



**New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations and Committee on Immigration
Joint Oversight Hearing: IDNYC and the Cultural Institutions Group**

Tuesday, December 15, 2015, 10:45 AM – Council Chambers, City Hall
Testimony Presented by New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
Acting Commissioner Edwin Torres

Thank you, Commissioner Agarwal and good morning Chair Van Bramer, Chair Menchaca, and members of the committees. I am Edwin Torres, Acting Commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. I am here today to present testimony regarding IDNYC and the Cultural Institutions Group. I am joined by a number of staff from DCLA as well as colleagues from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

By any measure, the cultural benefits provided by the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) to IDNYC card holders have been a tremendous success. The 33 members of the CIG are nonprofit cultural organizations that occupy City-owned land, encompassing a wide range of groups including Lincoln Center, Staten Island Museum, Brooklyn Children's Museum, Queens Botanical Garden, and Bronx Museum, to name just a few. In exchange for annual operating and energy subsidies, these organizations provide broadly accessible cultural programming for city residents. New Yorkers have fully embraced the IDNYC cultural benefits, redeeming memberships that have helped connect them to the full breadth of our city's incredible cultural assets. The impact on institutions has also been transformative: new members from hundreds of city zip codes have signed up, giving groups a powerful tool to engage with audiences and, in many cases, diversifying the geography of memberships. As the Mayor said at the American Museum of Natural History in July when the program surpassed 400,000 card holders, this card "is a pocket-sized expression of a hugely powerful message – this is a city for everyone." This program has proven without a doubt that residents see cultural experiences as an integral part of being a New Yorker.

Now, I'd like to walk you through some of the impressive statistics we've collected on the program. Since January, New Yorkers have redeemed over 160,000 memberships at all of the 33 CIG members. As of October, nearly 10% of these came from the immigrant rich communities of central Queens, including Elmhurst, Woodside, Corona, Jackson Heights, and Flushing. Other neighborhoods among the top 25 zip codes like Sunset Park, Crown Heights, and Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, and Kingsbridge in the Bronx tell us that this program is attracting new members from diverse communities all over the city. It's no surprise that the cultural benefit has been so successful: from the start, the CIG has embraced the program. They have hosted pop-up IDNYC enrollment sites, such as El Museo del Barrio did earlier this year (where I enrolled for my card, incidentally). Organizations have also worked to incorporate IDNYC into their promotional materials and institutional identity as places that are essential to making New York the dynamic and energetic place that it is.

We have heard stories of this impact from around the city:

- It has fostered increased diversity in membership across the board, whether you're considering geography, background, or even age. For instance, at Brooklyn Botanic Garden, which has always cultivated a diverse audience and participation, 40% of IDNYC members are from boroughs other than Brooklyn, and an incredible 78% are under age 55. Thanks to BBG's exemplary engagement with their IDNYC members, they even know that 98% of new members said the garden "met or exceeded their expectations."
- At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 54% of its nearly 25,000 IDNYC members live in boroughs outside of Manhattan, as opposed to 23% of paid members who are city residents. More than 21% of IDNYC members are from Queens, compared to just 11% of their paid members who live in the city. This remarkable pattern is repeated for the other boroughs as well.
- The Brooklyn Academy of Music reported just last month that more than 10% of their IDNYC members purchased tickets to the Next Wave Festival, indicating that our groups have found ways to sustain these new relationships made possible by IDNYC.
- In a letter from October, New York City Ballet Executive Director Katherine Brown wrote of the importance of the program to her organization, where IDNYC members constituted around 40% of the audience at recent events: "Many of these people had not previously been to our theater, and staff reports that our newest members have been eager to embrace all aspects of member activities and access...The IDNYC program is providing the Company a pool of potential patrons, previously unknown to us, who have a pre-disposition to the Ballet. We are pleased to have the opportunity to get to know these individuals and cultivate their interest over the course of a year-long membership."

We have seen evidence of this transformative impact again and again, of institutions developing larger and more diverse member bases than ever before, and New Yorkers taking their families to experience a museum, zoo, garden, or performance for the first time. For us, it's truly inspiring; we are eager to improve and build on this program so that even more residents and cultural groups can participate in this extraordinary program.

And so I'm pleased to echo an announcement made by Mayor de Blasio just yesterday: all 33 members of the CIG, along with seven new cultural organizations, have signed on to offer residents who get their IDNYC cards in 2016 free membership benefits. Additional cultural groups, including Roundabout Theater and New York Theatre Ballet, will offer discounts as well. This is a testament to these cultural organizations' commitment to engaging New Yorkers, and to their importance not only for their world-renowned programming – but also as something essential to our city's civic fabric.

Last week, our agency hosted a panel discussion where CIGs could share their experiences from the first year with their fellow participating organizations, including the seven new comers. It was packed with stories that explored creative ways of engaging new members, processing applicants efficiently, and strategies for retaining these new members in the long term. The discussion made clear that these groups are seizing the opportunity presented by IDNYC: they're surveying their new members to get a better understanding of the people that are joining, and they're developing communications and retention strategies to make sure these new members keep coming back as paying members even after their one year term is up.

The success of IDNYC wouldn't be possible without the support of our partners in the City Council, and we thank you for your role in increasing access to these treasured institutions. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.