

# CREATIVE NEW YORK

A RECAP OF THE *CREATIVE NEW YORK CONFERENCE* | OCTOBER 2015

On Wednesday, October 14, 2015, the Center for an Urban Future (CUF) convened a high-profile conference at the Morgan Library to discuss the future of the arts in New York. Co-sponsored by the City of New York, the event brought together over 200 leaders from arts organizations, philanthropy and government. It began with a keynote address from **Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen** and featured speakers such as NYC Council Majority Leader **Jimmy Van Bramer**, Ford Foundation President **Darren Walker**, Former NEA Chairman **Rocco Landesman**, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Acting Commissioner **Edwin Torres**, Brooklyn Museum Director **Anne Pasternak**, Studio Museum Director **Thelma Golden**, and choreographer and 2015 MacArthur “Genius” Award recipient, **Michelle Dorrance**.

The symposium delved into some of the biggest challenges facing New York’s artists, arts organizations and creative workers—from the affordability challenges experienced by so many artists and the struggles of mid-sized arts organizations to the diversity gap in the arts. Building upon the Center’s 2015 [Creative New York](#) report, the discussion focused on generating new ideas for strengthening the arts across the five boroughs and maintaining New York City’s status as the nation’s pre-eminent creative capital.

Deputy Mayor Glen kicked off the convening by emphasizing the powerful economic impact of the city’s creative sector. Importantly, her words framed investing in the arts as an investment in the city’s long-term economic growth, and reiterated a major finding from our report: that the creative sector arguably provides New York with its greatest competitive advantage. Glen also pointed out that the arts are integral to achieving the goals of the



As the keynote speaker, **Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen** emphasized the economic important and social impact of the arts in New York City.

de Blasio Administration, and she highlighted some of the steps the administration is taking to support the arts—from creating 1,500 units of affordable housing and 500 affordable workspaces for artists, to supporting NYC Media Lab, an incubator for innovative start-ups in the commercial, creative industries, to transforming unused spaces into a live/work spaces for New York City’s artists. And by improving access to cultural institutions through initiatives like IDNYC and increasing arts education in every New York City school, the arts are being deployed as an essential tool for reducing inequality across the five boroughs.

Not surprisingly, affordability was a major theme of the day. Renowned tap-dancer and 2015 McArthur Genius Award winner, Michelle Dorrance spoke of her struggles acquiring adequate rehearsal space. “A building recently torn down on Eighth Avenue that was the home of flamenco, tap and hip-hop communities, all together in one space.” She concluded, “I look at the way the spaces are being

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Future



Panel 1, from left to right: **Darren Walker** (Ford Foundation), **Rocco Landesman** (former chair of NEA), **Anne Pasternak** (Brooklyn Museum), **Edwin Torres** (DCLA) and **Michelle Dorrance** (Dorrance Dance).

destroyed, and communities of artists don't have anywhere to go when that happens."

Our first panel discussed a number of ideas for addressing the challenges that so many artists face in finding affordable space to work, rehearse or perform. One of the ideas that had broad consensus among the panelists was to open up auditoriums, music rooms and dance facilities located in public schools across the five boroughs that currently sit empty after school hours. At a time when affordable rehearsal spaces are in remarkably short supply, these school facilities could provide a big lift. While there are undoubtedly bureaucratic and legal hurdles, several panelists urged the Department of Education to work with DCLA to overcome these challenges and open up at least some of the city's school buildings to artists or nonprofit arts groups when no one else is using the space. This echoed

a recommendation from the Creative New York report, which suggested that the "DCLA and the DOE partner with local foundations to help cover custodial, security, energy and insurance expenses associated with the program."

There was also significant discussion about how to strengthen the city's small and mid-sized arts organizations. With a critical mass of capital funding going to large, elite cultural institutions, Ford Foundation President Darren Walker pointed out how smaller organizations are often overlooked, even though they are essential for the health of New York City's arts ecosystem. "The Whitney and the MOMA depend on the Studio Museum," said Walker, yet "now, all the risk is being taken by the vulnerable, smaller organizations." If we could move away from viewing larger cultural institutions as the paradigm, argued The Studio Museum's Thelma Golden, we



Over 200 leaders from government, philanthropy, cultural institutions and nonprofit organizations attended the conference.



Moderator **Adam Forman** (CUF) asking **Thelma Golden** (The Studio Museum) about the challenges of small and midsized arts institutions during Panel 2.

could better evaluate and sustain the assets of small and mid-sized institutions, like their impact, their reach and their connections to neighborhoods and communities.

To this end, many panelists emphasized the importance of government and foundation support for smaller cultural institutions. They recommended a greater share of grant dollars be devoted to General Operating Support and advocated for multi-year grants. As a way of increasing city operating support for arts nonprofits, several participants suggested that a portion of the Hotel Tax be dedicated to the Department of Culture, as is common in other cities.

The inspiration for the conference was the Center for an Urban Future's recently published [Creative New York](#) report, which documented the growing economic importance of the city's creative sector but also found that the city's working artists and nonprofit arts organizations are experiencing more intense challenges than ever before and that New York is facing increasingly intense competition for creative talent from a growing number of cities.

The event concluded with a time of audience response, where attendees could respond to the panel discussions and offer up their own ideas for what the city and government could do to bolster the arts in NYC. In addition to collecting ideas from attendees, we also asked respondents how optimistic or pessimistic they were about the future of New York's creative sector. Out of 70 survey respondents, 73 percent were optimistic about the future of the arts in NYC.

### AUDIENCE IDEAS

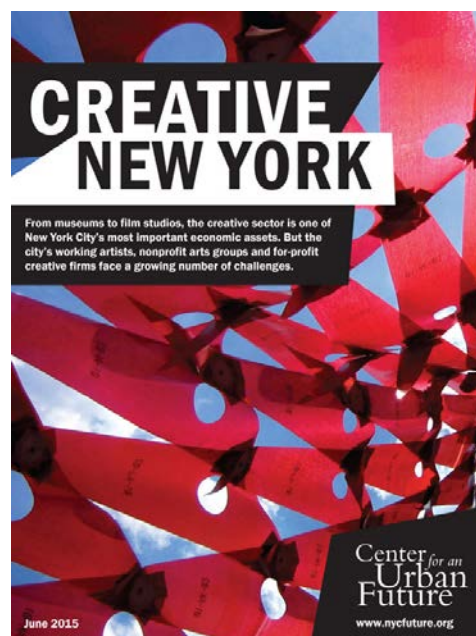
By the end of the conference, more than a dozen people shared their ideas out loud and 70 submitted their ideas in written form. We listed some of the most achievable and compelling ones below.

#### Grants/Funding/Budgets

- Increase general operating support and multi-year funding within public and philanthropic funding.
- Increase funding to local arts council, which can be passed on to artists and small organizations without 501c3 status.
- Increase DCLA budget to better support the cultural development fund, which often



Panel 2, from left to right: moderator **Adam Forman** (CUF), **Thelma Golden** (The Studio Museum), **Ella Weiss** (Brooklyn Arts Council), **Sheila Lewandowski** (The Chocolate Factory Theater) and **Rosalba Rolón** (Pregones and Puerto Rican Traveling Theater).



The Center for an Urban Future's 2015 report on the economic impact of New York's creative industries, titled [Creative New York](#).

accounts for 30 percent of small and mid-sized budgets.

- Create a hotel tax to support the arts in NYC.
- Allocate money from DCLA budget to help cover the utilities and health insurance costs of artists and small arts organizations.
- Redirect cultural capital funds for brick and mortar projects to working capital funds to support the operations, production and reserve capital needs of small and mid-sized arts organization.

#### School Partnerships

- Create more opportunities for artists to use community buildings and schools.
- Generate earned income through performances in community buildings and schools.

- The city should meet the state’s guidelines for teaching and learning in the arts. Every child, every class, every school should have arts infrastructure. It is foundational to college and career success, and teaches collaboration, creative thinking and other skills.

**Big to Small Organization Relationships**

- Create a mentorship/exchange/residency opportunities between big and small/mid-sized organizations with a specific focus on supporting organizations outside of Manhattan.

**Diversity**

- Build specific capacities in small & mid-sized organizations with the goal of nurturing structural diversity. Create a pipeline of diverse candidates.

**Affordable Housing and Workspaces**

- Look to other models in other sectors for innovation. For example: The tiny house movement and food truck movement. Small scale workspaces that could be mobile could provide a new space entry point for individuals and small orgs.
- Establish a zoning/FAR giveback to developers who develop art spaces, like the FRESH program, but for arts.
- Look to the Small Business Jobs Survival Act as a solution for artists/arts organizations who need stabilized rent.
- Create a tax free zone to incentivize commercial and private property owners to develop spaces for the arts and cultural organizations in specific areas.
- Capitalize on the city’s hundreds of empty buildings. Create a database of these spaces and a process for small nonprofits and artists to access them by offering property owners tax incentives for providing low rent or rent free space to artists or arts/cultural organizations.
- Change the name of zoning category “community facilities,” which is often misunderstood and undervalued by developers, to “cultural facilities.”
- Create a single resource/central hub where individuals in the arts can go for resources and

information, like open spaces for rent, jobs, funding opportunities, equipment purchases, mentoring, schools, meetings, etc.

**City/Government Involvement in the Arts**

- Embed artists, arts initiatives and arts staffing within all city agencies.

**Public Art/Art in the Community**

- Make Broadway a linear park for temporary art that is curated by a high level artistic jury.
- Support more public art installations and performances in public plazas, which are accessible to public, low cost to produce and can change frequently creating more opportunities for artists to participate.

