

# TESTIMONY TO THE COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS: OPEN CULTURE PROGRAM FOR ART AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Monday, October 31, 2022

## Testimony to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations: Open Culture Program for Art and Cultural Institutions

By Dance/NYC

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Thank you for your consideration of this testimony, submitted on behalf of Dance/NYC ([dance.nyc.org](https://dance.nyc.org)), a service organization that represents 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.

Dance/NYC joins colleague advocates working across creative disciplines to reiterate the value of Open Culture and call for the passage of [int 0590-2022](#) that will make Open Culture a permanent City program.

Begun as a lifeline for NYC artists and cultural organizations unable to continue with their regular indoor programming due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Open Culture brought arts, music, and dance from indoors and out into the streets. [Open Culture has become a popular form of community engagement](#) that has had a profound impact on the way that communities think about the importance of arts and culture in their lives and neighborhoods.

With gratitude to all the City officials and other dedicated workers who have contributed to the creation of the first iteration of the Open Culture program, Dance/NYC believes that there are necessary improvements to be made to the program. We offer the following recommendations to make Open Culture more sustainable as well as equitable for arts workers and accessible to all communities across the city:

1. Expand available locations and set a minimum number of Open Culture streets per community district to increase equitable access for communities in outer boroughs - The previously available Open Culture street map is not equitably distributed geographically and does not reflect the distribution of artists across the city. This inequitable distribution creates cultural deserts in underserved communities and does not allow all New Yorkers to have easy access to culture in their own neighborhoods.
2. Expand eligibility criteria beyond the currently limited cultural venues to include fiscally sponsored organizations and City Artists Corps eligible artists - Access to the Open Culture program has been limited to large nonprofit groups and has left out small budget dance entities, including fiscally sponsored groups and projects and independent dance artists, who make up the majority of the dance workforce in the City. The limited access to the program also meant there was de facto less participation from groups than the full potential under a more inclusive Open Culture program.
3. Require annual evaluation and reporting by the City of the program to address what's working, what's not working, and to ensure that community engagement is an integral part of Open Culture programming - A measure of the effectiveness and reach of Open Culture through regular evaluations is necessary to ensure that the program continues to grow and evolve in response to the needs of the diverse communities in the City. Accountability to communities it serves will only help ensure the continued success and sustainability of the program.
4. The City needs to expand its capacity to manage and implement Open Culture programming activities- This includes hiring more staff and investing the necessary funding to create the structure that can support the program fully and effectively. Producing site-specific outdoor performances takes a lot of labor, and the City needs to provide specific guidelines as well as adequate support to groups for Open Culture. For example, there was a lack of clarity and communications about hosting ticketed events that only few groups were able to take advantage of it.

The enduring cost of the COVID-19 pandemic is significant for both independent arts workers and organizations/groups and has disproportionately impacted BIPOC, immigrant, and disabled artist communities. Open Culture has shown its potential to help support arts and cultural workers as they continue to adapt to the realities of the pandemic. Though the program shares similarities with Open Streets, it is important to have a program that is specifically centered on culture. Culture has the right to happen in city streets. Arts and Culture are not only a major economic engine for New York City, they are vital to sustaining healthy communities. Moving forward with Open Culture as a permanent City program is not only a substantial investment in the resilience and long-term recovery of the arts and culture sector, but a forward looking investment in community building through arts and culture.

1. Blake, C., Jacques, N., and Dance/NYC (2020). [Defining "Small Budget" Dancemakers in a Changing Dance Ecology.](#)

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