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Testimony - January 2025

Expanding Pathways into the Arts and Cultural Workforce for New Yorkers

In this testimony before the NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations, Data Researcher Rachel Neches explains that New Yorkers of color are underrepresented in the city's creative sector and provides recommendations on how policymakers can create a more diverse creative workforce, such as replicating existing talent pipeline initiatives.

by Rachel Neches

Testimony of Rachel Neches
Data Researcher, Center for an Urban Future
Before the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
on Pathways into the Arts and Cultural Workforce for New Yorkers
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Good morning. My name is Rachel Neches. I am the Data Researcher at the Center for an Urban Future, an independent research organization focused on building a stronger and more equitable New York City.

I'll be sharing testimony prepared for today's hearing by our Editorial and Policy Director, Eli Dvorkin. Thank you for the opportunity.

I'd like to begin by commending Chair Rivera and the committee for highlighting the importance of strengthening the city's creative economy and expanding pathways into the arts and culture workforce for New Yorkers.

The creative economy—including advertising, film and tv, fashion, architecture and design, and independent artists—employs more than 300,000 New Yorkers, has grown significantly over the past two decades, and pays well above the citywide median wage. But these industries have a long way to go before they look like New York City.

Our recent report found that Black workers hold fewer than 8 percent of the city's advertising jobs, while comprising nearly 21

percent of the city's total workforce. In fact, New Yorkers of color are underrepresented across the creative economy.

There are a number of actions that the city should take to help expand access to careers in culture and the broader creative economy. One of the most important next steps should be to launch a Creative Economy Talent Pipeline initiative aimed at boosting career pathways for underrepresented New Yorkers into the city's creative sector.

This effort should incubate and expand initiatives in partnership with creative economy employers and nonprofits, many of which receive little if any city funding today; replicate the success of CUNY 2X Tech for the creative sector through a "CUNY 2X Creative" initiative; and build on innovative partnerships developed by some of the city's Career and Technical Education high schools.

The city also has an opportunity to put artists to work by addressing some of New York's big challenges, harnessing their creativity to advance solutions in housing, education, climate change, and more. A renewed, ongoing version of the NYC Artists Corps could help do just that.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and for bringing attention to the importance of expanding pathways to creative careers.

CENTER FOR AN URBAN FUTURE
120 Wall Street, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10005

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