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NYC DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS RELEASES “WHAT WE HEARD”: A LOOK AT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FOR THE CREATENYC CULTURAL PLAN

Since last fall, 185K+ New Yorkers answered the call to share their ideas, concerns, and priorities for culture in NYC

In a Siena College Research Institute phone survey conducted as part of outreach, 97% of residents said arts and culture are important to the overall quality of life in New York City

The public is encouraged to review proposal contained in What We Heard at CreateNYC.org, provide feedback, and rate their priorities

New York – NYC Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl today announced the release of What We Heard, an overview of the feedback collected during the public engagement process for the CreateNYC cultural plan currently in development. From May 15-31, residents can review the proposals at www.CreateNYC.org to offer feedback and rate their priorities for what will be included in the cultural plan when it’s released this summer.

“In tens of thousands of interactions with residents from all walks of life, we’ve heard loud and clear: New Yorkers see enormous value in arts and culture, and they want greater opportunities to participate in our city’s extraordinary cultural life,” said **Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl**. “We are incredibly grateful to the groups and individuals who seized on this opportunity to take a close look at how culture impacts our communities, and ways that we can make sure residents have greater access to its transformative benefits. With the release of What We Heard, we’re asking the public to take a look at what we’ve learned in this process and to let us know if their priorities are reflected as we work toward releasing the plan this summer.”

The commissioner will also participate in a series of CreateNYC Office Hours with the Commissioner at library branches in each borough over the next two weeks to review What We Heard and get direct feedback from residents. A full list of dates and locations for these is available at www.CreateNYC.org/show-up.

Over 185,000 residents have participated in the [planning process since it kicked off](#) in fall 2016, including more than 25,000 who showed up at more than 400 events in person. In person events included meetings, focus groups, workshops, and more. A [partnership with the city’s three library systems](#) helped to solicit over 10,000 cultural participation surveys by placing them in library branches in all five boroughs. Residents provided their views on issues including equity, arts education, affordability, art in public space, and neighborhood character, among others. Together, the feedback reflects a vast range of experiences and captures diverse ideas and opinions of New Yorkers from every corner of the city.

"From the beginning, the development of New York City's first cultural plan has intentionally been a deeply democratic process that only works if people from every neighborhood and all walks of life participate," said **Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer**. "Six months ago, we began a journey to find answers and gather insights on how individuals experience art and culture in our city. After community workshops, focus groups, and events in every borough, over 180,000 voices shared their personal experiences and thoughts on arts and culture. The results are in, and this feedback will be central in the coming months as we draft the cultural plan. We have a responsibility to ensure that art and culture is equally accessible to all, that we are working to empower and train the next generation of artists, and that cultural organizations large and small are fully supported. As the Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries, I'm committed to building a plan that meets this responsibility and renews our dedication to art and culture."

"New Yorkers certainly weren't shy when it came to sharing how their lives can be enriched through better access to arts and culture," said **Council Member Stephen Levin**. "Through CreateNYC, we heard from a rich tapestry of voices that make up our diverse and unique communities, unified in their love and enthusiasm for the arts. While the engagement with the public has been enlightening so far, it's not over yet. I invite everyone to continue making their voice heard, and together we can make the vision they see for their community a reality."

"What We Heard embodies our city's inclusive approach to realizing the vision that everyday New Yorkers have shared for the future of our city. As a Member of the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs who also proudly represents Brooklyn's Cultural District, I look forward to working with the Commissioner Finkelpearl to transform the five boroughs into a beautiful canvas that captures our unique cultural diversity and tells our story for generations to come," said **Council Member Laurie A. Cumbo**.

As part of outreach efforts, a phone survey was conducted by Siena College Research Institute conducted in March and April 2017, which confirmed the extraordinary level of support for culture across demographic groups:

- 97% of respondents said that arts and culture are important to the overall quality of life in New York City; 84% of these said it's "very important."
- 92% said that art and culture are important in their lives; 72% said "very important."
- 77% of respondents wish they were able to attend more arts and cultural activities.
- 90% indicated that promoting arts and culture is a key part of protecting the heritage of all New Yorkers.

Groups from across the city also organized events and feedback sessions to make sure that their communities' voices were heard in the process. This included groups [supported by The New York City Cultural Agenda Fund in the New York Community Trust](#) to ensure that a range of voices and perspectives influence the development of the plan. The Cultural Agenda Fund grantees hosted over 35 workshops, focus groups, and other events. Another 30 organizations submitted feedback for the plan using the CreateNYC tool kit, which was provided on request to help facilitate independent organizing around the plan. A number of groups and coalitions also submitted formal proposals and research to DCLA to inform the plan, including the NYC Artist Coalition, Dance/NYC, the Disability Arts New York Taskforce, the Cultural Equity Group, and more.

"The NYC Cultural Agenda Fund, a funder collaborative, helped ensure that the City heard a wide range of diverse voices from the culture sector throughout their cultural planning process, while documenting the social impact of the arts citywide. We encourage New Yorkers to show up for what's important to their cultural lives and weigh in on the City's policy proposals. Our hope is that the final cultural plan will embrace the values of equity, ensure a commitment to the City's artists, and increase support for arts and cultural agencies that are serving and are led by historically underrepresented communities that are on the frontlines of the issues facing our

sector,” said **Michelle Coffey and Kerry McCarthy, co-chairs, the New York City Cultural Agenda Fund.**

The cultural plan [Citizens Advisory Committee](#) and the [Cultural Affairs Advisory Commission](#) also played a critical role in guiding the process and ensuring that public engagement connected with constituents in every community.

“As chair of the cultural plan Citizens’ Advisory Committee I have witnessed firsthand how Commissioner Finkelppearl and his team have made listening to this city’s stakeholders a top priority,” said **Rockefeller Brothers Fund program director and Chair of the Citizen’s Advisory Committee Ben Rodriguez-Cubeñas.** “The document released today is only the beginning as we continue to create opportunities for all New Yorkers to share their views and to work toward a plan that takes into account their artistic and cultural aspirations.”

“The NYC Department of Cultural Affairs cast an immense net over the five boroughs to hear the public’s priorities about the arts and cultural activity,” said **Chair of the Cultural Affairs Advisory Commission Susana Leval.** “It is my hope that the CreateNYC Cultural Plan will translate the urgent energy of the community voices we heard into a vital document that accurately captures their vision and reflects their priorities.”

What We Heard reflects a condensed version of the huge range of data collected through the public engagement process. The value of this process extends beyond the data collected, providing unprecedented opportunities for DCLA to connect with New Yorkers where they live to learn more about what matters to them. It has sparked new coalitions and a wider conversation around the value of art and culture to all residents of New York City.

“Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelppearl, the New York City Council and all of the stakeholders should be commended for developing New York City’s first ever citywide plan on culture and the arts,” said **Queens Borough President Melinda Katz.** “Queens encourages everyone to comment on the proposals and have a direct impact in shaping and strengthening the CreateNYC Cultural Plan.”

“We are grateful to the many library patrons who contributed their opinions and perspectives to the CreateNYC planning process,” said **Brooklyn Public Library President and CEO Linda E. Johnson.** “The entire city will benefit from having a diversity of viewpoints reflected in the plan. The Library looks forward to hosting performances, exhibitions, readings and events that incorporate the vision and findings of CreateNYC.”

“New Yorkers have taken the stage and affirmed that the arts are central to telling their stories, reflecting their diverse cultures, educating their children and enriching their lives,” **Elizabeth Alexander, Director of Creativity and Free Expression at the Ford Foundation.** “The deliberative process to engage with as many New York residents as possible to learn more about how they experience art and culture will yield a more inclusive and equitable CreateNYC. With the transformative power of the arts more evenly dispersed throughout NYC and supports put in place to assist artists to live and work here, the result will be a boon to the city and all of its residents. We commend Commissioner Finkelppearl and the Department of Cultural Affairs for bravely aiming to improve and make more equitable our City’s landscape of arts and cultural resources.”

About CreateNYC

In May 2015, [Mayor Bill de Blasio signed legislation](#) requiring the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) to lead creation of New York City’s first comprehensive cultural plan, CreateNYC. Public input will be the backbone of CreateNYC, providing a long-term blueprint for the efforts and policies of the City and its partners in expanding access to cultural opportunities

for all New Yorkers. The plan will also examine a number of issues crucial for maintaining New York City's cultural vibrancy, including affordable artist workspace; access to arts education; and the role of cultural activities in public space. The CreateNYC cultural plan will be published in summer 2017. More information is available at www.CreateNYC.org.

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