

COMMUNITY ANCHORS

SUSTAINING RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS,
SOCIAL CLUBS, AND SMALL BUSINESSES THAT SERVE AS
CULTURAL CENTERS FOR THEIR COMMUNITIES





THE ART of EVERYDAY LIFE – SINCE 1986

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I. The Community Anchors Initiative

At a time of boom-and-bust development, artisanal pop-ups, and top-down gentrification, it is easy to forget the vital role played by long-standing community anchors like social clubs, religious institutions, and small businesses. For too long, philanthropy for arts and culture has paid scant attention to many of these grassroots sites, which serve as incubators for vibrant cultural activity in local communities. Fortunately, many visionary leaders are revitalizing immigrant and historic communities across the five boroughs of New York City. In 2015, with support from the Ford Foundation, City Lore's Place Matters program undertook an initiative called Community Anchors. Through this unique program, we were able to document and honor as well as financially support ten sites throughout the city in their creative placemaking efforts, and to explore the broader issues faced by similar organizations that galvanize community activity through the arts.

Although the number of community-based arts and cultural institutions has increased throughout the United States since 2009, this sector still sorely lacks visibility and funding opportunities. These institutions have often not been able to draw the attention of the philanthropic community, nor are they often considered by the media and the public to be an integral part of the city's cultural scene. To some degree, the problem stems from an accepted, albeit limited and outdated, definition of art. For the most part, art forms such as gospel music, ethnic dance, and costume making are not considered worthy of significant support, while institutions and organizations that represent the more traditional arts canon, and those with budgets of more than \$5 million, still receive the majority of support from contributions and grants.¹

To address this inequity, the Ford Foundation supported the Community Anchors initiative, which focused on ten sites representing three kinds of grassroots organizations that engage and enhance their communities through arts and culture: religious institutions (a church and two temples), small businesses (a music venue, a gym, and a radio station), and social clubs (a West Indian mas camp, a Puerto Rican casita, an informal jazz gathering, and an African American recreational association).

In February 2016, City Lore hosted its twelfth annual People's Hall of Fame Awards ceremony, wherein we honored each of the Community Anchors. Established in 1993, the People's Hall of Fame recognizes grassroots contributions to New York City's cultural life. We presented each of the Community Anchors with "tokens of esteem" in the form of a giant historic New York subway token. Held at the Clemente Soto Vélaz Cultural Center, on the Lower East Side, the Hall of Fame ceremony was attended by more than one hundred guests, who enjoyed video vignettes

highlighting the work of the awardees. We were thrilled to pay tribute to their leaders, who, in the words of one honoree, “inspire us to bring the people together for a common cause.”

This report begins with a look at Place Matters and its approach to advocacy and social justice through creative placemaking. It sets out a series of questions that the Community Anchors project sought to answer. It goes on to explore some of the key ideas that drive this cultural advocacy project, and then introduces the ten sites, outlining the major issues faced by each. The report concludes with a series of proposed next steps for these and similar organizations both in New York and other urban center across the U.S.

As our Community Anchors consultant and director of the University of Pennsylvania’s Social Impact of the Arts Project, Susan Seifert, notes, “The ten site profiles are a great vehicle to illustrate the diversity and reach of grassroots cultural enterprises and their potential as community anchors, as well as the challenges to sustaining these often hidden resources.” The profiles highlight two sets of issues: (a) the inflexibility of arts and culture grant-making given the realities of community-embedded resources, and (b) the vulnerability of grassroots cultural resources to community and real estate development processes.²

We hope that this report provides ample material for discussion among the variety of public, private, and community players who impact the livelihood and sustainability of these and other community cultural centers.

II. The Place Matters Approach

City Lore was founded in 1986 with a mission to foster New York City’s—and America’s—living cultural heritage through education and public programs. City Lore documents, presents, and advocates for New York City’s grassroots cultures to ensure their living legacy in stories and histories, places and traditions. In 1988, City Lore established the Endangered Spaces project to identify and support local establishments and landmarks that were disappearing in the city’s rapidly changing cultural landscape, in part because they were off the radar of preservationists and philanthropists.

In 1996, City Lore and the Municipal Art Society formed the Task Force on Historical and Cultural Landmarks, and collaborated on a conference called History Happened Here, held at the Museum of the City of New York. Two years later, they jointly established the Place Matters program to continue celebrating and advocating for places that hold memories, anchor traditions, and help tell the history of New York City.

For the past twenty years, Place Matters has endeavored to broaden the ways placemaking is understood and practiced in New York City by offering alternative ways of identifying, celebrating, supporting, and ultimately conserving places that matter. We Place Matters abides by the description of “cultural democracy” set forth by Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard:

. . .that cultural diversity is a positive social value, to be protected and encouraged...; that authentic democracy requires active participation in cultural life, not just passive consumption of cultural products; that many cultural traditions co-exist in human society, and that none of these should be

allowed to dominate and become an “official culture”; and that equity demands fair distribution of cultural resources and support through the society.³

The program’s achievements include the development of a Census of Places that Matter, which comprises an interactive, community-sourced map of more than seven hundred nominations and descriptions of places in the five boroughs that the public deems important; a tool kit for community activists concerned with placemaking; the book *Hidden New York: A Guide to Places that Matter*; a competition for innovative place markers; an outdoor exhibit titled *Your Guide to the Lower East Side*; and an oral history of the Two Bridges Neighborhood in Manhattan.

As Dolores Hayden suggests in her seminal book *The Power of Place*, urban places sites are layered and often contested spaces. Hayden also notes that the rate and scope of change in American cities have increased substantially in the last several decades.⁴ These changes mean that places—, from individual buildings, blocks, neighborhoods, to whole boroughs, —are like palimpsests – the ancient parchments that contained text that is scraped off or removed so that the parchment can be reused. Place Matters works to ensure that their elided histories are still legible on the parchment of New York City’s cultural landscape.

III. The Effects of Rapid Change

Despite the rapid rate of change in and growth of New York and other North American cities, support and infrastructure for community-based arts and culture appears to be deteriorating. . In the last five years, funding for small arts and cultural organizations has decreased.⁵ Among other hurdles, increased bureaucracy (often in the name of accountability) and English-only forms for proposals and requirements have served to discourage smaller, sometimes volunteer-run organizations that lack the skills and staff to meet these requirements. In addition, the paucity of affordable space has become a crisis in the city, as real estate prices in New York have continued to skyrocket. Although inclusionary zoning has taken center -stage in Mayor Bill De Blasio’s affordable- housing plan, many experts are predicting a net loss of truly affordable neighborhoods, both mixed-use and residential, in the coming years.⁶

At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of immigrant and community-based artists and leaders who work outside of the historically sanctioned arts and cultural venues, such as non-profit (museums and theaters) or commercial (galleries). They often merge their non-profit and for-profit activities into hybridized or entrepreneurial community-based organizations that are both integrated in and integral to the communities of which they are a part.⁷ Community-based, they are born of the need to cultivate tradition and catalyze change in equal measure. As Professor Maribel Alvarez notes, “the infrastructure that culture builds (the networks, communal obligations, shared spaces, shared rituals, passed-along symbols) is what allows political change to gain traction, to become feasible.”⁸ Such hybrid entities provide neighbors with services as well as opportunities for civic participation, and, significantly, a sense of belonging. Roberto Bedoya, former executive director of the Tucson Pima Arts Council, notes:

Before you have places of belonging, you must feel you belong... The task for us who work on Creative Placemaking activities is to assure and sustain a mindful awareness [of] what is authentic in Creative Placemaking. The authenticity I am invoking is grounded in the ethos of

belonging. Cultural and civic belonging—how to create it; how to understand and accommodate cultural difference in matters of civic participation; how to enhance the community’s understanding of citizenship beyond the confines of leisure pursuits and consumption; how to help the citizens of a place achieve strength and prosperity through equity and civility. Having a sense of belonging, therefore, needs to be foregrounded in Creative Placemaking practices.⁹

Among mental health professionals, a sense of belonging is considered one of the social determinants of health: the ways that community health impacts individual health. Now a key concept in psychiatric nursing and related fields, “sense of belonging” is defined as “the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment.”¹⁰

In 2002, Alaka Wali served as the principal investigator of a two-year ethnographic study of collaborative “informal arts” groups in the Chicago metropolitan region. The team looked at writing groups, painting circles, choirs, and other networks in which people congregate around a shared interest. They discovered that such collective pursuits enable people to come together across the often intransigent boundaries of race, ethnicity, and geography. The study suggests that these groups create a “metaphorical space of informality,” with few barriers to participation, affirmation, and mentoring.¹¹ They allow everyone to tell their story and to cull the best stories from their collective efforts. The Community Anchors explored in this report are all part of the world of informal arts identified by Wali.

IV. Key Questions

1. How can the public and private sectors establish guidelines and structures to create greater equity in culture and the arts?
2. How can fostering community-based cultural practices promote cultural equity and improve the quality of life in neighborhoods and communities?
3. How can we encourage the view that Community Anchors belong within the arts sector? How can we ensure they are privy to its resources?

V. Sustaining Community Anchors

ISSUE I: THE STRUGGLE FOR AFFORDABLE PUBLIC CULTURAL SPACE

In their work on artist space development, Maria Rosario-Jackson and Florence Kabwasa-Green note that “not until fairly recently was the concept of affordable space as a central need for artists articulated at local and national levels, even within the arts community. This need for space and its more robust articulation, in part, is associated with the affordable real estate crisis that many cities suffered as a result of changes in the economy.”¹²

While most of the Community Anchors sites have struggled to find affordable public space, the following two organizations have been especially vulnerable to New York’s aggressive and complex real estate issues relating to public space. While the South Bronx’s Casita Rincón Criollo has negotiated its fragile but stable occupation of city-owned green space, the Howard

Beach-based Federation of Black Cowboys unfortunately lost a bid for its long-term contract at Cedar Lane Stables, in Howard Beach, Queens, shortly after the culmination of the Community Anchors project.

A. Casita Rincón Criollo Melrose, the Bronx



Video:
<http://bit.ly/1TMNBdX>

Casitas are small houses surrounded by gardens that recall the look and feel of those in the Puerto Rican countryside. One of New York City's oldest and largest, Casita Rincón Criollo (meaning "Downhome Corner"), is currently occupying its second city-owned site in the Melrose neighborhood of the South Bronx. Also known as "La Casita de Chema," after founder José Manuel "Chema" Soto, or simply "La Casita,"

it was built in the late 1970s, when Soto and his neighbors, who were tired of witnessing the ongoing destruction of their neighborhood, reclaimed an abandoned, garbage-filled lot on the corner of 158th Street and Brook Avenue that Soto passed regularly with his daughter. Soon close to fifty community residents found themselves taking care of a piece of land they did not own. Casita members used this corner lot to gather, garden, hold community events, and share musical and cultural traditions. Among other bands, the *bomba* and *plena* musical group Los Pleneros de la 21, led by National Heritage Fellow Juan Gutiérrez, emerged from Rincón Criollo and taught classes there for many years. As folklorist Joseph Sciorra writes, "Rincón Criollo is a forum from which its members make a public statement of Puerto Rican identity."¹³

Casitas are derived from the balloon-frame shanty houses constructed in the 1920s and 1930s in the Puerto Rican countryside by residents forced off their land by the large sugar companies that were established following the 1898 takeover of the island by the United States. Though they were illegal to build, a law maintained that once a house was completed, it could not be demolished. Architect and scholar Luis Aponte-Parés identifies casitas as a form of architecture of resistance to the marginalization experienced by modern Puerto Ricans in New York City. They have also helped to anchor Puerto Rican communities in the face of urban renewal and displacement. Rincón Criollo was one of hundreds of green oases created in what Sciorra called "life-affirming responses to the political negligence and economic tyranny that reduced the South Bronx (and other poor neighborhoods) to rubble."¹⁴

In 1987 Rincón Criollo joined the city's GreenThumb community garden program.¹⁵ A decade later, the City's Department of Housing, Preservation and Development (HPD) announced it

would put half of GreenThumb's gardens on the auction block. With imminent neighborhood redevelopment in the Melrose area, La Casita was caught in the too-frequent urban conundrum of good causes competing for the same scarce space. In 2006, Rincón Criollo's lot was reclaimed for low-income housing. However, supporters fought to keep it in the neighborhood, and La Casita was reestablished on another city-owned property just down the block, at 157th Street and Brook Avenue.

The reborn casita on 157th Street is smaller than its 158th Street predecessor but is built entirely of wood rather than scrap materials, as the original was. It consists of two rooms: a large front room that serves as place to gather, play music, and display community memorabilia, and a smaller back room, used as an office, and features a porch along the front. As in Puerto Rico, a small, clean-swept yard without vegetation, known as a *batey*, surrounds the house, along with a garden, a grape arbor, and an iconic apple tree replanted from the original location. In the warm months, members gather almost every day to relax, play dominoes, and eat, and they often hold concerts and jam sessions beneath the roofed outdoor platform. The casita's bright teal exterior references the Caribbean color palette. Neighbors and visitors who grew up in Puerto Rico say that crossing the threshold marks a transition from a feeling of being in the Bronx to that of being on the island.

The legal status of Rincón Criollo has been in contention since the beginning, and although the city allowed the casita to reestablish on their new site, community members still worry about the future. Rincón Criollo was one of hundreds of green oases created in what Sciorra called "life-affirming responses to the political negligence and economic tyranny that reduced the South Bronx (and other poor neighborhoods) to rubble."¹⁶ For a few years the city's GreenThumb program regulated the unofficial use of city land. But Mayor Rudolph Giuliani tried to do away with the city's community gardens and use the land for housing. When the mayor's plan was stopped in the courts and a compromise was reached, many community gardens were officially recognized and provided with caretakers. Rincón Criollo was not among the victors, but its tenacious supporters were able to fight for a new corner lot to keep the garden going in the neighborhood.

As a result of devoted organizing by the community, Rincón Criollo's current space on 157th Street was taken off a list of potential development sites, and the site was transferred from the Department of Housing and Preservation to the Parks Department in December 2015. Redevelopment of the site, while technically plausible, is now a much more complicated legal process.

After Chema passed away in July 2015, his children, Desseree and Carlos Soto, and the casita community have paid tribute to their founding father by carrying on with the numerous joyful events that take place at Rincón Criollo. Unfortunately, Chema did not live to see his "Downhome Corner" selected by the National Park Service for a city-wide casita documentation initiative that will hopefully result in its designation on the National or State Register of Historic Places. City Lore has been honored to lead this effort. Such designation would elevate Rincón Criollo's political and social capital, and would result in broader, more nuanced recognition of Puerto Ricans' historic and continuing contributions to American cultural life and to New York City's identity. It would also enhance the registers' missions of equitably supporting resources that represent our society's textured cultural heritage. In the meantime, financial support for Rincón Criollo's general maintenance is as necessary ever.

Through the Community Anchors project, City Lore was able to provide funding for garden supplies and a new roof. Our larger goal is to educate the public about casitas and to put them on the radar of politicians, journalists, urban planners, and policy makers



**B. Federation of Black Cowboys
Howard Beach, Queens**

Video: <http://bit.ly/1Ydqc6Q>

Driving down South Conduit Avenue toward John F. Kennedy International Airport, one might notice a white wooden fence that suddenly materializes on the side of the road, and beyond it is a corral where horses graze beneath shady trees. This is Cedar Lane Stables, and, until recently, it belonged to the Federation of Black Cowboys. It is hard to imagine finding such a stark juxtaposition of urban and rural anywhere else in the city.

The Federation of Black Cowboys was formed in 1994. Membership is open to all (including women, who are known as the

Cedar Lane Jewels), but each applicant must have good character, a record of community service, and skills to contribute to the federation's daily and general operations—not to mention access to a horse, and, as cowboy Lenard Herbert slyly adds, "You gotta have a cowboy hat." All cowboys also have use cowboy nicknames.

The cowboys ride publicly in a variety of high-profile parades and marches, including the African American Day Parade and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, and hold semiannual rodeos that often draw more than five thousand people. The federation's primary activity, however, is teaching inner-city youth the fundamentals of horsemanship and the history of black cowboys in the American West, which the cowboys are steeped in.

Most members cite an early, formative love of horses. Eric "Red" Jackson moved to New York as a young man in 1979, but soon encountered a rough patch. He joined a rehab program in 1996, and began riding at Cedar Lanes four years later. His love of horses has taught him honesty and respect, and his association with the federation has helped him remain sober for almost two decades. Jackson hopes to help others find similar solace. R.W. "Curly" Hall was born in Jamaica, Queens. He began riding at age eight, and three years later he began shining shoes to earn enough money to pay for rides on weekends in Forest Hills. He joined the federation over twenty years ago. "I'm trying to transfer the love to the children, let them know about the Old West," he says. "What it meant for us to be black cowboys."

A number of young people mentored by the federation have found ways to transfer what they've learned to their careers, from horse training to the mounted police. Federation President Kesha Morse notes, "It's not just children. We have adults who come here . . . just to

get away from the daily trials of trying to pay the rent, or just life situations. This is an oasis. A sanctuary away from the inner city.”

The parcel of more than twenty acres of city-owned land comprises a corral the size of a football field, a recently renovated barn and stables, as well as a portable office. Cedar Lane Stables is located on land that has been owned by the city’s parks department since 1938; as such, the site’s future has always been tenuous. In 1998, the cowboys signed a license agreement with the Parks Department to run the stables as a concession, one of approximately five hundred city-owned parkland parcels operated by private food service or recreation organizations. This arrangement requires an annual fee, which is often divided up monthly, though the city is careful not to call it rent.

The Federation of Black Cowboys has always struggled financially. In the winter of 2003, the cowboys were out on South Conduit Avenue and Linden Boulevard, wearing sandwich-board signs proclaiming “Help save our barn.” At the time, the cowboys owed the city \$60,000 in back rent. Happily, that dispute was resolved and the cowboys were able to secure a renewal in 2007. Still, they have never been the most popular neighbors in Howard Beach, an area that, as one cowboy put it, “is not too partial to diversity.”

When the cowboys were forced to vacate the site in 2013 in order to complete renovations to the barn, the organization lost critical revenue, and a number of cowboys lost their mounts. Those who were able to hang on began bringing their horses back in May 2015, once the renovations were complete. But that summer, when the most recent license agreement ended and a new request for proposal was issued, the federation was one of three bidders competing for the property; historically, the federation had been the only bidder for Cedar Lane and had won back its land by default.¹⁷

In effort to help the federation compete in the bidding process, the Community Anchors initiative contributed to the application fee required by the city. The federation ultimately succeeded in raising the remaining funds through a telephone solicitation campaign and more sandwich-board parades. In February 2016, Morse was informed that the cowboys hadn’t made the cut.

GallopNYC, a local nonprofit whose mission is to aid adults and children with disabilities through the use of therapeutic horsemanship, won the bid and took over administration of Cedar Land Stables in June 2016. While GallopNYC operates several other sites in New York City, the Federation of Black Cowboys has no other place to go. The federation is negotiating a boarding agreement to keep its headquarters at the site, but it is still unclear whether the cowboys will be able to afford the fees; Morse, however, is cautiously optimistic.

C. Challenges, Recommendations, and Action Points

Lack of affordable cultural and arts space is a concern in many large cities, but in New York City it has become a crisis. The Arts and Culture Indicators in Community Building Project (ACIP) was “an exploratory and experimental effort to develop arts and culture neighborhood indicators for use in local planning, policymaking, and community building.” ACIP’s website refers to “indigenous venues of validation,” sites that are critical for the generation and transmission of community-based arts, including churches, libraries, gardens, ethnic social clubs,

and cafés. These are typically left off of community cultural inventories.¹⁸ As their spaces are also often rented or leased, their residencies may be tenuous at best. They are often threatened by limited opportunities for operating support and by displacement due to redevelopment and rising real estate values, even though they frequently contribute to their communities' revitalization or gentrification.¹⁹ Initiatives for permanent space require a level of investment, risk, and skill often uncommon among the leaders of grassroots cultural organizations, and collaboration with elected officials and funders requires an understanding of the complex and sometimes abstruse financial and regulatory issues of local real estate markets.

Since 1995, the city has often acted on the conviction that community gardens like Rincón Criollo, built on city-owned land parcels, are “vacant lots” that should be more productively used for housing or commercial development. Garden advocates have maintained that the lots aren't technically “vacant”—they contain gardens. Moreover, they contend that the gardens provide densely developed neighborhoods with important quality-of-life benefits like light, fresh air, and fresh food. They argue that the tranquil and often quirky green spaces bring neighbors together and increase the assessed property values of adjacent buildings.

To inform the public about these issues, 596 Acres' NYC Community Land Access Advocacy Program created livinglotsnyc.org, a dynamic online map that helps neighbors identify and transform city-owned vacant property into gardens, farms, and play spaces.

There are a variety of complex parameters to determine the use of city-owned spaces. The experience of the Federation of Black Cowboys, Rincón Criollo, and other sites City Lore has advocated for makes it clear that most allocations go to large organizations and high bidders. In addition, the sites are often subject to blind bidding, in which current users have to bid to keep their space without knowing the bids of their competitors. Assignments for the use of city-owned property should be preceded by a survey to assess the value of the organization and the space to the community.

ISSUE 2: THE STRUGGLE FOR

AFFORDABLE PRIVATE

CULTURAL SPACE

A. El Maestro Boxing and Educational Center Morrisania, the Bronx

Video: <http://bit.ly/1OJ5EOi>

My full name is Fernando Laspina, and of course everyone knows I'm “Ponce” because I was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico. But this is my community because this is where I really grew up. I went to school here. I



graduated from here. I live and work here, and this is where my kids and grandchildren grew up.

Fernando “Ponce” Laspina migrated to New York at the age of fifteen, and has been a devoted resident of the Morrisania section of the South Bronx for forty-five years. He also proudly bears the name of his native city, and has long found strength in his Puerto Rican heritage. Laspina is the founding director of El Maestro Boxing Gym, where local youth build physical and mental fortitude by strengthening cultural ties along with their muscles.

Laspina knows a thing or two about building strength. In 1970, his parents settled their eighteen children just four blocks from El Maestro’s current storefront gym. Laspina was a straight-A student at James Monroe High School, but at age seventeen he was recruited into an area-based gang by fellow *ponceño* Gerson “Franko” Vasquez.

Being in the Savage Skulls taught me how to defend myself. There was a lot of fighting in school and in the neighborhood; there was a lot of beating up on guys like me who were from Puerto Rico. We didn’t know the language. We didn’t know the local rules.

When Ponce and four others were convicted of stealing money from a local jewelry store, they were sentenced to a year on Rikers Island. Two weeks prior to his arrest, Ponce, by then a gifted street fighter, had completed the paperwork to participate in the Police Athletic League’s boxing program. Unfortunately, PAL never called, and he found himself fighting in a very different arena.

I was always into a lot of fights, either defending my brothers and sisters or defending my friends in school or defending my friends in the gangs, in the street. So when I got arrested in ’73, I decided that I was gonna do a different kind of battling, which was fighting for inmates’ rights to better food, to better bilingual education, and to better services.

The New York City Housing Authority launched a boxing initiative in 1997, just as Ponce was hired as an afterschool program coordinator there. Its gym accommodated up to two hundred boxers, and was located at Betances Community Center, where Ponce was the director. Within the first two years, the NYCHA program turned out three champions and two sub-champions. Ponce was inspired by the coaches’ and fighters’ commitment to the sport.

After NYCHA rejected Ponce’s request to host a benefit boxing match for families of 9/11 victims, Laspina decided to create his own program. In 2003, he opened El Maestro, at 700 Elton Avenue and 156th Street. The space was huge, but rent increases over the next four years forced him to move to increasingly smaller venues. The club is now located in a former commercial building, at 1300 Southern Boulevard. Laspina has managed its regulation boxing for fourteen years, and many of the NYCHA coaches followed him. All are volunteers, and although morale is high, money is tight. “Sometimes we do fundraisers on the weekends,” Ponce says. “Most of the donations are in-kind, and my family does the cooking.”

Financial strain aside, El Maestro has been highly successful. Boxing director Jose “Coto” Talavera typically works with between twenty-five and thirty boxers at a time. The club has sent fighters to the Golden and Silver Gloves tournaments, and it has sent others to college and to careers in the fire and police departments. “Boxing is a sport where you really have to be

focused,” Ponce explains. “You have to be very disciplined. You have to learn how to defend yourself and not get hurt. But it’s an art, so you want to win without really hurting the other guy.” Members typically work half-day shifts for their employers during the week, and spend the rest of the day and weekends in training.

The majority of members are neighborhood residents and many come seeking guidance beyond the ring. As Ponce notes, “I tell them about the things that I went through so they don’t make the same mistakes. I don’t hide my past. I explain and give them an alternative.” A Bronx civil court judge also sends juvenile defendants to El Maestro. “It’s a high recommendation,” Ponce says.

Beyond boxing, El Maestro serves as a cultural center for the neighborhood, which is home to a mix of Puerto Rican, Honduran, Dominican, Mexican, African American, Indian, and Chinese communities. Various local music ensembles practice in the space after hours and on the weekends. All play concerts or volunteer at the club in lieu of rent. For Ponce, the club’s cultural work is just as important as the athletics. “It’s part of the stuff that I believe in—to get the message to the kids through the chords of music, so that they know that this is part of their roots. Try to get them involved in their heritage and to find community through it.” El Maestro also hosts poetry salons, and a lecture series keeps area residents connected to social, political, and economic developments in the United States and the Caribbean.

“I know that there’s still gangs out there, and of course we don’t allow them here. We’ve learned how to fight them—by training body and mind. And now we have a lot of professionals in this community. They speak out about the gangs, about the crime, the prostitution, the abuse against children and senior citizens.” According to Ponce, the neighborhood has changed a lot. “There are more businesses and activities, so the momentum is building. People have different names for the area now. I just call it home. I’ve been here since 1976, and I want us to continue to be a big part of that change.”

In 2006, one of El Maestro’s members with grant-writing experience applied for a \$50,000 grant from the Union Square Awards, which the gym gratefully received. After spending considerable time teaching himself to write grants, with limited success, Laspina has come to the conclusion that the return on time investment is greater from the gym’s sporadic fundraisers than from hours spent on the applications. “We are a 501(c)3, and we have been since 2006 or 2007. But we don’t have an official budget, or money that comes in all the time,” Laspina says. “We gotta keep doing our little fundraisers here, putting a grant there. We’re always behind in rent.” Many of the boxers visit family in the Caribbean from July through August, so membership tends to drop in the summer, and there are limited audiences for fundraising events during that time. Beyond rent and utilities, El Maestro must purchase and maintain expensive gym equipment. Air conditioning is critical, as is liability insurance. The Community Anchors initiative provided El Maestro with funding for boxing-ring ropes and cushions, speed and wrecking-ball bags, a treadmill, and audio equipment for musical events.

Raising membership fees is simply not an option. The current membership plan, which includes access to the space and equipment as well as a trainer, includes a \$100 enrollment fee and a negotiable \$40 monthly fee. In exchange for discounted fees, the boxers often staff events or recruit new members. For Laspina, it’s not simply about getting paid—it’s about paying it forward.

**B. Terraza 7
Elmhurst/Jackson
Heights, Queens**

Video:

<http://bit.ly/1QU8rU5>

Terraza 7 is a bar and music venue located at 40-19 Gleane Street, near the Elmhurst/Jackson Heights border. Owned and run by Colombian-born Freddy Castiblanco,



Terraza 7 is a reflection of Castiblanco's taste -- a veritable salon of Latin American folk and jazz. Opened on June 20, 2002, Terraza 7 hosts live music five nights a week, and features bands playing a range of sounds, from Afro-Peruvian, Afro-Colombian, and modern Latin jazz to *bolero*, to *salsa*, to *timba*, and *jarocho*. Part of Terraza 7's mission is to make people in the community feel more involved, and to incorporate the traditions of their homeland — “cultural memories,” Castiblanco calls them — into their new city. The Tabalá Sextet, the Gaiteros de San Jacinto, and Diego Obregón are among the traditional bands whose music is heard there, and a long list of world-class jazz figures. join in and jam out, all contributing to the enrichment of New York City's cultural fabric.

Castiblanco worked as a doctor in Bogotá before moving to the United States. As he began to prepare for his board exams, however, he realized there was something missing in his new life here: the community he lived in felt fractured. “People of different backgrounds lived together but rarely interacted,” he recalls. So in 2002, Castiblanco founded Terraza 7 to build bridges between community groups through artistic expression.

I found that jazz is a very plastic way to express culture, because of the elements of improvisation you can use to express memories. People from different backgrounds start to admire others through music. Cultures start to contemplate one other. So then we start to work together. We want to create our own musicality—a dialogue among the elements that we find in our new city, our acoustic memories and cultural memories expressed through jazz. Basically, this is the way to empower our community, but we understand that music, our local artistic expressions, can also beget a process of displacement,” he says. “We need to make sure that artistic production in our communities should lead to political initiatives that ensure that people keep living in our communities.” Castiblanco hopes local musicians and artists will support initiatives that control skyrocketing rents and result in livable wages and locally based purchasing power.

Between 2001 and 2002, Castiblanco overhauled Terraza 7's space, formerly an abandoned storefront, and subsequently invested in a larger, safer stage that permits visual contact between the musicians and the audience in different parts of the space: “This is a *comuni3n* for musicians and audience.” As the first participant in the Community Anchors program, Terraza 7 received funding toward the acquisition of a piano for the bar. Until that time, the bar had only an electric keyboard, which limited the quality and variety of musicians the club could attract.

In 2013, Castiblanco spearheaded the creation of the Roosevelt Avenue Community Alliance (RACA), a coalition of small businesses, street vendors, and residents opposed to the establishment of the Jackson Heights–Corona business improvement district, which would expand the existing two-block BID into one of the city’s biggest. Castiblanco and other local entrepreneurs worry that the BID will result in increased land values, and, ultimately, the displacement of small businesses by corporate chain stores.

Despite Castiblanco’s deep and multivalent ties to the space and the neighborhood, and his intensive efforts to stabilize the community for long-standing, family-run businesses, when Terraza 7’s lease is up at the end of 2016, the rent will quadruple, from \$4,500 to \$17,000 per month, and Castiblanco will be forced to find a new home for the musicians and neighbors who have become his family. Property owner Charles Guo said the building that currently houses the bar will be demolished in 2017 to be replaced by a mixed-use building with retail shops on the first floor and residential units above.

Castiblanco is currently searching for alternative venues, but finding the right space at a fair price is proving difficult.

As a person who presents the beauty of the artistic contribution of immigrants, I also have the responsibility to encourage a conversation about the political and economic causes of the human displacement from our countries of origin, and also I have talk loudly about the risk of a second displacement within our New City.

As of this writing, Castiblanco has not yet located an alternative, affordable site for Terraza 7. His space requirements are not significant, although a liquor license and nearby subway access are both critical. In the best of all worlds, the sounds of the 7 train above the club will continue to mingle with those of the music and the community inside.

C. Challenges, Recommendations, and Action Points

Terraza 7 and El Maestro have both faced a frustratingly ironic reality: the localized cultural expressions they foster have, to a large degree, ultimately led to their displacement.

Castiblanco and RACA have called for the inclusion of artists, small-business owners, street vendors, residents, and tenants on BID boards, which often have disproportionate landlord representation. Also important is the enforcement of the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, which requires large financial corporations to facilitate credit access for small businesses. At present, many big banks are providing loans to developers who fit the loosely stated guidelines, but are not, in fact, small businesses.

Another strategy is a program of subsidized rent for cultural assets such as the sites and organizations covered in this report. Politicians across the country and across the political spectrum, however, are averse to commercial rent control, which would affect hundreds if not thousands of establishments in the city alone, and would have a measurable effect on the city’s economy. Cultural assets could be designated by a committee of the Landmarks Preservation Commission or the New York City Council and could be limited to a set number of sites in each neighborhood, which could retain this designation for five to ten years. Applicants could

be required to submit a petition or other demonstration of local community support. The effect on the city's economy would be negligible. Another consideration might be a real estate tax exemption for these sites, such as those currently given to religious institutions. Directly related is a push for better, livable wages, which would enhance the community's purchasing power and ability to support the businesses they cherish.

Perhaps, in addition to protecting community assets through rent subsidies, government assistance or incentives might be given to new immigrant social clubs that play a demonstrably significant role in their communities. The grants or incentives would enable them to purchase property for their activities in their neighborhoods. If these communities also offered immigrant and social services, these organizations would serve as a stabilizing force in neighborhoods: true "community anchors."

The process of finding and selecting these community anchors seems daunting, however. Today, foundation and government agencies have developed peer-review panels of experts in particular fields, as well as other ways of determining the quality of programs and their degree of local support. The systems are not perfect, but they do work.

We also believe that it is critical to educate the public about real estate issues in New York City. Jackson et al. (2003) note the "pervasive lack of understanding of the complexity of real estate issues among many artists and arts administrators" and especially about how to access capital for investments, tactics for lobbying the political-commercial sector, and knowledge of local planning and zoning regulations.²⁰

Fortunately, a handful of local organizations are committed to public education and advocacy around these issues. Fourth Arts Block (FABnyc) has secured eight formerly city-owned properties as permanently affordable spaces for nonprofit arts and cultural groups. Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts New York (NOCD-NY) is a working alliance generating a sustained commitment to and citywide platform for revitalizing New York City, from the neighborhood level up. The New York Real Estate Investment Cooperative (NYC REIC) is a group of several hundred New Yorkers who are pooling their money and resources to secure space for community, small-business, and cultural use.

Many of the cultural groups City Lore works with are unaware of and beyond the reach of these three advocacy organizations, however. We believe that the best way to create lasting, systemic change is to educate and empower more people about these issues. We would love to see foundations supporting regular workshops and training opportunities at times and locations convenient for working people in all parts of the city.

ISSUE 3: TOO MANY HATS, TOO LITTLE VISIBILITY

In her 2009 report for the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, Holly Sidford wrote:

The history of arts philanthropy in the United States is largely a story of building institutions, and preserving or creating artistic objects and products. We have paid far less attention to strengthening people and communities through artistic process.²¹

The three Community Anchors highlighted in this section challenge the pervasive understanding of art as a product as opposed to as a process. They symbolize a shift toward valuing cultural expression as well as stylistic expression, and the power of cultural continuity as well as history. Their leaders are driven by the desire to foster a better world, but because their spaces, their work, and their stewards fall outside traditional art and cultural parameters, they have limited opportunities for funding and development.

These leaders must therefore wear many hats and maneuver in many axes at once just to keep their processes going. Although they are often pleased with their multivalent work, they risk being pigeonholed in the blank space of the broad “Arts and _____” (education, health, economic development) categories, wherein the “and” is more familiar to funders, often resulting in dilution and skewing of their mission. Although two of these sites are incorporated 501(c)3s, they all rely largely on their limited but tried-and-true sources of support – volunteers, annual fundraisers, and small individual donations – rather than seeking grants, an often complex and cumbersome process, with its associated emphasis on reporting and traditional metrics. Like many of the Community Anchors participants, these three local institutions have struggled with or avoided the many restrictions and requirements of the nonprofit structure, which we necessitate oversight from a board of directors, registration with the Charities Bureau in New York State among other requirements. However, they have managed to stay afloat and thrive thanks to the devotion of their communities.

A. Marjorie Eliot's Jazz Parlor Harlem, Manhattan

Video: <http://bit.ly/IUFsYTx>



Every Sunday at 3:30 p.m., at 555 Edgecombe Avenue in Harlem, soft strains of piano start to mingle with loudmouthed brasses, low-toned basses, and chipper clarinet vibratos. The chords flirt in the vestibule and linger at the threshold of apartment 3F. The melodies float through the window and dance high above the Harlem River. For the last twenty-three years, Marjorie Eliot has delighted audiences with these sonorous socials, better known as parlor jazz concerts, in her home. Admission is always free, and guests receive granola bars and orange juice during intermission.

Marjorie comes from a long line of instrumentalists. Her childhood home in Philadelphia had two pianos, and piano practice

was integrated into her daily homework routine. She raised her five children with the same discipline, immersing them in what she calls African American classical music. She insists:

It was essential to your learning and growing up. It's central to being a balanced person, and it's a very big thing in black life. In historic black communities you could hear people dancing, you could hear people playing, the records were always going.. In Africa, everything is a celebration. You know, the corn came in: – ok it's a celebration! So this is something that black people brought in. The music celebrates.

The weekly concerts honor two of her five children, Philip and Michael, who both passed away. When Phil died, at the age of thirty, she found herself going crazy.

Phil died on a Sunday, and every Sunday I would scream—understandably. I can remember thinking, I'm not getting through this. So I desperately wanted to find a way to celebrate him. He loved music and I had played for him when he was sick. Now I would play in order to remember him.

Original theater scenes follow the music. “It so helps me. I get the greatest joy from the people who come here. It's a little miracle, really,” she says.

Together with her son Rudel, Marjorie runs Parlor Entertainment, a small business through which they promote the parlor concert series. Parlor Entertainment's first free concert was held on the lawn of the neighboring Morris-Jumel Mansion in August 1993. The following year, Marjorie brought the music into her home. These days, the apartment fills up fast on Sunday afternoons. Listeners from around the world line the living room, parlor, kitchen, and even hallway, where Marjorie sets neat rows of cushioned chairs, all with a view of the performance. Some guests watch attentively, while others close their eyes and let the sounds wash over them.

While most visitors come to engage with New York's living musical heritage, many do not know the legacy of 555 Edgecombe or the neighborhood. Notable past tenants of the building include esteemed pioneering pianist and bandleader Count Basie; saxophonist Johnny Hodges, actor and civil rights champion Canada Lee, social reformer Dr. Kenneth Clark, and Charles Buchanan, owner of the Savoy Ballroom. The building has since attained landmark status. Thanks to Marjorie's concerts, 555 Edgecombe is still filled with musicians. Regular performers included saxophonist Sedric Choukroun, bassist Gaku Takanashi, and trumpeter Koichi Yoshihara. Marjorie also works with a rotating roster of guest vocalists who make every Sunday show unique.

To honor and repay Marjorie for her service to New York City's long history as an incubator of jazz, City Lore and former City Council members have hosted numerous rent parties (parties to help raise rent money). She has been profiled by countless newspapers, magazines, and television programs and has received awards from organizations ranging from the Guides Association of New York to the Embassy of the Czech Republic. As Parlor Entertainment is not an incorporated 501(c)3, City Lore has long acted as its fiscal sponsor. Funding from the Community Anchors initiative enabled her to create an Actors and Musicians Fund. Her loyal performers may continue to refuse payment, but their payment plans are now official. At one of her concerts a few years ago, she told the crowd assembled, “The majesty within us is larger than any of us, so I can trumpet this and not blow my own horn.”

**B. Sesame Flyers
International
East Flatbush, Brooklyn**
Video: <http://bit.ly/1rzdBQM>

Founded in East Flatbush in 1983, Sesame Flyers International has been a mainstay in Brooklyn's West Indian American Day Carnival for over a quarter of a century. The group's work is not limited to the annual Labor Day weekend parade or even to the summer pre-Carnival season, however. The Flyers, a multi-service nonprofit organization, provide Flatbush and Canarsie



residents with year-round educational and recreational programs, ranging from family counseling to steel pan and Afro-Caribbean dance classes. and reach more than five thousand individuals annually.

Labor Day morning is always a busy time at the Sesame Flyers' Church Avenue headquarters. Starting around dawn, a small army of staff and volunteers set about organizing and distributing refreshments and fantastically feathered and sequined costumes to the more than one hundred members of the Flyers' mas (short for "masquerade") band. Even in the early hours, soca (soul-calypso) blares from speakers, invigorating the band. Porridge, salt fish, bagels, and coffee fortify all for the long march along Eastern Parkway to the parade grounds. Women take turns at makeshift makeup and hair stations; along the walls, bobby pins and Velcro are circulated to enable last-minute adjustments to bodices, bikini tops, and headdresses.

A mission to preserve Caribbean culture and tradition underscores all of the Flyers' work, but nowhere is their commitment to cultural conservation more evident than in their participation in the parade. As Curtis Nelson, the Sesame Flyers' executive director, puts it, "We have a year-round structure, so we're planning for culture year-round. But the last three months before Carnival—June, July, August: whew!"

Carnival season begins in June with Caribbean Heritage Month, when mas camps launch that year's theme and costumes onstage with models. In recent years, the Brooklyn Carnival has included between thirty and forty mas camps, whose themes are often inspired by politics, current events, history, mythology, fantasy, and popular culture. Early Sesame Flyers revelers wore printed T-shirts and sailor caps, but by 1992, Trinidad-based designer Steven Lee Young produced one thousand costumes for the Flyers around the theme of "Excerpts of the New World."

The Flyers' 2015 "Egyptian Royale" motif offered ten costume sections, each with a distinct color theme and designs ranging from elaborate to skimpy. The six hundred participants paid

anywhere from \$250 to \$1,500 for a costume, with some individuals spending more than \$5,000 for a queen or king option. Even the children's costumes for the Kiddie Parade follow the theme, and infant outfits cost up to \$150. While the adult ensembles are typically assembled elsewhere, most of the children's costumes are made in the Sesame Flyers headquarters by staff and volunteers, including summer youth volunteers who are interested in learning sewing skills. Coordinating and producing the costumes is expensive and time-consuming, but spectacular regalia is integral to the celebration.

Historically, the Flyers' band has fluctuated between three hundred and twelve hundred participants per year. Nelson notes, "Some masqueraders go from band to band, and some masqueraders have been playing with us for ten, fifteen years. We're lucky because they're very loyal. A majority of the band are folks who return."

Unofficially, the Sesame Flyers began in Trinidad, where, as the story goes, the founders' children played together in a small, secluded alley nicknamed Sesame Street, after the popular television show. When the families moved to the United States, they hoped to re-create a place like this, where their children could play, learn about their heritage, and receive community-based mentorship. So they organized a volunteer association in a rented space on East Flatbush's Church Avenue. On Saturdays they offered tutoring as well as steel pan and West Indian dance and cooking classes. Fundraisers helped to pay the rent, and eventually they raised enough to buy the space and establish an official homegrown community center; the group is still headquartered in its original location. When they incorporated as the Sesame Street Flyers, they were advised to choose another moniker due to trademark issues. Ultimately, they organized under the name Sesame Flyers International, in recognition of the community's ties to homes old and new.

Carnival has, to some degree, always been threatened by lasting stigma from several violent incidents in the 1960s, as well as long-standing racial tensions in Crown Heights. As central Brooklyn gentrifies, many empty lots where steel pan bands once practiced have turned into condos, and monthly storefront rental fees are skyrocketing. In addition, families moving into the neighborhood often issue noise complaints, hampering rehearsals. East New York is now home to pan yards formerly located in Flatbush. Pan yards and mas camps have always been sites for community coalescence, for congregating and socializing. As the bands are pushed out, the Carnival community may become more diffuse.

For now, however, Caribbean culture is still strong on Church Avenue. As Nelson notes:

I wouldn't say that it's the heart of the Caribbean community just in Brooklyn or New York. This is the heart of the Caribbean community in the entire country. This is the mecca of Caribbean culture.

When Nelson joined the Flyers in 1992, the organization had officially incorporated and the Flyers owned the Church Avenue building, but they still functioned as an informal club. "I helped them to put together a corporate structure to support public funding and move them out of a club structure," Nelson says. However, he would like to see the Sesame Flyers follow a traditional nonprofit structure. He is working to build a board with more capacity to govern the organization's contracts—and to fundraise.

The Flyers ran many successful fundraisers in the past. But affordable venues are increasingly hard to come by. Their annual scholarship gala, however, is a community galvanizer. Each year, the Flyers present a handful of scholarships of between \$500 and \$1,000, as well as college tuition support, to young people who have proven themselves within the organization's programs. "We always incorporate youth development with the Carnival. Rather than just having youth services, we want to make sure that these kids understand that there's a proud heritage that they can experience." Nelson is working on a formula to run a successful \$100,000 gala. "But it takes groundwork!"

Most of the Flyers' funding is from government contracts, many from the city's Department of Cultural Affairs or the Department of Community and Youth Development. "You know, the city and the government, if they were to run these programs, they would cost so much more," Nelson claims. "So they take advantage of our nonprofit commitment to the cause, and the low cost of having us run programs. Most nonprofits are not unionized, and the labor force is less formally trained." However, there are costs that are not covered by the government contracts, such as public relations, marketing, legal services, accounting, and auditing, which the Sesame Flyers must cover through fundraising. To this end, Nelson and his team write grants, solicit foundations and donors, and host myriad events. Happily, Nelson has been able to attract small sponsorships, and some elected officials have also provided discretionary funds to support the organization's year-round cultural activities.

The Sesame Flyers have been able to stay out of debt for the last several years, but serious debt in the past spurred Nelson to reorganize. The recession forced a turn to cost efficiency, including costumes produced in China rather than in Trinidad. Similarly, the Flyers used to bring over artists from Trinidad, as tradition and expectation dictated. But they now work only with DJs.

The Sesame Flyers provide cultural and educational programs to five community centers. In 2015, they applied funding from the Community Anchors program to replace stolen media equipment essential for a program that teaches individuals to document and present their community through their own eyes; this has been especially significant in countering the negative press that has often circulated around Carnival. As a result of shootings during but unrelated to two recent Carnival festivities, the media promoted inaccurate stereotypes of the Caribbean community. As Nelson notes:

Every year we battle with the media, which wants to associate any violent act with the Carnival. And it's not the Carnival. We have to deal with the violence in this country, period. And so we need to have folks who are more sensitive to the culture, and appreciate the culture, and respect each other so that they won't be so averse to participating in cultural activities and learning what it's actually about.

C. Radio Soleil Flatbush, Brooklyn

Video: <http://bit.ly/24yxskZ>

Radio Soleil is New York City's Haitian community radio station, serving a million dedicated listeners as the go-to source for news and information about Haiti, as well as music programs such as Haitian Boleros and Escal Caribeenne (Saturday Night Ball). As artist Kessler Pierre says, "When we want to find out what's going on at home, we don't get it from the *New York Times* or CNN." For nearly a quarter of a century, Radio Soleil has helped its community maintain its ties to Haiti in its listeners' own language.



Ricot Dupuy, director of Radio Soleil, was born in Gonaives, Haiti. He eventually left to study philosophy and medicine in Port-au-Prince, but in 1974, the oppressive Duvalier dictatorship and declining economy forced him to move to New York City. The transition wasn't easy. "When I came to this country, you didn't see Haitians in the streets. You didn't hear Creole being spoken. And you were sad, because there's a feeling that, my goodness, you didn't leave your country because you wanted to leave. You were somehow forced to leave, either because of the political situation or because of the economic situation."

Before and during his studies at Brooklyn College, Dupuy devoted significant energy to mobilizing local public opinion against the Duvalier dictatorship, but his involvement with politics really began to develop in New York.

In Haiti, I was repressed. This country was my first contact with democracy. You could really breathe! The first time I voted in my life was at Brooklyn College. There was no election in my country, so to me it was a major act. And from 1974 until the end of the regime, in 1986, it was an uninterrupted fight. I gave this thing all that I had.

After graduating, Dupuy worked in accounting and banking, but radio and politics were in his blood. He had developed radio experience in Haiti, and a friend called on Dupuy's skills to help launch a pirate station in Brooklyn. When the economic stagnation following Duvalier's 1986 ousting prompted a mass Haitian exodus to the United States, Brooklyn became home to a substantial Creole-speaking community. Dupuy says, "There were major demands for us to do more and more." In 2002, Dupuy took over as full-time station director at Radio Soleil.

For nearly twenty-five years, Radio Soleil has operated out of a tiny storefront on Nostrand Avenue, in a section of Flatbush that could easily be nicknamed Little Haiti. The 2010 earthquake caused a complete collapse of communication with Haiti. Although Dupuy struggled to gather details, listeners from around the world called his studio for updates, to share information about the missing, and for emotional support. Hundreds from the local community used the station as a town square, plastering the windows with photos of family and friends

who were unreachable on the island. “This station was tested in ways that we could never have previously imagined,” Dupuy says. “If ever we thought that this was just a pastime, or people just loving radio, the earthquake was a reality check.”

This one brought their mother. This one their father. I didn’t know what to do, but I still had to try to do something. As neighbors heard from their contacts in Haiti, photos were removed at the station. And they’d thank us, as if we had anything to do with it.

He was particularly inspired by the large number of Haitian teens who volunteered during the crisis. According to Dupuy, they effectively managed the station while he was engaged with relaying up-to-date information to major media outlets. The station’s current IT manager enrolled as a volunteer after the earthquake and has provided pro bono services to the station ever since.

Dupuy’s commentaries and analyses have had major resonance in the Haitian community both here and abroad, and are aired on a number of radio outlets throughout the United States; he is also consulted regularly by the American press and has been interviewed on CNN, NBC, and CBS.

Despite the station’s global and local significance, Radio Soleil’s financial struggles are constant. The limited staff is still mostly volunteer, and although the station is considered an authority in its field, it now faces competition from internet-based pirate stations, who have little or no overhead. As the main staff person, manager, and commentator, Dupuy directs his fundraising at securing advertisements and organizing an annual radio-thon. He feels that he lacks the experience and expertise to seek grants and awards. Unfortunately, Radio Soleil’s commercial structure and limited capacity keep it off the radar of many philanthropic organizations. City Lore was pleased to provide Radio Soleil with Community Anchors funding for a new digital console as well as automation software.

Dupuy has always prioritized the community’s stability over the station’s finances, however.

There’s a sense of communion that money cannot buy. Our past helps us put our poverty into perspective, and the love my listeners bring is something I take into consideration. Often we become jack-of-all-traders. People call us with their most profound and intimate problems. They trust us so much that they would tell us anything. So we become like advisers. There’s no limit to how far we go.

D. Challenges, Recommendations, and Action Points

All the sites involved in the Community Anchors program face serious development challenges. As is true of many nonprofit groups, their leaders lack experience in grant writing, which could secure larger and more reliable funds but is challenging and has a low return on investment. The groups have consequently come to rely on alternative fundraising sources, many of which are based on their own communities’ sometimes limited financial, political, and social capital.²² Even if the groups are incorporated as nonprofits, their boards are often poorly or loosely structured, lack giving capacity, or both. To properly manage the board would take additional time and energy that many of their leaders must commit to other responsibilities.

Funders in the arts are more generous about providing general operating support than those in most other sectors. However, the impact of general operating support is not measurable, and many private-sector funders do not want to establish long-term relationships with grantees who cannot provide metrics that provide proof of impact. Several studies suggest that private-sector general operating support is beyond the reach of groups like Sesame Flyers and Radio Soleil, who lack the capacity to fulfill these metrics. Social-justice funders are most interested in providing this support to larger, more visible “premier groups.”²³

If Parlor Entertainment were required to assess its impact, the results would likely be largely qualitative or anecdotal. This kind of evidence has yet to gain credibility in the philanthropic community.²⁴ The Sesame Flyers are certainly better positioned to respond to these stipulations, but the grants they generally receive are so small that hiring more people in order to measure impact seems to make little fiscal sense. Due to limited staff resources, Radio Soleil has more or less stopped grant-seeking altogether. For these groups to succeed, the funding community needs to value stories as much as data. Writing for *Common Practice*, Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt notes that “stories about the aesthetic encounters mediated by small arts organizations can offer nuanced, particular, and memorable encounters of their work.”²⁵

We suggest several changes to grant application and reporting structures that would benefit small groups like these. The first is longer grant terms. As the Foundation Center’s report titled “Social Justice Grantmaking II” notes, “The way foundation grants are typically made inhibits the field. Single-year project grants are seen as leading to tentative work and inhibiting innovative thinking.”²⁶ Similarly, Jackson et al. note that long-term grants provide artists with more time to spend time on their art rather than on grant writing. Unfortunately, only 4.7 percent of reporting organizations had awards programs with expected durations of over one year.²⁷ Small organizations have margins that are too small for sustainability in this system. The long-term impacts of this short-term thinking are deleterious to the cultural ecosystem.

To help with long-term capacity building, more funders should consider providing support in the form of leadership development.²⁸ They should also provide technical assistance to prospective grantees, as well as to grantees struggling through the reporting process.²⁹ The Center for an Urban Future’s 2015 “Creative New York” report suggests creating an MBA-style boot camp for cultural nonprofit administrators.³⁰ The New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) is developing and expanding its professional-development and mentoring programs to focus on small community-based groups. It recognizes many of these groups’ structure and function do not match the arts administration ideal but are instead driven by the sense of mission. Many leaders learn administration skills on the job, and often structure their organizations in a more collaborative, less hierarchical, less systematic way than textbooks recommend. According to NYSCA’s Robert Baron, “What we’re doing with these professional-assistance programs is thinking about how to meet organizations where they are, and according to their ideals and the mission, yet still help them be sustainable.”³¹ Although local arts agencies like NYSCA are important sources for professional-development training, funding for these programs is often episodic, making long-term training initiatives unsustainable.³²

But what of those who are not even eligible for grant funding? Jackson notes the importance of providing resources to the artists and cultural organizations that are unincorporated or in the commercial sector.³³ Although incorporation as a 501(c) 3 can help facilitate grant acquisition, the structure and restrictions of the nonprofit model do not make sense for everyone. Marjorie

Eliot is the sole proprietor of Parlor Entertainment, and she has long resisted registering as a 501(c) 3 because she is not interested in managing a nonprofit and being controlled by a board of directors, a requirement for maintaining nonprofit status in New York State. Whereas a traditional board might provide some funding for the organization, its members may also demand control over programming and policies.

According to Baron, “I think funding organizations are losing a whole generation of artists and musicians, many in ethnic neighborhoods or community-based entities, because many are not choosing to formally organize.” Indeed, research suggests that the “nonprofit,” “informal,” and “commercial” categories are not mutually exclusive, and that often artists and cultural organizations work across these sectors.³⁴ As hybrids often do not receive the attention or support they deserve, these organizations would benefit from more flexibility on the part of funders.

Further, many of these organizations are not established entities in the philanthropic milieu, because they are not well understood and/or do not neatly fit into funder missions. As Jackson notes:

Mainstream validation mechanisms fail to recognize that the arts and culture of many groups, including rural, Native American and some immigrant communities, often are seen by those communities as an integral part of community functions, components of a whole way of life. Separating the “art” component from the rest, which is often required for funding and mainstream recognition, can be inappropriate and sometimes impossible.³⁵

We feel that these three sites make a strong case for the necessity of support from intermediary organizations, which can provide knowledge, infrastructure, and stability for the field that funders do not.³⁶ However, there has been a slow and steady disinvestment in intermediaries in the last several years. On a national level, there is rising interest in direct relationships with grantees who received larger grants, and less enthusiasm for granting through brokers, who, in turn, give smaller grants to smaller organizations.³⁷

If receiving public funding is an unofficial prerequisite for interest from the private sector, public proposal processes requiring English-only online applications already put many of these groups at a serious disadvantage. An important step would be for funders large and small, local and national, public and private, to accept paper grant proposals in numerous languages. Barring that change, small organizations rely on intermediaries to help them access and translate applications.

However, we do not intend to negate the significance of local, informal support. Baron suggests that intermediaries, perhaps reframed as cultural brokers, could facilitate the development of small groups’ ability to seek and sustain funding sources within and beyond their communities. Small cultural entities are often rejected for funding because they are viewed as lacking organization or accountability. This could change if they received assistance with key administrative tasks, including grant writing, submission, and reporting, bookkeeping, facilities maintenance, and general operations. Cultural brokers could also help them develop more reliable, systematic support-seeking protocols like regular, structured individual giving campaigns or those aimed at local businesses.³⁸ Caron Atlas, director of Arts and Democracy and codirector of Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts New York, also suggests that small

groups should be able to show their significant in-kind contributions as potential matches for funding opportunities.³⁹

These groups and the artists nurtured by them benefit tremendously from the presence of folklorists and cultural specialists on the panels that determine grant recipients at public agencies. The dedicated folk arts panel at the New York State Council on the Arts are able to award numerous smaller, grassroots cultural organizations either directly or through conduiting organizations such as the Center for Traditional Music and Dance in New York. A few years ago, the Pew Charitable Trusts, which had previously funded few traditional artists, added folk arts as a grant category and brought folklorists onto a multidisciplinary panel. As a result, the number of master folk artists given significant financial awards increased exponentially.

Jackson notes that there are fewer awards programs for traditional and folk artists than for other disciplines, and that these groups have severe unmet equipment and materials needs due to scarcity and restrictions on using grant funds to purchase equipment.⁴⁰ One important way to combat this inequity is to include many more individuals from immigrant and ethnic communities on the staff, boards, and grant selection panels of foundation and arts agencies. As the Department of Cultural Affairs' recent diversity initiative explicitly states, "New York City's cultural workforce, the staffing of non profit cultural centers, does not reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the city."⁴¹ It is critical that the sector's workforce better represent the communities it serves so that smaller, community-based, ethnic, and cultural organizations have fair and equal access to support.

ISSUE 4: SACRED SPACES, SECULAR ARTS

Religious institutions play a major role as incubators and presenters of the arts. These institutions are tax-exempt in the United States; however, they have limited options for funding because many foundations and government entities will not fund religious institutions.

A. Christ Assembly Lutheran Church/African Immigrant Ministry Stapleton, Staten Island

Video: <http://bit.ly/lrzdQv7>

More than ten thousand Liberians make up one of the most well-established African



communities in Staten Island, whose roots extend back to the 1970s. From 1989 to 2003, however, civil wars forced hundreds of thousands of Liberians to flee their country, and more than one hundred and twenty thousand have arrived in New York City during the last twenty years. Reverend Phillip S. Saywayne founded the Christ Assembly

Lutheran Church/African Immigrant Ministry in 1996. Three years later, Christ Assembly redeveloped a former bagel factory at 27 Hudson Street in Stapleton to assist Staten Island's nearby West African communities. The church serves as a vital community center and social hub within the Liberian community.

Under Reverend Saywayne's guidance, the community-based ministry provides outreach not only in fellowship but also in education, traditional arts presentations, resettlement, and citizenship classes. Today, the ministry claims a growing five-hundred-person membership and averages three hundred attendees at services. Although Liberians constitute a majority of the congregation, and 90 percent live on Staten Island, the ministry embraces congregants on an interfaith and transnational basis. According to Reverend Saywayne:

We developed the kind of congregation where we could inject some of the styles of worship of the denominations that they come from. And most of the people from West Africa, they are denominations that clap hands, they dance. They stand up. They make a joyful noise unto the Lord, as the Book of Samuel said. At the same time, we developed a congregation to address both the physical and spiritual needs of the people. We like the European styles, too, but we encourage traditional dress. And we have time to sit with them to remind them about their culture. We're here, but we came from somewhere. The place we came from can never be forgotten.

Reverend Saywayne was born in Liberia and immigrated to Tennessee in 1989 to attend a school of ministry. During the course of his studies, war broke out in Liberia, preventing him from returning home. He was granted asylum and moved to Staten Island in 1991, where he was called by the Lutheran Church to serve as a missionary working with local African communities. For the last twenty years, he has served as senior pastor of Christ Assembly, the first and largest of the ten congregations he has developed in the northeastern United States.

In addition, Saywayne has been an advocate for the preservation of traditional arts in the community. Specifically, Saywayne has worked with Staten Island Arts to encourage the presentation of traditional folktales among a prominent group of Liberian women, a youth and adult choir, and a praise dance team and band.

In October 2012, Hurricane Sandy caused extensive damage to the church, ruining its audio-visual and HVAC systems. The Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church was immediately mobilized in a mammoth recovery program that continues to this day. The Missouri Synod contributed two large grants to recovery efforts, and has been assisting Christ Assembly with a loan to complete the repairs. The church has undertaken a \$40,000 campaign to not only replace but also update its music equipment and sound systems. The Community Anchors program is proud to have provided the choir with funding for new musical instruments and amplification equipment.

According to musical director Cecilia Martol, support for the program is critical to the church's role in community, as choir and band performances constitute approximately half of Sunday services. As one choir member put it:

There are a lot of things that happened to so many of these people who are attending church here today. This church has a lot of stories, as you can imagine, coming from a fifteen-year war.

A lot of people had to go through a lot of things to get from Liberia to here. So sometimes we feel so happy to just be here. When we are in the presence of God, we just want to give him all. Be it dancing; be it singing. That's it.

**B. American Sri Lanka Buddhist Association/Staten Island Buddhist Vihara
Port Richmond, Staten Island**

Video: <http://bit.ly/1XcSVdD>



Sri Lankans began immigrating to Staten Island in the early 1960s, but as the result of civil war and the financial crisis in the 1990s, Staten Island is now home to nearly seven thousand Sri Lankans, who make up the United States' largest Sri Lankan community. Located in Port Richmond, the American Sri Lanka Buddhist Association, also known as the Staten Island Buddhist Vihara, is a temple that organizes events for this community.

Founded in 1981 in Queens, the New York Buddhist Vihara long served the religious and spiritual needs of New York's Sri Lankans and other Buddhists. But for the

many Sri Lankan Buddhists living in Staten Island, a trip to the Queens temple on public transit could take as long as three hours each way, and the Staten Island Buddhist Vihara was founded in 1999. Today, nearly three hundred families visit the temple regularly. The Vihara offers weekly meditation classes and a children's school for language and spirituality. In addition to an altar, it houses a library, meeting rooms, an outdoor/indoor presentation space, and hosts several residential monks.

The temple is located in an adapted residential building on a small, quiet block. The main gathering space is fronted by an altar, where a golden statue of the Buddha sits, surrounded by flowers. One wall is adorned with large golden panels depicting the eight worldly conditions. Another wall displays panels illustrating the Buddha's teachings.

The Vihara's leader is Venerable H. Kondanna, a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk. According to Venerable Kondanna:

For any important thing in their Buddhist lives, Sri Lankans always communicate with the temple. When they first arrive here, before childbirth, or when a child goes to school for the first time, they start with the temple. They come here for a blessing. Always their lives are connected with a spiritual way of living.

But the temple is more than just a spiritual center. Venerable Kondanna spearheaded several programs for the benefit of the New York Sri Lankan community, including annual cultural festivals for children and adults. He has also supported the development of the Sri Lankan Dance Academy of New York, which trains more than fifty children and young adults in traditional Sri Lankan drumming and Kandyan dance each year.

Sachindara Navinna, Dance Academy president Dhammika Navinna's daughter, reflects on how the cultural programs have kept her connected to her community:

My mother wanted to make sure that we understood more about our cultural identity despite being thousands of miles away from our motherland. The drums and dance are connected to each other, and they, in turn, form such a heavy influence on wider Sri Lankan culture. They help me be me, to be happy, and just enjoy.

The Viharan community received Community Anchors funding toward the fabrication and shipment of traditional drums, which are handmade in Sri Lanka. The *geta bera* (a doubled-sided tapered drum) is being taught to all children enrolled in the dance academy's Sunday classes, where they learn basic techniques, which are used at traditional Kandyan dances, weddings, Buddhist ceremonies, funerals, births, and live concerts.

C. Hindu Temple Society of North America Flushing, Queens

Video: <http://bit.ly/ISSAkS8>

The intricately carved stone structure rises majestically, if surprisingly, over the small, detached houses of Bowne Street in Flushing, Queens. Built in a South Indian style and consecrated in 1977, the Sri Maha Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam, otherwise known as Ganesha Temple, does not seek to blend with its neighbors. Its distinctive appearance instead marks a sea change in the history and culture of Queens, and the coming-of-age of one of New York's newest immigrant groups.

The temple's open gate welcomes regulars and visitors seven days a week from early morning into the night. In alcoves along the walls, statues of Hindu deities repose, with the largest shrine dedicated to Ganesha, one of the most important Hindu deities. With his elephant's head and human body, Ganesha represents the "universality of creation." Devotees pray to "the remover of obstacles" each morning upon waking to ensure that the day goes well. Fresh flower garlands made by priests and devotees adorn the temple's large prayer spaces, which are empty of the pews common to other houses of worship. Floral *rangoli* designs made with brightly colored rice flour embellish floors throughout the temple, protecting its sacred spaces from evil influences. Painted scenes from Hindu cosmology ornament the walls. Dr. Uma Mysorekar, the



president of the Hindu Temple Society of North America, says, “Spiritual hunger is fulfilled right here in this place. The rituals and chants made here literally enrich the walls with spirituality, creating vibrations which devotees can feel.”

Dr. Mysorekar, a retired obstetrician and gynecologist, has been involved with the institution since 1977. Born and raised in Bangalore, she came to the United States in 1970. As temple president, Dr. Mysorekar has initiated many spiritual, educational, and cultural programs for the temple community. She has led interfaith meetings and spoken at numerous functions to increase public understanding of Hinduism. In addition, she has organized joint programs with and provides space for many other ethnic communities in the neighborhood. In 2000, City Lore awarded Dr. Mysorekar a People’s Hall of Fame Award, and the Community Anchors program provided the temple with funds for sound equipment.

In *Becoming American, Being Indian*, Madhulika Khandelwal, director of the Asian/American Center at Queens College, writes that Hinduism has no single sacred text or clerical order, leading many to label it a culture or way of life rather than an organized religion. Ganesha Temple has evolved to meet the changing devotional interests and practices of its worshippers, not all of whom come from India.

Yet Ganesha Temple is more than a place for prayer. It has served as an important venue for conveying Hindu beliefs and traditions to the younger generation in a community where Hinduism is a distinct minority faith. It is also an important cultural and community center and a magnet for Hindus from throughout the tri-state area, offering classes in Hindi and Sanskrit, traditional and folk dance, Hinduism, as well as college prep. The temple’s volunteers mediate problems, coordinate youth programs, raise funds, and decorate the space.

In the 1990s, the temple’s growing prestige encouraged its expansion. Next door, the posh, three-floor Hindu Community Center includes a large auditorium and stage, a vegetarian canteen whose hours match the temple’s, a conference room, and a spacious hall, the *kalyana mantapam*, for marriages and large events. (The temple maintains a marriage registry to help parents match-make for their children.) Along the block, single-family homes have been transformed into temple offices and accommodations for priests.

Ganesha Temple’s founder was Alagappa Alagappan, a United Nations civil servant from India who believed himself guided by divine instruction to build temples in the new land of Indian immigration. His community evolved into the Hindu Temple Society of North America. The society chose to locate its first temple in Flushing, because by 1970 the tri-state area was already attracting growing numbers of Indian immigrants, many of them Hindus settling in Queens.

In 1971, when a Russian Orthodox congregation put up its Bowne Street building for sale, Alagappan and his colleagues discovered what seemed to be a perfect site, as it had long been associated with houses of faith. Not all the temple’s supporters approved of the purchase, believing it was too expensive. But Alagappan’s group had envisioned a neighborhood temple convenient to many Hindu worshippers.

The project surged ahead when Tirupati Devasthanam, the largest temple in India, gave its support. A work camp of about 150 artisans was established near Hyderabad to produce the

key architectural elements such as the stone sanctum and the carved *rajagopuram* (royal tower) that rises above the temple. The pieces were shipped to New York and assembled here.

Khandelwal writes that the “priests were selected from a pool of Brahmins who had received scriptural training in India. The temple attracted more South than North Indians, but it accommodated a range of devotees of different Indian regional subcultures, including North Indian–style *arati* (waving of lights to gods), devotional songs, and religious festivals. The Ganesha Temple also affirmed the unity of all religions: the logo on the front of its building and on its stationery bore the primordial Hindu symbol *Om* in the center and was surrounded by symbols designating Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism.”

Ganesha Temple is one of the first Hindu temples built in North America, and its success has helped spur the construction of a dozen or more in Queens alone. It draws congregants from across the tri-state area, particularly on weekends. Especially for those living in far-flung suburbs, an excursion to Queens is a journey not only to the temple but to an Indian American heartland in New York City.

D. Challenges, Recommendations, and Action Points

Folklorist Ray Allen, who studies a capella gospel music groups and has worked extensively with storefront churches, talked with us about how these groups function as religious institutions in the informal economy of their neighborhoods.

At small and storefront churches in the African American community, Sunday morning service is dedicated to religious services, the church choir, and the sermon. But on Saturday night or Sunday afternoon, a gospel music program will often take place. The music is a combination of religion, Southern heritage, and art. The music is usually a ticketed event. Part of the money collected may be donated to the church, but part of it may go to the sound systems, the outfits, or to support the musicians, who all have day jobs.

City Lore has attended these performances only to discover world-class musicians working with static blaring from inexpensive amplifiers. We recommend that governmental agencies and foundations explore ways to support arts activities hosted by religious institutions.

The religious sites documented in this section provide services that impact their audiences’ daily lives. They provide on- and off-site guidance and connection to tradition, as well as community orientation, communications channels, educational opportunities, and even food, clothing, and emergency assistance. They provide financial resources, rehearsal and performance space, and help with local artists’ audience development.⁴² Their membership is so committed to the community’s health and well-being that the particular needs of the sites themselves are sometimes overlooked. They receive funding from their audiences, individual donors, and parent religious affiliates, but are not in the networks of major philanthropists.⁴³

These sites serve as second homes to immigrants and their families. They face the same developmental challenges as the other groups in this report, but are additionally hindered by their remote locations, making it less likely that passersby will be drawn into their spaces and encounter their programs. In addition, unless they establish a separate non profit affiliate, they are excluded from government funding.

VI. Next Steps

1. Seek funding for a convening of grassroots activists and community artists from around the country to give a broader perspective to the findings of this report. A model might be the pioneering work of Angelique Power and the Joyce Foundation, who, over the course of two years, brought together many of Chicago's cultural institutions and funders for serious reflection on how to strengthen all parts of the cultural field.

2. Establish a Cultural Assets on Public Land Task Force, whose recommendations would be addressed by the mayor and city officials at relevant agencies, including the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Their work should also be incorporated into New York City's forthcoming Cultural Plan. We suggest that the task force do the following:

- a. examine how the process of blind bidding for contracts for city-owned land could be more transparent
- b. explore how the city can find ways to assess the public good and honor cultural continuity as part of the process of bidding for contracts on public land

3. Establish a Cultural Assets on Private Property Task Force, with ties to mayor and the city's economic development agencies. We suggest that this task force be developed in conjunction with the city's Cultural Plan. We suggest that the task force do the following:

- a. advocate for including artists, small-business owners, street vendors, residents, and tenants on BID boards to balance the disproportionate number of property owners
- b. ensure that small businesses that request credit or inclusion from Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are indeed small businesses and not chain stores or developers masquerading as such.
- c. explore ways to identify key community assets through peer panels or demonstrations of public support
- d. develop policies and programs that will lead to an inventory of and support for community assets but that will not negatively impact the city's overall economy. Examples include the following:
 - i. stabilizing rent
 - ii. providing loans to purchase property
 - iii. offering tax-free status, as is offered to religious institutions

4. Work with the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs to offer development workshops for leaders of cultural anchors to teach them about real estate issues, grant writing, and opportunities available to their organizations.

5. Open a discussion with Grantmakers in the Arts about developing new, more user-friendly metrics for demonstrating the success of cultural anchors, including narratives like those included in this report.

6. Ask city and state arts-funding agencies, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Department of Cultural Affairs to fund a position—or perhaps one for each of the outer boroughs—dedicated to assisting smaller groups in navigating funding opportunities. NYSCA does allow larger organizations to help smaller ones, and there are opportunities through decentralization (small grants) programs that community anchors can access. However, DCLA does not currently accept proposals from fiscal sponsors. We believe it should.

VII. Conclusion

All the organizations included in this initiative fit the Arts and Culture Indicators Project's definition of "pillar institutions":

*organizations that are key catalysts for both amateur and professional arts practice and collaborate with a range of arts and non-arts organizations as part of their programming [and that] are especially important for a community's cultural vitality as we define it.*⁴⁴

These sites are critical to community health because they integrate arts and culture with community organizing strategies and long-term social justice efforts.⁴⁵ However, the Community Anchors initiative indicates that past and current policies have not sufficiently supported grassroots cultural institutions. It is time to both enhance existing resources and create new resources and legislation that support a diverse and equitable cultural ecology.

The experiences of the ten organizations described in this report point to a series of next steps. City Lore and its sister organizations will continue to explore ways to support cultural anchors. In addition, we suggest a convening of visionary leaders from organizations across the country that serve similar roles in their communities, support the cultural lives of people of color, and can add new strategies to a more equitable funding picture that supports the cultural life of the United States.

The many ways of sustaining cultural anchors in neighborhoods are complex and challenging. To make informed choices for the future of urban neighborhoods, we must ground our decisions in work that has already successfully created a sense of neighborhood and community. The dissolution of communities is real and costly, and cultural conservation is a preventive medicine that can keep neighborhoods and communities from falling apart. Assessing the value of these establishments may be difficult, but trying to re-create these sites after their doors have closed is not an option. Whatever the profits of new development might be, we cannot allow what is most distinctive and human about our cities be destroyed. As the folklorist Alan Lomax wrote, "If we continue to allow the erosion of our cultural forms, soon there will be nowhere to visit and no place to truly call home."

Acknowledgments

City Lore would like to extend our deepest thanks to the numerous, generous individuals and organizations who supported and participated in the Community Anchors initiative, and who gave so much of their time and knowledge to informing and reviewing the report before you. First and foremost, we are indebted to Roberta Uno, who, under the auspices of the Ford Foundation, provided the financial support for this project.

We are also so grateful for wonderful and productive collaboration with the ten Community Anchors, their leaders, and community members: The American Sri Lanka Buddhist Association, including The Venerable H. Kondanna, Master Percussionist Uthpala Eroshan, Dhammika Navinna, president of the Sri Lankan Dance Academy of New York, and Sachindara Navinna, Kandyan Dancer and Drum Student; Casita Rincón Criollo's Jose Manuel "Chema" Soto, Desseree Soto, and Carlos Soto; Christ Assembly Lutheran Church's Reverend Phillip Saywrayne, Choir Director Cecelia Martol, and the entire church band and choir; Fernando "Ponce" Laspina, founder of El Maestro Inc.; Dr. Uma Mysorekar, president of the Hindu Temple Society of North America; Marjorie Eliot and Rudel Drears of Marjorie Eliot's Parlor Entertainment; the New York City Federation of Black Cowboys; Ricot Dupuy, director of Radio Soleil; Executive Director Curtis Nelson and President Raymond Luke of Sesame Flyers International; Freddy Castiblanco, Edward Perez, and the Terraza 7 Big Band.

This report could not have been written without consultation and insights from Margaret Morton (Ford Foundation); Holly Sidford (Helicon Collaborative); Susan Seifert (University of Pennsylvania's Social Impact of the Arts Project); Caron Atlas (Arts and Democracy; Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts New York); Amy Chin (Cultural Consultant); Milly Hawk Daniel (Policy Link); Bob Holman (Bowery Arts + Sciences); Robert Baron (New York State Council on the Arts); Adam Forman (Center for Urban Future); Elena Martínez (City Lore and the Bronx Music Heritage Center); Edwin Torres (New York City Department of Cultural Affairs); Henry Goldschmidt (Interfaith Center of New York); Les Slater (Trinidad and Tobago Folks Arts Institute); Kristen Calhoun (Arts in a Changing America); Kerry McCarthy (New York Community Trust); Ethel Raim (Center for Traditional Music and Dance); Jan Hanvik (Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural Center); Christopher Mulé (Brooklyn Arts Council), and Dr. Ray Allen (Brooklyn College).

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End Notes

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