



DC COMMISSION ON THE ARTS & HUMANITIES

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT
SUBMITTED BY HERAN SEREKE-BRHAN, PhD
FEBRUARY 28, 2022

* Agency Development*Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access*Improved Grantmaking* Community Engagement*CAH Beyond Grants*

The following is a summary of the agency's activities and operations:

Agency Development: Welcoming New Staff

CAH welcomes our new staff member, Terrell Johnson, Senior Grants Officer, on board.

Terrell Johnson joins the CAH having served as Executive Director of the Illinois Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (IRAEF) and most recently as Manager of Workforce Development for the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (NRAEF), where he was responsible for leading the department in managing Department of Labor re-entry grants geared towards creating holistic pathways from incarceration to employment for young adults in seven states. Dedicated to supporting mission-driven initiatives, Johnson is excited for the opportunity to continue the great work of CAH and support the District's arts and humanities community. Johnson, a Milwaukee native, earned a B.A. in Public Relations from Marquette University and an M.A. in Organizational Psychology from National Louis University.

Annual Performance Oversight Hearing

CAH will have its annual performance oversight hearing before the DC Council Committee of the Whole on Friday, March 4, 2022 at 10:30 am.

Community Engagement

Since January 2022, CAH has resumed its virtual community engagement programming through two of its three tracks: Business of the Arts has presented three sessions on themes of copyright and trademarking (in partnership with the Washington Area Lawyers for the Arts) and organizing popup exhibitions; CAH in the Community has presented a program featuring partners and participants in *Create and Thrive!* arts program for older adults (see below). A total of over 150 participants attended the sessions.

Mayor's Office of Community Affairs (MOCA)

On January 26, 2022 ED Sereke-Brhan and Chief of Staff Scott initiated a preliminary meeting with the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs to explore areas of partnership in programming and outreach. This was followed-up with a second cluster meeting with thirteen agency directors on February 3, 2022 where the ED and Chief of Staff presented an overview of CAH programs and activities and responded to questions. Agencies in the MOCA cluster include the Mayor's Offices on/of: African, African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino, LGBTQ, Returning Citizens, Veterans, and Religious Affairs; Clean City; Women's Policy and Initiatives; Nightlife and Culture; and Volunteerism and Partnerships (ServeDC). The agencies also serve various cultural and linguistic communities in the District to provide access to local government programs and services.

Black History Month Activities

At the invitation of the Black History Celebration Committee, Commissioner Stacie Lee Banks

and ED Sereke-Brhan attended and provided remarks at the annual Black History Celebration Kickoff virtual event on February 1, 2022. Ms. Denise Rolark Barnes, publisher of The Washington Informer introduced keynote speaker Dr. Ben Chavis who presented a historical and contemporary overview entitled ‘Power of the Black Press Then and Now.’ Other invited speakers and presenters included Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, DC Council Chair Phil Mendelson, Deputy Ambassador of the US Delegation of the European Union Michael Curtis, Dr. Frank Smith, Director and Founder of the African American Civil War Museum and a poetry reading by Marvin Bowser.

Since 2014, CAH has annually partnered with the DC Black History Celebration Committee to print, distribute, and cross-promote a calendar of local free events celebrating Black History Month each February. This year’s calendar listed over 50 events and was available online and in print.

On February 19, 2022, CAH and the historic Lincoln Theatre presented “Remembering Black Broadway at the Jewel of U Street.” Briana Thomas, author of *Black Broadway in Washington DC*, was interviewed by writer Brianna Rhodes about her journey documenting important pieces of U Street’s history on the stage of the Lincoln Theatre. The evening also featured performances by musical guest, the Bohemian Caverns Jazz Orchestra. The event comes during the 100th anniversary of Lincoln Theatre’s opening.

Arts Education: Poetry Out Loud and Words on Fire Programs

This year, CAH has expanded the Poetry Out Loud recitation competition supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Poetry Foundation, and state arts agencies, into a two-day festival which includes the annual District finals of the competition, a poetry slam and a written poetry contest for District high school students. CAH will produce an online anthology of students’ works and host a newly developed Words on Fire program on the second day in partnership with ten DC Public and Public Charter Schools and over one thousand participating students.

Create and Thrive!

In FY21, CAH applied for and received a “Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging” grant award from the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in partnership with Aroha Philanthropies. In October 2021, CAH launched *Create and Thrive!* a pilot program to provide professional development opportunities for nine local artists to create arts learning curricula and a new interdisciplinary residency program at several partner senior centers.

The programs and participating teaching artists are as follows: The Gateway to Jazz is the Blues, Kenneth Dickerson and Davey Yarborough; When I Opened the Door of Feelings: A Poetry Workshop, Reggie Cabico; Resonate! Poetry and Voice, Charity Blackwell and Shaina Kuhn; Bring a Thing: Reconnect with Your Memorabilia, Margot Greenlee and Naoko Wowsugi; and Toy Stories: A Series of Storytelling, Poetry and Movement Practices, Joy Jones and Nephelie Andonyadis. On February 23, 2022 CAH hosted a virtual community event featuring these teaching artists and our partner, Arts For the Aging, to share perspectives on program outcomes.

Public Art Exhibition: *Resilience and Uncertainty*

As part of its FY22 Arts Exhibition Grant, CAH has opened a new exhibition at its 200 I Street SE Gallery titled *Resilience and Uncertainty* and curated by Julio Valdez. The exhibition features six contemporary, intergenerational artists from Washington, DC and New York, NY, and how they are experiencing and responding to the turbulent and unsettled period of the past two years. The artists, Felix Angel, Mildor Chevalier, Patricia Encarnacion, Eric Finzi, Dominic Nash and Ezequiel Taveras, each present a fresh approach to their discipline and collectively offer a thought-provoking reminder of the power of art to overcome adversity and celebrate resilience. CAH will host an exhibition opening on Friday, February 25, 2022 and the exhibition will close on April 14, 2022.

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