

**White House Meeting
May 7, 2009
Key Issues Impacting Arts and Cultural Organizations of Color
and Key Solutions to Achieve Cultural Equity**

On May 7, 2009 the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture (NALAC) organized a historic meeting at the White House to discuss cultural equity and the undercapitalization of arts organizations of color and from native and rural communities. Twelve representatives from Latino, African American, Native American, and Appalachian organizations met with Kareem Dale, Stephanie Valencia, Jodi Gillette and Yosi Sargent to begin a national discussion about how to address the challenges facing our field.

These organizations came together in unity and delivered a message of shared interests and needs. Present at the meeting were Carlton Turner, Alternate Roots; Linda Fraher, Amerinda; Bill Aguado, Bronx Council on the Arts; Marta Moreno Vega, Caribbean Cultural Center; Lori Pourier, First People's Fund; Michael Unthank, Harlem Arts Alliance; Maria De Leon, Abel Lopez, Christine Ortega and Rosalba Rolon, NALAC; Roger Green, Ralph Bunche Center at Medgar Evers College; and Dudley Cocke, Roadside Theater/Appalshop. The participants represented a coalition of arts and cultural organizations from diverse segments of the U.S. population that are typically disenfranchised from arts and cultural policy discussions. Although our organizations serve distinct communities we agree on the solutions and mechanisms needed to strengthen and build the capacity for the arts and cultural groups of color and native and rural communities. We recognize that our creative work is a driving force in the development and vitality of the communities we serve.

We believe that the current public and private structures do not address and support our artistic priorities and needs or reflect the changing demographics of the country. Many of the current policies and structures resulted from the dismantling of previous programs and abandonment of strategies that supported our artistic and cultural work. We are prepared to recommend strategies and solutions that are imbued with the concepts of equity and social justice to ensure that this nation's cultural policies and programs are more inclusive of our peoples and our communities.

Statement on Cultural Equity

Cultural Equity is grounded in the principle that every segment of the population has the equal right to be a full participant and contributor to the cultural life of the nation and to have fair access to resources, information and opportunities for complete cultural

expression. Cultural equity addresses the need for both numerical majorities and numerical minorities to have their histories, traditions and contributions included in all civil and political aspects of the nation's evolving story. Our sector has made significant contributions to the national discourse on racial, civil and social justice, and has been actively engaged in the protection of the cultural rights of historically marginalized communities. It is incumbent upon this administration to refocus on matters of cultural equity and develop systems to equitably distribute resources that support arts and cultural organizations and artists who are deeply rooted in and able to express the experiences of diverse communities.

We want to work with President Obama and his administration to frame the cultural equity dialogue going forward and to identify key strategies for investment to build capacity and ensure the stabilization of the field.

Key Priorities

1. To focus on the important principles and priorities of cultural equity, develop systems of equitable distribution of resources, and implement initiatives to infuse economic resources in marginalized arts and cultural areas.
2. To support leadership training initiatives that nurture and train the next generation of artists and cultural leaders.
3. To establish a mechanism to help organizations establish a baseline for adequate staffing based on their mission and level of activity.
4. To create a process and incentive model to assist organizations in the development of sustainable efforts to expand and diversify earned and contributed income.
5. To identify funds for low interest loans, grants and/or other mechanisms to support facility acquisition and enhancements and to encourage new models in collaboration/sharing of arts spaces.
6. To identify mechanisms that support the infrastructure and operational needs of organizations and support a viable economic base for artists.
7. To develop and implement cultural policies that will assure equitable distribution of resources in urban and rural communities. At present, the largest stand alone organizations of color in the country operate with at least 10 times less funding than their white or urban counterparts. Access to resources is often limited by budget size or by access to intermediaries and cultural brokers.

8. To establish special mechanisms to infuse capital into our sector. A large percentage of our constituents report reduced but ongoing programming, strong volunteerism, power of convocation in their communities, potential for job creation at all levels and artistic excellence. But, the gap between the value of their work and access to capital resources is enormous.
9. To engage government in a conversation about our readiness to work with various federal agencies in addition to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) which operates at nearly half the budget it had 28 years ago. To recognize that some of our needs, from production, to transportation, to housing, to health, to retirement, are no different from any other workforce in the country.
10. To engage government agencies in discussing strategies and implementing support mechanisms that would have a direct impact on our field. We are prepared to propose at least one example for a proposed model. There are others.

Strategy and Proposal for Investment in Organizations of Color

Proposal by Bill Aguado, Bronx Council on the Arts

Cultural Assets Investment Fund (CAIF) introduces a strategy for generating arts-related economic development while strengthening the capacities of community arts organizations. CAIF encourages a change in thinking for community arts groups - shifting their focus from planning for deficits and needs to assets and capacities-based planning. Some of the initiatives to be considered include investing in arts organizations, facilitating entrepreneurial capabilities, increasing earned income, and ultimately building capacity, growth, and sustainability. CAIF defines cultural "assets and capacities" as the valuable investments of skill, talent, resources, and unique qualities that exist in individual arts organizations, built through time and commitment.

Community-based cultural groups in low-income and rural areas receive limited support from local government and must compete with more visible, mainstream institutions for grants from foundations and corporations. To ensure their survival, community-based cultural groups must be provided with a means for self-sustainability and growth. CAIF will enable arts organizations to initiate new income generating ventures and audience development through a planning process based on their inherent strengths. CAIF Training and Implementation support from the Small Business Administration (SBA) would enhance the business side of community arts organizations as well as their sustainability as community anchors.

- Loan Program for Artists and Arts Organizations address emergency needs (e.g., natural disaster), entrepreneurial/ arts-related ventures, and housing/studio needs

to name a few. The SBA funds would be utilized as loan guarantees against local economic development lenders thus assuring a rapid response and impact. The interest rates charged on these loans would be significantly below market.

- Energy Support – arts organizations are being handicapped by the ever increasing energy costs. If an organization could pre-pay their annual energy costs, the energy provider would be able to provide a 10-15% rate reduction. Investment by the Small Business Administration in local economic development organizations that can administer the energy prepayments on behalf of arts organizations and be reimbursed by these organizations throughout the year. This prepayment plan would lessen the burden of the energy costs while encouraging additional energy saving strategies.
- Individual Development Account (IDA) artists and employees of cultural institutions and arts organizations will be encouraged to participate in this unique savings program; that is, by making a three year commitment to save a minimum amount annually, the local community lender will match the saving at a rate of 4 to 1. Participant, however, must commit to financial literacy/training workshops over the three years and funds can only be used for one of the following:
 1. professional development or education
 2. purchase or rental of studio or new housing
 3. earned income or professional arts projects.

The example above of a local stimulus-type program will encourage community-based financial solutions, enhancing the ability to cope with economic challenges on a local level. A committee could adjudicate the use of the funds to ensure compliance. The matching funds would be provided by House and Urban Development or the Small Business Administration.

Conclusion

We will continue to act in collaboration and to meet White House staff, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and other appropriate federal agencies to develop mechanisms for substantial investment in existing and new arts and culture work. We look forward to working with this administration to continue a solution-oriented dialogue that will result in innovative and equitable cultural policies for the nation.