pennsylvania
COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

PCA Creative Communities
Letter of Interest Coversheet

Lead Applicant Information

Organization: Asian Arts Initiative

Address: 1219 Vine Street

City: Philadephia **Zip Code:** 19107

Municipality: _____ **County:** Philadelphia

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Website: www.asianartsinitiative.org

FEIN: 23-2827657

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Contact Title: Deputy Director

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Organization Type: 501(c)3

☑ **By checking the box, you are indicating acknowledgment of and intention to comply with the local government resolution requirement, if your community is selected to participate in the Creative Communities Pilot Program. (See full application guidelines for more information on this requirement.)**

Letter of Interest (LOI) Submission Instructions: LOI deadline, Friday, June 28, 2019. LOIs must be submitted via email to RA-OAcreativepa@pa.gov.

a. Completed coversheet form with acknowledgment of and intention to comply with the local government resolution requirement, if your community is selected to participate in the Creative Communities Pilot Program.

b. Narrative (3 pages max.)
   - Brief community description.
   - Description of any existing cultural plans and/or experience implementing arts-based development strategies.
   - Description of successful community partnerships.
   - Description of community opportunity or challenge the organization would like to address through this program.

c. 3 Letters of Support (local government, planning, convention and visitors bureau (CVB), business improvment district (BID), chamber of commerce, local arts organization, etc.).

Asian Arts Initiative is pleased to submit this Letter of Interest to seek funding in partnership with the Philadelphia Chinatown Community Development Corporation in support of a new phase of the pilot program Shared Spaces 共享空間. At this critical moment in the Shared Spaces 共享空間 Program, we seek funding to move from the pilot phase to a more permanent program serving the cultural community, and expanding to the new Crane Community Center.

Asian Arts Initiative is a multi-disciplinary and community-based arts center in Philadelphia that advances racial equity and understanding, activating artists, youth, and their communities through creative practice and dialogue grounded in the diverse Asian American experience. The organization was founded in 1993 as a response to community concerns about growing racial tension between African American and Asian American communities. Located in Philadelphia's burgeoning Chinatown North/Callowhill neighborhood, Asian Arts Initiative is a multidisciplinary arts center. Through exhibitions, performances, and community projects, we provide an inclusive gathering place for conversation and exchange of ideas. Our community-based arts initiatives seek out and cultivate innovative models for artists to engage with local communities, with a particular emphasis on working in partnership with our immediate neighborhood.

The Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) was founded in 1966 by Cecilia Moy Yep, a single mother determined to save her home from being demolished from the Vine Street Expressway- a city project threatening to cleave the Chinatown neighborhood with the creation of a major highway. Under Yep's leadership, PCDC was successfully able to negotiate a scaled-down Expressway. PCDC has since grown to serve the community in not only civic engagement and neighborhood planning, but also as a trusted provider of bilingual English-Chinese resources for small businesses, families, seniors, and youth, assisting over 2,000 individuals annually.

Brief Community Description:

Chinatown--Chinatown was established in 1870 as a refuge for the Chinese immigrant community in Philadelphia. Today, Philadelphia's Chinese immigrant community includes more than 37,000 residents, and that number continues to grow. The Chinatown Commercial Corridor is the hub of this immigrant community. Thirty percent (30%) of Chinatown's population is foreign-born. Chinatown is financially stratified, with 44% of households earning less than $10,000 per year (2015 PCDC Housing Survey). At the same time, Chinatown is at risk of gentrification. Across the city, fifty-six percent (56%) of the city's Chinese residents overall are low-income, and one in three live in poverty.

Chinatown North/Callowhill--Chinatown North/Callowhill, is home to an ethnically, socioeconomically, and educationally diverse community of people, despite its reputation as an underdeveloped industrial area. Cut off from the commercial core of Chinatown and Center City when the Vine Street Expressway was built in the 1980s, the neighborhood also celebrates a vibrant history of community organizing, having defeated proposals for a federal prison, baseball stadium, and casino. After reaching its lowest population in a century in 2006, Philadelphia has enjoyed a decade of steady growth. This growth has caused rapid change in neighborhoods

throughout Philadelphia, including Chinatown North/Callowhill. From 2010-2014, the neighborhood saw a 41% population increase, with a 463% growth of 18-24 year olds, and a 22% growth in the Asian population. With this growth came rising property values and rental rates, and dramatic increases in new construction in 2013 and 2014. More recently, the neighborhood has seen many new large scale renovations of industrial properties. The neighborhood is characterized by: a growing arts district of fine art galleries and concert venues, an influx of new housing and loft developments, a creative "Spring Arts" community in the Northeast, an expansion of Chinatown businesses across the Vine Street Expressway, and the soon-to-open Rail Park, transforming an abandoned rail line into a city park. For some, new amenities represent the threat of displacement of others.

Existing Cultural Plans/Experience implementing Arts Based Development Strategies

Asian Arts Initiative Cultural Plan:

In 2016 Asian Arts Initiative launched **People:Power:Place**, a cultural planning process that centered the role of arts and culture in shaping the Chinatown North/Callowhill neighborhood. Using a participatory process, People:Power:Place convened a working group of diverse neighborhood stakeholders and their constituencies to weigh in on community priorities. The resulting plan offers suggestions to build a sense of community among diverse neighbors, and advocates for a vision that is inclusive of both "old" and "new." While cultural plans often only focus on the arts and culture sector, People:Power:Place looks to use culture as a lens for equitable development and looks at issues beyond the arts and culture field.

Asian Art Initiative arts based development examples:

Social Practice Lab: Asian Arts Initiative's **Social Practice Lab** artist-residency series commissions and supports the work of creative individuals and organizations in the highly diverse, rapidly changing neighborhood of Chinatown North in Philadelphia. The goal of Social Practice Lab is to allow for experimentation with processes that combine artistic excellence and innovation with building relationships and effecting positive change within the community. We are especially interested in creative projects that address the issue of equity and access to power within Chinatown North and that foster opportunities for access and equitable development. In 2014 SPL resident Rick Lowe, recognized for his work at the intersection of art, social action and community development, created ***CONSUMPTION: A project on Pearl Street***. Through collaboration with men in recovery from homelessness and addiction (the Overcomers) of Sunday Breakfast Rescue Mission(a homeless services organization). CONSUMPTION's work was housed in a storefront space along the 1200 block of Pearl Street, inside of Asian Arts Initiative's multi-tenant arts facility. The work completed through the project activated the space and communities surrounding the Pearl Street alley using the storefront as a central hub for social and economic exchange.

PCDC Neighborhood Plan: PCDC's goal is to build a platform for the immigrant community through artistic expression, cultural place-based creative initiatives, and storytelling. PCDC seeks to promote cultural cultural place-based creative initiatives, by implementing the recommendations of the 2017 Chinatown Neighborhood Plan, which engaged 1,300 stakeholders. Since 2017, PCDC's "Go! Go! Go! Chinatown" and "Chinatown Stories" community art initiatives have included immigrant artist-led classes, workshops, youth-led literary publications, and student

exhibitions to empower low-income immigrant residents to help define the identity of their community. PCDC has provide intergenerational arts instruction to first-generation, low-income immigrant youth, adults, and seniors. Calligraphy, painting, and history classes have enabled participants to learn about the Chinese immigrant experience and create to visual art that tells their stories. Opening this year, PCDC's new Chinatown Community Center at Crane will serve as a cultural center, offering cultural enrichment and language classes, community art classes, and events. Finally, PCDC is planning numerous cultural events to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Chinatown's founding in 2020.

Description of successful community partnerships:

Partnership with Asian Arts Initiative and Sunday Breakfast Rescue Mission:
Starting in February 2015, artist-in-residence Meei Ling Ng began working with men and women at the Sunday Breakfast Rescue Mission and volunteers from the Chinatown North neighborhood to set up a vertical farm and art installation in the mission's parking lot along Vine Street. Since it launched, the farm has become a venue for food education, food production and community building. Meei Ling has taught participants–primary members of the Overcomers program at Sunday Breakfast–advanced techniques for urban, high production growing so that participants gained knowledge and skills to start up their own urban agriculture operation. The farm has provided approximately one ton of fresh vegetables, fruits, herbs and flowers that have been used in the kitchen at Sunday Breakfast, distributed to Chinatown North community members, or sold at local farmers markets.

Community challenge we would like to address:

Through conversations with our community we identified outcomes for our neighborhood based on key challenges facing our community.

- **Increase, participation, engagement and advocacy through cultural activities**
  By ensuring that there is a range of cultural activities and events that appeal to and increase the participation of multiple audiences, Chinatown and Chinatown North/Callowhill can encourage meaningful interactions between different groups, including children, elders, non-English speaking members, and those who may currently be unhoused.
- **Prevent economic, residential, and cultural displacement and gentrification.**
  Chinatown and Chinatown North/Callowhill needs to remain a diverse community that welcomes and provides opportunities for existing artists, low-income residents, immigrants, and other working class members. Removing barriers that cultural groups face when looking for access to space ensures that their presence will remain a vital part of this community.
- **Create a shared identity and sense of solidarity across diverse stakeholders.**
  Chinatown and Chinatown North/Callowhill must honor and highlight the history of the neighborhood, its stories and people, in order to preserve and respect the unique character and identity of the area. Shared Spaces works to support the continuity of these history, stories and cultural practices and create platforms for visibility in sharing with wider and more diverse communities

MARY ISAACSON, MEMBER
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June 27, 2019

Creative Communities Selection Panel
Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
216 Finance Building
Commonwealth and North Streets
Harrisburg, PA 17120

To Whom It May Concern:

As you and your staff begin consideration of 2019 funding through the Creative Communities Initiative of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, I urge you to give strong consideration to the application for the Shared Spaces 共享空間 program of the Asian Arts Initiative in partnership with Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation.

It is imperative that this program is sustained so that traditional immigrant arts and cultural practices remain a part of the neighborhood's foundation. Asian Arts Initiative has been a cornerstone of the neighborhood's diverse community for over a decade, providing quality community arts programming as well as connecting cultural expression and social change in a part of Philadelphia that is rapidly transforming.

I have read testimony from members of the Shared Spaces program describing the joy they feel when teaching and sharing practices that are a part of their cultural heritage in a group setting. At Shared Spaces, my constituents have the opportunity to connect - across experience and skill levels, age, race, and class backgrounds – in pursuit of learning something they are passionate about. It is my desire that this community program continue forward to the next generation of teachers and students in honor of their past, present, and future.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information regarding their submission.

Thank you for your consideration regarding my request.

Sincerely,

Mary Isaacson

Mary Isaacson
Member, 175th District

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

June 22, 2019

Creative Communities Selection Panel
Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
216 Finance Building
Commonwealth and North Streets
Harrisburg, PA
17120

RE: The Impact of Shared Spaces on Cultural Development

Dear Selection Panel:

In May of this year, I had the pleasure of formally joining the Shared Spaces program through the Asian Arts Initiative. This program has provided me with the opportunity to teach martial arts classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The style of this martial art is called Ving Tsun (Wing Chun) Kung Fu. As a Chinese American with Hakka roots, I am thrilled to have this opportunity to share my cultural heritage. Let me tell you a little about how I got involved with Shared Spaces and why it is essential to my contribution to the Philadelphia community.

I began studying Ving Tsun Kung Fu in October 2008 at 117 N 10th Street, Philadelphia, PA, which is in the heart of Philadelphia Chinatown. We have about 25 to 30 active students. Beside developing the physical elements of Kung Fu, we also study Chinese culture and philosophy. Our teacher gives us guidance to develop physically, philosophically, and emotionally, while the students help and motivate each other to improve our studies. Through this process, we learn how to treat people with respect and kindness. The spirit and discipline that we receive from Ving Tsun Kung Fu has helped us to face all the obstacles in life, which has made for a very rewarding journey.

Unfortunately, in April 2019, the school's landlord raised our rent by almost 50%. The school does not generate enough revenue to pay the rent and upkeep expenses. As a result, we needed to close the school. At the same time, my teacher is at retirement age. I have made the commitment to bringing this martial arts legacy to the next generation of students, and I have only been able to do this with the assistance of Shared Spaces.

The Shared Spaces program has provided a beautiful space for me to teach new students. The program provides me with funds to cover expenses, which allows me to charge students an affordable tuition. Without the shared spaces program, I would not be able to carry on this Kung Fu legacy, and, as a community, we would lose this knowledge. My goal is to use Ving Tsun Kung Fu as a vehicle to bring a deeper understanding of Chinese philosophy to the community. This is why Shared Spaces is so important to me, my students, and to the legacy of the many teachers who came before me.

I hope this letter helps you to understand the positive impact Shared Spaces has made to myself, my students, and my Kung Fu lineage. On behalf of all of us, I am eternally grateful for their support.

Yours Truly,

Sifu Eddie Wong
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CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
CITY COUNCIL

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June 27, 2019

Creative Communities Selection Panel
Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
216 Finance Building
Commonwealth and North Streets
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Selection Panel:

I am writing to express my support for the Shared Spaces 共享空間 program of the Asian Arts Initiative and their partnership with PCDC to sustain this program with funds from through the Creative Communities initiative of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

Since moving into the Chinatown North/Callowhill neighborhood 10 years ago, Asian Arts Initiative has firmly established itself as a vital community anchor to serve our diverse population. In acting as a connector between various constituencies in the neighborhood, they have provided quality community arts programming to the residents of this rapidly changing area.

As I understand the focus of the Creative Communities funding, I believe Shared Spaces 共享空間 exemplifies all these values. In its pilot year, this innovative program has become a vital tool necessary for keeping arts, culture, and especially the traditional immigrant arts and cultural practices of our near neighbors as part of our neighborhood cultural fabric.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this application and I am hopeful the funding will result.

SIncerely,

Mark Squilla