

Cultural Centers

Report of the 1999-2000 San Francisco Civil Grand Jury

SUMMARY

The Civil Grand Jury (CGJ) investigated the operation of the four cultural centers maintained and operated by the San Francisco Art Commission. We find that in each case the staff is highly motivated, well-educated and trained for its particular position. Above all, the staffs are dedicated to the groups they serve.

While we have praise for the staffs and the work they are doing, we also find that in every center there are serious problems in the facilities themselves which, if not rectified, could lead to serious and avoidable consequences including the possibility of loss of life in the event of a major earthquake.

BACKGROUND

The four city-owned cultural centers are operated by nonprofit arts organizations. All of the centers offer a wide range of classes, many of which are targeted at youth or senior citizens. While all people, regardless of race or ethnic background, are welcome in all centers, some centers are primarily devoted to a specific ethnic community. For instance the Mission Cultural Center community is primarily devoted to Latino-Hispanic culture. The Bayview Opera House/Ruth Williams Memorial Theater serves the neighborhood residents in Bayview-Hunter's Point, a large African-American community. The Center for African and African-American Art and Culture seeks to support, enhance, and promote African and African-American art and culture, providing space for ongoing programs of resident organizations and individual arts. All of the centers serve all the citizens of San Francisco as cultural magnets and resources.

METHODOLOGY

The CGJ visited the following four Art Commission program sites and examined the programs offered at each of these sites:

South of Market Cultural Center;
Mission Cultural Center;
Bayview Opera House;
African and African-American Arts & Culture.

The CGJ also studied the 1999 financial review of the arts programs, which were prepared by the Office of the Controller, City of San Francisco, and financial reports made by the cultural centers to the Art Commission.

We found that each of the four cultural centers has four regular sources of funds. They are:

Funds from the City and County of San Francisco;
Revenues from services, classes and rentals;
Funds from private contributions and grants; and
Monies from bond issues (when passed by the voters).

RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION

The CGJ finds that each cultural center offers a rich variety of programs and activities to the community. During the visits, the CGJ examined the physical aspects of each center with a view of the need to bring each facility up to the standards and requirements of the

California State Health and Safety Code and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In each case, the CGJ found that the cultural centers are kept immaculately clean and that they are well-run by experienced and committed staffs.

Bayview Opera House

The Bayview Opera House has an extensive photography program backed up by its own photography lab. It also provides a special program for seniors as well as one for youths, ages 8 to 16.

The Bayview Opera House is not earthquake-proof. The projection room and the offices are on the upper floor which, in the absence of an elevator, are inaccessible to the disabled. For example, a projectionist who may be well trained and experienced could not be hired because the facilities are inaccessible to wheelchairs. While the bathrooms on the main floor have safety bars, they are too narrow for entry for a wheel chair. There is only one entrance for the disabled, which is insufficient during an emergency. The photography lab on the lower floor is also not accessible to the disabled.

2. Mission Cultural Center

Exhibits like the Dia de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead) which the CGJ visited are shown at least once a month. These exhibits have great value for the many school children who visit the Mission Cultural Center. The Center offers 45 classes each week. These are classes in dance, music, art and theater. Many of the classes are free. Mission Gráfica, an income-producing program, holds classes and does screen printing and posters for many community and non-profit groups. A complete series of classes is available for youth from small children to teenagers.

The Mission Cultural Center is earthquake retrofitted for only the first two of its four stories. Even more urgent, however, is the inadequate ventilation system for the fourth floor, which is used for graphic arts. The staff expressed concerns that the fumes generated by the solvents used in the graphic arts are toxic and harmful, especially to the young students enrolled in these classes.

Center for African and African-American Art and Culture

This cultural center runs a series of music, drama and film presentations in the Buriel Clay Theater. At the same time a series of art shows are presented in the Sargent Johnson Gallery. The center will have expanded facilities to serve the community when construction and renovation are completed, which is expected to be in the 1999-2000 period.

This center is located in the old Acme Brewing Co. building. We were advised that although the building appears sturdy, the upper floors require earthquake retrofitting. The elevator is a relic that also needs to be replaced. The next scheduled and major renovation is the removal of a concrete ramp which will add a great deal of space on the first two floors. We were advised that the money for this project has been raised.

South of Market Cultural Center (SOMARTS)

SOMARTS has thirty or more art shows each year in its large gallery. The shows run the entire spectrum of themes from great women artists to Asian Pacific art. The theater runs one or two shows every month. The center's technical services section works with festivals and parades all over the City. Productions have included the Shakespeare Festival, Chinese New Year celebrations, the Cherry Blossom Festival and Cinco de

Mayo. The center also houses offices of many community groups. The CGJ was advised that additional earthquake retrofitting is needed for the facility (see Attachment 1).

The management of SOMARTS is made up of both experienced technicians and administrators. We found this center to be a veritable beehive of activity. While some of the crew were still striking the set from the most recent theater piece about Halloween, other crew members were already preparing the next show.

The main entrance of SOMARTS cannot accommodate disabled patrons and visitors. There is no ramp for those in wheelchairs. The center is also in need of two elevators or lifts in order to reach the mezzanine where the offices and facilities are located. The staff advised the CGJ that the walls are made of corrugated sheet metal and there is no soundproofing. The noise emanating from the building is in excess of the limits set down by the California State Health and Safety Code and ADA requirements. We were advised that an alternate solution for the noise issue would be to obtain a legislative exemption from the Board of Supervisors since there are no residences in the vicinity.

Funding

Formerly, the cultural centers, which occupy City-owned buildings, were partially funded through CETA (the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act). When those funds were depleted, funding then came from private and public sources. San Francisco Business and Tax Regulations Code Section 515.01 provides financing to the cultural centers by line item support from the Hotel Tax. One of the conditions of this Section was that each cultural center have a Community Support Board which would hold no less than six meetings per year. The purpose of the Boards is to facilitate community outreach, funding and advocacy. The CGJ was advised that only one of the cultural centers has a formal, but limited, Community Support Board. The Community Support Board of the other cultural centers hold meetings, but have a membership which fluctuates at each meeting and, therefore, lacks stability.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion 1

A report prepared by the Cervantes Design Associates in association with the Saylor Consulting Group reflects that, despite the fact that the San Francisco Art Commission commissioned a capital improvements report in 1993, the recommended retrofitting has not been accomplished (see Attachment 1). The Bayview Opera House is in need of earthquake retrofitting. The top two floors of the Mission Cultural Center are in need of earthquake retrofitting. The Center for African and African-American Art and Culture is in need of earthquake retrofitting.

Recommendation 1

Support should be sought from the Mayor's Office for immediate infrastructure upgrade.

Required Response

Mayor

The Art Commission

Department of Public Works

Conclusion 2

The Bayview Opera House does not meet the standards of the ADA as to the bathrooms on the first floor, the photography lab and the main entrance. The main entrance of SOMARTS is not in compliance with the ADA. The Mission Cultural Center and SOMARTS are in need of new elevators.

Recommendation 2

Support should be sought from the Mayor's Office for funds to bring the Bayview Opera House and the main entrance of SOMARTS into compliance with the ADA. The Art Commission should advise as to the steps being taken to secure funds for new elevators for the Mission Cultural Center and SOMARTS.

Required Response

Mayor

The Art Commission

Department of Public Works

Conclusion 3

SOMARTS is in need of soundproofing.

Recommendation 3

The Art Commission should advise as to the steps being taken to secure funds for soundproofing for SOMARTS.

Required Response

Mayor

The Art Commission

Department of Public Works

Conclusion 4

The Community Support Boards of the cultural centers have been unsuccessful in obtaining the wide support needed to ensure the passage of bonds necessary to properly fund the cultural centers. Wide support for funding is also needed in order to complete upgrading of the facilities and to enhance their programs. The Community Support Boards of the cultural centers have also been unsuccessful in educating the public through community outreach to the local community as well as to the entire city. Further review of the cultural center reports to the Art Commission does not clearly reflect that the cultural centers are meeting the funding requirements as outlined in Section 515 of the Business and Tax Regulations Code.

Recommendation 4

The Art Commission should determine what steps the Community Support Boards of the four cultural centers have taken and need to take in order to carry out their responsibility to obtain funds for the cultural center and advertise the unique activities of the Centers. The Art Commission should require that each cultural center set up a formal Community Support Board composed of both local community members and city-wide members who are able to help the center meet its financial goals and increase city-wide recognition of each of the cultural centers.

Required Response

Art Commission
Mayor's Office of Community Development
The Board of Directors of the South of Market Cultural Center
The Board of Directors of the Mission Cultural Center
The Board of Directors of the Bayview Opera House
The Board of Directors of the Center for African and African-American Art and Culture

ATTACHMENT 1

1993 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS REPORT, Prepared by the Cervantes Design Associates in association with the Saylor Consulting Group, Art Commission/Cultural Centers