

TESTIMONY TO THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS HEARING ON EXPANDING ACCESS TO CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS FOR UNDERSERVED BIPOC YOUTH AND THE BIPOC COMMUNITY AT LARGE

Thursday, February 24, 2022

Testimony to the City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations hearing on Expanding Access to Cultural Institutions for Underserved BIPOC Youth and the BIPOC Community At Large

By Dance/NYC

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Thank you for your consideration of this testimony, submitted on behalf of Dance/NYC (dance.nyc), a service organization that reaches over 5,000 individual dance artists, 1,200 dance-making entities, 500 non-profit dance companies, and the many for-profit dance businesses based in the metropolitan New York City area. Its areas of service are of special benefit to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color), immigrant, disabled, low-income and small budget dance workers, organizations, and businesses. Dance/NYC is the only service organization for the dance sector in the metropolitan NYC area, and its action-oriented research and advocacy seek to represent and advance the interests of the dance field. It embeds the values of justice, equity, and inclusion into all aspects of its operations and frames the following requests through the lens of those values. Dance/NYC joins colleague advocates working across creative disciplines in thanking you for your leadership and requesting:

1. The establishment of a \$100 million fund to support BIPOC-led and -serving cultural entities and address gaps in cultural equity, including the facilitation of property ownership and land stewardship, recognizing that these are some of the most significant ways to address systemic inequitable distribution of resources;
2. The establishment of a reparations framework through the Racial Justice Commission to investigate and begin the process of providing reparations to Black and Indigenous communities;
3. The expansion of Cultural Institutions Group to include more BIPOC-led arts and cultural entities to support BIPOC stewardship of City-owned facilities and parkland;
4. The instatement of the arts as a core subject in New York City schools and prioritization of funding for the Department of Education Office of Arts & Special Projects Strategic Arts Plan to secure equitable access to high-quality universal arts education and arts partnership programs in BIPOC communities;
5. The ongoing prioritization of all new and existing funding and economic development programs through the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) and other City agencies for small budget arts and cultural organizations—inclusive of for profit enterprises, nonprofit organizations, and sole proprietorships—led by and primarily serving BIPOC, immigrant, disabled, and other historically marginalized communities experiencing the highest levels of pandemic impacts; and
6. The establishment of a \$15 million Cultural Equity Fund within DCLA to provide baseline support to BIPOC-led and -serving cultural organizations.

Equity is a central concern for the arts and cultural sector and the City at large, and this cause must remain at the center of all planning and decision making by legislators, agencies, and government stakeholders. Dance/NYC's Racial Justice Agenda¹ advances a vision for a just, equitable, and inclusive cultural ecology and encompasses changes to policy, investments, programs, attitudes, and actions impacting BIPOC artists, cultural workers, and audiences. Dance/NYC recognizes that racial justice does not exist individually or siloed from additional equity areas and resistance movements to interrelated forces of oppression (e.g., disability justice, immigrant rights, economic justice) in its work nor in the lives of its constituents. Instead, racial justice requires an intersectional approach that builds upon multiple areas that together create a more just, equitable, and inclusive cultural ecology. In a 2021 study, HueArts NYC identified and mapped 412 BIPOC arts entities that provide cultural programming directly to communities throughout the City.² Providing support to these entities is essential to broadening access to cultural programming for BIPOC communities. This effort requires a multi-pronged approach spanning all parts of the cultural ecology, among which priorities are: arts education, fund allocation and distribution for cultural organizations and individual arts workers, and property ownership and land stewardship toward reparations.

There are several issues that impact BIPOC access to culture. First, many BIPOC community members lack access to cultural institutions and programming where they live, work, or go to school, which points to a need for culture to be embedded more equitably across the City. Second, there remains a lack of BIPOC representation in the organizations and businesses that make up and serve the cultural sector, due in part to barriers to access training and resources to integrate into the workforce pipeline. Low wages within the arts and cultural sector can also be a deterrent for BIPOC workers to remain employed sustainably in cultural organizations, particularly in small budget organizations that may operate within their communities. These systemic obstacles point to the overall impact of white supremacist structural perpetuation of longstanding, intentional underinvestment and extraction in BIPOC communities.

The City must recognize the power of property ownership and land stewardship for BIPOC and other historically disinvested communities. HueArts NYC found that only eight of the 41 BIPOC-founded organizations surveyed in New York City own their spaces, which presents a significant barrier to the establishment of stable homes for their community-based programming.³ The creation of a \$100 million fund to establish and administer programs to support BIPOC-led and -serving cultural entities and address gaps in cultural equity. This support can enable existing BIPOC-led and -serving organizations and workers to gain ownership of their facilities and land to provide meaningful stability to these organizations and the communities they serve. By granting agency to these communities to cultivate and care for lasting landmarks and institutions of cultural heritage, the ties between culture and community are strengthened within neighborhoods and localities that would otherwise become cultural deserts. Arts and cultural institutions contribute to thriving local economies and can provide a nexus for resilience, growth, innovation, and change in the communities they serve. By embedding and empowering arts and cultural institutions directly in BIPOC communities and historically disinvested neighborhoods, the City demonstrates a commitment to equitable public access to cultural programming and the advancement of BIPOC-led institutions as social and economic anchors in their communities. These investments can ensure that BIPOC leaders have the resources needed to take full ownership of the spaces that provide space for arts workers and communities to cultivate, preserve, and sustain unique cultural legacies.

Property ownership and land stewardship measures are crucial first steps toward the provision of reparations and land back initiatives for Black

and Indigenous communities specifically. Dance/NYC calls on the City to acknowledge the ongoing impacts of slavery, establish and execute a plan to address those impacts, and repair the harm done by initiating reparations work within the City's Racial Justice Commission to address past and continuing harms inflicted upon Black and Indigenous people through colonialism, slavery, food and housing redlining, mass incarceration, and surveillance. All members of collective ecosystems carry the responsibility to examine roles and remain accountable within them by engaging in a sincere process of self-reflection and deep consideration. In strengthening capacity to enact significant change through reparations, the City must recognize that institutions and systems founded under white supremacist values are not leading the change. Interrogating racial systems must be guided by Black and Indigenous wisdom and leadership as the City takes steps toward envisioning and enacting truly equitable, anti-racist systemic reform. Ensuring that Black and Indigenous-led and -serving organizations have the resources they need to continue to thrive is paramount to the survival of Black and Indigenous arts workers and the cultural vibrancy of New York City.

Taken together, expanding BIPOC access to property ownership, land stewardship, and reparations can open opportunities for BIPOC-led organizations to expand capacity to provide sustainable programming from permanent homes anchored within their communities. These long-term measures must happen in progressive stages, and the expansion of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) to include more BIPOC-led entities can initiate and support greater agency and representation for BIPOC stewardship of City-owned facilities and parkland. By privately maintaining public facilities and land, BIPOC-led entities can partner directly with the City to scale up their operations in lasting, meaningful ways. A focus on identifying and investing in facilities and land in BIPOC communities and cultural deserts can ensure equitable distribution of publicly-accessible cultural programming throughout the City. In addition to expanding access to programs, the CIG empowers organizations to provide stable employment to community members and contribute meaningfully to the local economy by driving revenue to community businesses and contributing to overall quality of life by revitalizing and enriching neighborhoods.

Arts education is the entry point to the cultural sector for generations of New Yorkers, yet New York is one of only 19 states that do not require the arts as a core subject for public school students. This is despite the fact that 91% of Americans believe the arts are a vital part of a well-rounded education, and 84% believe arts and STEM are complementary subjects.⁴ As the largest school system in the nation, New York City schools have the opportunity to lead the way by making the arts—including dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts—a core subject in all City schools, with a focus on supporting schools in BIPOC communities that have historically lacked resources and access to arts education programming. As students recover from the impacts of the pandemic on their learning, arts education is key to strengthening student well-being, academic achievement, and future prospects. Arts programming fosters a welcoming, creative school environment, and arts partnerships and after school programs support students and their families to participate as engaged members of their communities. Performing arts education supports social and emotional well being while fostering creativity, critical thinking, team-building skills, self-reflection, and communication to prepare future leaders to face new and persistent challenges.⁵ Early participation in the arts also encourages children to pursue higher achievement and learning opportunities.⁶ Making the arts part of the core curriculum of New York City schools would set requirements for alignment with state standards and include a combination of in-school certified arts teachers and partnerships with arts and cultural organizations, all of which directly benefits students, educators, and arts workers in BIPOC communities.

Arts education is an equity issue tied to racial, social, and economic justice. Gaps in student achievement along racial and socioeconomic lines are longstanding and persistent in New York City.⁷ Arts education drives up school attendance and graduation rates, and limited access to arts education in BIPOC and low-income areas is evidence of sustained disparities in an inequitable system.⁸ These findings make it abundantly clear that arts education is not a luxury—it is essential to student learning, well being, and social and civic engagement. Equity in education as a whole cannot become a reality if quality arts learning opportunities are only available to some students. These pressing issues must remain at the forefront of the Office of Arts & Special Projects Strategic Arts Plan, with prioritized funding to support and execute the measures required to foster equity and justice in all schools. Advancing equity in the arts begins in the classroom and necessarily extends to community-based cultural organizations that partner with schools and offer independent programming for students and their families. These organizations provide spaces for safety, bravery, and transformative possibility for students in historically marginalized and underserved communities, in addition employing the arts workforce as teaching artists and administrators. Thus, achieving equity in the field means providing support for schools and cultural organizations that primarily serve BIPOC, immigrant, disabled, and low-income communities throughout the City. Teachers must also be supported with investments in training and certification for arts educators, with a particular focus on engaging BIPOC teachers. By providing universal access to arts education and championing equity in its planning and execution, the City sends the message that the arts are a viable pathway to success for all students, which in turn supports the cultural diversity of the arts workforce and the economic health of the City's creative industry.

Arts and cultural organizations and independent arts workers, who are often entrepreneurs, sole proprietors, and small business owner-operators, remain among the most severely affected segment of the City's economy, with BIPOC workers and communities experiencing the highest levels of impact. Nationally, 95% of arts workers have lost creative income during the pandemic. At the height of the pandemic in 2020, 63% experienced unemployment, with BIPOC arts workers experiencing higher rates of unemployment than white artists (69% vs. 60%) and losing a larger percentage of their creative income (61% vs. 56%).⁹ Disabled and immigrant arts workers in New York City have also suffered disproportionate impact, along with arts workers who are parents and caregivers, for whom the negative impacts of the pandemic extend to their families and communities.¹⁰ During the pandemic, arts and cultural businesses were the first to shut down and are among the last to reopen, with small budget and BIPOC-led and -serving organizations experiencing disproportionate impacts. Nationally, 95% of cultural organizations canceled programming, 88% modified the delivery of their programs, and 11% had to stop providing products or services to their communities, resulting in losses of \$6.8 billion.¹¹ Dance/NYC found that dance organization, group, and project budgets in New York City shrunk by an average of 31%, with the smallest organizations experiencing the greatest proportional impact, with budgets contracting by an average of 52%.¹² This level of impact is evidence that the arts and cultural sector has long suffered from inequity and underinvestment, which became starkly apparent at the onset of the pandemic and remains a top-level concern as the sector and its workers struggle to adapt and survive through pandemic surges. For arts and cultural institutions that employ arts workers and provide programs and services to BIPOC communities, the repercussions of organizational interruptions, displacement, and closures are compounded; losing access to these spaces puts the working lives of arts workers and the art itself at risk.

City funding and grant programs administered by the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA), Small Business Services, and other City agencies provide crucial support to the arts and cultural sector, and there is still work to do to make these programs accessible to the smallest, hardest-hit businesses that lack administrative and technical capacity to apply and comply with program requirements. Across agencies, inclusive funding programs in the form of grants, loans, and emergency relief must prioritize the needs of small budget organizations—inclusive of for-profit enterprises, nonprofit organizations, and sole proprietorships—led by and primarily serving BIPOC, disabled, immigrant, and other historically marginalized and underserved communities. The establishment of a \$15 million Cultural Equity Fund within DCLA can advance equity by securing dedicated baseline support for BIPOC-led and -serving organizations to overcome historic disinvestment and cultivate sustainable growth. Programmatic changes to application processes and fund distribution, such as increasing minimum award levels and disbursing grants in multi-year cycles to provide stability and reduce administrative burden on small BIPOC-led and -serving organizations, can help advance equity and sustainability in the field.

Access to general operating support through programs like DCLA's Cultural Development Fund gives BIPOC-led and -serving organizations the agency to apply for and expend grant funds directly where they are most needed. A reassessment of fund restrictions can support grantee organizational capacity for service delivery and the provision of living wages for workers. Grant disbursements must ensure proper allocation and payment of the actual administrative costs required for the effective, equitable execution of programs. Expanded technical assistance for applicants and grantees can alleviate the administrative burden for small budget organizations and entrepreneurs. In these ways, City agencies can amplify their reach and impact by making programs more accessible to small-budget organizations and independent entrepreneurial

enterprises, which comprise the lion's share of the City's arts and cultural economy. These programs require comprehensive oversight, evaluation, and review processes in order to permanently serve the needs of small budget BIPOC-led and -serving organizations in responsive and sustainable ways.

An equitable, sustainable Citywide cultural landscape calls for long-term investments in the people, organizations, and industries that drive artistic production and make every neighborhood in this great City unique and vibrant. By directly supporting the economic viability of BIPOC-led and -serving arts and cultural entities, independent arts workers, teachers, and students, the measures outlined in this testimony can ensure equitable access to arts and cultural programming for BIPOC communities. Overall, equity must be at the center of all budget allocations and funding programs across City agencies. Dance/NYC joins the arts and cultural sector in reiterating the following measures to ensure the advancement of equitable access to arts and cultural programming.

For Dance/NYC and its constituents, the most urgent priorities are:

1. The establishment of a \$100 million fund to support BIPOC-led and -serving cultural entities and address gaps in cultural equity, including the facilitation of property ownership and land stewardship, recognizing that these are some of the most significant ways to address systemic inequitable distribution of resources;
2. The establishment of a reparations framework through the Racial Justice Commission to investigate and begin the process of providing reparations to Black and Indigenous communities;
3. The expansion of Cultural Institutions Group to include more BIPOC-led arts and cultural entities to support BIPOC stewardship of City-owned facilities and parkland;
4. The instatement of the arts as a core subject in New York City schools and prioritization of funding for the Department of Education Office of Arts & Special Projects Strategic Arts Plan to secure equitable access to high-quality universal arts education and arts partnership programs in BIPOC communities; and
5. The ongoing prioritization of all new and existing funding and economic development programs through the Department of Cultural Affairs and other City agencies for small budget arts and cultural organizations—inclusive of for profit enterprises, nonprofit organizations, and sole proprietorships—led by and primarily serving BIPOC, immigrant, disabled, and other historically marginalized communities experiencing the highest levels of pandemic impacts.
6. The establishment of a \$15 million Cultural Equity Fund within DCLA to provide baseline support to BIPOC-led and -serving cultural organizations.

The above measures stand to support the advancement of equitable access to arts and culture to promote every New Yorker's holistic well being and the City's cultural vibrancy. Dance/NYC expresses gratitude to the City officials and other dedicated workers who have contributed to the recovery of the arts and cultural sector. Now is the time to act so that arts and cultural institutions, organizations, and workers continue to thrive and provide essential programming to all communities for years to come. Dance/NYC thanks you for your consideration and commends your leadership and ongoing efforts to ensure that every neighborhood in New York retains robust access to the social and economic benefits of arts and culture.

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Footnotes

¹ Dance/NYC. *Racial Justice Agenda*. <https://www.dance.nyc/uploads/DanceNYC-OneSheet-RacialJusticeAgenda-V5.pdf>.

² HueArts NYC. *Map and Directory, 2021*. https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/867189184f3247daaec186b7dcd33c41/?data_id=dataSource_1-17c760b66fd-layer-5%3A10

³ HueArts NYC. *Brown Paper: Mapping a Future for Arts Entities Founded and led by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and All People of Color in New York City, 2021*. <https://www.hueartsnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/HueArts2022BrownPaper.pdf>

⁴ Ipsos. *Research Findings: Americans Believe the Arts Are an Important Part of Society and Education*. <https://bit.ly/IPSOSArEducationSurvey>

⁵ New Victory Theater. *Spark Change: Investing in performing arts education for all*. <https://bit.ly/NewVictorySparkChangeReport>

⁶ National Endowment for the Arts. *A Decade of Arts Engagement*. <https://bit.ly/NEAArtsEngagementReport>

⁷ New York City Independent Budget Office. *Schools Brief: Tracing Changes in Achievement Gaps by Race & Gender in New York City Public Schools*. <https://bit.ly/AchievementGapReport>

⁸ Center for Arts Education. *Staying in School: Arts Education and New York City High School Graduation Rates*. <https://bit.ly/ArtsEdAndGraduationReport>

⁹ Americans for the Arts. *COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on The Arts*. <https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/COVID-19%20Pandemic%20Impact%20on%20the%20Arts%20Research%20Update%20%207-13-2021.pdf>

¹⁰ Dance/NYC. *Coronavirus Dance Impact Study Informational Brief*. <https://www.dance.nyc/uploads/Covid-Impact-Study-Brief-210316.pdf>

¹¹ SMU Data Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. *COVID-19 Impact on Nonprofit Arts and Culture in New York City*. <https://culturaldata.org/pages/covid-19-impact-on-nonprofit-arts-and-culture-in-new-york-city/>

¹² Dance/NYC. *Coronavirus Dance Impact Study Informational Brief*. <https://www.dance.nyc/uploads/Covid-Impact-Study-Brief-210316.pdf>