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NYC DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS ANNOUNCES MAJOR EXPANSION OF BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY PROGRAM, WORKING WITH LOCAL CULTURAL GROUPS TO STRENGTHEN THEIR ROLES IN UNDERSERVED NEIGHBORHOODS

Nearly \$700,000 in public and private funding, including new City money and a \$150,000 grant from the New York Community Trust, will support the program in four neighborhoods through 2017.

Groups in Jamaica, Queens, the South Bronx, Northern Manhattan, and East Brooklyn will receive targeted training, support, and other services to increase local access to cultural programming.

The program strengthens cultural organizations in communities that the de Blasio Administration is collaborating with on planning, visioning, and other efforts charting the future of neighborhoods.

New York – The NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and its community partners announced a major expansion of its [Building Community Capacity](#) (BCC) program to the neighborhoods of the South Bronx (including Melrose, Hunt’s Point and Mott Haven); South East Queens (including Jamaica); and Northern Manhattan (including Washington Heights and Inwood). The program has been working in East Brooklyn neighborhoods of East New York, Brownsville, and Cypress Hills since earlier this year. BCC brings a suite of services and programming to provide local cultural organizations with workshops, funding, and other support that help to strengthen their roles in the community and increase access to local cultural programming. It also formalizes a committee structure in each neighborhood for groups to communicate, collaborate, and leverage resources to better engage local audiences.

“The arts inspire, engage, and educate New Yorkers in every neighborhood. By ‘Building Community Capacity’ for local cultural groups, we’re helping to ensure that as our communities change over time, residents and arts organizations are working in tandem to grow the assets and opportunities that make NYC a great place to live, work, learn, and play,” said **Mayor de Blasio**.

“New York is home to the world’s most vibrant creative community, and community-based cultural organizations are woven into the fabric of neighborhoods in all five boroughs,” said **Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl**. “With this new program, we’re ready to collaborate with partners all over the city – cultural groups, community leaders, City agencies, elected officials, and many others – as local residents envision and build neighborhoods that will continue to thrive for generations to come.”

These four low-income communities have been targeted by the de Blasio Administration for inter-agency support as they undergo planning and visioning processes. One of BCC’s major goals is to integrate cultural assets and activities into these broader community development plans. In each target neighborhood, local groups establish a formal steering committee and each committee directs the hiring process for the full time program coordinator dedicated to moving the program forward. The coordinator is funded through BCC.

The program also provides:

- **Technical assistance** that stabilizes and strengthens arts organizations. Assistance includes training in fundraising and board development, ensuring organizations have the resources, leadership, and effective operations to function as a stable and vital presence in their community. BCC staff helps identify local cultural needs and assets and build relationships between arts organizations and other community stakeholders including City agencies, community development corporations, public housing community centers, healthcare providers, libraries, parks, small businesses, and residents. To date, the **NYC Parks Department** and **NYC Department of Transportation** have already provided a number of local workshops explaining the permitting process for activating public space with cultural activities as well as the process of installing public art on City-owned land.
- Each neighborhood will receive **a grant to support a community cultural project** to be designed over the course of the program and executed by the steering committee and local partners.

“Through EDC’s extensive community engagement sessions in neighborhoods like Jamaica, Queens, Inwood in Upper Manhattan and the South Bronx, we have heard from residents time and again that artists are integral to the vibrancy of their neighborhoods,” said **NYCEDC President Maria Torres-Springer**. “We are proud to work in partnership with the Department of Cultural Affairs to help foster and empower each neighborhood’s distinct culture. We applaud the expansion of this important program.”

“Community input into neighborhood planning is key to the future success of our incredibly diverse and amazing communities. With this added programming, residents and local groups will engage directly and consistently with city planners to strengthen neighborhoods and cultural organizations as we continue to invest in our communities – for today and for future generations of New Yorkers,” said **New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development Commissioner (HPD) Vicki Been**.

Given the incredibly diverse communities taking part in the program, BCC is working with stakeholders on strategies that leverage the unique assets of each target neighborhood. In addition to establishing a formal steering committee and hiring local program coordinators, activities in each target community are already underway, and progress to date includes:

- **In East Brooklyn**, the BCC cohort participated in the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development’s [visioning workshops for the Dinsmore-Chestnut site](#). The workshops allowed residents to explore possible building design and uses, including affordable housing, community space, and other amenities for the 80,000 square-foot City-owned site.
- **In Southeast Queens**: The Afrikan Poetry Theatre has started filming one minute clips “man on the street” style, asking residents, actors, artists, organizations, business owners, workers, and other locals what they think “Jamaica Is..” which is the BCC group’s slogan. The videos will be shared in public areas and other venues and channels.
- **In Northern Manhattan / Washington Heights**, the BCC cohort is undertaking a major cultural visioning and planning process that will reinforce the broader rezoning process underway in the area.
- **In the South Bronx**, the Bronx Culture Collective is developing “The South Bronx Cultural Assets Map,” a comprehensive online map and database that will document the cultural ecosystem and resources of the South Bronx. It will make a particular effort to capture new and emerging influences that will have a major impact on the cultural makeup and offerings in these neighborhoods going forward.

“Queens has so many dynamic cultural groups whose ideas will be able to move forward thanks to the funding from the Building Community Capacity program. Investing in our city’s cultural groups empowers our entire community, and BCC’s expansion will help ensure that cultural groups in Jamaica and Southeast Queens have the resources they need to connect with residents,” said **Council Member Rory I. Lancman**.

"I am thankful to the Department of Cultural Affairs for expanding its Building Community Capacity (BCC) initiative, especially here in our own community," said **Council Member Mark Levine**. "Through the BCC, we are able to highlight the eclectic culture of Washington Heights and – most importantly – emphasize the importance of weaving together our local nonprofits, cultural centers, schools and other organizations with a community that is incredibly proud and passionate about its history and its traditions."

"I am pleased that the Department of Cultural Affairs recognizes the integral role cultural organizations and the arts play in community development," said **Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson**. "As the Bronx gains long overdue appreciation for its cultural diversity, it is important we encourage and ensure our cultural partners' sustainability. I am particularly excited the Building Community Capacity program will be investing in Melrose and I thank Commissioner Finkelpearl and community partners for this expansion."

"Our city is facing so many challenges that can divide us, but love of arts and culture has always brought us together. The BCC program recognizes the important role local arts and cultural organizations play in every community and helps to expand their reach through funding and technical support, it has been a great success in neighborhoods in my district and I'm happy to hear about the expansion to more communities across the city," said **Council Member Rafael L. Espinal, Jr.**

"The Bronx community has a longstanding history of art, music and culture," said **Christine Licata, Director of Performing and Visual Arts at Casita Maria**. "The Building Community Capacity program will help community leaders, artists and organizations with the ability to increase impact, facilitate collaboration and provide greater support to the community for increased engagement and accessibility. This will ensure the sustainability of the community's rich art and culture that exists in the South Bronx."

"Art and cultural activities are vital to our neighborhood," said **artist and Jamaica Is... co-chair Rejin Leys**. "We're very happy to have the opportunity to participate in the Building Community Capacity program and work towards building stronger ties between our cultural organizations, artists, and community members."

"Building Community Capacity is rooted in the understanding that the people who live and work in our neighborhood are the people who know our neighborhood best," said **Veronica Santiago Liu, General Coordinator, Word Up Community Bookshop/Librería Comunitaria**. "I look forward to BCC providing us with an opportunity to preserve and amplify the essential role that arts and culture have long played in our uptown community."

"The Building Community Capacity initiative has catalyzed collaboration among local organizations here in East Brooklyn, expanding opportunities to develop cultural programming in a range of disciplines, together," said **Iris Robertson of Brownsville Heritage House**. "It provides a centralized platform for inspiring artists and entrepreneurs, strengthening connections among our diverse communities."

Extending through December 2017, BCC will be supported by \$370,000 in City funds, a \$150,000 grant from the New York Community Trust, and \$175,000 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant program. With the funding already allocated since the program started in 2015, nearly \$900,000 will support the full run of the program.

"While tourists tend to flock to Times Square's theater district or Fifth Avenue's 'Museum Mile,' New Yorkers know great arts and culture can be found citywide because great artists live and work in all five boroughs, even in the poorest neighborhoods," said **Kerry McCarthy, Program Director at the New York Community Trust**. "The New York Community Trust is pleased to help reveal vibrant cultural activity in these four neighborhoods and help raise the visibility of these important community arts groups and artists."

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