


Report - December 2020

# The Changing Face of Creativity in New York: Sustaining NYC's Immigrant Arts Ecosystem

Immigrant artists are increasingly essential to the creative landscape of New York City. But now the livelihoods of countless immigrant artists—and the survival of the cultural organiza-tions that champion their work—are facing major threats.

by Abigail Savitch-Lew

- The following is the introduction to *The Changing Face of Creativity in New York: Sustaining NYC's Immigrant Arts Ecosystem Through Crisis and Beyond*
- Read the full report (PDF)
- View the recommendations from this report

Each new decade brings a fresh wave of concern that New York City risks losing some of its cultural spark. Even before the coronavirus pandemic hit, New York's soaring cost of living and the lure of cities from Baltimore to Berlin had threatened the city's position at the apex of global culture. At the same time, a powerful, growing force of cultural vibrancy has reenergized the city in recent years and sharpened New York's creative edge: immigrant artists.

Foreign-born artists have long been here, birthing world-altering movements from abstract expres-sionism to hip-hop. More than any previous era, however, immigrants have become pivotal to the success of the arts in New York. The number of immigrant artists has grown 69 percent since 1990, compared to a 30 percent increase in U.S.-born artists. The ranks of immigrant producers and directors, writers, and photographers have all doubled since 1990, while the number of immigrant actors has grown by almost 150 percent. Today, the city is home to 12 percent of the nation's immigrant artists, far more than any other U.S. city. Across multiple disciplines, immigrants burnish the city's global reputation for artistic excellence, from the nine New York-based, foreign-born artists who were featured in last year's Whitney Biennial to the five 2019 Bessie Award-winning immigrant dancers and choreographers, to hip-hop superstars like Trinidad-born, Queens-raised Nicki Minaj.[1]

But now the livelihoods of countless immigrant artists—and the survival of the cultural organiza-tions that champion their work—are facing major threats. Without the benefit of endowments or large donor bases to help cushion the blow, many immigrant-led and immigrant-serving arts organizations are facing fiscal catastrophe, reporting revenue losses amounting to 50 percent or more of their annu-al budgets. These organizations were particularly vulnerable to financial shocks before the pandemic hit, with the average ethnic arts nonprofit bringing in just one-third the government funding and less than 7 percent of the board contributions received by mainstream peer organizations. Meanwhile, many immigrant artists have struggled to access government relief, even as income from exhibitions, perfor-mances, and side jobs has all dried up.

While city support for immigrant arts had increased in recent years, that funding is now in jeopardy: the city's 2021 budget cuts more than $23 million from the Department of Cultural Affairs and slash-es funding for Council discretionary initiatives by $79 million—funding that many immigrant-serving arts organizations rely on.

Absent a new level of support, New York risks losing its status as a beacon of cultural exchange and innovation, and jeopardizing its prospects in a daunting economic recovery. To continue attracting and sustaining brilliant creators from across the world—and keep pace with cities like Los Angeles, Houston, and Miami that are now experiencing far faster growth in their immigrant artist communities—city pol-icymakers and cultural leaders will have to do far more to help immigrant artists and arts organizations to survive the current crisis and weave new strength into the cultural fabric of New York City.

This report provides a new level of detail on the landscape of immigrant arts in New York City— and what's needed to sustain immigrant arts com-munities across the five boroughs. Funded by the New York Community Trust, the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, and Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the report builds on the Center for an Urban Fu-ture's previous research about the vital role of the arts in New York's economy, including the 2015 Creative New York study. The report documents the essential contributions of immigrant artists to New York City, identifies the core challenges facing im-migrants in the arts both before and amid the cur-rent crisis, and advances more than a dozen specific recommendations to support immigrant artists and immigrant-serving arts organizations and strength-en the city's creative future. It was informed by ex-tensive data analysis and interviews with over 100 New Yorkers, including immigrant artists, directors of immigrant-led cultural and social service organi-zations, leaders of other cultural institutions, art critics, creative professionals, and government offi-cials, among many others.

Since the coronavirus pandemic hit in March 2020, arts organizations of all kinds have experi-enced tremendous financial hardship. But our re-search finds that many of the city's immigrant-serv-ing arts organizations and working immigrant artists have taken the greatest hit. Galleries, perfor-mance venues, and community spaces that champi-on the work of immigrant creators have gone dark indefinitely, with few financial resources to cushion the blow.

New data from immigrant-serving arts orga-nizations reveals the scale of the crisis. Flushing Town Hall, a multidisciplinary global arts venue in Queens, has lost more than $400,000 in earned income through June—over 17 percent of its an-nual budget—and projects losses up to $500,000 for the late summer and fall, including lost income from weddings, events, ticket sales, and govern-ment contracts. The Nuyorican Poets Cafe has been closed since March with zero earned revenue and projects losses of between $400,000 and $450,000 for the year—more than half of its annual budget. The Bronx Academy of Art and Dance has lost over $20,000 in revenue from canceled events and rent-als since March, and has spent more than $40,000 on continued rent payments for its shuttered space.

For many immigrant artists, the impact of COVID-19 has been particularly devastating. Dancer and choreographer Hussein Smko saw the premiere of his autobiographical dance work post-poned by several months, and he lost a potential $40,000 grant and had to cancel a fundraiser, both due to the pandemic. His future plans to tour in his native Kurdistan have also

been placed on in-definite hold. Without live events, Colombia-born musician Johanna Casteñada has lost her main source of income and is surviving on unemploy-ment and micro-grants. But in her band, Grupo Rebolu, “We’re nine musicians affected. And that’s only in my band.” Artists from New York’s Hima-layan communities have lost income from canceled weddings and festivals, says community activist Nawang Gurung. But most of these artists actually make a living working under the table in particu-larly hard-hit industries like restaurants, nail sa-lons, and childcare: “They don’t get unemployment because they were paid in cash,” says Gurung. “It’s been a challenge for seven months just to pay the rent, and groceries are not cheap in New York City.”

Immigrants have experienced the steepest fi-nancial losses of any New Yorkers, with more than half of all immigrant workers in many commu-nities losing their primary source of income. The impact of this crisis is compounding the financial challenges already affecting immigrant artists, who earn just 88 cents on the dollar compared to U.S.-born artists. Given the challenge of earning a living from art alone, many worked in the city’s hardest-hit industries to support their artistic practices—from art handling and performance venues to restaurants and nightclubs—and a large share of these jobs have either disappeared or been dramatically scaled back. In addition, the deep eco-nomic pain afflicting immigrant communities, cou-pled with struggles accessing federal cash relief or unemployment insurance, has forced immigrants to cut back drastically on spending, resulting in patronage of artists and arts organizations all but disappearing in recent months.

Given the vital, growing role that immigrant artists play in cultivating the city’s broader cre-ative ecosystem, these dislocations and disrup-tions pose a major threat to the city’s long-term economic health and cultural vibrancy.

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**“We Need to Survive” COVID-19 Threatens the Careers and Livelihoods of NYC’s Immigrant Artists**

**Sirène Dantor Saintil** is the lead vocalist and founder of Fanmi Asotò, a Haitian song and drum group and cul-tural organization rooted in Vodou traditions. For Saintil and her husband, master drummer Jean Guy “Fanfan” Rene, Fanmi Asotò’s performances and workshops are the sole source of income for their family, and since COVID hit, they’ve had no work and no income. “My husband and I are both immigrants, both artists, this is the way we live our life, and now we’re stuck and don’t know what to do. Nobody calls us to perform. I usually have a contract for a year, and now everything has stopped,” says Saintil. “Right now to survive, to feed my family, I have to go to food banks.” Beyond a $500 emergency grant from the Brooklyn Arts Council and the occasional small donation for a free outdoor performance, Saintil has received no relief. “Make people under-stand us as immigrants, performers, artists,” she says. “We need to survive. This is our life.”

We interviewed a Lebanon-born multimedia artist who asked to be identified as “Sophia.” She currently lives in upper Manhattan with her partner, also an artist and immigrant, and two children. Her work has been exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum and Dumbo Arts Festival. As a result of the pandemic, both she and her partner have lost all of their income from their art practices and they have been unable to access any relief grants. “There is basically zero happening in terms of shows or speaking engagements or anything like that. It’s like our career has come to a standstill,” she says. “In terms of money in our pocket there is really abso-lutely nothing.” Sophia’s partner is unable to work his side job as an Uber driver to avoid exposing their family to the virus. Their family is now relying on her day job, which generates a fraction of their previous income.

Dancer and arts educator **Aeilushi Mistry** was born in Gujarat, India, and is now based in Bay Ridge. For the past eight years, she has led a traditional Arti, a Hindu lamp ceremony, on the shores of the East River in Brooklyn, connecting hundreds of New York families with the culture of India and receiving coverage in the New York Times. This year, her life’s work has ground to a halt. “My calendar is completely empty right now,” she says. “In a normal year, I’d have two or three residencies in schools in both spring and fall, teach-ing students about Indian culture through dance. I would lead movement workshops and seminars and give performances in the community several times a month. And I’d be performing at festivals. But those were all completely canceled or really scaled back.” Mistry estimates that she’s lost at least $15,000 to $20,000 in income from her work as an artist this year and is having doubts about her future in New York. “Artists are essential, but

there's no work for us," she says. "It feels like one door after another is closing."

**Tijay Mohammed** is a Ghana-born artist based in the Bronx who has organized community-based projects at the Brooklyn Museum and Studio Museum in Harlem. With a full calendar of exciting projects scheduled, Mohammed anticipated that 2020 would be his breakout year. As the pandemic intensified, however, he sustained one setback after another. He had been invited to teach workshops and organize projects at several institutions throughout the year, all of which were either canceled or scaled back to online-only programs. Mohammed estimates he lost about $12,000 in income due to cancellations alone. In addition, sales of his work have suffered. "I had one piece priced at $15,000 that was going to sell, but it didn't because the buyer lost her grandmother to COVID and was struggling," he says. "My community relies on me, but I was struggling myself."

Colombia-born **Lina Montoya** is a muralist, teaching artist, and designer based on the North Shore of Staten Island since 2010. Since her first commission for the NYCDOT in 2014, her work has centered on public art that engages the community, celebrates Staten Island's diversity, and creates a sense of belonging. But her work relies on public commissions and community participation, which have all but vanished. "Everything fell apart," says Montoya. "All my projects with the DOE were canceled. The four pieces I was supposed to do in 2020 never happened. I haven't been able to start any projects remotely or through distance learning." With no source of income and public schools closed, Montoya left New York City to stay with family in Colombia in the spring. She recently returned to New York, where she is trying to rebuild her career and find work again.

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**Immigrants are driving the growth and success of New York's arts sector.**

New York City's artistic relevance, from the 19th cen-tury through today, is greatly owed to the passion and creative vision of international newcomers. "Im-migrant artists and their work have been foundation-al to the city's cultural make-up," says Michael Royce, executive director of the New York Foundation for the Arts, a nonprofit supporting artists and emerg-ing artists and arts organizations in New York State and beyond.

Immigrants to New York like Roberto Matta from Chile and Arshile Gorky from Armenia paved the way for New York's groundbreaking abstract expression-ist movement led in part by other immigrants like Mark Rothko from Latvia and Willem de Kooning from the Netherlands. Lithuanian filmmakers Jonas and Adolfas Mekas became leading figures of the New American Cinema movement, while fellow Lithu-anian George Maciunas created the experimental Fluxus movement, involving artists like Yoko Ono and Shigeko Kubota from Japan and Nam June Paik from Korea. A lifetime of work by the French immi-grant Louise Bourgeois influenced the development of feminist-inspired body art and installation art.[2]

Immigrant Caribbean musicians are arguably responsible for the birth of hip-hop—people like Bronxite hip-hop founders DJ Kool Herc from Jamaica and Grandmaster Flash from Barbados. Puerto Rican migrants have also made immeasur-able contributions to the sounds and flavors of the city, with theater companies like Pregones/Puerto Rican Traveling Theater leading the nation in bi-lingual theater, and Boricua musicians like Tito Rodriguez and Tito Puente popularizing Cuban styles like mambo, giving rise to the distinctly New York sound that became known as "salsa."[3]

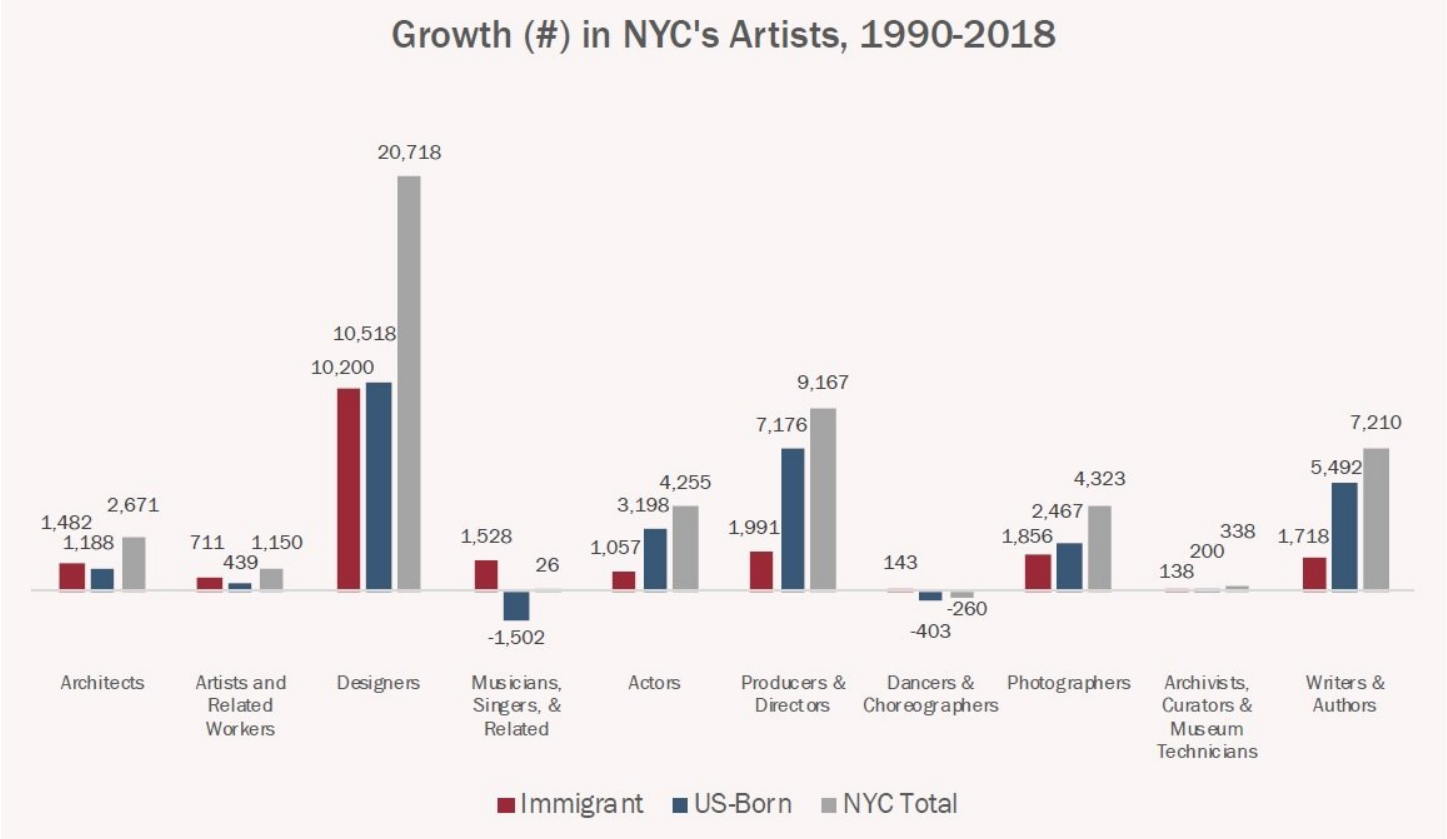
But while immigrants have always made vital contributions to the arts community in New York, immigrants now comprise a growing share of the city's artists—and, our research shows, play a lead role in pushing technical and creative boundaries, preserving cultural heritage, and anchoring New York's position as a global leader in contemporary culture. CUF's analysis of Census data finds that New York City is now home to 50,964 immigrant professional artists, a 69 percent increase from just 30,139 in 1990. The share of New York City-based artists who are immigrants has also grown—from 24 percent in 1990 to 29 percent today. What's more, the share of immigrants who are artists has grown by more than 25 percent. Since 1990, the number of immigrant artists grew faster than U.S.- born artists in every occupation we examined.[4]

Growth in immigrant artists can be seen across every artistic occupation since 1990, with the larg-est increase among

designers, up from 12,068 immigrant designers in 1990 to 22,268 by 2018, a gain of 10,200. Fashion design in particular has been driven by immigrant contributions: a recent survey of fashion industry employers found that 85 percent said international talent was important to the growth and success of their business and 67 percent employed international talent.[5]

In some cases, immigrants are driving the growth even while the number of U.S.-born art-ists has declined: since 1990, the city recorded a net loss of 1,502 U.S.-born musicians and gained 1,528 immigrant musicians. This is no surprise to Bronx musician and co-artistic director of the Bronx Music Heritage Center Bobby Sanabria, who teaches music at New York University (NYU) and the New School. “Every semester,” Sanabria says, “I sign these recommendation letters for people applying for their 0-1B visas”— visas for extraor-dinary ability in the arts—explaining that many of his students hail from the Caribbean, Central and South America, China, Russia, Israel, and other parts of the world. “That’s why immigration is so important—because it reinvigorates culture, it re-invigorates all of the arts.”

But there are many more skilled immigrant art-ists who are not reflected in these statistics, such as those who practice in community settings. “We’ve got some of the world’s best artists here driving cabs in Brooklyn and digging graves in Queens,” says Peter Rushefsky, executive director of the Center for Traditional Music and Dance (CTMD). In fact, the tremendous growth in foreign-born, professional artists captures just a fraction of the enormous world of immigrant arts in New York City—from the steel-pan bands on Eastern Park-way every Labor Day to the nail salon worker who performs Chinese opera at night.




*Source*: CUF analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, 2014-2018, and the 1990 U.S. Census

**Immigrants are increasingly essential to the city’s global leadership in arts and culture.**

Though many foreign-born artists do still operate on the margins of New York’s art world, more than ever before immigrant artists are being recognized for their excellence. Of the 78 artists and collec-tives shown in last year’s Whitney Biennial, 24 originate from outside the fifty states. Of those 24, nine live at least partly in New York City, including Wangechi Mutu from Kenya, Olga Balema from Ukraine, Meriem Bennani from Morocco, and oth-ers. “We’d be lost without the immigrant artists in

New York," says Andrew Russeth, art critic and for-mer executive editor of ARTnews.[6]

Immigrants are also having a profound impact on the city's music scene. "If you want to have a global presence you likely have to come to the U.S. and more specifically, New York," says Justin Ka-lifowitz, CEO of Downtown Music Holdings. "If immigration is prevented, you lose that edge. New York City is home to some of the most culturally relevant musicians. Contemporary artists like Nic-ki Minaj who was born in Trinidad and raised in Queens are pushing the boundaries of popular music."

From playwrights like Romania-born Saviana Stanescu, Poland-born Martyna Majok, and Ko-rea-born Hansol Jung, to companies like Ma-Yi Theater Company and the Pan-Asian Repertory Theatre, immigrant artists and immigrant-serv-ing groups are energizing the theater scene. Im-migrants are also crucial participants in the New York dance world. Of the 13 dancers who received Bessie Awards in 2019, five were immigrants: nora chipaumire of Zimbabwe, Tania El Khoury of Leb-anon, Shamar Watt of Jamaica, Alice Sheppard of Britain and Daina Ashbee of Canada.[7]

Immigrant artists are reshaping the film world in New York City. Of the 24 feature film directors presented by MoMA's 2019 New Directors/New Films festival, which highlights emerging film-makers from throughout the globe, twenty-one were born outside the United States, among which at least two are based in New York: Alejandro Lan-des and Lucio Castro. Of the 16 film directors who won Tribeca Film Festival awards in 2019, the ma-jority were from other countries, including Brook-lyn-based Rania Attieh.[8]

According to Barbara Schock, chair of NYU Tisch's graduate film program, the program's inter-national diversity is crucial to its success. "There are two things that [immigrants] bring: they bring stories from other places and other ways of under-standing the world, but they're also bringing their new existence as an immigrant to our culture," says Schock, "and it's this duality that is incredibly vi-talizing." Schock points to the Taiwanese graduate Ang Lee and his film The Ice Storm, set in a quintes-sential American suburb, as well as the China-born graduate Chloé Zhao and her film The Rider, set in South Dakota.

Meanwhile, immigrant designers have perhaps the most substantial presence of immigrants in any arts sector. Of CultureTrip's ten NYC-based fashion designers to know about in 2018, half were born outside the country: Canadian Chris Gelinas, Norwegian Eleen Halvorsen, Belgian Tim Coppens, and Australians Ryan Lobo and Ramon Martin. "I can't imagine our industry or any of the arts industries in America existing without the rich cultural heritage [brought by] everybody that comes to the U.S.," says Sara Kozlowski, director of education and professional development at the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA).[9]

New York City–based immigrant artists are also among the nation's literary giants, including Ko-rea-born, Queens-raised Min Jin Lee, author of the acclaimed novels Pachinko and Free Food for Million-aires; Mexico-born, 2019 MacArthur "Genius" grant award-winner Valeria Luiselli, author of The Story of My Teeth and Lost Children Archive; and Peru-born Daniel Alarcón, author of Lost City Radio and At Night We Walk in Circles. That's not even counting Salman Rushdie, a New Yorker since 2000.

The impact of New York's immigrant artists extends far beyond accolades and awards. Immi-grants are pioneering innovative, interdisciplinary practices. In both the 2018 and 2019 cohorts at NEW INC, the New Museum's cultural incubator for artists, designers, technologists, and creative entrepreneurs, over 40 percent were immigrants. And by melding genres and cultural traditions, im-migrant artists collaborate to develop completely new styles. "All of these art forms need rejuvena-tion," says David Johnston, executive director of Exploring the Metropolis (EtM), a nonprofit that supported access to workspace for performing artists for almost 40 years, before circumstanc-es tied to the pandemic forced the organization to cease operations in June. "They all need these shots of something new, and a new story and a new perspective."[10]

More than ever, that rejuvenation comes through the contributions of immigrant artists, many of whom are anchors in their

communities, sharing traditions, mentoring the next generation, and performing in community settings. When they are not touring internationally or performing at premier venues like Lincoln Center, immigrant artists and groups like the New York Crimean Tatar Ensemble of Borough Park and the Queens-based Mariachi Real de Mexico lead arts and cultural or-ganizations dedicated to supporting and serving immigrant artists and audiences.



*Students learn guitar at the Mariachi Academy of New York. Photo courtesy of Ramon Ponce.*

**Immigrant arts organizations sustain and uplift the city's most vulnerable communities.**

New York City's immigrant arts organizations greatly enrich the communities they serve, pre-serving traditions and bringing different genera-tions together to celebrate shared culture. In a time of crisis, these artists form a supportive ecosystem that sustains New York's immigrant communities through even the darkest times. In this report, we use the term "immigrant arts organizations" to encompass a diverse mix of arts and cultural organizations that are led by immigrants, serve immigrant populations, focus on specific ethnic and cultural arts practices and expressions, and/ or support and interact with immigrant artists and audiences in other ways.

Immigrant arts organizations create safe spac-es for undocumented families, single-parent youth or youth whose parents work around the clock, monolingual new arrivals, and people needing space to process and heal from traumas like war, displacement—and the COVID crisis. Executive director of Calpulli Mexican Dance Company Juan Castaño describes the atmosphere of trust in the company's community classes: "We've had families come to us and say, no matter what's happening, whether it's at our job or in the news or in school, we always know that we can come here."

Immigrant arts organizations and their leaders are also crucial facilitators of civic en-gagement. Founder and Executive Director of Napela, Inc. Adama Fassah invites immigration lawyers and other informative visitors to her cultural festival in

Staten Island. Shelley Wor-rell, founder and chief curator of CaribBEING, a Brooklyn-based organization that promotes Caribbean culture, served as Head of Caribbean Partnerships at the U.S. Census to help increase the Caribbean community's awareness and par-ticipation in the 2020 census.[11]

And art can be a powerful means for im-migrants to express political demands. New Sanctuary Coalition often employs art as a tool of protest: in 2017, activists carried blocks of melt-ing ice to a detention center to protest against U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The following year, the coalition and other groups organized a march in which attendees were each asked to bring a 25-pound suitcase in imitation of the small suitcases that families are allowed to provide to relatives facing deportation.[12]

**Undocumented, temporary worker, and perse-cuted artists face major barriers.**

For New York's many undocumented artists, simply living in the city and practicing their art form is po-litically charged: Due to legal status, they arguably face the greatest difficulty in learning and pursuing their craft.

Undocumented New Yorkers are ineligible for fed-eral tuition grants, face barriers to employment, and are often ruled ineligible for residencies and fellowship requiring work authorization. "There are a lot of un-documented artists who are doing really great work, and important work, that we would have loved to be able to support," says Suzy Delvalle, former executive director of and current advisor to Creative Capital, a nonprofit that supports innovative and adventurous artists nationwide. "Understanding how we could get to that point would be really helpful."

Radical changes to federal immigration policy and enforcement are also having harmful ramifications for New York's international students, artists on tempo-rary worker visas, and persecuted artists seeking to resettle here. According to interviews with students and faculty at New York's art schools and MFA pro-grams, in recent years many graduating international art students who might have settled in New York have been returning to their home countries or seeking out other global arts hubs. "In the past few months with-in my close community, everyone's leaving," says Yasi Alipour, an Iranian artist and graduate of Columbia University's MFA program in visual arts, who was in-terviewed shortly before the pandemic hit New York. New York-based arts groups that collaborative with foreign groups are also finding it more difficult to se-cure visas for their partners.[13]

"That puts us in a very perilous position as a nation," says Tina Kukielski, executive director and chief curator of Art21, a nonprofit presenter of contemporary art. "To not be seeking out in-dividuals who have exceptional talent, that have something unique they can offer to the cultural landscape of New York City."

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**Immigrant-serving arts organizations have been hit especially hard by the coronavirus pandemic**

The coronavirus pandemic and ensuing economic crisis has hit immigrant artists and immi-grant-serving organizations especially hard. Many artists have lost all income from performanc-es and exhibitions, and others are facing months without supplemental income from work in restaurants, bars, museums, galleries, and performance venues. For immigrant-run and -serv-ing arts organizations that were already financially vulnerable before the pandemic, the loss of earned revenue is proving devastating, and there is little sign of relief.

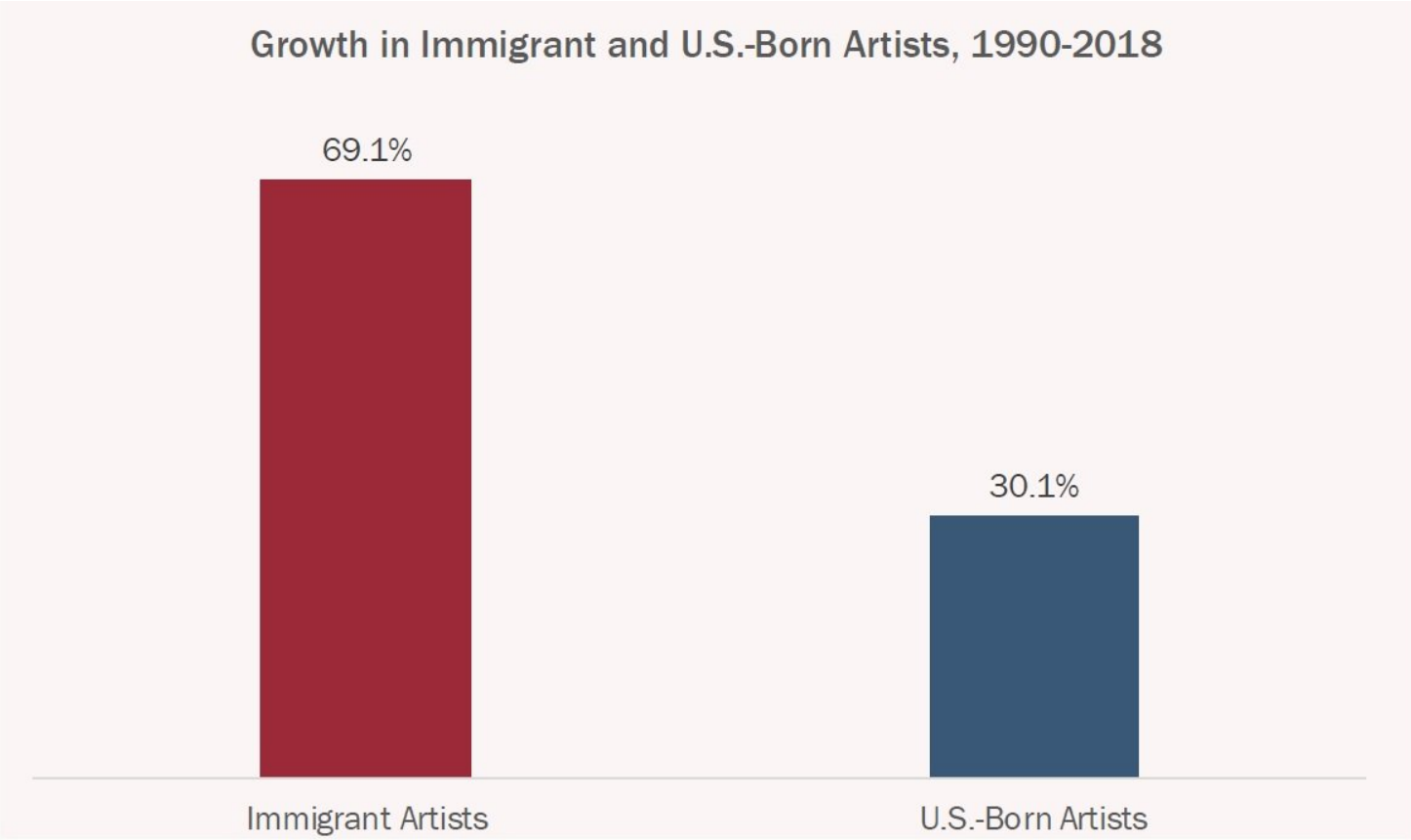
**Flushing Town Hall** has lost more than $400,000 in earned income through June—over 17 per-cent of its annual budget. With a $2.3 million budget, the organization projects up to $500,000 in additional losses for the late summer and fall, and no endowment to cushion the blow.

**Nuyorican Poets Cafe** has been closed since March and estimates a loss of more than $400,000 compared to last year—more than half of its annual revenue.

More than 40 percent of the $220,000 budget for the nonprofit **Bangladesh Institute of Performing Arts** comes from

revenue raised from its classes teaching Bangla music and dance, which are canceled for the foreseeable future.

**Centro Cultural Barco de Papel** in Jackson Heights, a Spanish-language bookstore and arts venue, is facing the prospect of closing for good, as the space's majority-immigrant patrons have been deeply affected by the crisis. "We are surviving based on the immigrant population, who are the ones that are being hit the most," says Paula Ortiz, the organization's executive director.




*Source*: CUF analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 2014-2018, and the 1990 U.S. Census

**The livelihoods of immigrant artists are threat-ened by rising rents and income disparities.**

While the pandemic is worsening economic dis-parities between immigrant and non-immigrant New Yorkers, even prior to the crisis. Foreign-born New Yorkers made a median of nearly $15,000 less than U.S.-born New Yorkers—the undocumented, almost $23,000 less—which means that for many immigrant creatives, the daily struggle to survive leaves reduced time for artistic pursuits. Likewise, professional immigrant artists are out-earned by their U.S. born counterparts: from 2000 to 2018, foreign-born professional artists in New York made an average income of about $41,000 annu-ally, less than the $46,600 annual income of U.S.- born artists.[14]

Lower incomes and rising living costs may be hampering the ability of the city's immigrant artist population to grow to its full potential. While the number of professional immigrant artists grew by 35 percent, over 10,676 artists, from 1990 to 2000, growth in the 18 years since 2000 has been more modest, increasing by fewer total artists (10,149), an uptick of 25 percent. Meanwhile, the number of U.S.-born professional artists grew by less than 2 percent from 1990 to 2000, and then shot up by 28 percent from 2000 to 2018.

These economic conditions have made it so that other cities may now be better poised than New York to attract immigrant artists. While New York City still has the lion's share of the nation's immi-grant artists, this share has declined. In 1990, New

York City was home to 11 percent of the nation's immigrants and 14 percent of the nation's immi-grant artists, while today the city is home to 7 per-cent of the nation's immigrants and 12 percent of its immigrant artists. Over the past two decades, Los Angeles added more immigrant artists than New York, and cities from Austin and Houston to Minneapolis and Miami all saw their immigrant artist populations grow faster than New York's. "It's critical that if we want to maintain that New York City that we all know and love, that we sus-tain immigrant artists," says Annetta Seecharran, executive director of Chhaya Community Devel-opment Corporation, a nonprofit focused on the economic well-being of South Asian and Indo-Ca-ribbean New Yorkers.

**Immigrant Artist Growth in Select U.S. Metro Areas, 2000-2018**

| Metro Area | 2000 | 2018 | Growth (#) | Growth (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Austin | 1,398 | 3,970 | 2,572 | 184.0% |
| Minneapolis | 1,427 | 3,497 | 2,070 | 145.1% |
| Houston | 5,060 | 10,231 | 5,171 | 102.2% |
| Miami | 17,610 | 24,415 | 6,805 | 38.6% |
| Los Angeles | 48,846 | 64,551 | 15,705 | 32.2% |
| NYC (5 boroughs) | 40,815 | 50,964 | 10,149 | 24.9% |
| **USA** | **293,169** | **413,086** | **119,917** | **40.9%** |

*Source*: CUF analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 2014-2018, and the 2000 U.S. Census

**Immigrant artists often struggle to get atten-tion, and to get paid fairly when they do.**

For the immigrant artists who call New York home, garnering attention from audiences, media, and funders is a challenge. This is especially true for immigrants who arrive here with limited economic means or under challenging circumstances. "Some artists are able to immigrate to the U.S. via a de-gree program in the arts, developing connections as well as experience with institutions and ad-vancement in the sector," says Sami Abu Shumays, deputy director of Flushing Town Hall. "Unfortu-nately, many others immigrate without any for-mal connections to the cultural sector, and often find themselves lost, having no idea how to mar-ket themselves or even to find arts organizations that might be interested in presenting their work." Black and Latinx immigrants remain seriously underrepresented in the arts, making up only 26 percent of the city's immigrant professional artist population, though they make up 53 percent of the city's immigrant population.

Even immigrants who obtain support from a local institution or cultural organization might still struggle to gain mainstream recognition, espe-cially if they live and work far outside Manhattan, or their work doesn't conform to western notions of what constitutes art. "It's a constant uphill bat-tle," says Catherine Peila, director of programs and artist services at the Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning. "How to get the audience in, how to have the audience to pay for it, how to get funders to support it as a professional art form where the art-ist is respected and paid the appropriate amount of funding."

When they do have an opportunity to per-form, immigrant artists often find themselves underpaid, or not paid at all. "No one would think of paying a cellist at Lincoln Center those low fees or expect something for free, yet some institu-tions would offer

that to a percussionist from the Bronx," says Elena Martinez, City Lore folklorist and co-artistic director of the Bronx Music Heri-tage Center. A 2019 study by Dance/NYC found that 22 percent of the immigrant dance work-force surveyed do not receive any form of income through dance-related activities.[15]

**Immigrant-serving arts organizations struggle to find and keep affordable space.**

Like individual artists, immigrant-serving arts or-ganizations also strain to cope with economic re-alities. The city's soaring rents have caused groups to lose original spaces and made it only harder to maintain makeshift, temporary solutions. Even pri-or to the pandemic, organizations like Local Project, Centro Corona, and Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance (BAAD!) had each been displaced from a pri-or location. Some hubs for art and culture had shut their doors completely, including Librería Lectorum and Librería Macondo in Manhattan, and Century Dance Complex in Staten Island.[16]

Immigrant-serving arts organizations are par-ticularly vulnerable to rising rents because they possess fewer assets. Of the 27 small cultural orga-nizations led by or working with immigrant com-munities that we interviewed, only one owned its own space. Furthermore, our review of 557 New York City arts organization profiles in the Data-Arts database from 2016 to 2019 found that or-ganizations not serving a particular ethnic group possessed an average of $10.5 million in fixed as-sets, while organizations affiliated with a partic-ular ethnic group possessed only $1.4 million in fixed assets.[17]

Some groups have found resourceful ways to adapt to a shortage of affordable rehearsal space— renting school gymnasiums, practicing in parks, or using the back rooms of restaurants during off-nights. Yet these adaptations constrain the ability of immigrant-focused arts organizations to build capacity, increase their impact, and create lasting connections with the communities they serve. "If the school closes, then of course we can't rehearse," says Luz Soliz, founder of Wabafu Garifuna Dance Theater Company, whose group preserves Garifuna culture through dancing, singing, and drumming, on rehearsing in a school building. "Naturally, we don't have a key. And there's not enough space to leave our costumes and drums on site."

**Immigrant-serving arts organizations face unique challenges raising revenue and accessing philan-thropy, which in turn limits growth.**

As with other arts organizations, immigrant-focused groups need revenue to survive, but because they of-ten are dedicated to serving lower-income communi-ties, raising money—whether from audience atten-dance or from wealthy donors—can be a challenge, leading to major disparities in revenue. Our research found that on average, non-ethnic arts organizations in the city bring in $4.8 million in total revenue, com-pared with only $891,000 for ethnic groups, according to a review of over 1,300 DataArts profiles.

With a lack of connection to wealthy donors, fundraising is a particular challenge, which can be ex-acerbated by preexisting neighborhood inequalities. According to our analysis of the DataArts profiles, non-ethnic cultural organizations obtain about 14 times the average earned revenue of ethnic organiza-tions, along with about six times the average corporate revenue, and 15 times the revenue from trustees.

Immigrant-serving arts organization can get trapped in a vicious cycle, where a lack of mainstream attention precipitates a lack of funding, which in turn means an organization is unable to build ca-pacity and garner the recognition it might deserve. With smaller budgets and fewer staff than other cul-tural organizations, those who work or volunteer for immigrant-serving arts organizations often juggle many responsibilities. "The team works together to do the grant writing, but it's also the same team that produces the event, sometimes the same team that's performing," says Juan Aguirre, executive director of Mano a Mano: Mexican Culture Without Borders. Of the 27 immigrant-serving organizations with budgets of less than $1 million (or not available) that we inter-viewed in-depth, seven did not have 501(c)(3) status, and of the 20 that did, only four had a salaried staff member dedicated to development.

**Immigrant artists and immigrant-serving arts organizations depend on public funding, and yet receive far less than mainstream counterparts.**

Immigrant-serving arts organizations and immigrant artists disproportionately depend on government funding, despite receiving far less support. Non-ethnic organizations profiled by DataArts receive an average of about $438,000 of their revenue from government sources (about 9 percent of their total revenue), while ethnic organizations receive an average of $148,000 of their revenue from government sources (about 17 per-cent of their total revenue).

But federal funding for arts and culture has waned in the 21st century. The National Endowment for the Arts received just $162 million in the 2020 budget, down from $176 million in 1992 (well over $321 mil-lion when adjusted for inflation).[18]

Given declining federal support, the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) play an increasingly important role in supporting the arts. But programs that support immigrant artists often make up mere fractions of the budget. For example, NYSCA's lauded Folk Arts program constituted 2 percent of NYSCA's total grant allocation to the five boroughs in 2019. And major geographic disparities exist in overall spending: NYSCA allocates $13 per capita in Manhat-tan, compared with less than $1 in the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island, though some Manhattan-based or-ganizations serve all five boroughs.[19]

Similarly, despite significant efforts by the de Bla-sio administration to reach smaller organizations in low-income communities, most city grant-making dollars continue to be spent on mainstream and Man-hattan-based organizations. Of the DCLA grant dol-lars listed in NYC Open Data for FY 2018 (not includ-ing City Council discretionary initiatives), 62 percent went to Manhattan and 19 percent to Brooklyn, leav-ing 8 percent for the Bronx, 9 percent for Queens and 2 percent for Staten Island. Strikingly, while per capita DCLA grant funding citywide is about $4.79, and an outsize $15.37 in Manhattan, per capita spending in the ten neighborhoods with the highest immigrant populations was just $0.74. Our review of DCLA grant-ees listed in Open Data found that just 14 percent of the organizations funded indicated in their DataArts profile that they served a specific ethnic group.[20]

DCLA's requirement that arts groups hold non-profit status often poses an additional barrier to funding. Thankfully, individual artists and collectives without 501(c)(3) status can apply for funding from NYSCA through fiscal sponsorship, and from the city's five borough councils. However, funding levels are not equal among the five councils: while about twice as many immigrants live in Queens than in Manhattan, the FY 2018 budget of the Queens Council on the Arts was just 40 percent the size of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's.[21]

To their credit, the de Blasio administration and City Council have made substantial new investments in the arts in recent years—and directed some new support to immigrant artists and arts organizations. Since 2014, Mayor de Blasio and the City Council had increased DCLA's operating budget from $157 million in FY 2014 to a record high of $212 million in FY 2020. Likewise, the City Council has increased support in recent years for immigrant artists and organizations, including funding the Cultural Immigrant Initiative (CII). Just last year, the New York City Economic De-velopment Corporation and DCLA announced plans to build a performing arts center focused on the immi-grant experience in Inwood. DCLA has also convened city policymakers, community-based organizations, artists, and other stakeholders to develop the Creat-eNYC cultural plan, which provides a roadmap to make the arts and culture sector more inclusive. From FY 2018 through FY 2020, DCLA committed an addition-al $8.2 million to cultural organizations that support low-income neighborhoods and underserved commu-nities, and has invested over $1.2 million in a new lan-guage access fund.[22]

But the current economic crisis is jeopardizing that progress. The FY 2021 budget slashes funding for DCLA by $23 million—with the bulk of those cuts aimed at cultural programs funding, on which many smaller, immigrant-focused arts organizations rely. Additionally, major reductions in councilmembers' discretionary budgets—enacted in response to the city's bleak fiscal state—will have a serious impact on funding for smaller, community-focused arts groups, including $9 million in

cuts to the Cultural Develop-ment Fund, and a $1 million cut to the CII program.[23]

Despite the progress made in recent years, includ-ing increased funding for immigrant-serving cultural organizations and the launch of several new programs, many of the challenges facing immigrant arts have gone largely unaddressed. As a result, New York risks losing the cultural diversity and creative spirit that make it a global icon—and cement the city as a bea-con for the world's most innovative and exceptional artists. To ensure New York City's immigrant artists and immigrant-serving arts organizations are able not only to survive but to thrive, city leaders will have to redouble support for immigrant creative communities across all five boroughs—and the responsibility can-not fall to DCLA and NYSCA alone.

To strengthen these vital communities, city lead-ers will have to do much more to provide immediate relief from the ongoing pandemic, address the per-sistent affordability crisis, rectify the damage of the Trump administration, and help artists and organi-zations to overcome the many obstacles they face in earning revenue, handling bureaucracy, obtaining in-stitutional funding, and navigating the immigration system. Even at a time of drastic fiscal constraints, the city can get creative in supporting immigrant artists— by launching new initiatives to connect immigrant artists with vacant storefront and commercial spaces, opening public spaces for immigrant arts performanc-es and exhibitions, building space for immigrant arts into future neighborhood development plans, helping New York's immigrant creative entrepreneurs to grow, and strengthening the reach and effectiveness of the borough arts councils. Together, policymakers, cultur-al leaders, government officials, and philanthropists can uplift and sustain the immense contributions of its immigrant artists and ensure that New York City maintains its position as a global hub of creativity.

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**NYC's Immigrant Artists Step Up to Support Communities in Crisis**

Across all five boroughs, New York City's immigrant artists are using their work and plat-forms to support immigrant communities in crisis.

In early 2020, Filipino-American artists **Jaclyn Reyes** and **Xenia Diente** launched Bayanihan Arts in Little Manilla, Queens. Intended as a series of public art activations cele-brating the Filipino diaspora, the project took on new meaning during the pandemic. "When COVID hit, we adjusted our project to create a mutual aid network between Little Manilla businesses and healthcare workers, many of whom are Filipino immigrants," says Reyes. The project has worked with local restaurants to provide free meals to frontline workers, and collaborated with local artists to paint the neighborhood's first mural dedicated to the Filipino community.

Ecuador-born, Bronx-based artist **Francisco Donoso** launched an "immigrant-powered shop" in August, with a goal of leveraging his burgeoning career to generate financial sup-port for immigrants who are struggling during the pandemic. He has partnered with orga-nizations that provide direct cash assistance to undocumented New Yorkers and advocate for immigrants and refugees, contributing up to 30 percent of the proceeds from his sales. He also employs "two younger, at-risk, undocumented artists that I can pay and mentor."

Mexico-born arts advocate and curator **Eva Mayhabal Davis** sees immigrant artists using their creativity and problem-solving skills to help the communities hardest hit by the pandemic. "Some of the most successful mutual aid networks serving communities of color and immigrant communities are being led by artists," says Davis. "People like Gua-dalupe Maravilla, who works with Bay Ridge Mutual Aid; the Indigenous Kinship Collective; and the creatives who work with Bed-Stuy Strong and Bushwick Mutual Aid. I'm proud to say that I've seen a lot of artists working in mutual aid networks, whether it's setting them up or helping to promote them."

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Notes

1. Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Commu-nity Survey, 2014–2018 5-

year sample and the 1990 U.S. Census. See methodology for additional information.

2. Artnet, “Roberto Matta.” Artnet, “What You Need to Know about Arshile Gorky, the Last Surrealist and the First Abstract Expressionist.” The Art Story, “Abstract Expressionism.” Bruce Weber, “Jonas Mekas, ‘Godfather’ of American Avant-Garde Film, Is Dead at 96,” New York Times, January 23, 2019. Alex Greenberger, “Shigeko Kubota, a Fluxus Artist and a Pioneer of Video Art, Dies at 77,” ArtNews, July 28, 2015. The Art Story, “Fluxus.” The Art Story, “Louise Bourgeois.”

3. Lawrence Chatman, “Reggae Rising: Hip- Hop’s Roots in Reggae Music,” Northwest Folklife. NPR, “Tito x 2: Celebrating the Kings of Mambo Again,” November 11, 2009. Jon Pareles, “‘Rhythm & Power’: A Little Bling, a Little Politics, a Lot of Salsa,” New York Times, June 15, 2017. NYPL, “Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Records, *T-MSS 1994-029 Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.”

4. CUF analysis of data from U.S. Census Ameri-can Community Survey, 2014–2018.

5. Council of Fashion Designers in America and FWD.us, “Alterations for an Outdated Immigra-tion System,” May 2018.

6. Whitney Museum of Art, “Whitney Biennial 2019.”

7. The Bessies, “The 2019 Bessie Awards.”

8. MOMA: Film Society Lincoln Center, “New Directors, New Films 2019 – Films.” Tribeca Film, “Here are the Winners of the 2019 Tribeca Film Festival’s Juried Awards,” May 2, 2019.

9. Rowan Anderson, “10 NYC-Based Fashion De-signers to Know About,” Culture Trip, January 25, 2018. Council of Fashion Designers of America, “2018 CFDA Awards.”

10. Rasu Jilani, E-mail interview, New York, NY, December, 2019. Katie Cox, “Exploring the Me-tropolis Announces Shutdown, Redtail Artist Residencies to Continue Legacy,” Exploring the Metropolis, July 27, 2020.

11. Shelley Worrell, E-mail interview, New York, NY, March, 2020.

12. Lindsay Holcomb, “Melting ICE: New Sanc-tuary Coalition Activists Surround New York Immigrant Processing Center, Calling for Justice,” December 20, 2017. New Sanctuary Coalition, “A Suitcase.”

13. Joseph Mellilo, Phone Interview, New York, NY, April 2019. Megan Bandle, In-Person Inter-view, Brooklyn, NY, March 2019.

14. MOIA, “State of Our Immigrant City: MOIA Annual Report for Calendar Year 2018,” March, 2019. CUF analysis of data from U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2014–2018.

15. Julie Koo and Mireya Guerra, “Advancing Immigrants. Dance. Arts,” Dance/NYC, July 31, 2019.

16. Milton Xavier Trujillo, Phone Interview, New York, NY, May 2019. Charles Rice-Gonzalez, Phone Interview, New York, NY, April 2019. Local Project, “About Us.” Johnny Farraj, Phone Interview, New York, NY, June 2019. Eli Rosenberg, “Spanish on the Shelves, Latin Culture in the Air at a Bookstore in Queens,” New York Times, July 31, 2016. Rose Kingston, Phone Interview, New York, NY, March 2020.

17. The data used for this report was provided by SMU DataArts, an organization created to strengthen arts and culture by documenting and disseminating information on the arts and culture sector. Any interpretation of the data is the view of Center for an Urban Future and does not reflect the views of SMU DataArts. For more information on SMU DataArts, visit www.culturaldata.org. The DataArts database allows each organization to answer, yes or no, whether they serve a par-ticular ethnic group constituency. Of the 1,373 New York City arts and culture organizations with profiles between the years 2016

and 2019, 70 did not answer, while 188 organizations answered “yes” and 1,115 answered “no.” We analyzed these 1,303 answering organizations, including them in each data query only when the organization’s answer was recordable. We calculated the average of total fixed assets for the 500 non-ethnic orga-nizations as well as the 57 ethnic organizations that answered. For all other data queries, there was a range of between 1,000 and 1,303 answer-ing organizations.

18. National Endowment of the Arts, “National Endowment for the Arts Appropriations History,” Accessed October 2020.

19. NYSCA, “NYSCA Grant Search.”

20. NYC Open Data, “DCLA Programs Funding.” Downloaded October 6, 2019. We looked at every organization listed in “DCLA Program Funding” in 2018 with a DataArts profile, and checked whether it self-identifies as an organization serv-ing a specific ethnic constituency.

21. Data from each Borough Arts Council.

22. New York City Council, “Hearing on the Fiscal 2015 Preliminary Budget & the Fiscal 2014 Pre-liminary Mayor’s Management Report - Depart-ment of Cultural Affairs,” March 11, 2014. Office of Management and Budget, “Expense, Revenue and Contact Budget - FY 2020,” June 2019. CreateNYC, “CreateNYC Action Plan,” July 2019. DCLA, “NYC Department of Cultural Affairs An-nounces Awards to 36 Nonprofits through Creat-eNYC Language Access Fund,” January 7 2020.

23. ART New York, “Updates on the DCLA Budget Hearing,” July 9, 2020.

- The following are recommendations from *The Changing Face of Creativity in New York: Sustaining NYC’s Immigrant Arts Ecosystem Through Crisis and Beyond*
- Read the full report (PDF)

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**1. Step up city funding and support for immi-grant-serving arts organizations.** New York City’s FY 2021 budget cuts pose enormous chal-lenges for immigrant arts organizations. The budget slashes more than $23 million from the Department of Cultural Affairs and cuts City Council discretionary spending by $79 mil-lion—sources of funding that many immigrant arts organizations rely on. At the same time, New York City’s immigrant arts ecosystem has been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and relief is needed urgently. But the city’s bleak fiscal outlook means that policymakers will need to find creative ways to boost support for immigrant artists by expanding access to pub-lic spaces, eliminating restrictions on current funding, scaling up volunteer efforts, tapping the private sector and philanthropy, and taking advantage of the unique opportunities that an economic downturn presents.

- **Launch a major new Immigrant Arts Re-lief Fund to address the ongoing COVID crisis.** Immigrant-led arts organizations, especially those which are unincorporated and/or operating within historically margin-alized communities, were already struggling before the pandemic hit and face multiple barriers to accessing public funding. To en-sure that the city does not lose a significant share of its immigrant-serving arts organi-zations, a major relief effort will be needed. Mayor de Blasio and the City Council should work with philanthropic foundations and business leaders to launch a new $10 mil-lion Immigrant Arts Relief Fund, partnering with intermediary organizations that have deep reach and trust within immigrant com-munities to distribute the funds. This initia-tive should include legal technical assistance for organizations administering relief funds to ensure that grant recipients are not put at risk with regard to immigration status. As the economy recovers, this program should convert into an ongoing Immigrant Arts De-velopment Fund, focused on institutional advancement, capacity-building grants, and general operating support.
- **Expand access to public open spaces for immigrant-serving arts organizations.** After months without any earned revenue, many of the city’s small, immigrant-run and -serving arts organizations are on the brink of fiscal collapse. One way that the city can help is by opening up public spaces—from parks and streets to the parking lots

under the BQE and the Metro-North—for paid performances, workshops, screenings, and events. With most venues closed and the looming threat of a second wave of infec-tions, immigrant artists need outdoor spac-es to work, perform, and earn income, and the city has no shortage of spaces to make available. This initiative should tap the in-genuity of the city's architects and design-ers—many of whom are themselves immi-grants—to design windbreaks, temporary shelters, outdoor heating solutions, por-table stages, and other structures that can allow outdoor spaces to be used by artists throughout the year.

- **Partner with technology firms to provide infrastructure and know-how to support virtual programs.** Many small arts organi-zations struggle to pay for technology like laptops, projectors, and other equipment that facilitates both creative work and im-portant administrative tasks—as well as the shift to virtual programming demand-ed by the pandemic. However, the city only supports equipment costs through a capital grant in which the equipment must cost no less than $50,000. The city should launch a new program in partnership with leading technology firms to help small arts organi-zations create income-generating virtual programs, build capacity to reach audiences digitally, and document cultural traditions through digital media.
- **Strengthen the power and reach of Bor-ough Arts Councils by increasing direct support for artists, raising the cap on re-grants, and expanding outreach via trust-ed intermediaries.** Our research found that borough arts councils are well-positioned to support immigrant arts, especially through their regranting programs and specialized outreach. However, despite increased over-all funding, council regrants are capped at just $5,000. By raising the cap to $10,000, councils could greatly increase support to individual immigrant artists and collectives who cannot directly access other city grant programs. Lack of awareness and language barriers also prevent many immigrant art-ists and collectives from participating in council regranting programs. The city, state, and philanthropy should work together to ensure that all five arts councils are funded to operate a standalone Folk Arts program and hire an administrator dedicated to im-migrant community outreach. In addition, each borough's council should partner with at least one local intermediary organization focused on immigrant arts to assist smaller organizations with fiscal sponsorship, grant writing, and other technical services.
- **Make Cultural Development Fund (CDF) grants more flexible to reach immigrant arts organizations.** DCLA's requirements for CDF grants limit the program's ability to reach many of the city's most vulnerable immigrant arts groups. Cultural projects in immigrant communities often work outside the 501(c)(3) structure—a requirement for CDF funding. The program's requirement of two years of financial documentation poses an additional barrier, and recently incorporated organizations must wait two years just to apply. DCLA should relax these requirements, expand eligibility to fiscally sponsored projects, and provide groups with guidance on finding a sponsor. Launching more flexible, responsive CDF funding will enable DCLA to better reach vital organiza-tions that lack the resources to formalize.
- **Expand the Language Access Fund, with increased translation support for immi-grant-serving organizations.** Nearly half the population of New York City speaks a language other than English at home. By making the Language Access Fund a stand-alone program, DCLA has recognized its great potential to improve access to cultural programming for New Yorkers whose pri-mary language is not English, but it funded just 36 grantees in FY2020, compared to over 900 organizations funded through the Cultural Development Fund (CDF). DCLA should preserve and ultimately expand the Language Access Fund so that more arts or-ganizations, especially immigrant-led and primarily immigrant-serving organizations, can improve access through multilingual programming, translated materials, and in-terpretation services.

2. **Establish Immigrant Arts Centers in all five boroughs as part of a long-term recovery plan.** Neighborhoods with large immigrant communities often lack permanent, affordable arts spaces. Recognizing the need for dedicated space for arts and culture for Inwood's large im-migrant community, DCLA and NYCEDC com-mitted $15 million in funding for the design and construction of the Immigrant Research and Performing Arts Center (IRPAC). DCLA and NYCEDC should develop plans for Immi-grant Arts Centers in historically underserved, predominantly immigrant communities in the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island, which could form the centerpiece of a long-term economic recovery strategy.

3. **Launch a citywide initiative to help immi-grant artists and arts organizations fill the growing number of storefront and commer-cial vacancies.** While the growing number of vacant storefronts presented a policy chal-lenge—and an

opportunity—even before the COVID crisis hit, the continued fallout from the pandemic's economic impact is likely to further increase the supply of storefront and commer-cial spaces for the foreseeable future. New York City should launch a new initiative to connect artists and arts organizations with vacant com-mercial space in their communities—focusing on underresourced and immigrant-serving arts groups and working artists. New York should develop a standardized temporary lease agree-ment, work with a partner organization to de-velop a simple online application and map of available spaces, and incentivize landlords to participate by providing a property tax credit through the duration of the residency.

4. **Create a NYC Immigrant Artist Film, TV, and Theatre Fund with seed money from the in-dustry.** In 2018, the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment (MOME) launched the $5 million Women's Fund, a major new investment supporting film and theatre projects by, for, and about women. The fund, designed to address the underrepresentation of women in film, TV, and theatre, has already invested $1.5 million to support more than 60 women-led projects with cash grants of up to $50,000. MOME should replicate the fund for foreign-born creatives, with the analogous goal of addressing underrep-resentation of immigrants in the film, TV, and theatre industries by providing much-needed fi-nancial support. Given the huge fiscal challeng-es facing the city, such a program could be seed-ed with funding from major content studios and distributors, or funded by a small surcharge on film and tv production permits.[1]

5. **Leverage underutilized city-owned spaces to provide immigrant artists with affordable work space in their communities.** As New York City's affordability challenges have grown in recent years, many artists and creative pro-fessionals report struggling to find space to practice their craft. The city should look to ex-tend affordability initiatives with specific focus on immigrant artists. To get creative in a time of fiscal constraints, the city should leverage underutilized, city-owned spaces, most notably in city schools. Many schools in neighborhoods with growing populations of immigrant artists have arts spaces, such as visual arts rooms, mu-sic rooms, theatres, dance studios, and even film production facilities, that go unused in off-hours and over the summer. These spaces could provide much-needed work space to im-migrant artists while strengthening and diver-sifying arts education and exposure. A partner-ship between DCLA and city schools could be an important component of a citywide strategy to support immigrant artists, tackle the afford-able space crisis, expand access to arts educa-tion in multiple languages, and help connect artists with their communities. In addition, the SU-CASA program, which places artists and arts groups in residence at senior centers across the city—enhancing arts programming for older adults and promoting community arts engage-ment while providing artists with much-needed workspace—provides a proven model that the city can build on. But this program's budget was slashed by nearly $2.3 million in FY 2021—a roughly 70 percent cut—and should be restored.

6. **Expand legal assistance programs to sup-port immigrant artists and arts organiza-tions.** Undocumented artists confront perhaps the greatest barriers to making a living as an artist in New York City, facing significant eligi-bility restrictions when it comes to funding and work opportunities. Temporary worker artists and artists fleeing persecution also face legal difficulties—and expenses—in securing visas to stay in the U.S. and practice their art. DCLA should partner with the Mayor's Office of Immi-grant Affairs (MOIA) to launch a new program specifically designed to support immigrant art-ists, including but not limited to undocumented artists, foreign-born arts students seeking to stay in the city upon completion of their degree, and artists who have faced persecution for cre-ative expression in their home countries. DCLA and MOIA should also develop a new training program to help major cultural institutions as well as smaller arts organizations hire and/or work with undocumented or temporary status individuals.

7. **Take advantage of the downturn to help im-migrant-led arts organizations band togeth-er to secure permanent spaces.** Because im-migrant-led organizations are much less likely to own their spaces, they have been especially hard-hit by rising rents and the disappearance of affordable rental space for production, re-hearsal, and performance. The city should take advantage of a softer real estate market and mortgage rates that are near record lows by bringing together small immigrant-led cultural institutions that can pool resources to purchase buildings and establish permanent, shared of-fice, rehearsal, and performance space. In addi-tion, government can help by establishing a new program to provide help with closing costs for arts organizations seeking to purchase space, potentially by forgiving the mortgage recording and/or transfer

tax or a portion of future prop-erty taxes.

8. **Expand NYC Community Land Trust Initiative to artists and arts organizations.** In 2019, the City Council pledged $870,000 in fund-ing to support the creation of community land trusts (CLTs) across New York City. This major investment in technical assistance, educational outreach, and organizing will give communities control over the development of permanently affordable housing, commercial space for local worker cooperatives and small businesses, and space for community organizations. But with focused leadership, the CLT model can be ex-panded to support the development of more community arts and culture spaces, as well as spaces where immigrant artists can both live and work.[2]

9. **Market immigrant arts organizations and programming to New Yorkers and visitors as part of the city's tourism recovery efforts.** As New York begins the long process of rekindling the city's devastated tourism economy, immi-grant arts should play a leading role. While the city's tourism marketing agency, NYC & Com-pany, has taken several steps in recent years to direct visitors to more off-the-beaten-path attractions and locations, the bulk of the city's tourism promotion has remained focused on Manhattan and major cultural institutions in the other four boroughs. The city should set a goal of greatly expanding the representation of immigrant-focused arts experiences in tour-ism marketing efforts and use the "All in NYC" campaign as an opportunity to encourage New Yorkers to visit and support immigrant-run and -serving galleries, performance spaces, festivals, public art projects, creative small businesses, tours, parades, open studios, and other events. These efforts could be bolstered through the creation of an Immigrant Arts Week, as well as expanded public support for cultural festivals from Diwali to the Lunar New Year.

10. **Help immigrant creatives start and grow their businesses.** Immigrant creative entre-preneurs face specific challenges in running successful small businesses—from language barriers and difficulties accessing capital to chal-lenges building a customer base outside their communities. The Department of Small Busi-ness Services (SBS) and NYCEDC should build on current initiatives intended to aid immigrant entrepreneurs, including the Immigrant Busi-ness Initiative and the Etsy Craft Entrepreneur-ship Program, and ramp up support for immi-grant creative businesses. The city should work with social impact investors to provide seed funding to 500 immigrant-run creative business ventures as part of the city's economic recovery efforts; launch new spotlight programs focused on immigrant creators during NYCxDESIGN, the New York Film Festival, New York Fashion Week, and major art fairs like the Armory Show and Frieze; partner with a technology company to provide digital marketing grants to immi-grant creative businesses; and expand the Craft Entrepreneurship Program to more immigrant communities through partnerships with the city's public libraries.

11. **Increase support for rehearsal space subsi-dy programs.** Despite recent declines in artist rehearsal and work spaces, there are still many facilities available—they're just not affordable to the vast majority of artists and performers. This affordability crunch can be alleviated in part through targeted subsidies. Successful ini-tiatives such as NYSCA's Dance Rehearsal Space Program, which provides grants to facilities of-fering 1,000 hours of subsidized rehearsal time at $10 or less per hour, should be replicated for music, theater, and studio arts. The city should also fill the void left by the recent closures of Spaceworks and Exploring the Metropolis and the loss of the SpaceFinder website, and launch new partnerships with landlords, educational and cultural institutions, and real estate devel-opers to provide affordable work and rehearsal spaces at below-market rates, with a focus on immigrant communities.[3]

12. **Strengthen partnerships between immi-grant-led arts organizations and city schools.** As part CreateNYC's goal of providing high qual-ity arts education to all public school students, the city pledged to connect public schools to local cultural organizations, with the goal of providing culturally resonant and responsive curricula. But so far, the pilot has been limit-ed to one Department of Youth and Commu-nity Development program with the American Museum of Natural History. DYCD and DOE should work together to expand opportunities for bilingual, indigenous, and immigrant teach-ing artists from non-Western traditions to ac-quire certification to teach in city schools. City agencies should collaborate with borough arts councils and grassroots intermediaries to con-nect schools with artists and arts organizations in their neighborhoods, bringing immigrant artists and collectives into classrooms and DYCD-administered Cornerstone and Com-pass centers.

13. **Mobilize philanthropic support for a CUNY Creative Careers Impact Fund.** In 2016, CUNY, DCLA, and the Rockefeller Foundation launched the CUNY Cultural Corps, placing 85 CUNY students in paid internships at 32 cul-tural institutions throughout the city. In 2019, the program placed over 100 students at more than 45 cultural nonprofits, increasing opportu-nity in the cultural sector and helping to create a more diverse and inclusive cultural workforce. With additional philanthropic support in the form of a major new impact fund, the program could support paid internships at smaller or-ganizations, host art meetups, and bring more cultural career support onto CUNY campuses, strengthening bonds between CUNY and the city's cultural community.[4]

14. **Address funding inequities across the Cultur-al Institutions Group (CIG).** Immigrant-serv-ing cultural institutions, including those in the Cultural Institutions Group, receive significant-ly less funding than more mainstream peers, greatly impacting their ability to expand out-reach into the communities they serve. Of the ten CIGs that received less than $1 million in city funding in FY 2020, two are located in neigh-borhoods with large immigrant populations (Flushing Town Hall and the Queens Theatre), while another two are located in neighborhoods with large non-white populations (Bronx Coun-ty Historical Society and the Bronx Museum of the Arts); a fifth, the Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning, serves a population that both has a large immigrant population and is largely non-white. While DCLA funding mechanisms such as the CDF have broadened cultural funding, the city should set a goal of doubling funding for smaller CIGs in communities of color.

15. **New York's leading cultural institutions should implement sanctuary space train-ing and deepen ties with local immigrant arts groups.** In today's political climate, fear is keeping many immigrant artists and audiences away from mainstream cultural institutions. Even if they cannot commit to serving as sites of refuge, museums, theaters, and other cultur-al institutions can still adopt policies that make their spaces safer for immigrant audiences and staff and should work with local advocates and organizations to do so. In addition, the city's flagship cultural institutions can support an in-clusive recovery for the arts by seeking out pro-grammatic partnerships with the city's thou-sands of community-based, immigrant-serving arts organizations and committing to increasing the representation of immigrant curators, ar-tists, performers, and staff across all levels of the institution.

Notes

1. Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, "Women's Film, TV and Theatre Fund.'
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**Cover**: "A Call to Prayer," from PROJECT TAG by Hussein Smko, performed at the Battery Dance Festival. Dancers: Mizuho Kappa (Japan), Maggy Van Den Heuvel (Netherlands) Valériane Louisy (France) Xavier Townsend (USA), and Hussein Smko (Kurdistan, Iraq). Photo credit: Steven Pisano

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