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By NYC Department of Cultural Affairs

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*The CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund will provide \$640,000 to 22 organizations for programs that deepen engagement in the arts for people with disabilities*

*This pilot follows recommendations from [CreateNYC](#) to build greater diversity across the cultural sector by increasing inclusion of people with disabilities as artists, cultural workers, and audiences*

New York – The NYC Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) today announced the grantees of the inaugural CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund, a pilot initiative designed to support new and ongoing efforts to engage people with disabilities as artists, cultural workers, and audience members. By supporting new and expanded programs in a number of disciplines for a range of different disabilities, the new fund builds on recommendations made in the CreateNYC cultural plan released by Mayor de Blasio in July 2017. It also reflects DCLA's commitment to working with cultural organizations to provide opportunities for all New Yorkers to engage in the arts.

"The thoughtful, exciting programs receiving the inaugural CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund grants are a testament to the strong desire in our cultural community to open up opportunities for people with disabilities to engage in the arts as creators, leaders, and patrons," said Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl. "The projects go beyond removing barriers by lifting up and celebrating the creativity and diverse perspectives of this historically underrepresented group. Thanks in large part to the tremendous advocacy of the disability and disability arts communities during the cultural plan process, this is just the beginning of our collaborations with NYC's arts organizations to ensure that those with disabilities are more equitably represented in the cultural fabric of NYC."

"Art has provided a voice to marginalized groups throughout history. Through mediums like sculpture, paint, video, song, and dance, thoughts are expressed in a way that words cannot," said Victor Calise, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. "As the Department of Cultural Affairs continues their mission of promoting and strengthening the vibrant cultural life of NYC, I applaud their efforts with the CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund. With these grants, New Yorkers can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges, joys, and nuances of people with disabilities and disability culture."

"The CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund is a fantastic, innovative initiative and I am so excited to see the projects that will stem from its first round of grants," said Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer. "As a champion of the arts and cultural affairs, I am thrilled to see funding go directly toward supporting and empowering creators of diverse ages and abilities. It is our responsibility to make our city's cultural institutions and programming more accessible to all New Yorkers."

"I applaud the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs for the inaugural CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund. It is of the utmost importance that people with disabilities have access to art, are afforded plentiful opportunities to be creators and cultural workers, and see themselves represented in art," said New York City Council Majority Leader, Laurie A. Cumbo. "Art serves to both affirm our humanity and expand our world, and for far too long people with disabilities have been left out of the equation. I look forward to seeing these efforts of inclusion continue to expand in the years to come."

"I congratulate BRIC, Brooklyn Arts Exchange, and the Mark Morris Dance Group for being awarded grants in the inaugural CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund," said Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams. "The arts can be enriching and healing for everyone, and I'm pleased to see DCLA's expanded efforts to engage people with disabilities and increase cultural accessibility."

"Queens is proud of our world-class cultural institutions," said Queens Borough President Melinda Katz. "The grants will help these distinguished recipients ensure that Queens residents of all abilities are able to create and enjoy art. Congratulations to Queens Theatre and Flux Factory."

"This award will allow the Staten Island Children's Museum to partner with the Grace Foundation, Staten Island Museum, and Staten Island Zoo to provide a series of unique experiences and create an array of programming for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder," said Staten Island Borough President James Oddo. "These partnerships are exactly what we want to see in the community – good people and good organizations coming together for the sake of children."

The Disability Forward Fund will provide \$640,000 to 22 arts organizations and cultural institutions. Grants range in size from \$10,000 to \$35,000 and were awarded through a competitive application process. Organizations currently supported by DCLA through the Cultural Institutions Group or the Cultural Development Fund were eligible to apply, and over 100 applications were submitted. Awarded projects will be completed between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019.

Each of the winning proposals meaningfully addresses one or more of the goals of the CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund:

- support substantive projects that deepen cultural organizations' engagement of people with disabilities, including artists, cultural workers, and/or audience members;
- support new work created by and/or with people with disabilities;
- advance the employment of people with disabilities working as artists and cultural workers;
- encourage the cultural sector to think creatively and resourcefully about the equitable representation and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in its program offerings;
- promote exemplary models of diverse and creative approaches to engaging disability communities through cultural programming.

Proposed projects represent a variety of approaches to addressing these goals, including: productions of new work with disability as its subject; residencies and creative opportunities for working artists with disabilities; inclusive audience development efforts by cultural institutions; promotion of self-expression and self-advocacy through the arts; and scholarly exploration of art through the lens of disability. Projects will

reach disabled New Yorkers in all five boroughs, from toddlers to seniors, from students to veterans, from people who perform in American Sign Language to those who dance through Parkinson's disease, from experienced creators to people who have struggled to find a place in the arts and cultural life of the city.

The following organizations and projects will receive support from the CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund:

- Alpha Workshops' Employment by Design will formalize its paid internship and job readiness program for all graduates of its 36-week decorative arts courses, paving the way for full-time permanent employment in the design field for dozens of people with disabilities.
- In ArtsConnection's program "It's Our Story to Tell," NYC public school students who have significant disabilities will study processes of documentary filmmaking and create original works communicating their unique perspectives on the disability experience.
- BRIC, with partner Museum Access Consortium, will plan and implement a concrete set of inclusion strategies to engage artists and audiences with disabilities as part of the 2019 BRIC OPEN, its free annual arts & ideas festival.
- In Spring 2019, Brooklyn Arts Exchange will offer workspace grants for six dance or performance artists with disabilities in the Old American Can Factory. Grants will include an honorarium, artistic advising, and a performance opportunity.
- The Center for Traditional Music and Dance will offer an intensive teaching and performance-based mentoring program for Bronx veterans with disabilities (including PTSD); using West African music and dance, the program will allow participants to share their own stories through music, movement, and rhythm.
- As an expansion of its ArtPartners program, Children's Museum of the Arts will offer longer and more deeply integrated arts education classes to better serve students with disabilities in District 75 schools.
- Dance/NYC will pilot a residency program creating opportunities for disabled dance artists, with the goal of developing a program model that could be scaled up and rolled out across the city to serve future disabled dancers and disability artists.
- Flux Factory will produce a major group exhibition that will commission new artworks by disabled artists engaging disability as a subject matter. Throughout the exhibition duration, one participating artist will receive a subsidized studio and join Flux's Residency program.
- Gina Gibney Dance will partner with Disability/Arts/NYC to host a five-day boot camp, bringing together cultural workers, activists, and independent artists to collaborate in creating knowledge networks around disability artistry, equity and inclusion in NYC's cultural landscape.
- In an effort to intensify the connection between audience members with disabilities and dancers in the interactive performance D.I.S.P.L.A.Y.E.D., Heidi Latsky Dance will develop innovative new approaches to captioning, audio description, and other enhancements to its accompanying smartphone app.
- Infinity Dance will double the number of free dance classes and choreography workshops that it offers for New Yorkers with disabilities, and offer new formal and informal performance opportunities for participants.
- IRT Theater will finish development of Stepchild, a new musical featuring five Deaf lead roles played by Deaf actors. The process will include hiring of seven additional Deaf theatre professionals to collaborate in all aspects of production from writing to directing to lighting design to publicity, with workshop performances taking place in May 2019.
- The Jewish Museum will offer new and expanded programs in American Sign Language (ASL) for the Deaf community, including workshops for families who communicate in ASL, expanded ASL tours incorporating performative elements and social time, and career development for a Deaf emerging arts professional.
- Building on their award-winning Dance for PD program, the Mark Morris Dance Group will engage 30 New Yorkers living with Parkinson's in a nine-month project in which they develop all aspects – including choreography, design, and performance – of a new work to debut publicly in April 2019.
- Taking a critical look at its collection, the Metropolitan Museum of Art will examine art and museum practices through the perspective of disability aesthetics by bringing together scholars, educators, artists, and cultural workers with and without disabilities, and engaging audiences with disabilities to reframe their collections in a more inclusive way.
- As part of its ongoing Sam Edwards Play Development Series, New York Deaf Theatre will refine strategies enabling Deaf playwrights to create and workshop plays naturally and visually in their native language, American Sign Language (ASL), through the use of "Video-Scripts."
- Playwrights Horizons will produce the New York premiere of the new play I Was Most Alive with You by Craig Lucas, opening on August 31, 2018. The play will be performed simultaneously by two casts, one performing entirely in American Sign Language (ASL).
- Queens Theatre's Theatre for All (TFA) Short Play Readings will build on its successful New Play Readings methodology to create this focused initiative directly benefitting approximately 30 dramaturgs, directors, playwrights, and actors, all members of the highly underrepresented population of individuals with disabilities.
- Roundabout Theatre's multi-pronged initiative will deepen their longtime commitment to the Deaf community with a Signed Interpreted subscription series, expand their current Relaxed Performance offerings for patrons with Autism and other sensory needs, and connect NYC public school students with the work of RTC's first Deaf Teaching Artist.
- In order to embrace a more inclusive perspective about physical development of the human body, Spellbound Theatre will engage choreographers, performers, and devising artists with disabilities to help rework The World Inside Me, an interactive musical for preschoolers that explores and celebrates how we understand our bodies.
- The Staten Island Children's Museum will partner with the Staten Island Museum and the Staten Island Zoo to offer a monthly series of cultural outings and hands-on art experiences for children, teens, and young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
- Theater Breaking Through Barriers will expand both their Playmakers' Intensive and Playmakers' Redux programs, allowing them to develop and produce original new works about disability; to utilize the talents of disabled writers, directors, and actors; and to begin paying all participating artists.

During the public engagement process for CreateNYC, members of and advocates for the disability community – including practitioners and supporters of disability arts – offered several recommendations for how the plan could address barriers to cultural participation for New Yorkers with disabilities. In addition to the Disability Forward Fund, DCLA has also earmarked \$2 million in funding for capital projects addressing physical accessibility to arts venues, and hired a new staff member dedicated to strengthening DCLA's connection with the disability community and promoting greater accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities in all DCLA activities.

"Fostering diversity and equity in New York City's cultural sector was one of the core goals of the CreateNYC cultural plan. The CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund is making a great stride toward that goal for people with disabilities," said Ben Rodriguez-Cubenas, Chair of the CreateNYC Citizens' Advisory Committee. "This group of grantees will amplify the voices of historically underserved New Yorkers of all ages, in all five boroughs, at all levels of engagement across a variety of disciplines of the arts. That's exactly the kind of result we were hoping for from the cultural plan."

"Dance/NYC is proud to join this cohort of colleague arts organizations and cultural institutions dedicated to amplifying the voices and autonomy of disabled New Yorkers and increasing inclusion and access for disabled artists and disability communities," said Dance/NYC's Alejandra Duque Cifuentes. "We commend DCLA on their pilot initiative and look forward to continued collaboration as the City builds on recommendations made in the CreateNYC cultural plan."

"The Jewish Museum is honored to be among the grantees of the inaugural CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund. The NYC Department of Cultural Affairs award will allow us to greatly expand and enhance our ASL (American Sign Language) programming for visitors from the Deaf community so that they may experience our exhibitions that explore art and Jewish culture for people of all backgrounds," said Claudia Gould, Helen Goldsmith Menschel Director, The Jewish Museum.

"Roundabout is committed to ensuring that all New Yorkers feel welcome in our spaces. The generous support of the CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund will allow us to deepen and expand our accessibility offerings to people of all abilities, through our relaxed and sign-interpreted

performances, use of captioning and audio description systems, and by connecting NYC public schools students with the work of Roundabout's first deaf teaching artist," said Todd Haimes, Artistic Director/CEO of Roundabout Theatre Company.

"We're thrilled that the Flux Factory will be hosting a month-long exhibition surrounding the theme of arts and accessibility, which will include works and performances by artists with disabilities, an adaptive art program, public programming, panel discussions, and an artist-in-residency opportunity. The Flux Factory will be used as a hub to celebrate and to have critical conversations about inclusion and accessibility in the arts, through the lens of disabilities. As an artist-in-residence at Flux, and having volunteered with individuals with disabilities for years, I am looking forward to learning more, and facilitating a space for this integral – yet often overlooked – conversation in the art world," said Lexy Ho-Tai, Lead Curator of the upcoming exhibition at Flux Factory.

"For over a century The Met has prioritized accessibility. We are thrilled to be one of the inaugural recipients of the CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund as it allows us to build on our commitment to making museum experiences engaging and inclusive for all," said Sandra Jackson-Dumont, the Metropolitan Museum's Frederick P. and Sandra P. Rose Chairman of Education. "This grant gives us another opportunity to foster and expand meaningful connections between art, society, individuals and communities. Celebrating identity, self-expression, and creativity for all visitors with and without disabilities is central to our work with scholars, noted practitioners in the field, and artists with disabilities."

"Spellbound Theatre is developing a new production for children ages 0-5, *The World Inside Me*, which will be presented at The New Victory Theater in 2019 as a co-production with the Chicago Children's Theatre. This show is a sensory musical all about the human body, and we knew that we needed a diverse range of abilities and body types to be a part of this show as we devise and perform. The CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund has enabled us to hire artists from the disability community to be a part of this production and create a performance that will be an inclusive celebration of the human body for the youngest audiences," said Spellbound Theatre Artistic Director Lauren Jost.

"Heidi Latsky Dance is absolutely thrilled to be a recipient of this forward thinking grant. HLD is dedicated to redefining beauty and virtuosity and shifting public perception about disability and dance through its innovative programming," said Heidi Latsky, Artistic Director and Founder, Heidi Latsky Dance. "With this funding we are able to extend our reach by developing our app so that it serves as an exciting and accessible vehicle for engagement with the public, specifically those with disabilities."

"The Disability Forward Fund comes at a time when NYC is witnessing bold and uncompromising disability artistry. Disability/Arts/NYC and Gibney are thrilled that our Boot Camp for Cultural Workers is among its first recipients. Together, we are building the disability arts movement and building community," said Simi Linton and Kevin Gotkin, Co-Directors, Disability/Arts/NYC.

"The CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund arrived at a crucial moment for master drummer, dancer, and disabilities advocate Sidiki Conde, who will draw on his own experience as a disabled artist to teach traditional Guinean drumming and song to military veterans," said Maureen Loughran, Deputy Director, The Center for Traditional Music and Dance. "We are proud to work with Sidiki and the Bronx Veterans Center on this project and are honored, through the generosity of the Department of Cultural Affairs, to help amplify Sidiki's message of inclusiveness through the arts."

"Infinity Dance Theater is grateful to receive a generous grant from the Disability Forward Fund to expand our tuition-free dance classes for individuals using manual wheelchairs and power chairs – now a year-round program at Gibney," said Infinity Dance Theater Founder and Artistic Director Kitty Lunn. "The expanded program will narrow the accessibility gap for individuals with physical disabilities seeking ongoing dance training, as their opportunities have typically been limited to one-time or short-term outreach/exposure experiences, or classes that are prohibitively expensive."

"CMA is honored to be among the recipients of the inaugural CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund," said Barbara Hunt McLanahan, Executive Director of the Children's Museum of the Arts. "The grant will support our museum wide programs for children with disabilities, children diagnosed on the autism spectrum and their families."

"We are grateful to be a recipient of the CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund to further our mission of recognizing and celebrating different learning styles and encouraging participation by visitors of all abilities," said Dina Rosenthal, Executive Director of the Staten Island Children's Museum. "We actively promote awareness and inclusion not only for our visitors, but among our staff members and in our programming – in fact, our October programs this year will focus on employees, artists, and chefs with disabilities who have succeeded in their chosen fields."

"With DCLA's inaugural CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund, IRT Theater is excited to continue developing *Stepchild*, a brand new musical featuring five Deaf leading characters, in addition to essential roles for Deaf artists in the production, design, and creative team," said Kori Rushton, Producing Artistic Director of IRT Theater. "Supporting the work of Deaf artists has always been an integral part of IRT's mission, and *Stepchild* will be the first step in a larger IRT producing program that will be devoted to supporting work by, with, and for the Deaf community."

"This grant will support the presentation of ten short plays by writers with disabilities and/or featuring characters with disabilities. We put out a call for submissions and have received over 150 in just four weeks: the voices are there, the roles are there, and with the support of DCLA, we will bring visibility to these writers and new opportunities for actors with disabilities," said Taryn Sacramone, Executive Director, Queens Theatre.

"Playwrights Horizons is honored to be one of the inaugural recipients of a CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund, which will help us to reach out to and serve New York City's Deaf and hard of hearing community with our production of *I Was Most Alive With You* by Craig Lucas," said Tim Sanford, Artistic Director, Playwrights Horizons. "The Disability Forward Fund's support will enable this audience to enjoy a rare production performed entirely in American Sign Language, and will deepen Playwrights Horizons' ongoing commitment to serving audiences and artists who are Deaf and hard of hearing."

"Amplifying underrepresented voices is at the core of BRIC's mission. We are grateful to DCLA for the opportunity to strengthen our commitment to better serving artists and audiences with disabilities," said Betsy Smulyan, BRIC's Executive Vice President.

"Many documentaries have been made about children with disabilities. Our project will put the camera in their own hands," said Steven Tennen, Executive Director, ArtsConnection. "We look forward to sharing the unique perspectives and artistic expression of the students at the Dr. Horan School."

"Access and inclusion are important aspects of all our programming at the Dance Center, in our Brooklyn community, and on tour," said Nancy Umanoff, Executive Director of the Mark Morris Dance Group. "This grant from DCLA supports performance opportunities for participants in *Dance for PD*, our internationally-acclaimed program for people with Parkinson's disease. We're proud to be recognized for the work that we do."

"We are deeply honored and grateful to New York City's Department of Cultural Affairs and its Commissioner, Tom Finkelpearl, for creating the Disability Forward Fund, which specifically targets support for disability and the arts," said Nicholas Vaselli, Artistic Director, Theater Breaking Through Barriers. "New York City once again proves to be the leader in supporting our rich and diverse disabled community and we feel extremely fortunate to be included in the pilot phase of this exciting new resource for our artists."

"The Alpha Workshops serves as a safe, creative space for people with disabilities, where access to art education provides hope and inspiration," said Alpha Workshops Executive Director Ken Wampler. "We are thrilled to be one of the organizations chosen for this pilot year of the Disability Forward Fund, which will give our students an opportunity to be placed in paid internships at creative businesses throughout

New York City."

"BAX is grateful for the opportunity to launch BAX SPACE ACCESS GRANT providing accessible space for dance, theater and performance artists over a five month period beginning January 2019," said Marya Warshaw, Founding Executive Director, Brooklyn Arts Exchange. "We recognize that there is a dearth of space and advocacy for artists with disabilities and that too often disability is left out of conversations about equity. BAX is an artistic home for so many artists, POC, LGBTQ, other national and cultural identities and it is ready to provide a home base to disabled artists and their projects."

"New York Deaf Theatre is incredibly honored to be one of the recipients of the CreateNYC Disability Forward Fund, the largest amount by far that our company has received in its 35+ year history," said New York Deaf Theatre's Annie Wiegand, Producing Director, and JW Guido, Artistic Director. "With this funding, we continue to push our mission, which is to create, develop, and support work by Deaf artists. We give Deaf artists opportunity and platforms that they may not find elsewhere."

#### About CreateNYC

Released by Mayor de Blasio in July 2017, CreateNYC is the first-ever comprehensive cultural plan for the City of New York. Based on input from nearly 200,000 New Yorkers, the plan will serve as a roadmap to a more sustainable, inclusive, and equitable cultural sector that all residents have a stake in. The plan's strategies for supporting arts and culture throughout the city include stakeholders at all levels –from residents on a single block to City agencies that encompass all five boroughs. Visit [www.CreateNYC.org](http://www.CreateNYC.org) to learn more.

#### About NYC Department of Cultural Affairs

The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) is dedicated to supporting and strengthening New York City's vibrant cultural life. DCLA works to promote and advocate for quality arts programming and to articulate the contribution made by the cultural community to the City's vitality. The Department represents and serves nonprofit cultural organizations involved in the visual, literary, and performing arts; public-oriented science and humanities institutions including zoos, botanical gardens, and historic and preservation societies; and creative artists at all skill levels who live and work within the City's five boroughs. DCLA also provides donated materials for arts programs offered by the public schools and cultural and social service groups, and commissions permanent works of public art at City-funded construction projects throughout the five boroughs. Visit [www.nyc.gov/culture](http://www.nyc.gov/culture) for more information.

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