



Testimony of Educational Alliance
Before the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs
Oversight: Administering DCLA's Cultural Development Fund
Councilmember Chi Ossé, Chair
Submitted September 26, 2023

Thank you Chair Ossé and members of the Cultural Affairs Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important subject.

Educational Alliance was founded in 1889 to provide supports to newly arrived Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. At that time our programs included art classes that allowed participants to explore their own creativity and cultural offerings that provided an escape from cramped tenement life. Since our earliest years, Educational Alliance has been guided by the principle that each person is born with a divine spark of dignity and creativity and this belief remains central to the cultural programming incorporated into the services we provide today. In each of our community centers we offer a range of arts programming: studio arts classes, dance and creative movement classes, theater workshops and performances, and music programs for parents and babies. All are low-cost and accessible to a wide and diverse audience.

Particularly as the City emerges from the pandemic, investments in cultural programming are critical for stabilizing local venues and expanding opportunity. Though we do not currently receive funds through the Cultural Development Fund (CDF), we have been a recipient in the past and have used these dollars to directly support arts programming for over 1,200 New Yorkers through our art school, which offers studio art classes to anyone in the community, as well as theater performances in the 14Y Theater through **LABA, a laboratory for Jewish Culture**. With a troubling rise in anti-Semitism across the City and nationwide, this important program is a critical response that broadens the field of education and raises cultural awareness. Past funding we have received through the Cultural Development Fund, as well as discretionary awards through CASA and SU-CASA, is critical to the work we do, and enables us to offer high quality programs infused with opportunities for creative expression and rich cultural experiences.

Our small, independent theater venue offers an important resource in the downtown performing arts community, where affordable rehearsal and performance space is difficult to find. We are dedicated to keeping small independent theater in our community despite the difficulties facing this industry today. The Cultural Development Fund would provide much needed resources for us. While reforms to the CDF program in FY2024 helped make the funding process more equitable, we join colleagues in asking for further reforms:

Timeliness

- CDF funds must be **allocated in a more timely manner**. When grantees don't receive promised funds until well into the following fiscal year, they must pay for programming up front which often forces them to scale back programming or not pay artists on time.

Transparency

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- DCLA should **release data on distribution of CDF funds** as well as clear information about available funding streams within CDF and how best to navigate the system to be considered for funding.

Equity

- DCLA should create **new and narrower budget tiers** and award amounts so that organizations are competing against peers of similar sizes, and so that award amounts better reflect the relative size of the organization.
- DCLA should establish an **equitable baseline increase** for funded organizations, and develop a more collaborative path towards achieving model equity in cultural funding.
- DCLA should create a **dedicated funding stream for art service organizations** so they are not competing with arts-producing and arts-presenting organizations.

Accountability

- The Cultural Advisory Council should be a true **oversight body for DCLA**. It should hold regular, public meetings with DCLA to review applications and grant-making decisions.
- The Cultural Advisory Council should have representatives of each borough to ensure **geographic distribution**.

Thank you for your consideration.