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NYC DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS AND OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ANNOUNCE CREATION OF CULTUREAID RECOVERY NETWORK

Network of organizations in all five boroughs incorporates lessons from past events to coordinate emergency response and facilitate sharing of resources following future disasters.

NEW YORK— New York Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl and Office of Emergency Management Commissioner Joseph Esposito today announced the launch of CultureAID (“Culture Active in Disasters”), a response and recovery network committed to strengthening New York City’s cultural community before, during, and after disasters.

CultureAID was developed in direct response to Hurricane Sandy--which struck New York in October 2012--and to the increasing threat that severe weather and climate change pose to the region. In the days and weeks following Sandy, an enormous amount of information, technical and financial assistance, and other resources were made available to affected groups and individuals. CultureAID was developed as a way to reduce redundant communications and make efficient use of the resources available. CultureAID will also help the community prepare for the next potential disaster by sharing resources and best practices about emergency preparedness throughout the year. Cultural organizations, artists, and other stakeholders in New York City are encouraged to visit www.cultureaidnyc.com to learn more about the network. Organizations are encouraged to join by completing the opt-in form.

“New York’s arts community was hit hard in Hurricane Sandy, suffering alongside neighbors across the City as facilities were flooded and irreplaceable works of art were damaged or lost,” said **Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl**. “CultureAID will help the artists and cultural groups that are so vital to our city’s vibrancy minimize the impact of future disasters by promoting preparedness and providing information about recovery resources more efficiently. After Sandy, we also saw arts groups step up to offer assistance to their peers and City residents in need. CultureAID will help to streamline the wealth of services and information for the maximum benefit of all New Yorkers when disaster strikes.”

“From floods to fires, New York City residents, businesses, and cultural institutions are vulnerable to emergencies,” said **Office of Emergency Management Commissioner Joseph Esposito**. “We encourage the city’s artists and cultural organizations to join the CultureAID program, a great new resource that will help this community to better prepare for emergencies and recover as quickly as possible should a disaster strike.”



Said **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Sandy Recovery Office Executive Director Laura Phillips**, “Having a systematic approach to sharing information and accessing resources is a critical piece of the disaster management cycle. We’re confident many individual artists, cultural organizations and cultural institutions will benefit from having access to resources and sharing best practices on emergency preparedness.”

CultureAID is the result of a process initiated by the Department of Cultural Affairs and FEMA. Starting in November 2013, soon after the first anniversary of Hurricane Sandy, a series of planning sessions were convened with representatives from arts organizations and groups that serve the cultural community to determine how the field could be better prepared for the next disaster. The group explored the idea of implementing the National Coalition for Arts’ Preparedness and Emergency Response hub model, a version of which was piloted in southern California. They saw great value in coordinated messaging, damage assessment, resource sharing, and advocacy for the cultural field’s inclusion in response and recovery. Over 10 working sessions, the committee created the framework for CultureAID. Support for the process was received by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

CultureAID will not generate original first response information—instead it will disseminate first response and safety information from other official sources—and will focus on how the arts community can manage its own recovery process and provide assistance to others. Assessment information collected through the network will also be used to develop a field-wide picture of disaster impact. Information will be shared through multiple platforms including email, telephone, print, and social media, where communications will use #CultureAID. As the network grows, additional capacities will be created to assist cultural groups and artists with their unique set of needs following an emergency. Priorities for the first year include promoting preparedness for artists and cultural groups and creating a uniform assessment tool, such as a survey, to systematically capture the impact of specific disasters upon them. All best efforts will be made to make all CultureAID materials universally accessible for New York’s diverse communities. There is no cost to participate in the network. To learn more and join the network, visit www.cultureaidnyc.com.

“In addition to our city’s housing stock, small businesses and vital infrastructure, some of our city’s arts and cultural institutions were also hard hit by Hurricane Sandy and suffered significant damage as a result of flooding from the storm,” said **New York City Council Member and Chair of the Committee on Recovery and Resiliency Mark Treyger**. “In addition, many cultural groups played an instrumental role in helping our city recover in the days, weeks and months that followed. Moving forward, it is imperative that we look to innovative ways to improve communication following future emergencies to help our organizations and neighborhoods recover as quickly as possible. The CultureAID program is a vital part of this effort to bring groups and community stakeholders together and will help facilitate their recovery during a time of emergency.”

“CultureAID is a great initiative, and I wish it much success,” said **Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer**. “As its membership grows, CultureAID’s innovative approach can serve as a model for other community networks in enhancing our disaster response and recovery.”



A steering committee of 13 cultural organizations from across the City serves as the governing body of the network, which is open to all organizations with cultural constituents in the five boroughs. Participation is free. The Steering Committee is co-chaired by Executive Director of Staten Island Arts Melanie Cohn and Maria Villafranca from New York Foundation for the Arts and includes representatives from Actors Fund, Alliance for Response, Alliance of Resident Theaters/New York, Asian American Arts Alliance, Bronx Council on the Arts, Brooklyn Arts Council, Dance/NYC, Lawyers Alliance for New York, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, and the New York Council for the Humanities.

“When Hurricane Sandy hit New York City, both of our organizations were directly affected, NYFA in DUMBO and Staten Island Arts in Staten Island, and the impact on artists and cultural institutions was far reaching and devastating,” said steering committee co-chairs **Melanie Cohn and Maria Villafranca**. “It was at this time that artists and cultural organizations – many of which are now part of the CultureAID steering committee – shared resources, assessed damages, and provided assistance to those in need. This spirit of collaboration is the basis for CultureAID’s formation and structure. We eagerly invite all cultural institutions to join. It is our sincere hope and goal that CultureAID will be as inclusive as possible so as to build a truly coordinated effort around preparedness, response, and recovery in the service of New York City’s cultural sector.”

Said Staten Island-based poet and performance **artist Margaret Chase**, “In the months after Hurricane Sandy, I veered between states of exhaustion, disbelief, and frustration. In addition to damage to my home, I had to cope with damaged artwork, cancelled performances, and disrupted teaching dates, which added up to a lot of lost time and income. Through the kindness and vision and outreach of the amazing staff of Staten Island Arts and other members of the cultural sector, I was given an opportunity to come together with other artists and connect with a community that really understood the challenges facing artists. Ultimately, these connections also yielded tangible support that helped me return to working and teaching. I look forward to the CultureAID network facilitating these kinds of connections for even more of my fellow artists.”



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