



New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Committee on Finance

Oversight Hearing: Supporting the Arts, Culture, and History of Indigenous Peoples in New York City

Tuesday, December 10, 2024, 10:00AM – Council Chambers, City Hall

Testimony Presented by NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner Laurie Cumbo

Good morning, Chair Rivera and members of the committee. I am Laurie Cumbo, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, here to testify in regard to today's topic: Supporting the Arts, Culture, and History of Indigenous Peoples in New York City.

I want to thank the Council for having a hearing on this important topic. There has been tremendous momentum in recent years to better recognize and celebrate the Native people who lived on this land before Europeans arrived, and whose ancestors continue to live here and across the US today. Native Americans are a dynamic community here in New York City: more than 180,000 city residents identified as having American Indian or Alaska Native ancestry in the most recent Census.

The efforts to be more inclusive of Native American voices and culture include both important symbolic and ceremonial gestures, and real investments in Indigenous communities that are helping to amplify their voices and reclaim their place in our national narrative. There's so much more to be done. But following Native American Heritage Month, this is a great moment to take stock of what the cultural community here in New York is doing to uplift the Indigenous people of this land – past, present, and future – and how we in city government can better support this work. So I'm grateful for you convening today's hearing.

Art and culture can do for our Indigenous communities what it does for so many others: it can help to foster, preserve, and share an identity. It can forge community networks, strengthen social bonds, and drive local economies. Art can also carve out a space in contemporary society, communicating across the divides that have kept Indigenous people unfairly marginalized for generations.

This weekend, I had an amazing time at a Lenape culture fair in Prospect Park, which brought together Indigenous artists from around the region. The traditional crafts, artwork, food, and performances at the fair were so joyful and alive. I was honored to participate in this vibrant celebration and I'm thrilled at so many groups across our city are taking steps to listen to Indigenous people and collaborate with them on events like this one.

As you know, the primary way that the Department of Cultural Affairs supports the cultural life of New York City is through funding to nonprofits which, in turn, create the vast array of programming that is so central to our city's energy and identity. Many of these groups offer programming that engages deeply with Indigenous culture, uplifts Indigenous artists, explores Indigenous history, and works closely with Indigenous people to convey the diversity and vibrancy of their culture to audiences.

To share just a few examples of Indigenous programming, exhibitions, and events from organizations we're proud to support:

- At **Historic Richmond Town** on Staten Island, their Native Encampment site features a wigwam and several other structures that depict the life of Native people in Staten Island during post-European contact. The encampment includes special programs throughout the year, including Old Home Day, and Hearth & Harvest Weekend.
- For Native American Heritage Month, the **New York Botanical Garden** in the Bronx offered programming and digital highlights of the plant-based traditions of Native Americans from the Northeast and throughout the Americas. These included lessons on the Lenape's use of plants for food, medicine, tools, building materials, alongside Native-led programs exploring contemporary Indigenous perspectives.
- **The Met Museum** offers a great example of how cultural organizations can both examine Native history and tradition, and also uplift contemporary Indigenous artists. For Native American Heritage Month, they offered a tour exploring subjects, voices, and narratives found across 5,000+ years of artwork in their collection. From 2019 to 2021, the Met also featured a site-specific commission in their great hall by Kent Monkman, a Cree artist known for his playful and provocative re-imaginings of Western European and American art history.
- This past Saturday, **Flushing Town Hall** in Queens hosted a Native American Market and social, featuring artwork, dancing, drumming, singing, and storytelling, in an event created in collaboration with Indigenous-led organizations, artists, and small businesses.
- **The American Museum of Natural History** re-opened their Northwest Coast Hall in 2022 following a five year, \$19 million renovation. This was done in close consultation with First Nations people of Canada's Vancouver Island, where many of the artifacts originated. The new hall thoughtfully incorporates the perspectives of the 10 nations whose cultures are displayed, giving greater care and context to the meaning of the items for the people who created them. Space is also provided for first-person community testimony, and for examining the government-backed oppression of their people. The process of presenting these sacred objects in a way that is respectful and gives their creators their due is part of an ongoing conversation that's happening in institutions around the world.
- Last year, the **Whitney Museum of American Art** held an exhibition of the work of Indigenous artist Jaune Quick to See Smith, the first New York retrospective of her extraordinary work. The museum hosted several Open Studios for families with kids of all ages, and collaborated with Rachel Martin, an Indigenous artist based in Brooklyn, to lead a family program inspired by the groundbreaking exhibition.
- On **Governors Island**, **American Indian Community House** has been an Organization in Residence since 2019, receiving free indoor space on the island in exchange for offering free public programming. In September of this year, the public programming that grew from this partnership included a panel featuring a representative of Thunderbird American Indian Dancers, which explored the links between land-based dances and well-being.
- **The La MaMa Indigenous Initiative** aims to provide a platform for Indigenous arts and culture, both nationally and worldwide. The Initiative curates original Indigenous programming, including workshops, markets, and theatrical productions, to elevate the voices and artistic works of Native communities.

- This year marked **Lotus Music and Dance's** 22nd Annual Drums Along the Hudson: A Native American and Multicultural Celebration, which happened this past June in Inwood Hill Park. The event was conceived as a pow wow in 2002, and has evolved into a showcase of cultures that share the drum as the "heartbeat" of artistic expression

We're proud to partner with Council to invest in our city's organizations doing this important work. Through the Cultural Development Fund, Coalition of Theaters of Color, and other Council Initiatives we administer, DCLA has worked with Council to support a number of organizations with missions dedicated to Native American culture and programming. These include:

- **AMERINDA**, which promotes the indigenous perspective in the arts to a broad audience through the creation of new work in contemporary art forms-visual, performing, literary and media. Amerinda is committed to empowering Native Americans, breaking down barriers and fostering intercultural understanding and appreciation for Native American culture.
- **Coopdanza**, is an interdisciplinary art, media and educational organization that produces dance and multimedia experiences inspired by the wisdom of Indigenous American Cultures. They engage in local and international collaborations to create ARTivism, performances, community, and educational programs to generate environmental awareness.
- **The Redhawk Indian Arts Council** is a not-for-profit organization founded and maintained by Native American artists and educators residing in New York and New Jersey. Since 1994, the Council has been dedicated to educating the general public about Native American heritage through song, dance, theater, works of art, and other cultural forms of expression. Each June, the Council hosts the largest pow-wow in the northeast at Brooklyn's Floyd Bennet Field.
- **The Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian** has an outpost here in New York, located adjacent to Bowling Green and Battery Park. This institution cares for one of the world's most expansive collections of Native artifacts encompassing the entire Western Hemisphere, and the location here in New York houses exhibitions, research, educational activities, and performing arts programs.
- **Spiderwoman Theater** – founded and led by the extraordinary Muriel Miguel – has been a leading voice in advancing Native American voices through the performing arts since it was founded in 1976.

In partnership with local arts council partners in each borough, DCLA invests nearly \$3 million each year directly into artists, collectives, and smaller organizations across the five boroughs. The Bronx Council on the Arts recently awarded a Bronx Recognizes its Own – or BRIO – award to Dennis Darkeem, whose work focuses on Indigenous visual art. The Brooklyn Arts Council includes Cliff Matias - founder of Redhawk Native American Arts Council - in their Folk Feet Dance Workshops guide, which aims to connect people to Brooklyn's traditional dance masters. We will continue to work with the arts councils to support Indigenous culture and creative expression across the five boroughs.

Through our Percent for Art program, we've commissioned a number of Native American artists for permanent, site-specific public artworks. These include artist Jeffrey Gibson, who designed a mural for a community room in the new home of the NYPD's 40th Precinct in the Bronx; and Frank Big Bear, who created a set of works on paper for the library of P.S. 75 in Brooklyn.

Next year marks 400 years since the Dutch first established a permanent colony on Lenape land not far from here. At this moment in our history, we are poised to make the most of this milestone, to dig deeper in the Native history of our city, and to explore new narratives around the people and communities who made New York into the city it is today – willingly or not. Last month, Mayor Adams hosted a reception at Gracie Mansion for Indigenous groups, and declared November 20 Lenape Heritage Day. Next year, NYC Tourism will be leading a collective effort to mark the occasion through a range of programming. For our part, we will be making sure to connect our cultural partners with the citywide programming that will accompany the 400th anniversary.

We're living through an incredible moment where Indigenous people are raising their voices, working together, and fighting for recognition across New York City and beyond. This gives me so much hope for the future. We're seeing new opportunities open up for Native American artists and cultural organizations, and so many other organizations are taking the initiative to work with Native people to right the wrongs that are ingrained in their collections, exhibitions, and programs. We recognize that there is still a tremendous way to go, and in here NYC we are committed to taking that journey with our partners in the cultural sector. The phenomenal work and programming I've listed here today is just the start. I'm so inspired by the growing eagerness to listen to Indigenous voices, work with Indigenous leaders and communities in good faith, and work together toward a fairer, more inclusive approach to engaging with and celebrating their cultures.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on today's topic. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.



JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS
DECEMBER 10, 2024**

Good morning,

I want to thank Chair Rivera and the members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations for holding this hearing today. This year marks the 400th anniversary of the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam – later to become the New York City we know today. This settlement, however, started the long process of dispossession and the removal of the island’s native inhabitants, the Lenape people. Reconciling these facts and recognizing the impact of colonization is an ongoing process, but today New York City is home to a growing Indigenous community with countless places dedicated to learning about the city’s rich past.

According to the 2020 Census, approximately 2% of residents (180,866 people) in New York City identify as “American Indian or Alaska Native”, an uptick of 1.3% from the 111,749 people tallied in the 2010 census.¹ This makes the city home to one of the largest Native American populations among U.S. urban centers. Supporting and preserving the arts, culture and history of Indigenous populations, especially as we head into an administration intent on rewriting history, is not only morally imperative but also politically prudent.

The opening of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in 1994 brought to Manhattan one of the world’s most expansive collections of Native artifacts, including an ongoing exhibition called Native New York, which tells the stories of important cultural contributions from the Native community, such as the Mohawk "skywalker" ironworkers who were instrumental in building the city's iconic skyline.² Contemporary community spaces like Relative Arts and non-profit organizations like the American Indian Community House, which regularly hosts events and educational programming, further uplift the present-day community’s art and activism.

I hope to hear from groups and individuals in the community today on how my office and this City Council can further support and uplift our city’s vibrant Indigenous community as well as the thousands of visitors who travel here every year to share in community and cultural events.

¹ <https://www.thecity.nyc/2021/10/10/native-american-new-yorkers-grow-numbers/>

² <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20241121-where-to-discover-new-york-citys-native-american-roots>



**Testimony of
Michael Schnell
Director of Government & Community Affairs
Brooklyn Botanic Garden**

**New York City Council
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**

**Oversight - Supporting the Arts, Culture, and History of
Indigenous Peoples in New York City**

Good morning, my name is Michael Schnell and I am Director of Government & Community Affairs for Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Garden's work to co-create with indigenous people share the history and traditional ecological knowledge of indigenous people.

ABOUT BBG

Founded in 1910, Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG) is an urban botanic garden that connects people to the world of plants, fostering delight and curiosity while inspiring an appreciation and sense of stewardship of the environment. Situated on 52 acres in the heart of Brooklyn and open year-round, the Garden is home to over 12,000 kinds of plants and more than 30 specialty gardens.

OUR COMMITMENT TO THE HISTORY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN NEW YORK CITY

BBG has had a long-standing commitment to teaching and sharing stories about native plants and their botanical, medical, traditional ecological uses by indigenous people. BBG recognized the need to work collaboratively with indigenous people to tell their stories of the indigenous plants in our collection with New Yorkers.

Ohkehteau (Plants of the Earth): A Shinnecock Oral History

This semi-permanent exhibit co-created with Chenae Bullock, member of the Shinnecock and Montauk Nations highlights indigenous plants in the Native Flora Garden and the ways that people from the Shinnecock Nation know and use them with signs and audio. Visitors go on a self-guided tour and can hear Chenae Bullock tell stories passed down to her and describe traditional uses for plants, including medicines that have been used for

thousands of years.

Learn more here: [Ohkehteau \(Plants of the Earth\): A Shinnecock Oral History - Brooklyn Botanic Garden \(bbg.org\)](#)

Trees of Little Caribbean

This exhibit is a celebration of the trees (and treelike plants) cherished by Caribbean people that spark stories of rebellion, resilience, spirituality, and joy. Visitors to the Garden learn about native Caribbean trees like papaya, guava, soursop, and allspice as well as nonnative plants (like the banana) that were brought from across the globe under colonialism.

Learn more here: [Trees of Little Caribbean - Brooklyn Botanic Garden \(bbg.org\)](#)

UPCOMING EXHIBITS SUMMER 2025

BBG's Education Department, and specifically our Interpretation and Exhibitions staff, are working with two different indigenous people on installations this summer in the Discovery Garden: Courtney Street, from the Nanicoke Indian Community and the founder of the Native Roots Farm Foundation is developing signs that will explore her relationship with the native plants in the Discovery Garden. And Angela Ferguson from Braiding the Sacred is planting a traditional Three Sisters Garden in BBG's Discovery Garden.

Angela wrote the most recent entry for the BBG blog about the importance of saving seeds: [Angela Ferguson of Onondaga Nation Farm on the Importance of Saving Seeds - Brooklyn Botanic Garden \(bbg.org\)](#)

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any of your questions.

BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY TESTIMONY

TO COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES, AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

OVERSIGHT HEARING: SUPPORTING THE ARTS, CULTURE, AND HISTORY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN NEW YORK CITY

JOEL WHITNEY, BPL PRESENTS LITERARY PROGRAMS CURATOR

DECEMBER 10, 2024

Good morning. My name is Joel Whitney and I am the BPL Presents literary curator at Brooklyn Public Library. Thank you to Chair Rivera and the members of this Committee, as well as the entire City Council, for the opportunity this morning to highlight our partnership with the Lenape Center and the work across many BPL departments to celebrate and support the arts and culture of Indigenous Peoples in New York City.

BPL Presents, overseen by Vice President of Arts & Culture László Jakab Orsós, is the Library's year-round series of arts and culture events, including author talks, panel discussions and readings, as well as live music, dance and theater, film screenings and art exhibitions. Events feature new and established artists engaged in exploring non-traditional artistic spaces and incorporating civic themes. So far in 2024, we have presented over 790 cultural events attended by more 51,000 patrons, including an event just last month with the Lenape Center.

The Lenape are the original inhabitants of the land we are meeting on today. Four years ago, my colleagues and I met with Joe Baker, Hadrien Coumans, and Curtis Zunigha at The Lenape Center, and asked a simple question: *what do you need?* Their answer launched an ongoing, multiyear, and multidisciplinary collaboration that has touched on so many facets of BPL. Within two years of that conversation, we opened *Lenapehoking*, the first Lenape-curated exhibition of Lenape cultural arts, in the City of New York.

"Lenapehoking" is the Lenape name for their homeland, reaching from Northern Delaware to the foot of the Catskills, from Western Connecticut to Eastern Pennsylvania, with New York City at its center. Curated by Joe Baker, *Lenapehoking* used a mix of contemporary and historical objects to tell the story of a vast and vibrant community, reframing the narrative of indigenous tribes told in more traditional settings, which too often overlooks the genocide of the Lenape people and their living legacy today.

With Mr. Baker, we selected Greenpoint Library and Environmental Education Center as the home for *Lenapehoking*. This library archives Greenpoint's history as the site of one of the largest oil spills ever recorded in the United States and the community's fight for environmental justice. During the exhibition, the branch's rooftop teaching garden featured Indigenous fruit trees that

were historically cultivated by the Lenape in Manhattan, using seeds descended from those carried by Lenape during the forced expulsions from the East Coast. The incorporation of organic materials into the exhibition space created a portal into the living culture of the Lenape people today and a continuity between the ecological past and present.

Alongside this exhibit, BPL hosted poetry readings, artist talks, and panel discussions as part of an ongoing reckoning around Indigenous rights and historical revisionism of the Lenape. This series featured talks with activist Gloria Steinem on critical social issues, readings by Lenape poet Rebecca Haff Lowry, and panel discussions with the nonprofit Hudson Valley Farm Hub, all of which prescind, recognize and honor the fervent Lenape plan of return to their homeland. They should be welcomed by New York's institutions, lest we continue to perpetuate the erasure and injustice of centuries of forced removal.

As part of the exhibition, Lenape Center and BPL began discussing a curated book list patrons could reference to further learn about Lenape history. This was not possible: there were just not enough published books detailing Lenape culture in their own words and images, in a way that did not relegate their stories to the distant past. To correct this, BPL and Lenape Center published *Lenapehoking: An Anthology*, with selections of original Indigenous scholarship, essays, poetry, full-color art and more. Approaching its 4th printing, this anthology is available in select libraries across the region.

Last month in a conversation at Central Library's Dr. S. Stevan Dweck Cultural Center, Mr. Baker mentioned that our actions can be generative and impactful in ways we never planned. He was describing, to over 100 educators, how this anthology is the foundation of Lenape Center's partnership with Teachers College Professor Rachel Talbert to create curriculum for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade students, to provide a comprehensive approach to teaching Lenape history and culture. He could easily have been describing that first conversation BPL and Lenape Center had together.

Beyond these actions, BPL took a participatory approach to the acquisition of Indigenous stories and materials in our collection. BPL staff worked alongside Lenape Center to find books that should be in BPL's collection. Internally, BPL has also launched an Indigenous Services Committee to advise on strategies to help connect our patrons with the diversity of materials on our shelves through innovative programming, marketing, and outreach. This committee was launched in 2019 after Living Land Acknowledgement convening hosted by the Brooklyn Museum.

Separately from our work with Lenape Center, BPL's Heritage Ambassador program aims to foster and highlight folk arts at our branch libraries. This initiative supports folk and traditional artists in Brooklyn by connecting library patrons to cultural heritage practices through art-making,

storytelling and community knowledge-sharing. For much of this year, works by Heritage Ambassador Bebonkwe Brown, a Brooklyn-based Plains Cree artist, hung at Brooklyn Heights Library in an exhibit titled *Urban Skins & Ancient Kin* and Heritage Ambassador Araceli Poma created minidocumentaries with Indigenous Language speakers here in NYC. BPL's Center for Brooklyn History archives the work by Heritage Ambassadors.

I and the BPL team are proud of this work. We consider everything I've described to you to be part of our Living Land Acknowledgement. This is not just something we say at the start of special programs or at ribbon cuttings, but a collaboration and a practice we've put into place. It's not just words but actions we are taking to support the culture of Lenape and Indigenous Peoples in New York City.

Thank you again for the time to speak this morning and for all your support of Libraries.



December 11, 2024

Written Testimony for the City Council Hearing on Supporting Indigenous Arts, Culture, and History in NYC

Honorable members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Maeve Montalvo, and I serve as the Director of Education at the Museum of the City of New York (MCNY). I am honored to share insights into our ongoing efforts to elevate the arts, culture, and history of the Lenape people, the original inhabitants of this land, through transformative programming and partnerships.

Since December 2022, MCNY has been engaged in a collaborative effort with the Éenda-Lūnaapeewáhkiing (Land of the Lunaapeew) Collective, a coalition of Lenape leaders, elders, and artists from across Turtle Island, alongside other key partners like the American Indian Community House. Together, we are co-creating *Unceded: 400 Years of Lenape Survivance*, an exhibition set to open in fall 2025. This project reflects a pivotal moment for MCNY, as we shift from solely being storytellers to becoming conveners and drivers of restorative practices that challenge dominant narratives and embrace the full complexity of Lenape history and culture.

The *Unceded* project, co-created with Lenape community members, explores pre-contact Lenape life, their central role in the region's development, and the ongoing impact of their cosmology, land stewardship, and cultural practices. Visitors will confront enduring myths, such as the misconception that the Lenape sold Manhattan for \$24, while engaging with stories of dispossession, resistance, and survival. This exhibition bridges past and present, highlighting the revitalization of Lenape language and culture while addressing contemporary issues such as environmental justice and sovereignty.

The community-driven curation process has been key to ensuring this project represents the diversity of Lenape voices. Lenape people have been displaced through diaspora but remain connected to their ancestral homelands in varying ways. Our partnership with the ELC has allowed us to bring these dispersed communities together.



The Museum has led these conversations resulting in a co-generative, multi-year project which includes: traveling to Amsterdam in November 2023 to meet with cultural and civic leaders; a co-curated exhibition in Amsterdam which opened in May 2023 at the Amsterdam Museum; a kick-off event at the Museum of the City of New York in May 2024 that included talks, performances, and activities co-curated by the project's Lenape partners; weekend programming for visitors at MCNY beginning in September 2024; a two-year ongoing community-engaged exhibition planning process; and the opening of *Unceded: 400 Years of Lenape Survivance* in fall 2025.

The Museum of the City of New York's successful two-day event, ["We Are Still Here!" A Lunaapeew/Lenape Celebration Weekend](#), took place on Saturday, May 4 and Sunday, May 5, 2024 and welcomed 1,762 visitors of all ages. Those dates were chosen in recognition of the 400th anniversary of the settlement of the Dutch in the Lenape homelands and the creation of New Amsterdam. MCNY hosted and co-developed this event with a Community Curator from the ELC and facilitated it in collaboration with the Museum's Lenape project partners.

The weekend event included panel discussions featuring community and cultural leaders from four Lenape nations, musical and dance performances by Indigenous performers, craft-making, a marketplace featuring the work of Indigenous artisans, and other cultural activities that invited participants to engage with the heritage and resilience of the Lenape. These programs were geared towards intergenerational audiences and offered hands-on opportunities for participants to learn about the history of the Lenape and New Amsterdam during their visit. One of the highlights of the weekend was performances by the Red Blanket Singers; another was a series of Munsee language workshops led by language teacher Kristin Jacobs (Eelünaapéewi Lahkéwiit). Activities were held at the Museum's Fifth Avenue building from 11am to 4pm on Saturday and Sunday and were free with Museum admission, which is pay-what-you-wish for general audiences and always free for visitors ages 18 and under and East Harlem residents.

The weekend also included an Intertribal social event on Saturday evening, where Indigenous community members, allies, and guests were invited to join an intergenerational Intertribal Social celebrating the Lenape in their traditional homeland. This powerful event included meaningful dialogue sessions between community leaders, food, dancing, drumming, and song-sharing, celebrating the resilience and culture of the Lenape and other local Indigenous



Nations. The Museum was able to provide physical space for these communities as well as travel and accommodations to make it possible. These gatherings, supported by Museum funding for the travel and logistics of our community partners, foster collaboration and connection that would otherwise be challenging to achieve.

As part of the kick-off event, MCNY also held onsite meetings with the project's Community Advisory group, which is led by Brent Stonefish of the Eelūnaapèewii Lahkèewiit First Nation. Brent Stonefish is the co-founder of the Éenda-Lūnaapeewáhkiing (Land of the Lunaapeew) Collective, which aims to establish a partnership between Lenape communities with a vision to unite and hear the voices of the Lunaapeew across Turtle Island. For the project, MCNY has convened a Lenape Advisory Circle composed of two members from each of the four nations currently participating in the EL Collective: the Munsee-Delaware Nation (Ontario Canada); the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Nation (Bridgeton, NJ); the Ramapough Munsee Lunaape Nation (Mahwah, NJ); and Eelūnaapéewi Lahkéewiit (Moravian of the Thames Band) (Ontario, Canada). Following the kick-off event, the Museum worked with the Lenape Advisory Circle members to curate ongoing weekend activities for families and adult audiences. This launched in September 2024 with the integration of activities honoring Lenape heritage into the Museum's NYC Discovery Lab. Weekend activities for families now include themes such as "Transportation and the City," which explore the role of Lenape canoes and waterways in shaping the region and served 986 visitors in September. In November 2024, in honor of Native American Heritage Month, we hosted hands-on activities including corn husk doll-making and map-based explorations of Lenape place names, serving 1,270 visitors. These programs have engaged thousands of visitors of all ages and helped foster a deeper understanding of the Lenape's enduring presence and contributions to New York City.

This work reflects our belief in the importance of presenting the complexity of New York City's history—and our confidence in people's ability to appreciate that complexity. New York City's identity as a hub of commerce, diversity, and resilience is deeply tied to Lenape history. By integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, *Unceded* and related programs offer fresh perspectives on critical challenges, such as ecological sustainability and the reckoning with colonial histories.

However, sustaining this work requires significant resources. Members of the Éenda-Lūnaapeewáhkiing Collective and other partners dedicate their time while balancing full-time



jobs and personal responsibilities. Continued funding is essential to support travel, logistics, and programming that amplify Lenape voices. Without these resources, the reach and impact of this vital work will be diminished.

By supporting initiatives like ours, you are helping ensure that tens of thousands of students, teachers, and visitors learn about the Lenape people—not as relics of the past but as vibrant communities shaping our shared future. This is an opportunity to foster understanding, civic engagement, and cultural pride by presenting an inclusive and truthful narrative of New York City’s history—one that acknowledges all its voices and complexities.

Thank you for your time and for recognizing the importance of this work.

Submitted by:

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**New York City Council Oversight Hearing
COMMITTEE ON
CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS
"Supporting the Arts, Culture, and History of Indigenous Peoples in New York City."
December 10, 2024**

Good morning, my name is Jason Baumann and I am the Susan and Douglas Dillon Director for Collection Development and Global Studies at the New York Public Library (NYPL). I would like to thank Chair Rivera, Speaker Adams, and the members of this committee for inviting me to testify today. It is a privilege to share the work NYPL does to support the arts, culture, and history of Indigenous people in New York City. Today, I will be talking about this topic with respect to our research collections, special events and exhibits, and initiatives within our branch libraries. You will observe that NYPL's support of the Arts, Culture, and History of Indigenous People speaks to collections and initiatives both by and about this demographic.

Our primary offerings that pertain to the history of Indigenous peoples are our research collections. While the City primarily funds the operations and collections of NYPL's branch libraries, our endowment and other private funding support the majority of the offerings of our four research libraries. NYPL's research collections have more than 100,000 volumes that document Indigenous peoples of the Americas, this ranges from the earliest grammars and dictionaries of Indigenous languages from the 16th century to contemporary literature (including children and young adult literature) and scholarship by Indigenous people. The Library's curators collect not only materials by and about the Indigenous peoples of the United States, but also of North, Central, South America, and the Caribbean, with very strong holdings in Spanish, Portuguese, French, and dozens of Indigenous languages. The Library's collections are also

strong in historical works in linguistics, with many pioneering works on native languages, including manuscript dictionaries of Algonquin and Chippewa languages from the 19th century. The Library's special collections are strong in documentation of Indigenous relations during the 16th and 17th century colonial period for Latin America, particularly in Mexico and Peru, including early manuscripts in Nahuatl. Additionally, NYPL holds important documents relating to New York's relations with the Six Nations (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora) in the 18th century. Building on these published works and historical collections, our curators have grown our visual collections by Indigenous artists in recent years, acquiring works by interdisciplinary Diné artist Dakota Mece, photographs by Indigenous Inuit Canadian artists for our recent exhibition about the Arctic, as well as acquiring a collection of the first photographs of Indigenous communities in Colombia, important collections of photo documentation of Indigenous communities in Brazil, and artist books from Indigenous creators in Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Peru, among others.

Beyond acquisitions and offerings, the Library's curator for Latin American, Iberian, and U.S. Latino Studies works intensively on showcasing relevant holdings and connecting them to Latin American Indigenous communities in New York City. In 2019, this team organized and hosted the panel "Identity, Culture, and Poetics in Latin America: Reading and Conversation with Elicura Chihuailaf, José Mármol, and Miguel Ángel Zapata." Mr. Chihuailaf is considered one of the most influential Mapuche Chilean authors. He writes in Mapudungun and in Spanish, and has been translated into many other languages. In April 2024, this same department connected with the Colibrí Collective, an organization in New York City of Indigenous working with the departments of education and health to provide translation and interpretation services of Latin American Indigenous languages. Our curator gave the collective an orientation on the diversity of books and periodicals that the Library holds in dozens of Indigenous languages that can aid them in their work. The team also published a research guide in Spanish to facilitate the

discovery of these materials and has provided similar orientations for students in the Center Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) at NYU.

This year, our Latin American, Iberian, and U.S. Latino Studies curator additionally took the first steps to establish a collaborative relationship with Juan de Córdova Research Library, a renowned cultural institution in Oaxaca that specializes in Indigenous languages from the Americas. Our organizations coordinated to digitize “La rosa del amor” an extremely rare 19th century pamphlet in Zapotec language whose only surviving copy is held at NYPL’s Stephen A. Schwarzman Building. This pamphlet will be eventually published in a facsimile edition by the state of Oaxaca to promote the reading of texts in Zapotec.

Complementing our research collections and activities are a number of exhibitions and programs. NYPL’s premier cultural series, LIVE from NYPL, which hosts writers, artists, and scholars for conversations and performances, has held events that highlight Indigenous authors and topics on several occasions. In 2023, the series hosted Lenape Center co-founders and co-directors Joe Baker, Curtis Zunigha, and Hadrien Coumans along with, Cora Fisher, Curator of Visual Art Programming at Brooklyn Public Library, for a conversation entitled “The Land We’re On: Living Lenapehoking.” The four speakers discussed the Lenape Center’s work, A Lenapehoking Anthology, a work that contends with subjects ranging from the myth of the purchase of Manhattan to the self-curation of Indigenous art and culture.

In June of last year, the Library for Performing Arts hosted an exhibition entitled, *Border Crossings: Exile and American Modern Dance 1900-1955*. *Border Crossings* highlighted the fundamental contributions of artists of color, immigrant, or Indigenous communities to the history of modern dance. It featured photography, costumes, moving images, and archival objects in an examination of the crucial issues of geopolitical events and structural racism at the heart of

American modern dance. Additionally, a number of works by artists and makers Indigenous to North America have been displayed in *Treasures*, our permanent exhibition highlighting our world-renowned research collections, since it opened in 2021. This includes a print by contemporary Diné artist Dakota Mace (b. 1991) to a syllabary by Sequoyah (ca. 1770–ca.1843), a member of the Cherokee Nation, recording his language, among others.

In the spring of 2026, NYPL plans to mark the 250th anniversary of the signing of the declaration of independence with an exhibition entitled “Revolution at 250.” The exhibition will feature all aspects of the dynamics leading up to and following this historic event. This includes the exclusion of women, enslaved people, and Indigenous people from those identified as “American.” The center case will also feature documents highlighting the role of western expansion and Indian removal in precipitating the revolution.

NYPL’s branch libraries conduct a number of initiatives, campaigns, and offerings that aim to support the arts, culture, and history of Indigenous peoples in New York City. On an ongoing basis, branches highlight Indigenous voices through selections for branch book discussion groups. For example, this past month, branches hosted discussions about relevant titles like *Shutter* (Harlem), *Future of the Living Good* (Inwood), and *Wandering Stars* (SNFL). The branches also regularly hold “Heritage Celebrations,” a cornerstone of programming, with events that celebrate the multicultural diversity and rich heritage of our communities. One such celebration took place as a collaboration between the Staten Island Museum and the West New Brighton Library. The branch hosted the event, where participants learned about the history of the Lenape people on Staten Island and joined an art activity where they made a pinch pot inspired by artworks on display. A number of programs geared towards children and young adults focus on works by and about Indigenous peoples as well. This includes “KidsLIVE” events featuring relevant titles from our “Best Books for Kids” lists and a two-page spread on the

Lenape in our teen-reading-ambassador-produced magazine, *Portal*. Our teen reading ambassadors have also written a number of blogposts in observance of Native American Heritage month on book recommendations for kids.

Since 2021, NYPL has hosted an annual World Literature Festival. The first festival featured a virtual panel discussion organized by our curator for Latin American, Iberian and U.S. Latino Studies entitled "*Celebrating Indigenous Languages of the Americas.*" The event brought together Quechua Collective and the Mixteca Organization, two New York City-based organizations, who talked about their work in preserving and educating people about Indigenous languages of the Americas spoken in New York City. This year's World Literature Festival hosted Stephen Graham Jones for an author talk on his novel, *My Heart is a Chainsaw*. The book covers themes such as Indigenous displacement and colonialism, among others, through the eyes of a "half Indian" protagonist.

Whether within our research materials, on display in our exhibitions, or through an interactive event with our patrons, the New York Public Library is committed to telling the stories and featuring the works of Indigenous peoples. I thank you for the opportunity to testify today and am available for any questions.

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations
Tuesday, December 10th, 2024
NEW YORK SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL dba THE PUBLIC THEATER Testimony

Supporting the Arts, Culture, and History of Indigenous Peoples in New York City

Thank you, Chair Rivera for calling this committee hearing to discuss the necessary topic of supporting Indigenous Peoples from Manahatta – present day Manhattan in New York City – to the larger surrounding area known as Lenapehoking - The Land of the Lenape – and all Indigenous communities and sovereign nations throughout the present-day United States. Since our organization’s inception, our founder, Joe Papp, established The Public Theater as a civic institution designed to engage, both on stage and off, with some of the most important ideas and social issues. The Public Theater recognizes that the effects of racism, sexism, and other systemic biases are deeply embedded in our national culture, including in the theater world. We acknowledge the ways in which we have caused harm and wish to speak today about the ways in which we have recommitted our organization to serving as an organization that centers the lived experiences of Indigenous People in our work onstage and off. It seems only right to show our support today as an ally for Indigenous peoples before the committee today. The Public Theater works intentionally to avoid superficial and performative behaviors when engaging with community partners, inclusive of Indigenous communities. As a predominantly white institution, we feel a responsibility to utilize our resources in service to our community and to acknowledge the ways in which we have failed and the ways in which we strive to do better. This testimony includes ways in which The Public Theater not only supports Indigenous peoples' true history but also listens to Indigenous artists and aims to create a socially conscious staff and audience base.

The Public Theater’s seven performance spaces and administrative offices rest upon the homeland of the Lenape people. The Lenape Center is involved in regularly revising The Public Theater’s land acknowledgment which currently reads, “The Public Theater stands in honor of the first people and our ancestors. We acknowledge the land on which The Public and its theaters stand—the original homeland of the Lenape people— and the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory. We honor the generations of stewards, and we pay our respects to the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land.” All playbills handed to audience members contain this acknowledgment. Furthermore, as the Delacorte Theater in Central Park reopens, the Public Theater will ensure proper representation and acknowledgment of Indigenous communities and their histories.

In addition to our Land Acknowledgement, The Public believes it must go further to create a strong, mutually beneficial relationship with Indigenous communities. This work includes centering the voices of Indigenous communities in the work we produce. The Public Theater is committed to cultivating diverse talents and providing resources and networks to support new

generations of storytellers. Our past two seasons have featured productions by Indigenous playwrights: WHERE WE BELONG by Mei Too Ann and MANAHATTA by Mary Kathryn Nagle.

In 2022, we were proud to produce WHERE WE BELONG in partnership with the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company and the Folger Shakespeare Library. In "Where We Belong," Madeline Sayet, a Mohegan playwright, explores her identity and the complexities of belonging in a globalized world. The play delves into her personal journey as a Native American woman studying Shakespeare in England, intertwining her experiences with the historical context of colonialism and the resilience of her ancestors. Sayet's powerful performance and insightful storytelling challenge conventional narratives and invite audiences to reflect on their own sense of belonging.

The Emerging Writers Group is a fellowship at The Public Theater for playwrights and other generative artists at the early stages of their professional careers. Last Fall 2023, The Public Theater produced the play MANAHATTA written by Mary Kathryn Nagle, a playwright and an attorney specializing in tribal sovereignty of Native nations and peoples. It was during law school that Nagle realized she wanted to advocate for Native rights as a playwright as well. During her time in the Emerging Writers Group in 2013, she wrote MANAHATTA. The play takes place in 21st century Oklahoma, as well as both 21st and 17th century Manahatta. The Public Theater is honored to have offered space and born witness to this remarkable indigenous artist and activist. Furthermore, our organization has remained steadfast to the notion of ensuring consistent resources and offering space for creatives with Native backgrounds. Our current class of emerging writers includes Native individuals. Lastly, all playwrights, directors, actors and visiting creatives on seasonal theater productions meet with our Associate Director/Director of Cultural Transformation and other staff members to discuss the social impacts of each production. Each time a new production is brought to The Public Theater, from MANAHATTA to HELL'S KITCHEN, we examine the intended outcomes and potentially unforeseen effects our production may on audiences, cultural workers and our community. Additionally, after each production has its final performance, we hold a debrief session to which all staff members are invited to identify any positive and negative outcomes of the production so those learnings can be applied to future productions.

To properly acknowledge and support Indigenous Peoples' arts, culture, and history, The Public Theater meets with The Lenape Center on a regular basis to listen and learn about their history, meet community members, and assess the genuineness of our land acknowledgment. These conversations have shaped our internal cultural transformation plan which aims to create socially conscious staff members and theater productions. As an anti-oppressive organization, exploitive and repressive behaviors are contrary to who we are and what we aspire to be. The work to provide a conscious, healthy, and respectful work environment can be challenging, but it is something that every employee and board member of The Public Theater takes seriously. The Public Theater Cultural Transformation Plan's measurable goals include: anti-racism training beyond what is required of all New York City employees for staff and board members; all staff

discussions and retreats to examine the intersections of theater productions with social topics; maintaining a Cross-Departmental Indigenous Voices and Land Acknowledgement affinity group that meets regularly; and consistently revisiting our land acknowledgment to ensure its accuracy and to avoid performative behaviors.

The Public Theater thanks the New York City Council for providing space and time for organizations such as The Public Theater to amplify the voices of Indigenous communities throughout our city through today's hearing. We accept that our work, although well-meaning and researched, is not complete and has a long way to go in terms of multigenerational inclusivity and fully addressing colonialist bias. We believe that theater is an essential cultural force, and that art and culture belong to everyone, and we know that our work will never be done in becoming a more just, more inclusive organization. In keeping with our mission and cultural transformation plan, The Public will continue to produce native plays, work with native artists, ensure a fair and living wage to all staff members, actors and creatives, provide ongoing educational sessions for staff and board members, and continue to regularly communicate with The Lenape Center.

We strongly support calls for increased funding for Indigenous artists and programming in conjunction with an overall baseline increase in funding for the arts in New York City. It is through storytelling and art-making that we keep the rich history of this land alive for future generations.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to Kate Madigan, Government Affairs Coordinator, at kmadigan@publictheater.org with any questions or further information about our programs and work. Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.

PAC ■ NYC

PERELMAN PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

December 10, 2024

Testimony by the Perelman Performing Arts Center

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations
Oversight – Supporting the Arts, Culture, and History of Indigenous Peoples in New York City

Good morning, Chair Rivera and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. My name is Katie Hill, I am the Assistant to the Executive Director of the Perelman Performing Arts Center at the World Trade Center, also known as PAC NYC. I appreciate the opportunity to share a few details related to PAC NYC's commitment to working with indigenous artists and communities.

Serving and representing all people who call New York City home is one of the key values of PAC NYC. To help us reach this goal, we created a department of Civic Alliances department to develop partnerships with key organizations who serve different constituencies. One of these partnerships is a foundational alliance with Lenape Center. We work closely with alliance partners throughout the year, providing free tickets and access to our programming, a stage to engage in dialogue with our artists and audiences, and the opportunity to curate performances on our Lobby Stage. Celebrated Indigenous playwright and activist Mary Kathryn Nagle sits on our board, while Native American artists Ty Defoe and Murielle Borst Tarrant are two of our Artistic Advisors.

Our inaugural season included a three-week run in our large theater of BETWEEN TWO KNEES by the inter-tribal sketch comedy troupe the 1491s (the creators of the hit television show RESERVATION DOGS). The show is an irreverent satire spanning 90 years in the life of a fictional Native American family. We intentionally programmed the show for our first season to honor the Lenape land upon which PAC NYC sits and demonstrate our commitment to presenting work by living Native artists. The audience was 30% Indigenous, with many attending for free through our access ticket initiatives.

We held special events to uplift native and indigenous voices throughout the inaugural season including:

- Kishux – a photographic installation conceived by Joe Baker from the Lenape Center
- A pre-show opening night performance by the band Yellow Trees
- Two performances of Good Medicine, an all-Native stand-up comedy show
- A post-show conversation on Native representation in contemporary media with Native artists and changemakers

- A community-curated post-performance panel featuring speakers from multiple Indigenous organizations
- Two pop-up marketplaces in partnership with Relative Arts to showcase Indigenous-owned fashion and design.

On January 8-11th we will run *Tipi Tales From the Stoop*, a solo show by Indigenous artist and performer Murielle Borst-Tarrant. The show is about growing up in Brooklyn – where her family were the only indigenous residents on a Mafia-run block. We plan to work with Native communities once again to bring Indigenous audiences to the show and plan associated programming.

As we move beyond our inaugural year, we look forward to continuing these key partnerships and uplifting Native voices; however, few – if any – dedicated funding sources exist to support programming and partnerships of this nature. If DCLA were to initiate funding opportunities specifically for indigenous programming and civic partnership, then we would be supportive of such an initiative. Cultural organizations are eager to develop work and partnership with indigenous communities, and the Department of Cultural Affairs can make an impact.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing. We hope to see you at PAC NYC soon.

**Testimony of Dylan Yeats Ph.D., Director of Museum Programs and Operations, Prospect Park Alliance
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations
Oversight Hearing: Supporting the Arts, Culture, and History of Indigenous Peoples in New York City
December 12, 2024**

I am Dylan Yeats, Director of Museum Programs and Operations for the Prospect Park Alliance, the non-profit organization that operates Prospect Park in Brooklyn in partnership with the City. In my role, I develop interpretation and programs at Lefferts Historic House Museum. With guidance from descendant community advisors and partners, the museum explores and honors the cultures of resistance and resilience of the Indigenous peoples of Lunaapeewahkiing (Munsee dialect) or Lenapehoking (Unami dialect) whose unceded ancestral lands the house and park rests upon, and the Africans enslaved by the Lefferts family. The vision of the museum is to transform a site of brutality into an incubator for descendant community cultures.

The museum's current focus on Indigenous history and the legacy of enslavement began in 2022 with Prospect Park Alliance's hiring a part-time coordinator to conduct new research into the site alongside a much-needed structural restoration funded by the Brooklyn Delegation of the City Council. In 2023, transformative support from the Mellon Foundation funded a new interpretive plan, which was created in partnership with the Eenda-Lunaapeewahkiing Collective with representatives from four Lunaapeew or Lenape Nations serving on our advisory committee. The new plan includes outdoor and indoor exhibits and public programs, which will be implemented over the next four years through further funding from the Mellon Foundation, State Assembly members Robert Carroll and Brian Cunningham, and the Prospect Hill Foundation. Additionally, just this past weekend, with generous support from City Council Speaker Adrienne E. Adams, the Eenda-Lunaapeewahkiing Collective, and American Indian Community House, the Alliance hosted an Indigenous Culture Fair that provided thousands of visitors with free cultural performances by the Red Blanket Singers, craft workshops, and access to Indigenous artisans from across the continent curated by George and Julianne Stonefish.

Welcoming the Lunaapeew or Lenape to share their cultures in their homelands has a profound effect on the park and our communities. It helps us better connect ourselves to the histories of this land so we can build more sustainable and equitable relationships to it and to each other. However, this work is not easy. Culture-bearers need support, audiences need access, and centuries of war, dispossession, and discrimination cannot be undone overnight. Many museums and other institutions in this city took active part in the desecration of Indigenous cultures. While many are now trying to do right, building trust takes time. The only way to actually do this work is to build genuine and equitable partnerships rooted in shared respect that include tough discussions that can lead to effective actions.

Supporting the arts, cultures, and histories of the original peoples of this land deserves and requires substantial financial support as well as flexibility. Organizations need time to develop reciprocal relationships and shared visions that don't always fit into the typical funding-cycle calendar. Culture-bearers are often extremely over-extended and need compensation and care commensurate with their importance. Skyrocketing transportation, accommodation, and venue costs are also a factor. I am honored and grateful to be able to address this committee on this important topic and I urge you to commit the resources necessary to do right by the histories we have inherited and the peoples to whom we owe so much.

**Testimony by Sharon Myrie, Vice President of Programs & Services
Queens Public Library
New York City Council's Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and
International Intergroup Relations**

Oversight - Supporting the Arts, Culture, and History of Indigenous Peoples in New York City

December 10, 2024

Good morning. My name is Sharon Myrie, and I am the Vice President of Programs and Services at Queens Public Library (QPL). It is a pleasure to be here to speak on how the Library serves as a key resource in discovery and learning about the history, culture, and arts of Indigenous peoples in New York City. Before I begin, Chair Rivera and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this subject and for the incredible work you do to support New York City's public libraries.

Queens Public Library welcomes every individual who visits our branches and our digital platforms, regardless of their circumstance or background. Our branches serve as beacons of knowledge and opportunity, allowing our users to follow their curiosity, dive into any subject matter, and form their own viewpoints. A significant component of fulfilling this mission is preserving and strengthening our extensive collections to aid in anyone's learning journey. We take seriously this responsibility, including as it relates to our offerings focused on the Indigenous peoples of New York City.

The Library has a vast and diverse collection, comprised of books, ebooks, periodicals, newspapers, and more. Our collections include materials that focus on Indigenous peoples – their history and contributions, fiction, social justice, health and wellness, poetry and more – for all ages. Free streaming platforms offered by QPL, like Hoopla and Freegal, offer audiobooks, television shows, documentaries and music created by and/or focused on Native Americans. While these items are available throughout the year, a special spotlight is given during Indigenous Peoples' Day and Native American Heritage Month, along with special programs and curated book lists and displays for adults, teens, and children. This year, the Library's programs included a Native American-focused QPL Baby: Baby & Me storytime at Auburndale Library, A Celebration of Native American Heritage with Alexair Dreams Storytelling at Rochdale Village Library (sponsored by Speaker Adrienne Adams), and a book discussion on Wandering Stars by Tommy Orange at our Fresh Meadows Library.

Vital to QPL's ability to properly provide and promote information on this topic is close collaboration with various cultural institutions, community-based organizations and local groups. In partnership with CUNY Queens College, QPL's Queens Memory Project collects personal histories, photographs and other records of contemporary life in the borough. Since 2016, Queens Memory has been collaborating with Professor Jonathan Thayer and graduate students on the ongoing project, "The Olde Towne of Flushing Burial Ground." Starting initially as grassroots, community activism, the project aims to document and preserve the original Native and African American burial ground that dates back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which was turned into a city park in the 1930s. Including local residents, several of whom are descendants of those buried at the location, this collaborative effort continues to reveal more about the history of the grounds through research and interviews and shares its studies via public presentations, lesson plans, oral history interviews, and genealogical research on the Queens Memory website. In 2019, the burial ground and this research project served as inspiration for a Queens Museum exhibit by Alexandria Smith called "Monuments to an Effigy."

More recently, Queens Memory has been working with Zion Episcopal Church in Douglaston to examine the church's history, in particular its relationship with the local Matinecock nation. With support from the Institute

of Museum & Library Services, Queens Memory is working with the Church to examine and reveal its past relationships with the tribe, especially the relocation in 1931 of their burial grounds to the churchyard. In February, we hosted a four-week community conversation series with Zion at our Douglaston-Little Neck Library, and we are currently coordinating a follow-up series for next year. We look forward to sharing our research about the Matinecock and their experience and relationship with Zion Episcopal Church as our research continues.

QPL's Archives are essential to the ongoing documentation of life in Queens and Long Island, with thousands of photographs, newspapers, books, audio recordings, including interviews conducted by Queens Memory, and more. One highlight is an interview with Chief Little Fox, the Sachem Chief of the Matinecock nation, in which he discusses growing up with Native American traditions, becoming the leader of the tribe, and the preservation of the tribe's traditions and land. Archival content illustrating the lives and memories of the local tribes also includes a collection of photos, postcards and papers. Readily available online are the "Easthampton Inhabitants and its Indian Tribes Papers," a collection of eleven manuscripts on land transactions from the seventeenth century, as well as "The Ralph Solecki Photographs," which showcase artifacts like arrowheads, ceramics and other supplies that provide a glimpse into the past lives of Indigenous peoples.

Additionally, the Library's research databases are valuable for discovery and learning about Indigenous groups. Users looking to learn more about the Lenape or native populations can access Britannica Academic, which provides information not just on the peoples of New York, but also the east coast and entire continent. The database suggests other potential areas of interest for those who want to learn more about the Lenape and critical moments in their history, such as the Walking Purchase, the infamous treaty that forced them off their own lands. It also recommends primary documents, for example, "The Treaty With the Delawares: 1778," and external sites, such as the Official Site of the Delaware Tribe of Indians and a National Public Radio segment on the Lenape.

For individuals who are interested in learning more about their own family histories, QPL has Ancestry Plus. The database provides access and makes it easier for users to search government records to learn more about their ancestors, including records on Black and Indigenous Soldiers who served in the American Revolution, Indian Census rolls dating from 1885 to 1940 and "Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs" from 1824 to 1881. It also provides the ability to engage other users via message boards for helpful recommendations from others doing similar work.

The Library is proud to uphold its legacy of serving as a free and trusted repository of information. While we are proud of the resources we offer that focus on the city's Indigenous peoples, we know there is more we can do. Queens Public Library is dedicated to ensuring all the cultures, races and ethnicities that form this amazing borough and city are recognized in our collections and programs – including the Indigenous peoples who originally lived upon this land. We look forward to continuing to expand this area in our public offerings, giving more opportunities for the public to learn about the people who stood here before us.

Thank you, Chair Rivera, for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Queens Public Library.

*Staten Island Museum testimony by Janice Monger, President & CEO,
to the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup
Relations for Supporting the Arts, Culture, and History of Indigenous Peoples
in New York City.
December 10, 2024*

The Staten Island Museum, founded in 1881 and a NYC Cultural Institutions Group member, maintains collections in natural science, history and art and all three disciplines have materials in the collection that are Native American/Indigenous in origin. The archaeology collection has approximately 3,500 items collected on Staten Island and in the surrounding region. These items can be attributed to the Lenape people and their ancestors. The Staten Island Museum updated a display of Lenape archaeological items, along with a land acknowledgement, in a central location to maximize visibility and forefront the Lenape collection for museum visitors as they enter.

For decades, the Museum's education department has offered the Land of the Lenape lesson for elementary and middle school classes to introduce Lenape culture and local Algonquin lifestyle to NYC students. During this lesson, students learn about the history of the Lenape in the New York City region and see a demonstration of traditional tools. In FY2024, the Museum served 3,500 students from 155 classes for this lesson.

Over the last several years, the Staten Island Museum has made concentrated efforts to develop relationships and build trust with the Federally Recognized Lenape descendant nations— the Stockbridge Munsee Community, the Delaware Nation and the Delaware Tribe of Indians. We have opened lines of communication with their respective Tribal Historic Preservation Offices and endeavor to always involve the communities in projects related to their cultural heritage.

In August 2024, the Museum received an Institute of Museum and Library Services Museums for America grant to update inventory documentation and reanalyze the archaeology collection, with the support of the three nations. All three nations have agreed to consult on this project to reevaluate the status of the items currently in the Museum's care and determine if anything in the collection is considered funerary, sacred or otherwise culturally significant. This project may lead to updated Summaries per NAGPRA regulations.

The Museum has also made strides in pursuing and maintaining compliance with current Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act regulations and guidelines. To that end:

- In October 2023, the Museum published a Notice of Inventory Completion in the Federal Register with the three nations listed as affiliated nations/tribes for the four Lenape ancestors housed in the museum's collections.
- In May 2024, the Museum published a Repatriation Statement to relinquish possession and control of the four ancestors thereby returning control to the descendant nations/tribes.

The Museum maintains a Stewardship Agreement to maintain physical custody as long as the tribes/nations require.

- The Museum is in the process of creating and updating Summaries per NAGPRA regulations in order to report all items at the institution that are Native American and/or Indigenous in origin and provide that information to the appropriate tribes/nations. These will be completed in 2025.

The Staten Island Museum and its staff and board are committed to continuing this important work of stewarding Native American collections in consultation with tribal representatives. We look forward to continuing to deepen these relationships and working in partnership to expand interpretation of their cultural heritage in their ancestral homeland of New York City. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Janice Monger

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Testimony to the NYC Committees on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations Oversight hearing on supporting the Arts, Culture, and History of Indigenous Peoples in New York City.

December 10, 2024

Thank you, Chair Rivera and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to speak about the Whitney Museum of American Art's work with Indigenous art, artists and community-based organizations.

I am Laura Phipps, Associate Curator, and Co-Chair of the Whitney's Indigenous Art, Artists and Audience Working Group. This internal body was convened in 2017 with members of the Museum's staff across departments to think critically and collectively about the place of Indigenous art in the Whitney's collection and program. Indigenous art was a field that the Museum had not historically engaged in our program, and one aim of the group since its inception is to focus how the Whitney, as an institution dedicated to American Art, can address this absence and articulate a way forward. Alongside our work to build the collection and organize exhibitions, the ongoing and evolving aim of the group has been to develop programming; to pursue a variety of forms of outreach to and engagement with Indigenous artists and audiences; to create resources for Museum educators and appropriate terminology for interpretation. I would like to share highlights of our work together with the Committee.

Since its founding, the group has researched works by Indigenous artists in the Whitney's collection, built relationships with artists for programming within the museum, and worked to frame the museum's engagement with contemporary Indigenous artists and communities. Including work by Indigenous artists in the Whitney's permanent collection not only provides material support to artists and their estates but also signals our commitment to care and to broader recognition of the contributions made by Indigenous artists to the art and art history of the United States. Since Whitney's move to its new home downtown, the museum's collection has grown to include over 140 works by 43 Indigenous artists, representing 38 sovereign nations. This represents a more than 20% increase over the past 9 years and is an example of what focused attention and resources can accomplish. However, we cannot simply hold works in our collection; the work of Indigenous artists must be visible and available to audiences. Since 2017 Whitney has presented 20 exhibitions that included works by Indigenous artists, including notably all four of the most recent Whitney Biennials, the Museum's signature exhibition and longest-running survey exhibition of American art, and has presented the first New York museum solo shows for three Indigenous artists at different stages in their careers.

Alongside our exhibition and collection activities, the Whitney, through the Working Group and leadership in the Museum's Education Department, has prioritized growing meaningful partnerships with Indigenous community-based organizations. This has included engaging with visiting scholars with expertise in the field, which has emphasized the diversity of the field and absolute necessity of consulting with Native artists and curators. Since 2017 the Whitney has hosted 13 educational programs and special events focused on Indigenous artists and culture to share this work with the public. One special partnership is with American Indian Community House, or H, which has been a community partner through the Museum's Whitney Education

Community Advisory Network (WECAN) since 2018. These partnerships are sustained, extended relationships that bring educators and artists into an organization for extended programming and collaboration. American Indian Community House, which was founded in 1969 by Native American volunteers as a community-based organization to improve the status of Native Americans and foster intellectual understanding and serves Native Americans residing in New York City, works with the Whitney to increase visibility of American Indian cultures in an urban setting to cultivate awareness, understanding and respect. As part of the partnership, The Whitney has hosted H's community gatherings since 2018 and in March 2025 the Whitney will host their spring social, inviting the public to engage with the work of this important organization

The Indigenous Art, Artists and Audiences Working Group presents its work regularly to the internal Whitney community through presentations and workshops and has advised Museum leadership on policy development and implementation including the adoption of the Museum's first Land Acknowledgement in 2022, the culmination of a multiyear process of conversation, research, and relationship building. The Working Group looks forward to continuing to remain in dialogue with the community to reflect on and improve the Museum's work in line with the institution's values including embracing complexity and encouraging an inclusive idea of America.

Thank you to members of the Committee for holding a hearing on this topic and for exploring ways to supporting the arts and culture of Indigenous people in New York.

For more information contact:

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Indigenous Cultures Surviving in NYC: 'still here'

Coopdanza, Inc/USA

Mission & Vision

Coopdanza, Inc/USA is an interdisciplinary art, media and educational organization that produces dance and multimedia experiences inspired by the wisdom of Indigenous American Cultures. We engage in local and international collaborations to create ARTivism, collaborative performances, community and educational media/dance programs. Since 2019, we have built and strengthened an intergenerational and intercultural Indigenous North/South bridge through festivals, co-productions, and community education.

We envision a resilient planet where every form of life is honored, and Indigenous values of harmony, balance, and justice are deeply respected and integrated into daily practices. We dream of a world where communities thrive sustainably, guided by the wisdom of native cultures. Through the universal languages of dance, music, and poetry combined with digital media and rap storytelling, we foster a profound connection between humanity and nature, celebrating the rhythms and rituals that unite us all.

Programming

Our organization connects and collaborates with Indigenous and non-indigenous communities in the Americas to promote the wellbeing of the planet and prevent further environmental ravages. In this regard, from 2005 in the USA and from 2019 in Colombia, Coopdanza has developed and promoted a cultural and academic curriculum with general audiences from diverse backgrounds. This curriculum has been produced in cooperation with communities, artists, ARTivists, NGO's, environmentalists, activists, scholars, researchers, students, public libraries, public schools, campuses, and community centers all over New York and Pennsylvania.

In the last two decades Coopdanza Inc has produced 15 multidisciplinary artistic performances and organized 3 Indigenous Festivals. All in collaboration with indigenous artists from the Lakota, Mohawk, Mexica, Maya, Taino, Cherokee, Apache/Mescalero, Passamaquoddy, Mapuches, Wayuu, Navajo Diné, Nasa, Misak and Yanacona communities. Coopdanza aims to connect ancestral traditions, rituals and contemporary dance through the use of digital technology, or as we call it 'digital storytelling', as a way to reach new generations. Most of our productions combine multimedia pieces with contemporary and traditional choreographies that explore indigenous urban cultures, their historical influences, and traditional mythology. We mix contemporary atmospheres, images & rhythms with ancestral ethnic sounds as well as indigenous tongues and instruments in our audio tracks. Here are some examples of our work:

2023- 2024- *Mohawk and Native IronWorkers that built the City of New York: An interdisciplinary work for children/youth featuring Indigenous dancers, performers, storytellers and music, to acknowledge Native American culture, issues and history as how Mohawks built our city in the past and in the present and really nobody knows it.*

This work is very important considering that our city and our State represents hundreds of U.S. Tribal Nations as the Mohawks from the Six Nations in Syracuse. Finally NYC is home to the largest population of Urban Indians.



2023- 2024- *Eina La Majayut*: was a bi-national creation and production which premiered in New York in June 2024 with performances across New York City's four boroughs. In *Eina* exalts the cosmivision and resilience of Indigenous Wayuu people. We show how ambition and greed make nature sick and generates suffering in all the beings that inhabit it.



2022: *Indigenous Festival MNI in New York*: MNI is the Lakota word for water, SIE is the Muysca word for water. Continuing with the impact of our original Festival SIE in Bogota in April 2022, funded by a grant of the Public Affairs Section: US Embassy in Bogota/ Department of State, and all cultural official institutions in Colombia. We wanted to replicate an Open Call for artists from Canada and the US, inspired by the concept of 'water'. We had live performances at La Nacional and the Queens Public Library and screenings of the media arts participants (8) at La Nacional and the John Jay College, organized by the Anthropology Department.

2021: In the pandemic we hosted our *Festival Pikajiraa Suma*, featuring over 50 Indigenous artists, scholars and activists from all over the Americas in very successful live and online events. Held in 3 different Boroughs of New York City partnering with 8 presenters facilitated discussions and art projects focusing on how extractive corporate practices affect Indigenous communities



We have presented our work with communities at the Theater for the New City; many Public Schools in Manhattan, Queens Public Libraries in Manhattan; Jackson Heights and Jamaica Central Library; Brooklyn Children Museum and MAYDAY Space in Brooklyn; Queens Museum of Art; Terraza 7; the Secret Theater and Socrates Park in Queens; La Nacional Spanish Benevolent Center; John Jay College for Criminal Justice, CUNY, The Graduate Center, CUNY; ID Studio; BAAD Bronx Arts Academy of Dance and X225 Theatre Arts Production (TAPCo) in the Bronx and at the Arch Street Meeting House (PYM) in Philadelphia.

Next year we want to launch our third Indigenous Festival in New York City: SIE II in June 2025 to create a North/South Multicultural Indigenous Exchange Bridge inspired this year on the 'Defense and Protection of Territory'. An academic, artistic (dance, music, film and media arts) and indigenous educational community exchange program between communities of Colombia, New Zealand, Chile, United States and Canada.

The prophecy says that during the next 500-year period, beginning in 1990, the potential would arise for the Eagle and the Condor to come together, to fly in the same sky, and to create a new level of consciousness for humanity. The prophecy only speaks of the potential, so it's up to humanity to activate this potential and ensure that a new consciousness is allowed to arise.'



COOPDANZA, INC.





Testimony of Brent Stonefish

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations
Oversight Hearing: Supporting the Arts, Culture, and History of Indigenous Peoples in NYC

December 10, 2024

[Opens in the Munsee Dialect of the Lunaapeew/Lenape language)]

And so what I said is: “My name is The One Who Rides A Snake. I am Turtle Clan, I am from Eelūnaapèewii Lahkèewiit, which is a Lunaapeew/Lenape community in Canada.” I said: “I am also from here.” I represent the Eenda-Lunaapeewahkiing Collective.

Eenda-Lunaapeewahkiing means “the Land of the Lenape” in the Munsee dialect of the Lenape language, which was spoken in New York City at contact. Our word for ourselves is Lunaapeew. Most people say “Lenape,” that’s the Unami dialect of the language. “Lunaapeew” is the Munsee dialect of the language, and that’s the language that was spoken here. So when the Unami people call this “Lenapehoking,” we say “Lunaapeewahkiing.”

I’m a language coordinator for our community, and I’ve been spending time with the only Lunaapeew speaker left in the world: Dianne Snake. She’s 83 years old. I also represent the Collective as one of the cofounders. My other cofounder is my cousin here: George Stonefish. George Stonefish has lived his entire life in this city and his mother was actually one of the founding members of American Indian Community House.

We’ve entered into many partnerships in the city, and one of the partnerships is with the American Indian Community House (AICH). I honor the American Indian Community House because they were the first ones who created space for Indigenous people in the city in 1969. Recently, AICH were able to receive support from the Manahatta Fund, and they recognized that they needed to give that money to a Lunaapeew group to create events and create educational opportunities in the city. George, being a former member of the AICH board, was the one they approached, and approached me, so we created the Eenda-Lunaapeewahkiing Collective. For short, we say E.L. Collective.

The reason I’m here is that the E.L. Collective represents two state-recognized Lunaapeew communities; Nanticoke Lenni Lenape Tribal Nation & Ramapo Munsee Lunaape Nationn, two federally recognized communities in Ontario, Canada; Munsee-Delaware Nation; and one non-recognized Lunaapeew community, Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania. We also have many different private citizens from different Lunaapeew/Lenape communities across Turtle Island.



Because our vision is ***to unite and hear the voices of Lunaapeew across Turtle Island***, our whole idea is to create space for many different stories from many different Lunaapeew/Lenape.

I respect and honor the testimony that was given by the Lenape Center, and I appreciate all of the work they've done in this community, but at the same time there's a lot of work to be done. We're hoping that we will be able to share that responsibility going forward.

One of the things that we're trying to do is have a two-day Pow Wow in New York City, but because of stipulations by the Parks Department, you can only have a one day event. You would think they would make an allowance for the original people of this land. Because this city has been built on the bones of my ancestors. We are also looking for space. The American Indian Community House is strained for space as well. If they could give the E.L. Collective space as one of their partners, they would. But they don't have the space themselves. So we are looking for space as well, and we're looking to have a Pow Wow, a two-day Pow Wow that goes against the policy of the Parks Department.

We also have many partnerships, one being the Museum of the City of New York and another being Lefferts Historic House at the Prospect Park Alliance. We've also been talking with Dyckman Farmhouse Museum in Inwood and the Old Stone House in Brooklyn. So we wanted to do this testimony to introduce ourselves to you and show that we are present in the city as well. It's very expensive for me to travel from Canada to do this testimony, but I thought it was important to do that. With a little bit of help from our partners, we were able to do that, and I appreciate the time.

Anushiik (Thank you),
Brent Stonefish
Co-founder
Eenda-Lunaapeewahkiing Collective



NYC Council

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

Testimony - Luke Boyd

12.10.2024

Good afternoon Chair Rivera and members of the Committee. On behalf of Historic Richmond Town (HRT), thank you for hearing my testimony and for your support of the arts, culture, and history of Indigenous Peoples in New York City. I am here today to advocate for the financial support for cultural organizations and indigenous artists, scholars, and presenters who chronicle the life of our city and its people.

Historic Richmond Town is situated in the geographical center of Staten Island, within the ancestral lands of the Lenape people of the Northeast Woodlands. Guided by the City Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs, Historic Richmond Town has refined its mission to expand its programming to embrace the totality of human history on Staten Island. The history and culture of New York's original land stewards, the Lenape, is at the center of this initiative.

To address this gap in the historical narratives presented, the museum has been building a Native Encampment, an outdoor exhibit that illustrates the lifeways of Lenape people. This installation re-creates a homestead of Native peoples in the 17th century that visitors can see and touch. Since 2021, the project has evolved in stages, from the construction of a wigwam or summer house, oyster midden and lean-to structures, to a palisade wall evoking defense fortifications made during Colonial conflict.

With the support of private sector donations and grants, Historic Richmond Town has successfully funded phases 1 and 2 of this project, in which the wigwam was constructed, Native life scholars and educators were consulted to craft programs, lean-to structures and the palisade wall were built. Funders supported the construction of an ADA-compliant pathway to the site, ensuring visitors with disabilities could experience the area, and interpretive signage to explain the meaning of the installation.

Historic Richmond Town is seeking a funder to support the third phase of this installation, which will ensure that the site will accurately reflect Native American History with robust structures that can host visiting groups of scale year-round.

The Native Encampment has been an impactful fulcrum for education and engagement on Staten Island. More than 20,000 visiting students have encountered the encampment, with dialogue and activities facilitated by a museum educator. Hundreds of students that participate in HRT's CASA programs have taken part in Lenape-themed activities and lessons informed by the installation. The encampment has hosted living history displays and programs, in which native life presenters and historians within the

greater indigenous community of New York have shared their knowledge and culture with our audience at annual events.

A deeper impact of the encampment is that within the Native community itself. The scope of this installation, set within the bucolic campus of Historic Richmond Town, is unique among the five boroughs of New York City. Not only is this a place for visitors to learn about Native American culture and heritage, but it is also a place for the Native community to convene. The encampment will serve as a catalyst for community ceremony, connection, and healing. The encampment attests not only to the challenging history of colonization and dispossession of Native Lands, but to the continuous presence of Native people on this continent through the present.

These ongoing efforts have created lasting partnerships with artists and scholars within the Native community. These collaborations have provided work opportunities that not only underscore the value of the work provided, but support the long term preservation of Native culture and history. The touchstone of this work at HRT is the annual Hearth & Harvest Festival, which engages more than 25 indigenous artists, who present a showcase of dance, storytelling, music, historical interpretation, and foodways - enjoyed by hundreds of visitors to the site. The fourth annual festival was hosted this November, and we look forward to making this event larger and more comprehensive, with deepened financial support.

The Council's support for this work and the Indigenous artists is critical. The commitment to understanding and preserving Native history and culture goes beyond a yearly event or commemorative milestone. It is a perpetual practice that is ongoing - and in many ways we have just begun.

HRT is a member of the City's Cultural Institutions Group and is the oldest cultural organization on Staten Island. Historic Richmond Town is dedicated to understanding and chronicling the unfolding human history of Staten Island - and providing experiences that inform, provoke, and delight. Whether that be a tour program, a living historical reenactment, a school field trip, or a walk on our grounds - we remain committed to preserving the past and serving our public in the present.

Thank you once again Chair Rivera and members of the Committee.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

18

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18

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in favor in opposition

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Name: Laurie Cumbo

Address: 31 Chambers St

I represent: NYC Dept of Cultural Affairs

Address: _____

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Name: Laura Perry

Address: 31 Chambers St

I represent: NYC Dept of Cult. Affairs

Address: _____

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Name: George Stork

Address: [Redacted] W 12th Ave

I represent: Language Council

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Address: _____

I represent: Ty DeFoE

Address: _____

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Name: Laura Phipps

Address: _____

I represent: Whitney Museum

Address: _____

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Name: Murielle Boast Tarcont

Address: N.Y.C.

I represent: Safe Harbors NYC

Address: Manhattan

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Name: IKA SANTAMARIA

Address: _____

I represent: Coopdanza

Address: 202 W 107 St New York City

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Luke Boyd

Address: _____

I represent: Historic Richmond Town

Address: 249 Coner St S. I. N. Y. 10306

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Name: Dylan Yeats

Address: _____

I represent: Prospect Park Alliance - ReImagine Lefferts

Address: _____

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Name: Maeve Montalvo

Address: _____

I represent: Museum of the City of NY

Address: _____

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Name: Katie Hill

Address: _____

I represent: Perleman Performing Arts Center

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Angel Lopez

Address: _____

I represent: Museum of the City of NY

Address: _____

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Name: JOE BAKER

Address: _____

I represent: LENAPE CENTER

Address: _____

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Name: Sharon Myrie 11432

Address: 89-11 Merrick Blvd, Jamaica

I represent: Queens Public Library

Address: _____

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Name: JOE WHITNEY

Address: _____

I represent: BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY

Address: 10 GRAND ARMY PLAZA, BK NY

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Name: Jance Menger

Address: 1000 Richmond Terr, Bldg A Staten Island
10301

I represent: Staten Island Museum

Address: _____

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Name: Jason Baumann

Address: _____

I represent: NYPL

Address: _____

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Name: Natalia Mesa Higuera

Address: nmesa@ballethispanico.org

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brent Tonafish

Address: _____

I represent: the Eenda Lunaspeewahking

Address: Collect



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