MAS
NYC

# 2025/2026 Enduring Culture Initiative Community Partners

CONTENTS

**Introduction and Looking Ahead** 3

**Friends of Abolitionist Place** 4

**JaiBa** 8

**KiKi Arts Collaborative** 12

**Mobile Print Power** 16

**MOMENT NYC: Museum of Music & Entertainment in New York City** 20

**QNCC: Queer Nightlife Community Center** 24

**WE STAY/Nos Quedamos** 28

**Acknowledgments** 32

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# Enduring Culture Initiative Community Partners

## INTRODUCTION

The Municipal Art Society's Enduring Culture Initiative (ECI) is a multi-year effort that aims to expand New York City's approach to preservation by protecting and celebrating more of the places, cultural activities, and histories that make our neighborhoods and communities unique.

Historic preservation, as traditionally practiced, protects physical places and buildings with a focus on material architectural integrity and strict rules for maintaining historic sites and structures. However, defining a sense of place involves a larger set of layered histories, narratives, cultural traditions and practices, and community anchors — from legacy businesses to public artworks, to the havens of urban gardens. These stories, practices, and sites are intimately related to community identity, yet often lack resilience in the face of change.

As part of our 2025-2026 program, MAS partnered with seven community-based organizations who are advancing cultural preservation efforts across New York City in diverse ways to safeguard the traditions, spaces, and stories that define their neighborhoods. The program included financial support for each partner as well as technical assistance workshops, office hours with MAS staff, programmatic support, and paid consultations with field experts. The goal of these partnerships was to (1) support community-based organizations in their efforts to tell and preserve their stories and sites; (2) elevate sites of cultural significance tied to underrepresented histories; and (3) lay the groundwork for an expanded field of historic preservation that is more inclusive, equitable, and supportive of multivocal perspectives. The following pages are a celebration of the cohort's work and community-building over the past two years.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The Enduring Culture Initiative Community Partnership program reinforced a central lesson: preserving cultural heritage requires supporting the people and organizations already fulfilling this often-unseen work on the ground. Over the course of completing their grant-funded projects, the partners navigated complex bureaucratic systems, institutional barriers, and development pressures, highlighting the roadblocks that smaller groups face in carrying out cultural heritage preservation and localized activations. These shared challenges reveal opportunities to implement more integrated and expansive preservation policies, targeted funding, and long-term support for community-based stewardship to effectively assist groups that enrich our city through their programming.

The experiences documented throughout this report have also helped shape MAS's priorities, informing our work in the planning and preservation fields. We continue to call on the City and institutions to explore opportunities to advance and broaden cultural heritage preservation practices. Our city's diverse and ever-evolving cultural heritage must remain a vital part of its neighborhoods, our public spaces, and our collective history for generations to come. We look forward to translating the community-led work and experiences found in this report into a forthcoming agenda for a more inclusive and equitable preservation ecosystem.

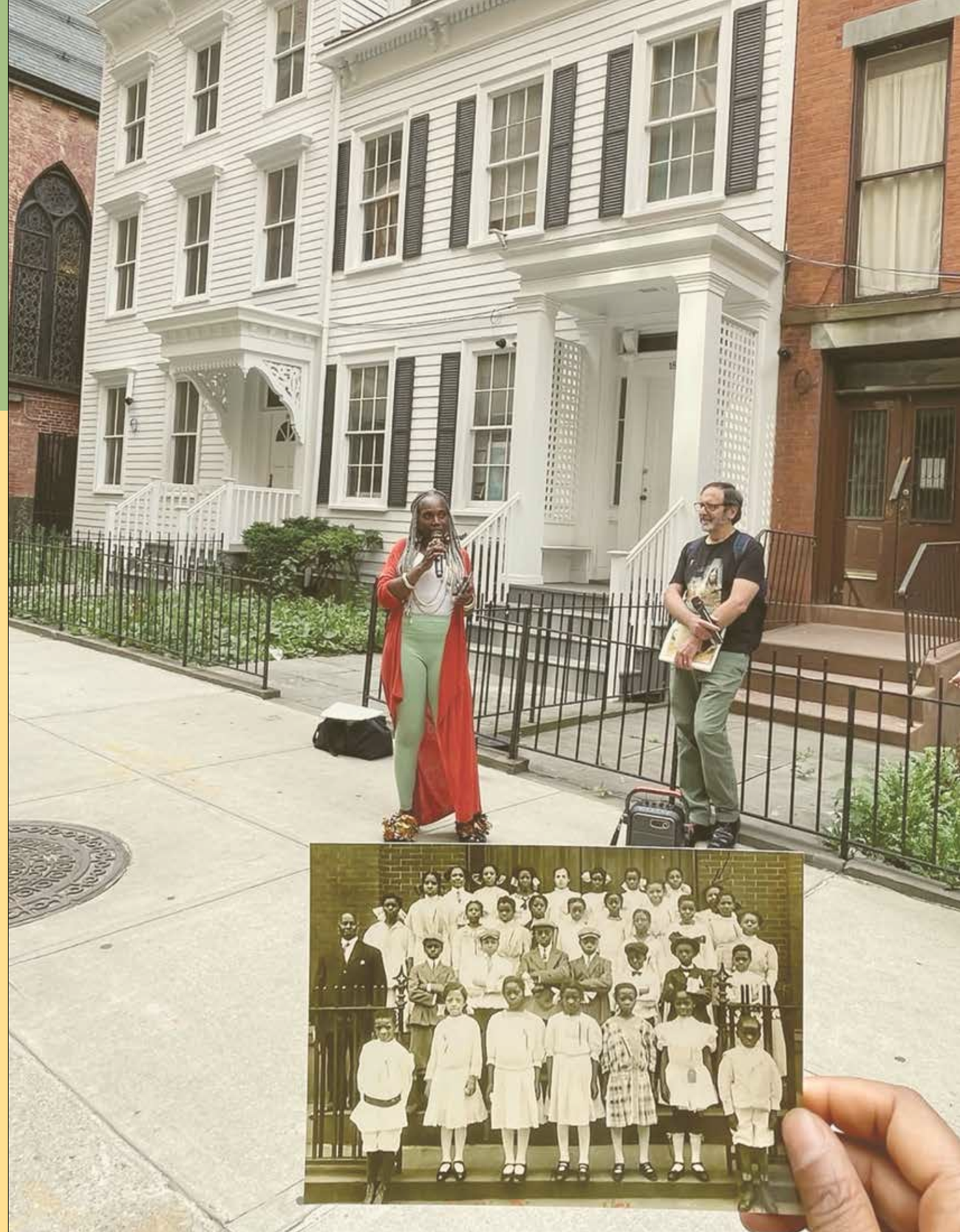
Mobile Print Power workshop in collaboration with Mujeres en Movimiento, a program with The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop. Photos, front cover and right: Argenis Apolinarioto, Courtesy of Mobile Print Power. Photos back cover, top: Marissa Sirasi, Courtesy of MOMENT NYC; bottom: Sawyer Alcázar-Hagen, Courtesy of Kiki Arts Collaborative

# Friends of Abolitionist Place

**DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN**

Friends of Abolitionist Place is dedicated to preserving and sharing the Black and abolitionist history of Downtown Brooklyn through community engagement, cultural programming, immersive walking tours, and innovative digital tools including historic site mapping with Augmented Reality (AR). By creating virtual learning spaces for schools, senior centers, and online audiences, their work deepens public engagement with this history. Their long-term vision is to establish a heritage center at the City-owned 227 Abolitionist Place, creating a community space for exhibitions, education, historical interpretation, and Black history and racial justice programs.
The building, formerly 227 Duffield Street, was home to abolitionists Harriet and Thomas Truesdell and is believed to have been a safe house on the Underground Railroad. Friends of Abolitionist Place and their allies fought tirelessly to save the home from demolition; their organizing efforts secured landmark designation for the building in 2021 and they continue to work to safeguard its future.

**‘Preservation is a way of maintaining identity and legacy. The history of a building brings pride and camaraderie to a community that may be marginalized.’**



*The Friends of Abolitionist Place’s walking tours regularly pass places of nationally known Black leaders. Photo: Courtesy of Friends of Abolitionist Place*

## GRANT ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Through the MAS ECI grant, Friends of Abolitionist Place launched a pilot AR experience to enhance their Mama Joy Abolitionist Walking Tour program. The new immersive digital storytelling asset showcases historic sites and individuals connected to the Underground Railroad and Black abolitionist movement, keeping these stories alive. Following the success of the pilot, Friends of Abolitionist Place aims to implement AR throughout their walking tours and continue to make public awareness of this important part of Downtown Brooklyn's history more accessible and interactive.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

By enhancing the Mama Joy Abolitionist Walking Tour with AR technology, they encouraged visitors to forge a deeper emotional connection to the stories of Black freedom, abolition, and resistance. Tour participants have reacted in awe to the historically accurate virtual depictions of people, buildings, and neighborhoods, seen in direct contrast to the modern Downtown Brooklyn streets experienced first-hand on the walking tour. In addition to the AR experience, Friends of Abolitionist Place has strengthened its organization by building meaningful partnerships and expanding its community network.

## CONNECTIONS & IMPACT

Friends of Abolitionist Place has reached hundreds of people of all ages through walking tours, lectures, workshops, festivals, and public presentations. The organization participated in a Black History Month presentation given to more than 50 judges at Brooklyn Family Court and presented a walking tour and African Dance Workshop to 25 middle school students from Vermont. Friends of Abolitionist Place continues to connect with the public at events and panel discussions, including with the Show Brooklyn Some Love Festival and co-sponsoring and tabling at the Historic Districts Council's 2026 Preservation Conference.

## CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

As a result of the ECI-funded programming and expanded community engagement, Friends of Abolitionist Place experienced a significant increase in partnerships, public interest, and new opportunities. The growth was encouraging but highlighted the challenge of navigating competing priorities within the limited capacity of a small, volunteer-driven organization, including managing programs, partnerships, and funding opportunities, often with deadlines falling at the same time. The organization recognizes the need for additional operational support and organizational infrastructure to ensure that they can meet increasing demand while continuing to provide high-quality public programming. They are seeking additional members to help share responsibilities, particularly with organizational finance and accounting, outreach, and securing operational funds to stabilize leadership staff.

## FUTURE GOALS

Friends of Abolitionist Place is focused on transforming 227 Abolitionist Place into a heritage center, which is central to their mission to preserve Downtown Brooklyn's abolitionist legacy and share Black history through a freedom-fighter perspective. The group hopes to work with the City to establish a formal stewardship agreement that would allow the organization to take responsibility for the site's preservation, interpretation, programming, and community use. This process will include developing a preservation and restoration plan, completing necessary structural, environmental, and feasibility studies, and demonstrating organizational and financial capacity to steward the property. To achieve these goals, the group welcomes and appreciates help from partners and grant funders, and continues building community, institutional, and philanthropic support for the future heritage center.

Friends of Abolitionist Place works to create and uplift a national monument of our country's history of abolition, while simultaneously honoring the movement for Black liberation and racial justice that continues today. Photos: Courtesy of Friends of Abolitionist Place

**'Witnessing these histories come to life and inspire our audiences has reaffirmed the importance of our mission and the lasting value of innovative public history programming.'**

# JaiBa

**LOWER EAST SIDE, MANHATTAN**

JaiBa works to reclaim overlooked public spaces through sound- and food-based cultural programs, including stoop dinners and youth-led sensory mapping. Building on activations in London and along Flatbush Avenue, the group creates spaces for gathering, knowledge exchange, and shared experiences. Through democratized participation, JaiBa celebrates layered cultural memory while fostering connection and creative placemaking. From revitalizing markets and community incubators to designing mobile interventions and hosting public forums, projects are rooted in place and shaped through collaboration. JaiBa also serves as a co-design partner, collaborator, and connector in the relaunch of The People's Institute for the Advancement of Science and Art (PASA), a partnership between Cooper Union and Abrons Arts Center at Henry Street Settlement focused on strengthening civic engagement among local communities. In this role, JaiBa has helped shape the Institute's approach, build relationships, and develop programming.

**'The success of this work depends not only on strong content or good partnerships, but also on how people are invited in, when programs happen, where they happen, and whether the structure of the gathering feels genuinely accessible.'**

JaiBa works at the intersection of policy, place-making, and public life to build infrastructures that reflect the needs, values, and leadership of communities. Photo: Courtesy of JaiBa

## GRANT ACTIVITY SUMMARY

The ECI funding supported PASA's pilot year of public programming, helping JaiBa produce five events that reactivated the initiative as a platform for community knowledge exchange, public scholarship, and cultural organizing. These events included the Global Black Studies Workroom, a conference presented as part of the Lillian Wald Symposium, and Long Table workshop discussions, open forums for sharing ideas and formulating how theory and practice link up in the world. PASA encouraged students, faculty, researchers, and community partners to bring ongoing work and research into Long Table workshops to develop and implement ideas. The grant supported the creation of a zine that will document and extend the conversations, research, and collective learning developed through PASA. Funding was used to compensate program participants, produce marketing and other printed materials, support community engagement, and cover coordination and administrative labor.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

JaiBa evolved from a re-emerging initiative into an active public platform, with a clear direction in programming. JaiBa developed a flexible model for public conversation and community exchange, building a rhythm of activity connecting scholarship, cultural practice, neighborhood relationships, food, mutual support, and collective reflection. Programming involved active engagement, with participants being contributors during events rather than passive audience members. Food, which is essential to JaiBa programming, was sourced from EV Loves, a local food justice nonprofit run out of the Lower Eastside Girls Club. The catering aligned with the values of the project and created a comfortable environment where members could gather, eat, and build relationships.

## CONNECTIONS & IMPACT

Through their work with PASA, JaiBa reached over 300 participants across five public events, with audiences comprising residents, artists, organizers, students, faculty, cultural workers, public-sector partners, and community organizations. Event attendance grew from 12 participants at JaiBa's first event, to approximately 50 participants at a Long Table event, and over 100 attendees at the Lillian Wald Symposium. Social media outreach made 4,000 impressions on program-related content. Across programming, JaiBa hosted 30 guest speakers, artists, and other contributors. The majority of both the audience and guest speakers were BIPOC, local residents, and Cooper Union students.

## CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

One of the main barriers JaiBa faced during the grant cycle was navigating accessibility between institutions and community members who may find these spaces to be too formal or disconnected from their everyday lives. To address this, JaiBa developed communication methods rooted in trust and openness to create environments where people felt welcomed as contributors rather than visitors. Additionally, aligning programming with the rhythms of the communities JaiBa sought to reach — including work hours, caregiving, school, and other neighborhood commitments — presented scheduling challenges that impacted attendance, outreach, and levels of participation. This reinforced the importance of flexible scheduling, accessible locations, informal formats, and earlier community input when designing future programming.

## FUTURE GOALS

Moving forward, JaiBa looks to continue developing formats that bridge institutional resources with community-rooted ways of gathering, learning, and exchanging knowledge. JaiBa hopes to expand its programming and deepen community partnerships following its pilot year. At the end of the year, PASA's zine will be published to document the events conducted, reflections from participants and partners, and be a resource for long-term programming efforts.

> Preservation is a living act of care, to cure, tend, and let culture deepen over time, like all the best things that make life worth living.'

JaiBa projects are grounded in research and storytelling, guided by a commitment to cultural stewardship and shared ownership. Photos: Courtesy of JaiBa

# Kiki Arts Collaborative

**THE BRONX AND UPPER MANHATTAN**

Kiki Arts Collaborative is preserving the legacy of the Black trans and queer Kiki ballroom community through oral histories, archival storytelling, and performance. The organization aims not only to preserve the Kiki ballroom scene, but also to reposition its members as cultural bearers, thought leaders, and agents of preservation. Kiki Arts Collaborative's activities make the kiki scene a living and adaptable preservation site and make community mentors — not outside experts — arbiters of the scene. While ballroom culture has been gaining more mainstream recognition, the kiki scene, which is the most vulnerable and community-driven part of ballroom, is becoming more marginalized. As cultural bearers of the kiki ballroom scene, Kiki Arts Collaborative expands the community's archive, to document its own history, and curate and protect its future.

**‘Preservation means resisting the fascist erasure of our communities and what they have contributed to our culture and society.’**

Ballroom becomes more than a place to perform—it's a space to find safety, joy, and community. Photo: Dumebi Malaika Menakaya, Courtesy of Kiki Arts Collaborative

## GRANT ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Kiki Arts Collaborative held its first visual art exhibition, Archives of Belonging, which examined kiki ballroom culture as a space of self-invention for people who exist at the margins, and fashion and archival practice as tools for self-preservation. Archives of Belonging featured five emerging artists from the kiki scene working across photography, archival practice, film, and fashion design: Jermaine Valentine, Iman Hill, Ken Tiffany & Co., Noelle Deleon, and Stitched Addiction. Kiki Arts Collaborative held other public programming, including an artist talk, Vogue and Runway workshops with leaders compensated through ECI funds, and a closing performance showcase. The organization presented a public showing of "How Far Can We Go," an inaugural full-length dance theater work in BAAD!'s Out Like That! Festival.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Throughout the grant cycle, Kiki Arts Collaborative formalized practices developed under its origins within the House of Louboutin to expand programming and resources to the wider community. Across this year's curatorial theme of archive and kiki scene origin, the organization produced the first exhibition to center visual artists from the kiki scene. The exhibit's public program compensated community mentors and introduced ballroom to new audiences. The grant cycle also marked the first public articulation of the organization as building an ongoing performance company rooted in the kiki scene.

## CONNECTIONS & IMPACT

Kiki was able to increase their impact through building institutional relationships. The organization's core members are LGBTQ+ youth and young adults of color, ages 18 to 30. The exhibition reached 400 visitors across its six-week run at Inspiration Point, including curators and administrators from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MoMA, the Hip Hop museum, the Queens Museum, and NYC's Department of Cultural Affairs. Workshops, performances, and the BAAD! Festival brought audiences into direct contact with kiki scene bearers.

## CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Kiki Arts Collaborative is growing exponentially, but the organization does not currently have the infrastructure needed to support this exciting development. The programming tested the organization's bandwidth and what they could reasonably execute at a professional standard, highlighting the challenges of a young organization operating with a small team. The disparity between output and ability made clear the need for dedicated program staff and consistent donor support to continue to deliver to new audiences and preserve the future of the community.

## FUTURE GOALS

Kiki Arts Collaborative is seeking general operating support through grants and individual donors to advance their goals of onboarding dedicated program staff. The organization is looking for more funding that is not project-restricted, which is necessary to invest in the infrastructure that will support organizational growth.

**'Preservation, done right, is a living practice, not a museum piece.'**

Kiki Arts Collaborative works to ensure that the people at the heart of ballroom culture have the tools and resources to tell their own stories. Photos: Sawyer Alcázar-Hagen, Courtesy of Kiki Arts Collaborative

**'Preservation isn't about freezing something in the past or keeping it unchanged. That instinct is actually foreign to ballroom itself. Across Kiki Arts Collaborative's programming this year, whether it was the Miss USA Kiki Ball, the Archives of Belonging exhibition, or How Far Can We Go, the throughline was placing ballroom's history at the center while letting it adapt in the hands of the people living the culture right now.'**

# Mobile Print Power

**CORONA, QUEENS AND CITYWIDE**

Mobile Print Power engages communities across New York City by activating public spaces to hold printmaking and educational workshops that center stories of place and identity. Through collective artmaking, zines, and silk-screen prints, participants help build a living archive of cultural memory rooted in shared experiences. Mobile Print Power's participatory design model engages communities where they are, allowing for more meaningful collaborative artmaking and community knowledge preservation. This programming facilitates conversations to empower first-generation immigrant and LGBTQ+ communities to take stewardship of their own narratives.

**'Preservation is an act of social justice. The history we have access to is an intentional choice, and we have a responsibility to preserve the knowledge being created and shared in our communities. This knowledge emerges in public spaces, in conversations with neighbors, and through connections in art, and its creators must be active participants in its preservation.'**

Each Mobile Print Power project reflects their commitment to social justice and the belief in the value of shared artistic production. Photo: Argenis Apolinarioto, Courtesy of Mobile Print Power

## GRANT ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Mobile Print Power hosted three workshops in collaboration with Mujeres en Movimiento, a program with The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop (RBPMW), as well as an event with I'm Finna Talk. ECI funding helped compensate collaborators, facilitators, and photographers, and covered food, transportation, and art supplies for the events. Mobile Print Power members participated in NYU's Latinx Project's "La Feria" print sale, accessed print shop hours, engaged in a full-day membership working retreat, and gained membership to RBPMW. The organization also hosted two workshops in Ocean Hill, Brooklyn in partnership with Farmers Garden BK, holding a community cookout, and creating an opportunity for participants to generate new printmaking designs, share food, and harvest herbs grown in the garden.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Over the grant cycle, Mobile Print Power was able to hold consistent in-person meetings and hold two full-day retreats, allowing for more internal programming as well as collaboration with other organizations. Through the three workshops with Mujeres en Movimiento, long-term partnerships were forged, and three brand-new designs were created. The ECI funding allowed Mobile Print Power to return to the long-time collaborators that the organization's work began with, cover the costs of the workshops, materials, photographer, and compensate a visiting indigenous artist.

## CONNECTIONS & IMPACT

Mobile Print Power reached approximately 150 participants through workshops and public programming across New York City. Attendance ranged from approximately ten participants at smaller, more intimate sessions to around 50 participants at larger public programs, allowing the organization to create both sustained small-group engagement and reach broader audiences. The organization's workshops with Mujeres en Movimiento worked closely with migrant, first-generation, and second-generation Latin American community members in Corona, Queens, and through the Fridays at the Patio series at NYU, Mobile Print Power engaged Spanish-speaking students. Their collaboration with I'm Finna Talk reached LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities, while workshops at the RBPMW connected the organization with fellow artists, printmakers, and broader creative communities throughout the city.

## CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Because the organization's programming involves public space activations, finding venues during the grant cycle was a consistent challenge. Programming during winter is difficult, as indoor sites that are compatible with wet art-making materials can be hard to find. Thus, the organization's ability to work in public spaces has a limited time frame of spring, summer, and early fall.

## FUTURE GOALS

Mobile Print Power plans to publish more art books, host public printmaking workshops in Corona Plaza, Queens, and build a wider network of grassroots organizations. The expansion of consistent public programming necessitates an update of the organization's outdated website and so, in the short-term, a goal is to revamp the site including posting images and information about workshops, updating the digital library, and streamlining the process to contact the organization.

**'Preservation means listening to our communities, creating collectively, printing what matters, and carrying our shared stories from the past into the future.'**

Mobile Print Power creates inclusive spaces for people of all backgrounds to gather, reflect on social issues, and co-create visual art that speaks to their lived experiences. Photos: Argenis Apolinarioto, Courtesy of Mobile Print Power; Faisa Warsame, Courtesy of Mobile Print Power

# MOMENT NYC

## Museum of Music & Entertainment in New York City

**CROWN HEIGHTS, BROOKLYN**

MOMENT NYC is reviving the music legacy of the historic MUSE community arts center through a retrospective that includes panel discussions, archival exhibits, and performances that highlight MUSE's role in nurturing free artistic and civic expression. Existing in Crown Heights into the early 1980s, the MUSE center was a vital resource for many musicians, offering visual arts, photography, dance, poetry, science and community history exhibits, music classes, workshops, and free concerts. The story of MUSE serves as a prime example of both the importance of municipal support for the arts and how inequitable, underinvestment in the arts impacts less-resourced neighborhoods. MOMENT NYC seeks to be an ongoing archive of local music history, as well as a community-driven structure for independent musicians. Through the preservation of legacy music scenes that emerged out of the city, MOMENT NYC supports and celebrates local independent musicians who are not institutionally supported and face a difficult artistic landscape. This struggle is exacerbated as gentrification threatens and impedes new local music scenes. Through performance, exhibitions, and education, MOMENT NYC seeks to dispel the notion that music is a nuisance to the public realm, and rather, is fundamental to New York's communities.

**'Making sound in NYC has many economic barriers with additional obstacles for experimental, younger musicians, and seniors. We know that music is fundamental to all human societies and an important part of a healthy and happy life. Yet, from a municipal point of view, sound is mostly approached in the public realm as a nuisance or disturbance.'**

The history of New York City's greatest musical innovations illustrates that music from small communities creating outsider independent music has had the greatest impact on the city and across the world. Photo: Logan Poe, Courtesy of MOMENT NYC

## GRANT ACTIVITY SUMMARY

The majority of ECI funds went to compensating performing artists at events organized by MOMENT NYC. Programming included previews of the MUSE exhibit to sold-out audiences at the Gill Evans Orchestra, Medgar Evers College, Lefferts Historic House, and the Center for Brooklyn History. The ECI grant also filled gaps in printing and digital exhibition costs, interview and panel stipends, and costs of space and transportation.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

MOMENT NYC procured greater support and material for the retrospective of MUSE with new institutional research, interviews, and community outreach. The project has garnered a wider network of musicians and community partners, including faculty and administration at Medgar Evers College, librarians and event coordinators at the Center for Brooklyn History, and organizers at Lefferts House. MOMENT NYC's work of unearthing forgotten artifacts of MUSE and documenting this collective history strengthened intergenerational bonds across communities. In gathering oral history, MOMENT NYC provided spaces for elders to pass on their experiences and speak to music's inherent value beyond its material worth.

## CONNECTIONS & IMPACT

The ECI grant helped MOMENT NYC connect with audiences through performance, exhibition, and community documentation. The exhibit at Shapeshifter for Miles Davis's centennial sold out to a crowd of 200 people, and the Gill Evans Orchestra featured some of the city's top musicians. The project was presented at regular Crown Heights community meetings to about 60 people, where residents were introduced to MUSE, and provided informational material to an online memory gathering survey. Beyond community outreach, MOMENT NYC has collaborated with faculty from the Music, Anthropology, and Research departments at Medgar Evers College, and musicians including Craig Harris.

## CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

One of the key challenges for MOMENT NYC was the difficult nature of gathering documentation of the MUSE archival project. Because MUSE existed only into the early 1980s, many people associated with the former arts center are no longer around to fill in gaps of records. Additionally, scheduling musicians and venues, as well as confirming interviews, has been a challenge due to limited capacity and availability. Economic barriers and other obstacles are especially present for experimental, younger, and senior musicians, who need greater support. MOMENT NYC's increased programming creates opportunities for thorough planning to meet the needs of sustainable organizational expansion.

## FUTURE GOALS

Looking ahead, MOMENT NYC plans to expand its collections and publish commissioned and previously unavailable past works. As a goal to meet expanding programming and exhibitions needs, MOMENT NYC is aiming to hire an administrative assistant. The organization also recognizes its need for legal advice, and plans to bring on new board members, advisors, and marketing assistance to meet long-term goals.

**‘Preservation is caring for the places and communities that demonstrate the possibility of a harmonious, creative, humane and just society.’**

The cost of living in this city has made playing music a practice largely for the privileged. MOMENT NYC strongly believes that every community should have a space to dance, sing, and make music for free. Photo top: Genji Sirasi, Courtesy of MOMENT NYC; left: Marissa Sirasi, Courtesy of MOMENT NYC

# QNCC

## Queer Nightlife Community Center

**EAST NEW YORK, BROOKLYN**

Queer Nightlife Community Center (QNCC) is building an infrastructure for preserving queer nightlife through mentorship, vinyl archiving, storytelling, and by uplifting nightlife as both cultural expression and community lifeline. QNCC is a first-of-its-kind organization that is built around and in service of underground queer nightlife. QNCC hopes that harm reduction and nightlife programming will be seen as legitimate public goods and a serious site of cultural production, and that the workers and artists in this community have access to financial and institutional support that historically has not been afforded to them. Creating a permanent home for QNCC is vital for communities that have long gathered in temporary, precarious, or invisible spaces. QNCC is working to be a driver in policy change to modernize regulation around nightlife and community health, and to expand the preservation field to include ephemeral cultural experiences. Additionally, QNCC is working to reform permitting and noise ordinances and structural barriers to harm reduction and community health.

**‘Preservation does not have to mean permanence. Some of the most important cultural experiences are ephemeral by design — a night that will never happen again, a performance that exists only in the room where it occurs, a moment of collective release that leaves no official record. Nightlife has always understood this. The ephemerality is not a flaw; it is the point.’**

QNCC programs support artists while preserving a vital cultural ecosystem that is increasingly under threat from displacement, commercial pressure, and a lack of sustainable venues.
Photo: Maria Branova, Courtesy of QNCC

## GRANT ACTIVITY SUMMARY

QNCC built its foundational infrastructure with ECI funding during the organization's inaugural year. QNCC hired local and queer-owned businesses to provide essential functions at events, including security, EMT services, lighting, and sound. The organization partnered with the Legal Aid Society to provide nightlife artists and workers with financial literacy programming and made a widely circulated harm reduction zine in partnership with Callen-Lorde Community Health Center and the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DoHMH). Public programming, like the Stonewall Jukebox Project and the ongoing Slambient series was made possible through grant funds and illustrated the organization's combined storytelling with preservation efforts.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Club RAT, the quarterly series with artist and DJ Juliana Huxtable produced in partnership with GumGum Studios, was one of the largest gatherings of queer underground culture in the city. QNCC also hosted a town hall with the Mamdani Administration, titled "The Future of Nightlife in New York," moderated by author and academic McKenzie Wark, featuring Deputy Mayor for Economic Justice Julie Su, Commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs Diya Vij, Executive Director of Office of Nightlife Jeffrey Garcia, and Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment Rafael Espinal. The Town Hall brought visibility and was an in important step of legitimizing queer underground nightlife culture in the field of cultural preservation. Finally, the harm reduction zine was created in collaboration with queer artists, and brought institutional capacity and resources to communities that historically do not have access to either.

## CONNECTIONS & IMPACT

During the grant cycle, QNCC reached thousands of people across queer and trans New Yorkers, nightlife workers and artists, and residents from all five boroughs. Altogether, QNCC held more than 40 events in its first 10 months, with a total of about 12,500 people moving through QNCC's space in East New York. QNCC compensated more than 200 artists, workers, and technicians. Club Rat drew 1,100 attendees, and Slambient reached 1,500 attendees across three events. Dozens of public programs, with topics covering health and well-being, workforce programming, legal and financial education, and arts events, averaged between 20 and 100 attendees each. Large-scale community celebrations, included a Kiki Ball, and a week-long Radical Faerie Gatherette residency comprising 26 programs, and Night at the Cathedral.

## CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

QNCC has been built from the ground up with no precedent organization roadmap to follow. Capacity has been the most consistent challenge as the small volunteer team conducted project management, event production, fundraising, and building management all at once. Expanding QNCC staff and building coalitions with advocates, policy makers, and other community members will be critical for long-term organizational growth and policy advocacy; however, finding dedicated, sustained funding requires time and attention that is difficult for a small organization. QNCC has recently received an additional major grant from the Ford Foundation and keeps operations running via coalitions with East New York partners.

## FUTURE GOALS

QNCC is looking for a permanent home, through either ownership or a long-term lease. They are seeking assistance with real estate, community land trust structures, and nonprofit property acquisitions to help them achieve this goal. Additionally, QNCC is aiming to increase outreach, visibility, and community partnerships to make the organization a model for underground queer nightlife support.

QNCC is brought to life by a group of artists, cultural producers, organizers, scholars, health advocates, designers, and storytellers building a transformative space for queer culture, community, and preservation. Photo top: Michael Falco, Courtesy of QNCC; right: Hunter Abrams, Courtesy of QNCC

> **What we wish the preservation field understood more broadly—is that the most durable artifacts of a cultural moment are often the ones that cannot be catalogued. They are the memories audiences carry home. The painting on the wall that lingers. The object someone brought for a themed night that ends up on a shelf and stays there. The conversation that happens in the bathroom between strangers who will never meet again but who both leave a little changed.'**

# WE STAY/ Nos Quedamos

**MELROSE COMMONS, THE BRONX**

WE STAY/Nos Quedamos Inc. is a South Bronx-based Community Development Corporation engaging Melrose Commons residents in bilingual storytelling and community mapping to examine the lasting impacts of the Melrose Urban Renewal Plan. The organization advocates for the needs of neighborhood residents, improves infrastructure and public spaces, builds and rehabilitates affordable housing, supports local businesses and job creation, and provides social services. Through their Preservation to Power campaign, Nos Quedamos reframes preservation as not only maintaining affordable housing, but also building sustainable ownership, leadership, and decision-making power in neighborhoods facing displacement pressures. This work contributes to an inclusive dialogue on memory, culture, and future planning for residents in the neighborhood. Nos Quedamos was founded in 1993 to resist the City's South Bronx urban renewal plan that would have displaced thousands of Melrose residents. They contributed to the 197–a community-driven Melrose Urban Renewal Plan, which was approved by City Council in 1994. As the plan sets to expire in 2034, the group is working to preserve Melrose and the South Bronx to ensure community members will not be displaced in the future.

**‘Preservation is not simply about maintaining buildings; it is about protecting people, communities, and decades of public and community investment. When affordable housing is preserved, families can remain in their homes, seniors can age in place, children can stay in their schools, and neighborhoods can retain the social networks that make them resilient.’**

Nos Quedamos not only works to ensure marginalized residents withstand redevelopment, but create a resilient future, on their own terms. Photo: Francis Montoya, Courtesy of Nos Quedamos

## GRANT ACTIVITY SUMMARY

ECI funding supported several foundational activities that strengthened the organization's ability to engage residents and advanced the Preservation to Power Campaign, a civic education and engagement effort that equips residents with the knowledge, stories, and organizing tools to understand and shape the future of their community. Through mentorship and strategic coaching focused on organizing, resident engagement, and base-building, staff enhanced their ability to facilitate meaningful community participation and leadership development. ECI funding also enabled Nos Quedamos to establish new partnerships with Pratt Institute and the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) to support community planning and explore opportunities for Melrose Commons as a potential cultural district. These partnerships advance a broader vision of preservation that includes affordable housing, cultural identity, community assets, and long-term neighborhood stability.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Alongside the momentum of the Preservation to Power campaign, Nos Quedamos launched resident committee meetings, bringing together residents across the organization's affordable housing portfolio to learn more about housing preservation, neighborhood planning, and opportunities for civic engagement. These meetings are actively creating space for residents to discuss the future of Melrose and explore how to protect the hard-fought gains achieved through decades of community organizing and planning. This helps to cultivate a new generation of resident leaders prepared to participate in future planning processes and advocate for community priorities. The Pratt and CUP partnerships created opportunities to document and celebrate the neighborhood's history and cultural resources, and supported residents in understanding zoning, land use, and cultural asset mapping, strengthening their ability to participate in shaping future neighborhood planning and preservation.

## CONNECTIONS & IMPACT

Through the program, the organization engaged with more than 200 community members across Melrose and the broader South Bronx, including residents within their affordable housing portfolio and community stakeholders. Residents participated in discussions about housing preservation, neighborhood planning, community history, and their role in shaping the future of the Melrose Commons. Community engagement highlighted priorities beyond housing, including cultural preservation, youth opportunities, economic development, environmental resilience, public spaces, and maintaining the unique identity of Melrose.

## CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Nos Quedamos initially lacked the technical assistance needed to advance this work, including access to preservation planning experts and specialized resources. Through the funding, they were able to engage an external consultant; however, defining the scope of work, identifying the appropriate expertise, and onboarding the consultant required additional time and organizational capacity that had not been anticipated. Staff capacity also shifted unexpectedly following the abrupt conclusion of a fellow who had been supporting this work. While Nos Quedamos was able to realign existing team members to ensure the work continued without significant interruption, the transition required the team to reassess roles, redistribute responsibilities, and re-strategize its approach, resulting in additional time and effort that impacted the pace of implementation.

## FUTURE GOALS

By continuing to link preservation work with community programming, public space activation, and youth leadership, Nos Quedamos hopes to reinforce a model where cultural continuity is protected through long-term local ownership and decision-making power. A key priority is furthering the Preservation to Power campaign and scaling place-based preservation strategies that link housing stability, cultural identity, and resident power. They are moving forward with the Melrose Cultural District feasibility effort, which seeks to formally recognize Melrose as a cultural anchor in the South Bronx. To meet their future goals, the group is working to grow pathways for community participation, and build networks in city planning, cultural district development, and with other community agencies.

Nos Quedamos equips the next generation of residents—young people, new immigrants, and families drawn to Melrose by the very revitalization the organization helped create—with the tools, confidence, and networks to carry the movement forward. Photos: Francis Montoya, Courtesy of Nos Quedamos

> At a time when many affordable housing portfolios face significant financial and physical challenges, preservation is one of the most effective tools we have to prevent displacement, stabilize neighborhoods, and build lasting community power. Preserving housing is ultimately about preserving the ability of residents to remain, thrive, and shape the future of their communities.'

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