The Naturally Occurring Cultural District Working Group (NOCD-NY) is a citywide alliance of community based arts networks and leaders that has joined together to revitalize NYC from the neighborhood up.

Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts (NOCDs) stimulate a combination of social, civic, and economic benefits within communities and across them. As anchors for neighborhood-based economies, they support community self-determination, equity, and local livelihoods. Their reach and impact also extends beyond their neighborhoods to broader citywide and regional economies.

Our communities and constituencies reflect the diversity of NYC and are often underserved by the conventional arts infrastructure. Our locally led, cross sector initiatives draw on community cultural assets to connect arts with small business and industry, re-imagine transportation hubs and plazas, and connect neighborhood vibrancy and sustainability.

Members range from a non-profit industrial developer to a cultural district made up of small arts organizations and businesses, from a community human rights institution to an arts museum. They include: Arts & Democracy Project; Bronx Council on the Arts; Fourth Arts Block; Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center; NY Chinatown History Project; El Museo del Barrio; The Point CDC; El Puente; Queens Museum of Art, Urban Bush Women, Council on the Arts and Humanities of Staten Island, and at large members Michael Hickey and Betsy Imershein.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Prioritize Equitable Distribution of Opportunities and Benefits Related to Cultural Economies**
   
   - Formal recognition of NOCDs and cultural clusters to ensure access and participation in existing City programs (like BIDs, historic districts, industrial districts).
   - Provide equitable funding for community-based organizations, not limited by budget size or cultural hierarchies.
   - Develop funding criteria for excellence that recognizes diverse communities and cultures, with a broad definition of culture, and reflects the demographics of NYC.
   - Prioritize equitable development that is shaped by local stakeholders and benefits diverse community members; avoid development that negatively impacts local cultural vitality.

2. **Support Cultural Incubators and Mission Driven Ownership**
   
   - Establish incubator spaces for start-up creative industries; many of which are immigrant owned enterprises.
   - Stabilize current manufacturing areas by maintaining and strengthening industrial zoning. Review use of special zoning districts (i.e. manufacturing, theater sub-district).
   - Continue to provide funding for the development of affordable manufacturing space for businesses and creative industries displaced by legal and illegal conversions of traditional manufacturing stock.
   - Support tax credit proposals for private landlords to rent to nonprofit cultural groups.
   - Provide low-cost financing to mission driven landlords, including nonprofits and creative industry leadership to establish or stabilize flexible creative workspaces.
3. **Reduce City Bureaucracy & Burdensome Regulations**

- Ease and clarify Street Activity Permitting Office guidelines so they don’t punish smaller community events in their efforts to eliminate big commercial festivals.
- Develop more programs like the NYC Business Express (NBAT), which helps small food businesses navigate the permitting process to open quickly.
- Streamline Dept of Transportation guidelines to help guide community based efforts to improve streetscapes, operate temporary or permanent kiosks, and manage public plazas.
- Provide management and financial support, possibly through a maintenance endowment to community organizations managing public plazas.
- Initiate creative solutions to minimize or eliminate physical/infrastructure barriers to community building and open space (i.e. BQE decking campaigns).
- Enforce multilingual access to Parks department procedures and revisit Parks Rules of Use to enable more diverse cultural expression (in particular, rules concerning music and food).
- Support and enforce the rights of creative street vendors and artists.

4. **Provide Access to Public Spaces**

- Review City-owned property for opportunities to use and share space creatively during non-primary use hours (i.e. libraries, recreation centers, schools, warehouse, piers, garages, empty pools, senior centers).
- Create more opportunities to establish ongoing workspaces in city-owned property through long-term leases, nonprofit partnerships, and RFPs.
- Maximize opportunities for temporary public art on public land by creating a unified public art program with clear guidelines & expectations, easy access points, and small grants.
- Facilitate community-based cultural projects in public spaces for other agencies, like DOT and Parks.

5. **Use Public Resources to Equitably Support Neighborhood Based Culture**

- Champion and promote neighborhood cultural vitality citywide using existing promotional tools, ranging from free street banner program to improved NYC & Co relations (i.e. reduction of fees for small culturals, borough specific campaigns, web promotion, visitor centers).
- Work with MTA to include more local cultural resources and creative districts on the neighborhood maps in the subway stations and promotional campaigns.
- Launch a marketing campaign to promote the City’s creative manufacturing sector, including all aspects of development and production (designer and fabricator) and art & culture that originates in NYC and moves across the globe (theater, music, publishing, art).
- Increase cultural funding to 1% of the city budget.
- Facilitate cross agency funding partnerships, like between SBS & DCA.
- Protect Summer Youth Employment funding.

6. **Include Cultural Leaders in Decision-Making**

- Convene an interagency stakeholders roundtable with a focused agenda and clear milestones, to create a blueprint for support for neighborhood-based cultural clusters and networks.
- Establish knowledgeable cultural liaisons at City Councilmember offices with the role taken either by senior councilmember staffer, a member of the local cultural community, or both.
- Support cultural committees on community boards.

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