

# Creative Transformations

Stories, Learnings, and Recommendations to Support Arts, Culture, and Public Housing Communities



**The many problems related to public housing in New York City are well known.**

A history of disinvestment. Decline of federal funding. Isolation and physical neglect. During the building of public housing super blocks, communities were broken apart and a diverse range of cultural spaces were lost, leaving behind a multi-generational trauma that extends far beyond inadequate facilities.

**Until recently, the power of arts and culture in public housing communities has been much less visible.**

This report shares stories, learnings, and recommendations from our Creative Transformations initiative that demonstrate how arts and culture contribute to public housing communities. Arts and culture develop leadership, break down isolation, build community infrastructure, strengthen activism, further entrepreneurialism, deepen healing, and shape community planning.

**NOCD  
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Report by Caron Atlas, Emily Ahn Levy, Claudie Mabry, Tom Oesau and Sharon Polli, 5/31/19.  
Creative Transformations is organized by Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY (NOCD-NY), a citywide alliance of cultural networks and community leaders that have joined together to revitalize New York City from the neighborhood up. Visit us at [www.nocdny.org](http://www.nocdny.org).

Creative transformation illuminates the ways that places are constructed through imagination and perception, which themselves are shaped by history, as well as past and present systems of oppression. It is about working to transform the systems that determine what is public in the first place.

- Elizabeth Hamby, Director, Take Care New York  
NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

The Creative Transformations initiative supports arts and culture as an integral part of public housing communities. It includes creative programming, capacity building, peer support, and advocacy. The initiative was shaped by a research and planning process, including a cross-sector roundtable held in July 2015, and has supported 17 pilot projects, including 19 partners and more than a thousand New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents and artists.

As part of *CreateNYC*, New York City’s cultural plan, the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP) affirmed that arts and culture have a significant impact on the social wellbeing of New York City neighborhoods.



Groundswell Activism students engage the Saint Nicholas Houses community in participatory action research. image: Groundswell

At the same time, they noted that cultural assets are “extremely unequally distributed” across the city.

New York City now has a tremendous opportunity to address this inequity and strengthen the social fabric of historically disinvested communities. One way to do so is by investing in community-based arts and culture in public housing communities as a vital part of a just and equitable New York City.

## Lessons Learned

While arts and culture are often valued by community members, their role in strengthening community well-being and as part of activism is often underestimated. There is also a history of well-meaning but sporadic cultural programs in public housing that too often overlook the creative leadership of public housing residents and end as soon as funding runs out.

Three key learnings guide our work:

- Programs must further the leadership, self-determination, and creativity of public housing residents. There are many diverse artists and cultural programs that exist within public housing that need support. Additionally, there are many previously successful programs that have been lost due to funding cutbacks in public housing.
- Resourced cultural organizations and artists can have a positive impact in public housing when they carry out their work with exemplary practices. These practices include respect for cultural and neighborhood context, reciprocal partnerships, and meaningful engagement of residents.
- Arts and culture can enhance housing advocacy and neighborhood preservation and development, with artists and youth in leadership roles. Arts and culture can share stories; shift narratives; further community engagement and multilingual participation; and raise visibility through media, theater, murals, and graphic design

In academia they call them drive by researchers. We have artists like that. Whatever arts happen, it needs to support community needs.

- Cathy Dang, former Director  
CAAAY: Organizing Asian Communities

# Key Themes:

## How Arts and Culture Make a Difference

By making connections, facilitating opportunities for creative liberation and popular education, and integrating culture into organizing and movement building, arts and culture support progressive change on individual, community, and systemic levels.

## Support Community Leadership and Resident Organizing

Self-determination is critical to the success and continuity of arts and culture initiatives. Supporting the creative leadership and organizing talent that exists within public housing communities reinforces self-determination and mobilizes existing social networks.

### Project Profile:

#### CVH Vision

An Artist Collective Elevates an Organization's Visual Campaigns

#### Arts and Culture Partners

Giancarlo Fernandez,  
Individual Artists Living in  
Public Housing

#### Cross-Sector Partner

Community Voices Heard (CVH)

#### Process

Community Voices Heard (CVH) has been building power with individuals and families of color in low-income and public housing communities in New York for over twenty years.

However, its outreach materials did not fully convey CVH's storied past and inspire its base. Giancarlo Fernandez, an artist living in public housing, brought together a collective of artists eager to apply their skills and creativity to strengthen the movement. In its first year, CVH Vision created typography and illustrations for a "State of NYCHA" action. The image of a family huddled next to an oven for warmth presented during Mayor Bill De Blasio's 2018 State of the City address drew significant press attention, including WNYC's *Brian Lehrer Show*.

#### Outcome

The collective amplifies CVH's work and builds cultural leadership, combatting the notion that art is not a viable career path for residents. Fernandez has since joined the Board of Directors.



CVH Vision illustration for a "State of NYCHA" action. image: CVH and Giancarlo Fernandez

When the people who are directly affected by the issues affecting NYCHA work on visual campaigns there is more authenticity and the public responds to that. We are striving to make what the Vision team produces have that level of honesty and intent. We're not just talking about the problems, we're living through them.

- Giancarlo Fernandez, Co-Founder and Lead Illustrator  
CVH Vision

## Break Down Isolation, Connecting Fellow Public Housing Residents and Their Neighbors

Isolation in NYCHA is not only geographic, but also due to the stigma attached to public housing. Arts and culture are effective in connecting public housing residents and their surrounding communities through collaborative programming, reciprocal partnerships, and participation in community coalitions. Arts and culture also deepen residents' relationships to community history.



Oral historian Antígona González interviews a Lower East Side resident. photo: Downtown Art

### Project Profile:

## Resistance is Resilience A Housing Organization Uses the Arts to Illustrate Neighborhood Resiliency

### Arts and Culture Partners

Downtown Art, FABnyc, Raúl Ayala, Antígona González

### Cross-Sector Partner

Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES)

### Process

Public housing can be isolated. Damaris Reyes, director of Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES) and a Baruch Houses resident, describes, “In our neighborhood, the buildings line the waterfront and are home to some of the most vulnerable residents of our community.” Neighborhood housing and preservation organization GOLES is working with neighborhood groups to build LESReady!, a vehicle of unity to address issues of disaster preparedness and climate justice post-Hurricane Sandy.

GOLES and LESReady! worked with local arts organizations Downtown Art and FABnyc to bring in muralist Raúl Ayala and oral historian Antígona González to develop visual, oral, and videotaped stories of neighborhood resistance and resilience through a sustained, multi-year partnership. The project places current resident struggles against a context of historic community resiliency and achievement.

### Outcome

GOLES and LESReady! now have murals, banners, buttons, podcasts, and resident quotes to incorporate into ongoing resiliency tours and activities. As Ceci Pineda, former Resiliency Training and Policy Coordinator at GOLES, describes, “This project armed our idea that integrating arts and creative practices into our organizing and political education work opens several strong pathways for community members to access and engage with organizing campaigns. This project also gave the ability for Downtown Art, FABnyc and GOLES to strengthen their organizational ties and build deeper and more trusting relationships between their organizational staff.”

## Build Community Cultural Infrastructure

Cultural hubs, networks, and community arts councils sustain partnerships between neighborhood arts organizations and public housing residents. This cultural infrastructure helps build equitable collaborations, share resources, strengthen capacity, and support resident decision making.

### Project Profile:

## Intergenerational Community Arts Council Residents Shape Cultural Life in Fort Greene

### Arts and Culture Partners

BRIC, University Settlement's The Performance Project, Najee Omar

### Cross-Sector Partners

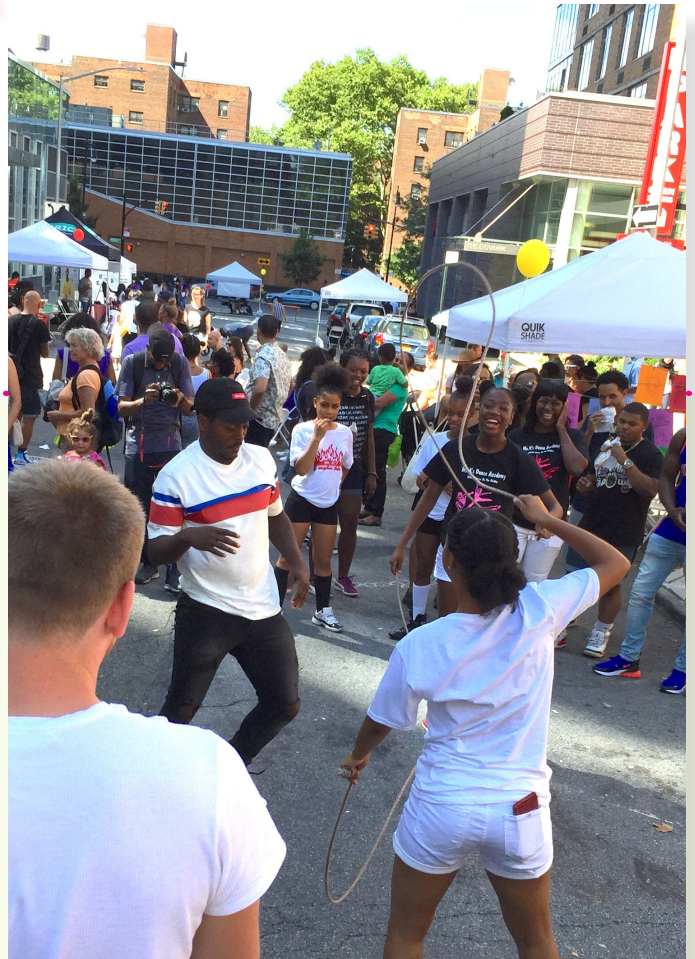
University Settlement at Ingersoll Cornerstone Community Center, New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD)

### Process

The Intergenerational Community Arts Council (ICAC) is a multi-generational team of twelve public housing residents and neighbors from Fort Greene and Downtown Brooklyn who have joined forces to actively shape the artistic and cultural life in their community. The ICAC plans and produces arts programming by and for community members at Ingersoll Community Center, a DYCD Cornerstone Program. In 2018, the ICAC partnered with University Settlement and BRIC to continue a monthly SHARE! event featuring resident artists and selected artist-in-residence Najee Omar to help the group organize a culminating We Are Brooklyn! community block party in August.

### Outcome

This partnership provides structure and resources for residents to determine and produce cultural programming, connects NYCHA residents with neighbors and neighborhood cultural resources, raises visibility and increase opportunities for local artists, and creates a new model for partnerships between arts organizations and NYCHA community centers now operated by community based organizations. It subverts the structure by which arts organizations traditionally 'deliver' programming to community partners and offers a process through which the resources of arts organizations are authentically accessible to neighbors who live in public housing.



Intergenerational Community Arts Council's We Are Brooklyn! block party. photo: Tom Oesau

What comes when we have a new wave of people who are coming in but who don't necessarily have connections to the neighborhood? And then what happens to the long term residents...the people who are priced out and can no longer afford to live here? What happens to the cultural history, the rich history? How can we actively work toward preserving it?

-Najee Omar, 2018 Artist-in-Residence  
Intergenerational Community Arts Council

## Strengthen Activism

People bring their full selves to their activism, including their creative skills, cultural identities, and diverse languages. Arts and culture make organizing more welcoming, accessible, and inclusive, and have the potential to effectively engage young people in key roles in important areas like affordable housing advocacy. Effective cultural organizing also models changemaking that can be scaled to address systems.

### Project Profile:

#### #NO CUTS PSA

Youth at Red Hook Initiative Create a Video to Preserve HUD



#NO CUTS PSA by Red Hook Initiative Youth. photo: Red Hook Initiative

#### Arts and Culture Partner

BRIC Media Artist David Sainté

#### Cross-Sector Partner

Red Hook Initiative (RHI)

#### Process

In response to President Trump's election pledge to make cuts to HUD's budget, Youth Organizers of Red Hook Initiative (RHI), who are all Red Hook Houses residents, partnered with a teaching artist in the summer of 2017 to write and produce a PSA video about how cuts would affect them as young people living in NYCHA. The video illustrates parallel storylines of young students in their daily routines, juxtaposing the pressures of a NYCHA teen working after school to help cover his family's rent against an image of a young man free to concentrate on academic success.

#### Outcome

The PSA amplified the message and perspective of young people living in NYCHA. It has been shown to fellow RHI youth, screened at a local theater for the broader community, and shared with organizing partners across New York City who are working on related issues. According to RHI Community Organizer Kiyana Slade, "The opportunity to provide an artistic outlet for youth to connect their organizing work to a wider audience leads to youth feeling empowered. They gain knowledge about a new way to have a positive impact on their community."

## Further Economic Development and Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship and marketplaces strengthen cultural practices, build educational and business competencies, grow cross-generational relationships, and promote placemaking and civic engagement.

### Project Profile:

#### Park Hill Community Market

West African Immigrants Present an Open-Air Cultural Marketplace



A grandmother and vendor at Park Hill Community Market. photo: Anna Mule

#### Arts and Culture Partners

Resident Entrepreneurs and Artists, Staten Island Arts

#### Cross-Sector Partner

Napela Inc

#### Process

Napela Inc, a non-profit organization that operates in Staten Island's Park Hill neighborhood, is comprised of West African and other immigrant and refugee families who are committed to English language aptitude, improving knowledge around U.S. citizenship, and entrepreneurship. Several mothers connect each of these commitments on summer afternoons at Park Hill Community Market. They set up vendor stalls and create an open-air cultural marketplace in a former parking lot at Park Hill Apartments, a HUD Section 8 development. They sell

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## Deepen Healing

Intergenerational trauma is present throughout public housing. In addition, public housing residents are disproportionately impacted by health and wellness challenges due to structural injustice. Arts and culture promote resilience and healing, build empathy, create space for reflection, and amplify efforts to ensure optimal health and wellbeing for all.



Children think creatively during The Blue Bus Project with Artist Annalisa Iadicicco at Queensbridge Houses in 2018. photo: Annalisa Iadicicco

*(Park Hill Community Market continued)*

You have to know if it is something your community needs.

- Adama Fassah, Founder, Napela Inc

clothes, fabrics, specialty produce, prepared foods, traditional drinks, and secondhand items.

### Outcome

Not only does the market support entrepreneurship, it also helps pass on culture and build social cohesion among immigrant and refugee families. Community buy-in is important for those interested in pursuing similar initiatives in their own neighborhoods. Napela founder Adama Fassah has been able to successfully navigate a complicated public housing environment because she knows she has the backing of the West African community in Park Hill that wants to continue a market culture rooted in their ancestry.

### Project Profile:

## What Creates Health? @ Queensbridge A New Collaboration Examines Violence as a Public Health Issue

### Arts and Culture Partners

NOCD-NY, Long Island City artists and arts organizations

### Cross-Sector Partners

NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement

### Process

Queensbridge is the largest public housing development in the country. According to New York City Police Department data, residents of Queensbridge face a disproportionate number of shooting incidents. 696 Build Queensbridge, a Cure Violence program supported by DOHMH and based at Jacob A. Riis, engages local youth to reduce violence. Through the new collaboration What Creates Health @ Queensbridge, project partners with a history of working at Queensbridge and a cohort of local artists, community violence interrupters, and Cure Violence participants will deepen this work to include an arts-based community engagement process. Creative activations, including story circles, design workshops, performances, and art installations, will support Queensbridge residents in elevating and sharing new narratives about what creates safe and healthy communities. The project will advance DOHMH and its partners' commitment to place-based approaches that amplify community power.

### Outcome

This cross-sector collaboration will create place-based arts programming and public design projects with public housing residents to examine violence as a public health issue. The goal of the project is to transform public spaces that have been disproportionately impacted by gun violence into sites that promote self-determination, resilience, active living, and social change.

Riis Settlement believes the arts are an invaluable way to harness community power to build community, overcome obstacles, and develop neighborhood assets. We are honored and excited to join with our partners to fight for peace, equity, and justice in Queensbridge.

- Christopher Hanway, Executive Director  
Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement

## Shape Community Planning

Public housing residents are inadequately represented in community planning and city policymaking. In zoning conversations, for example, they may feel unwelcome at meetings, be left off the map, or have others speaking on their behalf. Arts and culture bring residents to the table to speak in an accessible medium about the issues that directly impact their lives.



Gowanus Wildcats, a 50 year old youth step team, performs in *Soft*.  
photo: Hester Street

### Project Profile:

## Making Gowanus and Theater of the Liberated *Arts and Culture Inform a Rezoning Process*

### Arts and Culture Partners

Artist Imani Gayle Gillison, Individual Artists Living in Public Housing, Making Gowanus Steering Committee

### Cross-Sector Partners

Hester Street, Fifth Avenue Committee, Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice

### Process

In order to survey the cultural ecosystem in Gowanus public housing communities and to creatively mobilize residents around local needs, Hester Street and artist Imani Gayle Gillison launched Making Gowanus in collaboration with a steering committee of community organizations in 2017. Over six months, Imani organized a summer camp and founded and directed a Theater of the Liberated piece, co-written and co-produced with fellow public housing residents, entitled *Soft*. With humor, the performance identified issues, traumas, and physical conditions that public housing residents face daily. It was performed at BRIC House in the fall.

I went to a lot of community planning meetings and I kept introducing myself as a local artist. A lot of the meetings I went to just didn't mention NYCHA, and then eventually someone said, "Are there artists in NYCHA? Where are they?" And I was like, "We're here!" Issues we face are not just NYCHA issues. We are your neighbors.

- Imani Gayle Gillison, Artist, Founder and Director  
Theater of the Liberated

### Outcome

The creative community continues to activate around citywide processes. *Soft* has traveled within and outside the neighborhood to advocate for NYCHA residents. Cultural leaders have partnered with Fifth Avenue Committee and Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice to urge for the permanent reopening of the Gowanus Houses Community Center. Imani has hosted multiple neighborhood workshops using the *Cultural Blueprint for Healthy Communities*, co-developed by El Puente, Arts & Democracy, Hester Street, and NOCD-NY, to assure that the needs of public housing residents and the homeless community are voiced in the neighborhood's rezoning process. Recommendations are documented in the *We Are Your Neighbors!* report.



# Challenges

## NYCHA: The Working Context

NYCHA is an extremely complex system that has struggled to meet its mission both historically and today. In this context, cultivating and sustaining arts and culture in public housing faces a variety of challenges, including:

- Agency-wide corruption and the mismanagement of operating funds designated for residents and initiatives.
- A growing \$2.5 billion deficit, which results in the divestment of partnerships, community programs and centers supported by NYCHA.
- HUD cutbacks, and the installation of a federal monitor to oversee all NYCHA processes.
- Decades of neglect and infrastructure deterioration in units, centers, common spaces and grounds.
- Systemic racism, that roots back to the birth of the housing authority, and the urban planners who influenced its implementation.
- Disconnection between public housing developments and the changing neighborhoods that surround them.
- Impacts of privatization of public housing.

Considering the heightened level of crisis, innovation is difficult. Recent initiatives established by NYCHA, including *NextGeneration NYCHA* and the founding of the public/private partnership The Fund for Public Housing, have been faced with immense controversy and significant budget cuts.

Additionally, the current Cornerstone model, in which community centers are leased by DYCD rather than NYCHA and operated by a social service organization, is not a model that is conducive to arts and cultural programming for residents. Instead, operators are tasked with meeting government quotas that often focus on sports, tutoring, and other activities. This makes it challenging for operators to incorporate the arts and provide staff the dedicated time and capacity to support cultural programming.

Gentrification and displacement plague this working context as well. Many view public housing as the last stronghold of truly affordable housing in New York City. Gentrification exacerbates the juxtaposition of luxury housing against public housing, where residents fight to be heard about basic housing standards to support their overall quality of life.

Unfortunately, displacement is growing. If this is not addressed, we will continue to see the inevitable dismantling of public housing communities across the five boroughs. Additionally, real estate developers of new luxury housing often use art as their tool for attracting new people and new investments. It signals a lifestyle that excludes public housing communities, triggering concerns that art could be used against them.

I met a high school student who resisted any discussion meant to gloss over the challenges of living [in NYCHA]. She spoke of waking to the smell of urine in the elevators, fearing crime against her elderly neighbors, and dodging drug dealers at the park near her house. To consider anything less, would be, in her words, “a false view.”

- Danielle Jackson, Critic and Researcher

## Public Housing in the Media

Media coverage on public housing is too often negative, highlighting issues pertaining to NYCHA's bureaucracy and corruption, crime and gang activity, crumbling infrastructure, and conveying a message that public housing continues to “drain tax payer dollars.”

This narrative has stigmatized what it means to live in public housing, and has further exacerbated the lack of social cohesion between the residents of NYCHA and those who live in the surrounding neighborhood. Through *Talking Back to the Media*, a project facilitated by New York Institute of Technology scholar Nicholas Bloom, residents were given the opportunity to reflect on and analyze how media influences their homes and lives.

Through this discussion, residents spoke about the long-term impact of this negative coverage, both on the broad perception of public housing as well as their own self-perception as residents. Arts and culture can help NYCHA residents control their own representation, share their own stories, and shift the public narrative to better reflect residents as workers and neighbors.

# Recommendations

## Program Planning, Peer Learning, and Evaluation

**Value and strengthen community assets.** Recognize the cultures, wisdom, and wealth of experience that are part of public housing communities and build on these resources. When developing programs, respond to community and cultural contexts and engage local leadership. Support neighborhood-led cultural mapping processes.

**Develop realistic expectations and timeframes for project impacts.** Don't expect artists and cultural organizations to make structural change on their own. Develop appropriate measures to demonstrate the value of arts and culture in public housing.

**Support community-based infrastructure that sustains the work over time** including cultural hubs, community cultural councils, cultural producers, and organizers who function as liaisons to connect residents with multiple neighborhood partners and processes.

**Instill arts and cultural relevancy into community spaces.** Make open space in public housing communities accessible, and involve residents in planning for space from the very beginning. When renovating spaces, design them to welcome artmaking and with appropriate acoustics, equipment, and floors. Address the barriers to public use of spaces through easier permitting, lower fees, and by providing insurance.

**Support field-led peer learning across communities and projects to address challenges and share exemplary practices.** Peer learning can offer training opportunities, facilitate collaborations, and provide a citywide platform to amplify the impact of the work.

**Support community based practitioners to write about and evaluate their work** and to attend and present at conferences.

## Funding and Investment

**Create a new, and sustained, arts and public housing funding initiative to further cultural equity in these significantly under resourced communities.** This will help *CreateNYC*, New York City's cultural plan, fulfill its commitment "to further equitable funding distribution by creating new support to arts and culture in historically under-resourced communities." When designing this funding program, make it accessible to small organizations, artists, and public housing residents. This includes streamlining paperwork and contracting and allowing groups to use fiscal sponsors.

**Provide multi-year funding** that provides support for relationship and trust building, and enables groups to take risks, incorporate learnings, and sustain their work. Support planning, implementation, and follow up.

**Support holistic approaches where culture is fully integrated into community wellbeing and transformative change.** Invest in programs co-designed by cultural and community groups and cross sector partnerships, recognizing the importance of making these partnerships equitable. Support arts and culture as an integral part of housing activism and anti-displacement strategies. Encourage foundations and city agencies to coordinate on sustained cultural strategies that can outlive individual projects.

**Create opportunities for collaborative fundraising that furthers equity** where larger organizations support smaller ones and intermediaries open up access to opportunities. To access larger grants, create cross-sector networks including nonprofits, CBOs, artists, residents and City agencies.

**Fund in a manner that supports best practices.** Design funding programs in collaboration with practitioners so these programs are informed by on-the-ground knowledge. Robust cultural funding ensures the consistency and quality of the work.

## Network Building

**Prioritize community agency, self-determination, and infrastructure.** Center governance and decision making in the hands of local leaders and support local artists. In cultural and neighborhood planning and organizing, go to where the people are and include trusted allies as facilitators.

**Support critical grassroots infrastructure** including community hubs and networks, naturally occurring cultural districts, and the people who cultivate them.

**Recognize that scaling out may be more important than scaling up.** Support neighborhood networks that link public housing communities with their neighbors and with other neighborhoods across the city. Build upon the strength of neighborhood cultural ecosystems and extend their reach.

## Cross-Sector Impact

**Ensure government and community-based partners align their work with best practices.** Community based organizations who are programming public housing community centers, including those participating in the DYCD program, should reflect the demographics of the residents, engage residents in leadership and in the determination of operators, and

# Projects and Partners

## Artivism

*Groundswell, Saint Nicholas Houses residents*

## The Blue Bus Project

*Annalisa Iadicicco, Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement, Queensbridge Houses residents*

## The Bronx is the World's Strongest Borough

*Baron Ambrosia, Casita Maria Center for Arts & Education, Claremont Healthy Village Initiative*

## Community Development Policy

*Danielle Jackson and Christine Licata*

## CVH Vision

*Community Voices Heard, Giancarlo Fernandez*

## Intergenerational Community Arts Council

*BRIC, University Settlement, Ingersoll Cornerstone Community Center*

## Making Gowanus & Theater of the Liberated

*Hester Street, Imani Gayle Gillison, Making Gowanus Steering Committee, Fifth Avenue Committee, Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice, and Wyckoff Gardens, Gowanus Houses, and Warren Street Houses residents*

## Talking Back to the Media

*Nicholas Bloom, New York Institute of Technology (NYIT)*

*Neighbors Council and Youth Participatory Budgeting Council Friends of the High Line, NYC Council Speaker Corey Johnson, and Fulton Houses and Chelsea-Elliot Houses residents*

## #No Cuts to HUD

*Red Hook Initiative, Red Hook Houses residents, David Sainté*

## Park Hill Community Market

*Napela Inc, Staten Island Arts, Park Hill Apartments residents*

## Public Exchange Photography Workshop

*MoCADA, Lee Jimenez, Jendog Lonewolf, Ingersoll Houses residents*

## El Puente Leaders Program

*El Puente, Joe Matunis, Lisa Aronowitz, DJ Ruggz, Shy Richardson, DYCD, Jonathan Williams Plaza youth residents*

## Resistance is Resilience

*Good Old Lower East Side, Downtown Art, Fourth Arts Block, Raúl Ayala, Antígona González*

## St Mary's Park PSAs

*BronxWorks Betances Community Center, Educational Video Center*

## Soul Circle: An Ode to Self Love

*ARTs East New York, Linden Houses and Boulevard Houses residents*

## Storytelling for Language Justice

*CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities, Melissa Liu, Queensbridge Houses residents*

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This report draws on NOCD-NY's previous roundtable report, Creative Transformation: Arts, Culture, and Public Housing Communities, by Nayantara Sen and learnings and recommendations made by project partners. Thank you to Roberto Bedoya for the concept of "scaling out," Nicholas Dagen Bloom for public housing history and challenges, and Imani Gayle Gillison for contributions to Tips on Doing the Work Well.



Women gather for a Storytelling for Language Justice workshop with CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities. photo: CAAAV

incorporate arts and culture in the budget and organizational support of programs.

**Fully incorporate NYCHA properties and residents in city planning processes.** Incorporate local artists and cultural organizers into engagement processes to identify and elicit core issues, recognize the cultural assets and businesses that serve public housing residents and contribute to diverse and healthy neighborhood ecosystems, and foster collaborations with local organizations. Ensure resident access to and participation in the design of neighborhood public space.

**Engage New York City civic engagement opportunities** such as Participatory Budgeting and the new Civic Engagement Commission to further public housing community participation in decision making. Ensure that Participatory Budgeting capital projects developed by public housing residents, such as a community centers, get implemented in a timely fashion. Add expense funding to facilitate the development of cultural projects. Include public housing residents on committees and commissions.

**Build on and support institutional change within participating organizations,** leveraging arts and culture to help shift how large organizations such as settlement houses engage with their staff as well as community based partners and public housing residents.

# Tips On Doing the Work Well

## Putting Values into Action

### **Build on existing local assets with an understanding of history and context.**

Analyze how places are shaped by history and systems of oppression. Learn about concerns related to arts-driven gentrification and displacement and the root causes and structures of inequity at the foundation of those concerns.

### **Prioritize working with cultural groups in the community to ensure a long-term presence.**

Develop agreements to ensure equitable partnerships and plans for sustaining the work. When working with cultural groups from outside the community, invest in appropriate training for them to engage democratically and equitably with the neighborhood.

### **Be intentional and transparent about partners' goals, expectations, and assumptions**

and how they might advance or conflict with the values underlying the project. Clarify the roles that each partner is playing and be mindful of power relationships between partners.

**Take the time to build trust.** Get to know one another, learn about each other's communities, and listen to one another before pushing for a shared agenda or joint action. Name and advance ethical practices (e.g. around the use of people's stories) and develop ways to assess accountability for the people most impacted by the work.

**Promote language justice,** ensuring that programs are accessible to people who use languages other than English.



Youth from El Puente Leadership Center at Williams Plaza learn hip-hop with artist Roger G. photo: El Puente

**Pay artists and community participants,** recognizing the value of their participation. Respect the professionalism of artists living in public housing, their artistic goals, and their multi-layered creative process. Support their leadership as they navigate multiple roles as artists, community nurturers, advocates, and liaisons.

**Reclaim, animate, and reopen important public spaces** that have deep meaning for communities and bring people together, such as historic African American schools, public plazas, and public housing community centers. Support cultural preservation and reclaiming on the community's own terms.

**Support intergenerational community building and organizing.** Organize Youth Councils to participate in decision making processes and leadership positions in community centers, associations, and neighborhood partnerships to nurture a sense of ownership. Supplement resident associations, which tend to be older.

**Recognize that tools and processes need to be adaptive.** An approach that may work in one community may not be appropriate in others; avoid cookie cutter models. Ground your process in the specific contexts, complexities, and experiences of the neighborhood and communities.

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