

## WORKING TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE CULTURAL PLAN (HUFFINGTON POST)

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### Working Toward a Comprehensive Cultural Plan (Huffington Post)

By Lane Harwell

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I am writing to advocate the inclusion of a comprehensive cultural plan in the New York City Charter, with thanks to the City Council for [introducing this effort](#).

In my role at Dance/NYC, I am focused exclusively on services for dance teachers and companies in the metropolitan area. Yet, I offer here that all of us in arts and culture are strongest when we are working together with all New Yorkers.

For a cultural plan to be comprehensive, it should view, as its starting point, arts and culture as a whole and consider the evolving roles of all allied disciplines and forms. Certainly, it would consider the 501(c)(3) organizations -- in all City Council districts, and of varying shapes and sizes -- currently eligible for funding by the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA). But, it would also embrace those contributing to arts and culture outside this legal structure, including individual artists. It would acknowledge that creative lives exist on a continuum, and take seriously arts education, arts careers, institutional advancement, and, concomitantly, audience and constituent access and engagement.

Such a plan would NOT look at arts and culture in isolation, but as being reciprocally linked to society; the arts and New York are one.

For a cultural plan to be effective, it must be data driven. The New York State Cultural Data Project is a useful source of financial, activity, and workforce information. That said, small groups, those lacking a 501(c)(3) designation, and those with non-Manhattan headquarters are as yet underrepresented (see [State of NYC Dance 2013](#) for how Dance/NYC is putting this tool to use in its research).

I advocate the generation and analysis of more inclusive data, listening to the arts community (and all New Yorkers) and mapping cultural assets neighborhood by neighborhood. For the plan to be effective, it must also be adaptive, so that the city can respond nimbly to needs and opportunities as they arise.

There are inevitably budgetary considerations. I invite the city to hold out the possibility of increased investment through the DCA, and of improved alignment between this allocation and growth in overall city expenditures. This is not a statement of need. Rather, as data already tells us, and as a comprehensive cultural plan would do as well, investment in the arts drives healthy returns. This includes neighborhood vibrancy and economic development. It is also the case that for the DCA to include new groups in its portfolio, and to help currently funded groups to scale their delivery of public value, it would need additional funds.

Critically, however, I believe a comprehensive cultural plan would look beyond city arts dollars and the DCA. City funding is but one critical lever in advancing the health of arts and culture. A comprehensive cultural plan could, ideally, stimulate revenue growth for board members and individuals (which are down, according to [recent Dance/NYC research](#)), institutions, corporations, and earned sources). It could catalyze public/private partnerships and harness the creative potential of our city's artists to lift up neglected, established, and startup industries, perhaps especially the booming tech sector. And it could consider an array of in-kind offerings.

I advocate interagency strategy. We have seen this approach evolve nationally through recent leadership (from New York) with the National Endowment for the Arts, and at the state level with a new commitment to the arts through the Regional Economic Development Councils (REDC). (Full disclosure: I am a [New York State Council on the Arts REDC panelist](#)). There are, of course, many examples of interagency collaboration in our city, but there remain untapped opportunities for arts leadership at critical agencies that would promote the bridge-building that puts artists and arts organizations at the table in critical policy and program discussions.

The arts have a role to play in creating solutions for the issues facing all New Yorkers. Take, for example, some of those detailed in mayor-elect Bill de Blasio's vision for New York and his framework for addressing inequity, ["One New York, Rising Together"](#): jobs and economic development, education, safety, [affordability](#), transit, sustainability, resilience, and equality for all New Yorkers, including immigrants, LGBT people, and women. In each of these issue areas, opportunities for arts and culture abound (see my recent entry, ["Opportunities for the Arts in Our New Mayor's One New York,"](#) for more).

In "One New York, Rising Together," De Blasio also describes government reform that would increase transparency and engage New Yorkers more greatly in setting priorities for our communities. As arts and culture are priorities for New Yorkers, they will also be priorities for the next administration and City Council of our great city.

As a New Yorker in dance, I am optimistic and looking forward to continuing my work with you and all New Yorkers.

Please weigh in with your thoughts on Twitter: @NYCCouncil #NYCCulturalPlan

A version of this entry was presented as [testimony](#) to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations on November 19, 2013.

Please note: This article first appeared on Lane Harwell's Huffington Post Blog on November 21, 2013.

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