

TESTIMONY TO MAYOR'S OFFICE OF CITYWIDE EVENT COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT (OCECM)

Friday, February 26, 2021

Testimony to Mayor's Office of Citywide Event Coordination and Management (OCECM)

By Dance/NYC

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On behalf of Dance/NYC (www.dance.nyc), a service organization that serves over 5,000 individual dance artists, 1,200 dance-making entities, and 500 non-profit dance companies and the many for profit dance businesses based in the metropolitan New York City area, including BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color) dance workers, immigrants, and disabled dance workers. Dance/NYC joins colleague advocates working across creative disciplines in thanking the Committee for your leadership during this time.

We express our gratitude to the City Councilmembers, City Officials, Mayor's Office and other dedicated workers who have contributed to the creation of the Open Culture Program. The Open Culture Program has the potential to help to support arts and cultural workers in New York City as they continue to adapt to the new realities of the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. Moving forward with Open Culture is a substantial step in the safe reopening of the arts and culture sector. We thank the City for changing the guidelines, allowing performances with up to four consecutive days. With gratitude, we believe that there are comprehensive improvements to be made to the program in order for it to be financially, logistically, and administratively beneficial and accessible to dance making entities, groups and workers (the lion share of which are very small budget operations):

We would specifically like to draw attention to:

1. Limiting Sponsoring organizations to only 4 days a month does not work, instead place limits on the artists or organizations presented;
2. Producing site-specific outdoor performances takes a lot of labor. The City needs to provide specific guidelines Open Culture, approved by the City, such as site templates for COVID-19 protocol templates, and templates for ADA guidelines;
3. The prohibition of sound permitting with the use of a stage does not work for the dancer workforce. Dancing on concrete increases the risk of injury. The City needs to allow for sound permitting within reasonable levels for performances using a stage which is necessary for the safety of the dance workforce and to provide better guidance around sound permitting levels;
4. The current distribution of streets is not equitably distributed across the boroughs of New York City leaving many neighborhoods especially in the Bronx culturally desolate. The City needs to provide continued opportunities to add streets to the program. Many artists will not be able to perform in their neighborhoods and will need to travel to share their artistry.

As Open Culture permitting stands, participants are allowed a maximum of four consecutive days per month per location to perform. Organizations are able to sponsor artists who do not receive DCLA funding to participate in Open Culture. However, the amount of good sponsors can offer is severely limited by the 4 day constraints per month. Sponsoring organizations are being held to the same 4 days per month limits. DCLA grantees can only sponsor 4 days per month, regardless of whether the artists they sponsor are different for each of those days. The ability to sponsor many artists becomes moot with the 4 day rule on sponsoring organization. We ask going forward that this rule be changed to apply to the companies performing, rather than their sponsor organization. Currently, the rule is making it difficult for small companies to find sponsorship.

The City has discussed creating resources for Open Culture participants. Open Culture would reduce the burden on arts and cultural organization by providing templates for COVID-19 spacing requirements, social distancing and maximum capacity regulation, and accessibility guidelines in line with the ADA. These have not been released as of yet, and we want to reiterate that there is a need for these and they would be greatly appreciated.

Through Open Culture, a sound permit must be obtained separately from the Open Culture program through the NYPD, and costs \$45. We appreciate the City's willingness to expedite the sound permits through the NYPD. However, amplified sound is not allowed in tandem with a stage or screen. Dance companies need stages for safety reasons while performing. Not all genres of dance can be safely performed on concrete. Moreover, after nearly a year of limited to no dance training makes dancers physically and biomechanically more susceptible to serious injury and require the shock absorption that a stage provides to protect the impact on their joints. This limitation is a dire safety concern for the dance workforce to participate in Open Culture. If dancers have to sacrifice their stage for sound they risk injuring themselves, and if they need to sacrifice their music to dance a critical element of the performance is lost. This We understand that there are legitimate public health concerns about crowds forming around performances with amplified sound. Clearer guidance on what constitutes non-amplified sound from the City will greatly help performers prevent the spread of COVID-19 while still being able to perform. What constitutes amplified sound and if amplified could be used but kept at ambient noise levels to avoid crowded forming but help the performance.

Finally, the Open Culture available street map does not yet equitably reflect the distribution of artists in this City and is not equitably distributed geographically. We appreciate that the City made strides in allowing for more streets to be submitted which opened up more streets in the Bronx and upper Manhattan but there is still work to be done. This inequitable distribution creates cultural deserts and does not allow all New Yorkers to have easy access to culture in their own neighbors. Especially, with the mental health as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic this is even more of a necessity. Additionally this creates a drain on cultural workers who are unable to perform in their local communities and instead need to travel to more affluent neighborhoods to perform. There needs to be an avenue for the continued availability for councilmembers to request more streets in the future to ensure equity.

We thank the City in advance for your consideration and commend New York City's ongoing efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19. We look forward to the opportunity to ensure that New York remains a vibrant capital for arts and culture and making Open Culture a mutually beneficial program.

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