

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

City Council Budget Hearing – November 7, 2019

Remarks – Commissioner Mark Kelly

Thank you, Chairman Dowell and Council members for the opportunity to discuss the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE). Guided by the visionary leadership of Mayor Lori Lightfoot, my team and I have enjoyed working with you on a wide range of projects that advance the City of Chicago and its vibrant neighborhoods – including youth arts initiatives, cultural grants, markets, public art installations, community concerts celebrating Chicago’s music legacy, neighborhood festivals, block clubs and positioning Chicago as a hub for film and TV production.

At DCASE, with a small-but-mighty, hard-working staff of just 64 people, we accomplish big things. By the end of this year, we will present 2,000 programs for an audience of well over 25 million residents and visitors.

I’m pleased to share a few more facts and figures – a snapshot of DCASE, by the numbers:

- Chicago is a city of festivals, with some 700 neighborhood events facilitated by DCASE this year.
- Our Chicago City Markets program has delivered more than 60 markets to wards across the city, with an emphasis on underserved communities.
- We presented some 80 free concerts, films and special events at the Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park, featuring mariachi, house, gospel, blues, jazz, classical, opera, Broadway and more.
- In 2019, our Cultural Grant Program awarded 334 grants totaling \$1.9 million to artists and organizations in 86% of Chicago’s wards – up from 70% in 2016.
- DCASE secured \$1 million in foundation support for the 2019 Year of Chicago Theatre and provided \$1.3 million in direct support to the local theatre community – including more than \$835,750 in financial grants and \$448,650 in performance fees and commissions to 273 local theatres and theatre-makers in neighborhoods across the city.
- We also launched a new Millennium Park theatre series offering paid residencies to a diverse cohort of nine local theatre companies and free performances for the public, July through October.
- We presented dozens of free cultural events celebrating Chicago’s Latinx communities. Highlights include movies, music, markets, dance, and theatre in the heart of the city and in neighborhoods across Chicago – including, for the first time, ¡Súbelo! (turn it up), a Latinx music celebration as part of the World Music Festival Chicago.
- “The Big Deal” celebration in August signaled the relaunch of Maxwell Street Market, the longest running open air market in the U.S. Funded by the NEA and made possible by partnerships with community organizations, the free event included artmaking, music, street food and shopping from 125 local vendors.
- DCASE announced 25-year industry veteran Kwame Amoaku as the new director of the Chicago Film Office. Last year alone, 520 film and media projects took place in Chicago, resulting in an estimated all-time high \$474 million local economic impact.
- We launched a new “Taste of Chicago Community Eats” program in June, working with nine Taste vendors to host free, community meals for local nonprofits – serving seniors, advocates for abused and neglected children, advocates for the homeless, Gold Star families and others.

- In July, more than 1 million residents and visitors attended the 2019 Taste of Chicago, which showcased 80 local eateries including 36 new vendors, employed over 3,000 people, hired 600 artists and performers, and contributed \$106 million to the local economy.
- DCASE partnered with the Chicago Park District to bring 2,000 cultural events to 77 neighborhoods via the Night Out in the Parks program.
- We rolled out a new City of Chicago Mural Registry, a publicly-accessible database of Chicago's collection of murals (including graffiti art) found at chicago.gov/muralregistry. Maintained by the Chicago Public Art Program, the registry was developed as a tool to help communities identify, explore and preserve murals in our neighborhoods. To date, 275 murals have been registered.
- DCASE and its programs received critical praise and numerous awards and accolades including 11 staff recognitions and a tremendous amount of positive media coverage.
- We increased sponsorship support by 25% to \$2.6 million and grant support by 20% to \$1.4 million.
- And our work with Choose Chicago helped deliver an unprecedented 57.6 million visitors last year.

Looking forward to next year, Mayor Lightfoot and DCASE along with members of the local music industry have designated 2020 the “Year of Chicago Music.” This citywide, year-long focus on music seeks to lift up Chicago as a world music capital – launching a new brand for Chicago music and a major local/national/international marketing campaign, presenting free music programming downtown and citywide, providing increased financial grants to musicians and music-makers, advocating for local venues and clubs, and supporting music education.

In addition:

- We will expand our Cultural Grants Program – increasing our support by \$1 million to artists and cultural organizations across the city, with a special focus on underserved neighborhoods.
- We will restore the Chicago Cultural Center and animate the 15 neighborhood cultural centers, in partnership with the Chicago Park District – leveraging a major gift to transform “The People’s Place” into a world-class asset that supports the cultural landscape, and updating neighborhood cultural centers to support and expand the vitality of underserved neighborhoods.
- We will collaborate with other City departments including Aviation, Planning and Development and the Chicago Public Library to bring more public art and cultural programs to our visitor hubs, creative districts and neighborhoods.
- We will improve the Millennium Park campus, Chicago’s town square – where the city comes together and where we showcase the best of Chicago.
- We will strengthen our Blues Festival, Jazz Festival, SummerDance series and the Taste of Chicago.
- And we will continue to advance Chicago’s vibrant neighborhoods through film and TV production, cultural grants, markets, public art, community concerts, block clubs and neighborhood festivals.

There is great enthusiasm and support for this work across Chicago’s creative industries. There’s a palpable sense that the City’s current support of the arts and culture is unprecedented, thanks in very large part to your unflagging commitment and the leadership of our Mayor.

We all look forward to working closely with you and your constituents in 2020.

Thank you. I’m happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.