

Seattle City Council Confirmation Questions & Answers
Gregory Randall Engstrom, Director
Seattle Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs

Monday, April 22th, 2013

- 1) What are some of your most notable accomplishments during your brief tenure as Acting Director of the Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs? What are some of your disappointments?

I am really excited about the progress that we have made with the Arts Education plan. Despite some unforeseen challenges, I think the plan and our partnership with the school district is the strongest it's been.

I'm also proud of the fact that we are building a program around Creative Placemaking, and are moving forward with strong plans for addressing issues of affordable space for arts and culture.

I'm disappointed that we won't be able to work with Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative to the degree that we would have liked this year, but am glad we are building stronger relationships with both SYVPI and the Office for Education.

I'm disappointed that we did not receive implementation funding from the Wallace Foundation and that our local fundraising partner, PONCHO, wasn't able to continue their work. That said, I am very pleased with how we adapted and remain confident we will be successful.

- 2) What are your major goals for the Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs (OACA) over the next four years?

I would like to see us implement the K-12 Arts plan, and deepen our support for arts education and youth development.

I would like to see OACA meet the community need around access to affordable space for arts and culture.

I would like to see our office be involved with a cultural plan for the region, in partnership with local agencies, funders, and cultural organizations.

I would like to help Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute implement a plan for long-term sustainability.

I would like to see arts and culture integrated into more facets of civic development, in particular the waterfront redevelopment, neighborhood activation, and economic development.

- 3) What do you see as the primary challenges facing OACA over the next four years?

I think we need to better connect with the broader community, and with other city departments.

I think we need to improve our ability to tell our story.

As our city continues to grow and thrive, we must ensure that we can provide affordable space for arts and culture.

- 4) How will you ensure that Councilmembers and Legislative staff receive timely information needed from your department for Council to make sound policy and budgetary decisions?

I would be happy to provide updates whenever they were useful. I also have sent our work plan to the council, and have met several times with Councilmember Licata and others.

I work collaboratively, and would like to have a strong partnership with the Council.

- 5) What opportunities do you see for improving collaboration between your department and other City departments?

Office of Economic Development: I'd like to help develop an economic development and regional tourism strategy based on our local creative economy. I'd also like to see Arts more involved with neighborhood based placemaking, which we could do with 'Only in Seattle'.

Office for Education: We'd like to create a much stronger relationship with OFE and be a bridge between Arts Education and the Families and Education levy. Additionally, we'd like to grow our partnership with SYVPI, as we believe that arts can be a powerful strategy for youth development.

Department of Planning and Development: We will be working closely with DPD on the development of our cultural space program, helping organizations better understand code compliance issues and where there may be opportunities. We will also work closely on the waterfront redevelopment, and would like to further explore how we might develop cultural districts.

Department of Neighborhoods: Continue to partner with DON on granting programs, and work more with P-Patch and urban agriculture and their intersection with the Arts.

Seattle Department of Transportation: We work closely with SDOT on the waterfront, much of our public art program, and share 2 positions currently. I sit on the Public Space Activation task force, and want to help the arts be an engine of space activation throughout the City.

Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs: Seattle has a rich cultural wealth, and we'd like to work with OIRA to better reach and support our immigrant and refugee communities with their various forms of cultural expression.

Office for Civil Rights: Work to develop and offer trainings around RSJI to be offered to the broader arts community. This will help with both Community accessibility as well as future audience development.

Department of Parks and Recreation: Continue to work on the transition of LHPAI into OACA, and think about innovative ways that arts programs can be offered throughout our parks and facilities. Continue to partner on ArtSparks and the Public Art program.

Seattle City Light and Seattle Public Utilities:- Continue to partner on our % for art program, and think about the concept of 'The art of a sustainable city'.

- 6) How do you intend to promote artistic and cultural intergovernmental relations? How will you foster partnerships with local, state, and federal governments to develop effective arts and culture policies? How will you work to ensure that Seattle's goals and priorities are reflected in regional arts and culture projects?

We have a close working relationship with both 4Culture and the Washington State Arts Commission. We'd like to partner on cultural planning efforts for our region, and find more ways to collaborate.

We are also part of the national American's for the Arts network, where we have the ability to network and learn from our peer organizations across the country.

- 7) What have you accomplished in your past employment, and what improvements are you working on in your leadership role at OACA, in the area of neighborhood outreach to audiences and potential applicants, especially to those who may be considered underrepresented in the arts?

Most of my professional life had been spent working with underrepresented communities and the arts. I remain extremely proud of what we accomplished at the Youngstown Cultural Arts Center, turning a vacant school into a thriving creative community. I've also felt proud of my contributions to 12th Ave Arts, Washington Hall, and Central District Forum for Arts & Ideas. RSJI is very important to me personally, as I believe it is for the city. OACA has been a leader in this area and I plan to support our work in this area, and grow it to reach more communities.

- 8) What are your thoughts on increasing the City's 40 year old 1% percent allocation of eligible City construction projects for the purchase of public art?

I fully support any increased capacity for our programs. I would want to work with our partners in other departments and on the Arts Commission to determine how to best

leverage the impact of additional resources. I hope our office continues to be a leader in the field of public art, and more resources would help us accomplish that.

- 9) How will OACA address the City's evolving workforce, such as filling positions vacated by aging City workers, welcoming more people of color, and embracing people with disabilities - workers who traditionally may not have been represented in the arts in large numbers?

OACA has one of the most diverse staffing profiles in the City, and I hope to continue and support that. I also believe strongly in developing a pipeline of leadership through internships, mentoring, and increased professional development opportunities.

- 10) How will you review internal operations at OACA to determine if they warrant improvement? What are your goals for continuing to improve the internal operations of OACA?

I'd like to organize a staff retreat later in the year or in early 2014 so together we can look at how we do our work and see if there are ways that the office can be more effective and have greater impact. I think we have a great team, and I'm excited to be working with the department.

- 11) How do you approach making decisions on improving the City's arts and culture climate? Do you have a strategy for OACA being able to respond to arts funding emergencies that may threaten organizations or respond to public controversies involving the arts?

I think we need to continuously be engaged with the broader city. We have to be able to measure and speak to our impact. I think creativity is in the DNA of this city, and we should harness and leverage what it does for our neighborhoods, our economy, and our youth. I also don't think we should always fear controversy; the arts are one of the ways that we can have a conversation with our city, and that dialogue can be a good thing, even if at times there is disagreement.

- 12) How do you intend for OACA to approach its awarding decisions so as to give ample opportunity for women, minority, and disabled artists?

OACA has long sought to find ways to support underinvested communities. From technical assistance to the development of new funding programs, OACA has seen the need to create more opportunities for different communities. I hope to be able to explore how our funding programs can ensure both quality and equity across the city.

- 13) How do you anticipate working with and supporting the Seattle Arts Commission, keeping in mind its recommendations may at times challenge the Executive or the Council?

Having spent 6 years on the Seattle Arts Commission, I greatly value their role in advising the Office and acting as representatives of the broader community. The work of OACA

around Arts Education and Cultural Space have been shaped to a large degree by the Commission, and it's my job to listen to and support their efforts to strengthen the cultural community of Seattle.

- 14) What are your thoughts on how the City of Seattle organizes separately from its arts and culture activities its music and film businesses in its Office of Economic Development?

I have enjoyed working with our partners at the Office of Film and Music and OED. I think they do critical work for the City, and we should grow our relationship with them significantly.

My understanding is that OACA's focus is on supporting mainly non-profit cultural organizations, while OFM works more with for profit, entertainment oriented businesses. We do a lot of direct funding, while their programs are more focused on incentives. I think both are important ways to support a thriving creative sector.

- 15) What are your thoughts on the Cultural Overlay Districts Advisory Committee's recommendations for cultural development in Seattle, which were endorsed by the City Council in 2009 by Resolution 31155?

Having served as a co-chair for the CODAC Committee, I believe that many of the recommendations of the committee would still be very valuable to implement. We are hiring a Cultural Space Liaison, and working on how to establish a cultural space program that would be able to successfully implement the CODAC recommendations.

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