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Where There's Smoke...

Responses to Civil Grand Jury Recommendations and Findings

III. Neighborhood Cultural Centers

A. Findings

F22. The Cultural Centers are a primary responsibility of the Arts Commission under the Charter.

Agree. The African American Art and Culture Complex (AAACC) believes that the City's Cultural Centers are one of the primary responsibilities of the Arts Commission, and are a critical piece in providing free and low cost access to programming and venues to the neighborhoods they serve. The AAACC is a central hub of the Western Addition Community and has provided a much-needed focus and support for the children and families living there. Additionally, the Center, as prescribed in the City Charter (Section 5.103), has "support[ed] an active interest in the arts and...remain[s] a vital contributor to the cultural love of the City and County". The AAACC recommends that closer oversight is provided by the Board of Supervisors to ensure that the Arts Commission is adequately allocating funds to each Cultural Center.

F23. SFAC has not given support and maintenance of the Cultural Centers the priority the Charter requires.

Partially Agree. While the AAACC recognizes that the SFAC has been extremely underfunded for capital needs, it does not believe the SFAC has adequately prioritized the support and maintenance of the Cultural Centers as indicated in the Charter. Although basic repairs were addressed during the AAACC's 2008 renovation, other major facility needs remain unaddressed. Center Directors have been needing to spend a large amount of time, aggressively focused on facility improvement projects to make sure they happen, when more of their time should be spent in accordance with the mission of the Centers: work within the community, raising funds, promoting the arts and developing high quality programming. The AAACC Executive Director spent around 40% of her time securing almost $3 million in funds for capital improvement, as well in project and facility management during the process.

There are a number of upgrades needed due to the long-term deferred maintenance on the building. Plans are forthcoming for new second floor bathrooms, an industrial sink on the third floor, an electrical upgrade and a new roof. The Center desperately needs new windows and is looking for ways to get this funded.

762 FULTON STREET, SUITE 300
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102
Phone 415.922.2049
Fax 415.922.5130
WWW.AAACC.ORG

F24. SFAC has not addressed the long-term funding, stability and safety needs of the Cultural Centers.

Partially agree. The AAACC believes the SFAC looked to address long-term funding and stability of the Cultural Centers through the implementation of the Cultural Data Project (CDP). The CDP helps to improve financial management; streamlines reporting/application processes, giving a clearer picture of the Center's assets, contributions, and needs; and facilitates better access to grant making resources. This project has also helped Cultural Center leadership highlight major gaps in funding. With those gaps highlighted, the SFAC and Cultural Center leadership are better able to find necessary resources to address losses during the global financial crisis. Over the past few years, SFAC has decreased funding to Cultural Centers while the maintenance costs have been on a continual rise. In terms of safety, the AAACCis still looking to the SFAC to help secure the valuable staff, art, and resources on site. The AAACC hires reliable security staff for events and daily activities, but cannot provide their continuous presence due to financial challenges.

B. Recommendations

R15. SFAC hold public hearings about the Cultural Centers and their short and long-term funding (for programs and facility maintenance), facility, safety needs to develop an action plan to secure the Cultural Centers.

Partially Disagree. Forums for public comment are already in existence for those who would like to comment on any topic related to the Centers and the AAACC does not believe additional opportunities are needed at this time. However, a comprehensive action plan regarding funding, facilities and safety would be appreciated.

Additionally, the Cultural Centers are run by independent 501c3 organizations and it would therefore not be appropriate for the SFAC to hold hearings which could impact them. Community input on the Centers' role, function and effectiveness is needed, though, especially as the Centers receive so much public funding. The receptacle for input is already set up through the required community support board meetings, which should be happening six times per year, and which meetings are taking place at the AAACC.

R16. SFAC enter long-term leases with their Culture Center Operators.

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Partially agree. Long-term leases would understandably help facilitate opportunities for Cultural Centers to receive funding for capital projects, though the AAACC has not yet run into a challenge with funding projects as a result of the current one-year lease policy.

Submitted by Tamika Chenier
Interim Executive Director
African American Art and Culture Complex
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762 FULTON STREET, SUITE 300
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102
Phone 415.922.2049
Fax 415.922.5130
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