pennsylvania
COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

PCA Creative Communities
Letter of Interest Coversheet

Lead Applicant Information

Organization: Fleisher Art Memorial

Address: 719 Catharine Street

City: Philadelphia **Zip Code:** 19147

Municipality: Philadelphia **County:** Philadelphia

Phone: 215-922-3456

Website: www.fleisher.org

FEIN: 23-2249360

Contact Name: Jamie Hughes

Contact Title: Development Director

Contact Phone: 215-922-3456 ext. 350

Contact Email: jhughes@fleisher.org

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.).

Creative Communities Initiative
Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
216 Finance Building, Commonwealth & North Streets
Harrisburg, PA 17120

June 28, 2019

Dear Members of the Review Panel:

Fleisher Art Memorial is pleased to submit a letter of interest for the Creative Communities Initiative to support *Common Space*, a neighborhood-based program designed to help community members find and keep a sense of place in a culturally diverse and rapidly changing South Philadelphia. Together with community partners, including Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition, Puentes de Salud, Laos in the House, and Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia, as well as many others, we will use art and creativity to help immigrant and refugee families share their stories and traditions, while highlighting the important role they play in the cultural and economic life of our community. In a time of increasing gentrification and tensions over the use of South Philadelphia's limited public space, Fleisher will create a place where inclusive, community-driven projects are made and shared.

Fleisher is the oldest community school of art in the United States, established in 1898 as a place where anyone, regardless of economic means, background, or artistic experience can make and learn about art. Our founder picked the location of our campus in South Philadelphia because the area was home to many immigrant families and he knew that access to art was a key contributor to quality of life. The descendants of the Italian, Irish, Polish, and German families from the early 20th century are today joined by newly arrived families from Mexico, Cambodia, Bhutan, China, Guatemala, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Hands-on art-making is a proven way to improve health and happiness, and Fleisher's work is driven by three core values:

- The Artist in Us All — Within every individual are the ingredients for original artistic expression.
- Art is a Pathway to Fulfillment — An individual's ability to use art is a vital means for emotional and intellectual exploration and growth.
- Art Enriches the Community — By nurturing each individual's creative potential, we aim to provide social, cultural, and economic benefits to the community as a whole.

Community Description

South Philadelphia is a diverse and rapidly changing area that has historically been the arrival point for many immigrant and refugee families to Philadelphia. According to census data, the Latino and Asian populations in this area have increased by 317% and 277% during the last two decades. Though rich in diversity, South Philadelphia has also faced conflict and tension as people work to find and keep a sense of place in a changing environment when many families lack sufficient resources. Fleisher is the largest visual arts organization in South Philadelphia, and we believe that art helps build bridges among community members. The majority of arts institutions and educational resources are concentrated on affluent areas in the Center City neighborhoods of Philadelphia, and cultural programming does not truly capture and reflect the diversity of the area's residents.

Fleisher has been at our location for more than 100 years, just one block from the historic 9th Street Market, the oldest continuously operating outdoor market in the United States, spanning 20 city blocks. A stroll through the market and surrounding area illustrates South Philadelphia's changing demographics, with family businesses that have been in existence for generations joined by stores owned by Asian and Latino immigrants. Throughout the area's history, there have been tensions between different groups of people, yet there is also a shared interest in keeping South Philadelphia a vibrant, compelling place for residents and visitors to engage in. We believe that through our strong partnerships and the existing assets of our neighborhood, there are unique opportunities for *Common Space* to explore how artist-led projects can play a role in the area's growth.

Existing Cultural Plans & Arts-Based Development Strategies

South Philadelphia does not have an existing cultural plan, and we believe that *Common Space* will be a catalyst to inform and influence how art and creativity play a role in the economic decisions of our community. Fleisher has extensive experience in arts-based development strategies that strengthen quality of life in our surrounding communities. We created a dynamic community engagement plan during a five-year research project funded by The Wallace Foundation, which has been looked to as a national model and featured in 2015 case study *Staying Relevant in a Changing Neighborhood: How Fleisher Art Memorial is Adapting to Shifting Community Demographics*. The goal was to develop strategies to better engage members of our surrounding South Philadelphia neighborhoods, and our research included surveys of current and prospective students, interviews with local leaders, and focus groups with community residents. Findings show a lack of resources in South Philadelphia for immigrant and refugee community members to make and share artistic projects of their own design.

There have been interesting development projects and creative efforts happening in South Philadelphia, but they are often siloed and not united by a shared vision of the role of art in our community, adding to already existing tensions. There is also a decreasing availability of public spaces in which community members can engage in creative art-making and share their cultural traditions with a broader audience. There are real and perceived institutional barriers to access, and through *Common Space,* Fleisher will open our doors wider to engage community members who are underrepresented in Philadelphia's arts and culture landscape. This funding opportunity presents a compelling way for Fleisher and our partners to connect with local business owners, nearby civic associations, and community organizations in elevating the inherent creativity of South Philadelphia and establish a new space for community members to connect and share.

Community Partnerships

Fleisher has a strong track record of community partnerships that inform our work. We recently completed two major community projects with organizational partners Women Organized Against Rape and VietLead that showcase what's possible when institutions remove barriers to space and resources for community members to develop their own artistic projects:

- With VietLead, a creative community garden was established at Furness High School created by young people in collaboration with elder urban farmers in their community. The goal of the project was to use gardening, cooking, and art-making to reclaim resilient practices. During the process, lead paint was discovered in the school and the project expanded to use art and creativity to raise awareness of contamination in local schools and advocate for more healthy spaces in our community.
- With Women Organized Against Rape, a group of Latina women from South Philadelphia formed an artist collective and created a large-scale curtain using 60,000 recycled soda tabs as a platform to tell their stories. For them this piece holds great power and is an opportunity to honor themselves and those who are no longer present. The group has discussed using the dynamic piece as a platform for activism.

One of our advisors for the project was leading community engagement expert Roberto Bedoya who helped us see our work as a strategy for belonging and a way to dismantle institutional barriers to artistic resources. These pilot projects made a big impact on the individuals we engaged, yet Fleisher sees a great opportunity to take our work to the next level and engage the

broader South Philadelphia community during a challenging time of increasing gentrification, changing demographics, and fewer public spaces where community members can express their cultural heritage.

The lessons we learned in our past projects will inform our strategies in the Creative Communities Initiative. We propose working with established partners to create a series of 12 events over the course of the year, with programming for each driven by community members that reflect the diverse immigrant and refugee residents of South Philadelphia. Projects will connect Fleisher's artistic resources and expertise to community partners, and we will use our historic Sanctuary space to present programming to a larger audience. Through this effort, we will learn from each other and share the diverse, creative voices that make our neighborhoods vibrant places to live, visit, work, and play. Proposed partners for *Common Space*, in addition to other organizations in South Philadelphia, include:

- Laos in the House: *Bringing together Lao and Laotian Americans in continuing their cultural legacy through storytelling and the arts. The trauma of war isn't easy to talk about, but in hiding it, that history becomes forgotten, misunderstood. For future generations, this turns into questions about their identities, not knowing what to ask and whom to seek those answers from. We believe the arts is that link to initiating dialogue.*
- Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition (SEAMAAC): *One of the oldest and largest refugee-founded agencies in the region, serving constituencies from as many as 18 distinct linguistic communities. SEAMAAC acknowledges the challenges immigrants and refugees have faced in their pursuit of freedom from war, tyranny, and oppression and our work and mission seek to recapture the resilient spirit and strengths of immigrants and refugees to adapt, survive, and flourish.*
- Puentes de Salud (Bridges of Health): *Promotes the health and wellness of Philadelphia's rapidly growing Latinx immigrant population through high-quality health care, innovative educational programs, and community building. We believe that community health, wellness, and empowerment result from a collaborative, multidisciplinary effort to address the conditions in which we grow, learn, live, work, and age.*
- Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia*: Improve the quality of life of Cambodian-Americans in Greater Philadelphia through direct service, advocacy and cultural education. We specialize in providing innovative and unique bilingual programs and services to meet the combined social, economic, health and educational needs of Cambodians in Philadelphia, many of whom are survivors of the Cambodian genocide or descendants of survivors.*

Community Opportunity & Challenge

With our partners, Fleisher has the opportunity to cultivate the inherent creativity that exists in South Philadelphia's diverse communities, celebrating the rich cultural diversity and traditions of among immigrant and refugee families. With the area's history as the arrival point for many immigrant families and the demographic changes projected for the next decade, there is a compelling opportunity for Fleisher and our partners to engage community members in enriching artistic experiences. We have existing partnerships, past experiences, and extensive community connections that will help Fleisher realize the goals of the Creative Communities Initiative.

Thank you for your consideration of our letter of interest. Please contact me with any questions at 215-922-3456 ext. 317 or egrimaldi@fleisher.org, or Jamie Hughes, Development Director, at 215-922-3456 ext. 350 or jhughes@fleisher.org.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Grimaldi
Executive Director

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
CITY COUNCIL

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June 28, 2019

Creative Communities Initiative
Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
216 Finance Building, Commonwealth & North Streets
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Members of the Review Panel:

I am writing to support Fleisher Art Memorial's application to the Creative Communities Initiative of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Fleisher is recognized as the nation's first community school of the arts. For 121 years, Fleisher has engaged children and adults of all backgrounds in enriching artistic experiences that help them find their creative voice.

Fleisher is the largest visual arts organization of its size and scope in South Philadelphia. More than 20,000 people participate in Fleisher's arts education programs each year, including its affordable classes, contemporary exhibitions, and award-winning community-based programs. I serve on Fleisher's board of directors, and have seen firsthand their commitment to partnering with organizations in South Philadelphia to create equitable access to the arts for community members diverse in age, background, and experience.

Through their proposed program, Fleisher will help to strengthen the cultural, educational, and economic vitality of South Philadelphia. Their partnerships with organizations like Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia, Puentes de Salud, Laos in the House, and Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition, will showcase the rich cultural traditions of immigrant and refugee community members.

I am pleased to offer my support of this project, and urge the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts to strongly consider Fleisher Art Memorial's letter of interest.

Sincerely,

Mark Squilla

Mark Squilla

SEAMAAC, Inc.

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Creative Communities Initiative
Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
216 Finance Building, Commonwealth & North Streets
Harrisburg, PA 17120

June 28, 2019

Dear Members of the Review Panel:

Please accept this letter of support for Fleisher Art Memorial's letter of interest to the Creative Communities Initiative. We look forward to the opportunity to partner with Fleisher to launch a new program that is driven by community members and shares the rich cultural traditions of South Philadelphia. This project will advance the goals of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts by strengthening our community, supporting authentic partnerships, and promoting South Philadelphia as a place to experience art and creativity.

SEAMAAC's mission is "to support and serve immigrants and refugees and other politically, socially and economically marginalized communities, as they seek to advance the condition of their lives in the United States". Our organization has been incorporating arts and culture into the fabric of all that we do and in a more intentional way recently with our work in Mifflin Square Park and on the South 7th Street commercial corridor, utilizing food and cultural programming and entrepreneurship as an anchor.

We have worked well with Fleisher over the years through the Color Wheel program and events and we look forward to further collaboration going forward. Our joint efforts will help us to bring a very diverse South Philadelphia community together and highlight the great cultures and local ethnic entrepreneurs and economy.

I am pleased to offer my support of Fleisher Art Memorial's letter of interest. Please contact me if you would like any additional information.

Sincerely,

Andy Toy
Community Development & Development Director
267-978-7355
atoy@seamaac.org

PUENTES DE SALUD

Creative Communities Initiative
Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
216 Finance Building, Commonwealth & North Streets
Harrisburg, PA 17120

June 28, 2019

Dear Members of the Review Panel:

Please accept this letter of support for Fleisher Art Memorial's letter of interest to the Creative Communities Initiative. Fleisher collaborates with Puentes de Salud, a nonprofit organization that promotes the health and wellness of Philadelphia's rapidly growing Latino immigrant population through health care, education, and community building initiatives. There is great potential for this funding to broaden access to the arts in South Philadelphia to help families create and keep a sense of place in this rapidly changing area.

For five years now, I have worked with Fleisher staff to provide access to arts education for our community. We are in our third year of working with Fleisher to bring arts programming to our after-school and summer programs, which serve approximately 75 students ages 7-12. It has been a pleasure collaborating with Fleisher and with their teaching artists to develop projects that connect with our students on topics such as migration, superheroes, and community change. Their staff is skilled at supporting these partnerships and works with dedicated awareness of and sensitivity to the diverse sets of experiences and the linguistic and personal backgrounds of our students and families.

We are also in our third year of collaborating with Fleisher in support of the annual Día de los Muertos celebration. This is a deeply meaningful tradition to our families and one rooted in many of their home communities in Mexico. Fleisher convenes a dedicated group of artists, educators, organizers, and community members to plan for and co-create this celebration, which spans multiple days and events. This is an unparalleled opportunity for our children and family members to take an active part in the preparation for, celebration of, and education about this set of traditions. Our parents have created ceremonial displays in our local public school partner and have taken leadership roles in organizing our community to participate in the parade and principal celebration. Each year, this celebration grows in size, in scope, and in nuance and responds to our community's changing needs and desires. We are grateful for these various points of collaboration to work hand in hand to support our community's own development.

With this letter of support, I ask you to strongly consider Fleisher Art Memorial's letter of interest to support creative communities in South Philadelphia.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Wolkoff
Director of Education
Puentes de Salud
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