDermott, Global Action Project
Jackie Miller, Only Make Believe
Joan Minieri, Community Learning Partnership
Eve Mosher, artist
Michael Premo, Housing is a Human Right
Marlène Ramírez-Cancio, Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics
Yasmin Ramirez
George Emilio Sanchez, artist
Amy Schwartzman, National Coalition for Arts' Preparedness and Emergency Response
Sasha Sumner, Pratt Institute
Schawannah Wright, Columbia University
Sarah Zeller-Berkman, PhD, The Youth Development Institute

To review an up-to-date list of signatories, visit: <http://miniurl.com/5T7P>

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