



White House Briefing: Art, Community, Social Justice, National Recovery

On May 12th, more than 60 artists and creative organizers engaged in civic participation, community development, education, social justice activism, and philanthropy will come together for a White House briefing. During the campaign, powerful narratives, compelling images, and creative activism moved people from all walks of life to get involved in civic participation and public service. Every day, artists and organizers apply our knowledge and creativity to the actions that make democracy concrete. We perceive this as a favorable moment to catalyze broad public support for a bold and forward-looking national agenda and we look forward to discussing how we might work together toward that end.

Our purposes for this White House briefing are:

- (1) To learn about key Obama Administration initiatives that might be advanced through the long-term engagement of artists working with communities;
- (2) To connect the creative community with campaigns and other action opportunities involving important national issues;
- (3) To share the exemplary work of our diverse field;
- (4) To facilitate the inclusion of dynamic cultural strategies as an integral part of the administration's agenda for economic recovery, community renewal and civic engagement.

Our work encompasses both the for-profit and non-profit sectors. Our group includes individuals working independently and with a range of organizations and networks, in new and old media, including hip hop activists, green designers, creative communicators, arts educators, social networkers, and visual, performing, literary and media artists. While we work in many different ways, we share a common dedication to the power of the word, music, and image to capture moments of triumph, struggle, and transcendence. Within our group we:

- Honor unheard, authentic and diverse voices;
- Reach the hearts and minds of Americans who often are not included in organizing campaigns or town hall meetings, transcending the polarization that marks so much public discourse;
- Cultivate social imagination, helping people to envision positive changes in their communities and the nation, to see past differences to common purpose and see themselves as part of the change;
- Engage the earthshaking power of creativity in the service of national recovery.

Some of us focus on the arts' power to call attention to possibility and generate hope. Some of us focus on cultural development as a process that cultivates democracy through art and imagination, through shared stories and an experience of our own creativity. Some of us focus on cultural recovery, putting artists to work for the common good in communities across the country.

As artists and organizers we are interested in advancing public policies, generating ideas, raising the visibility of key issues, and working collaboratively with the administration in support of its long-term goals. We have a deep passion for social justice and experience in carrying out successful programs and campaigns. We see this as a special moment of opportunity to be of service and advance the administration's goals for national recovery.

That the briefing is taking place is unprecedented acknowledgement from the White House that our work's value is being perceived, which we receive with gratitude and hope. We look forward to using our creative muscle in collaboration with the Obama administration, making our mutual vision for change a reality. We will meet after the briefing to immediately begin drawing on what we have learned to inform our strategies for future action.

Caron Atlas, Claudine Brown, Arlene Goldbard & Billy Wimsatt