



PRESS RELEASE

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NEW ARTS ALLIANCE WILL GIVE UNITED VOICE TO NORTHEAST OHIO'S ARTS COMMUNITY

Arts Leader & Cleveland Native Jeremy Johnson Selected to Lead "Assembly for the Arts"

CLEVELAND – An ambitious plan for a new organization built on a collaborative model to serve all of Cleveland's arts community is set to launch mid-June. After more than a year of planning, leaders have announced the formation of Assembly for the Arts, a nonprofit arts alliance in Greater Cleveland, to provide a unified voice, set regional goals, and represent shared priorities for the creative economy in Northeast Ohio. Jeremy V. Johnson, a Cleveland native and most recently Executive Director of Newark Arts (NJ), has been chosen to lead Assembly for the Arts after a national search.

Assembly for the Arts will be a nonprofit and advocacy organization [501(c)3 and 501(c)4]. Assembly for the Arts will focus on an ambitious advocacy and cultural policy agenda; racial equity initiatives; informed and focused research; cooperative marketing that elevates the region; a diverse portfolio of membership services; and capacity building for nonprofits, artists and creative businesses. The new organization will be governed by a volunteer board with a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion. At least 50% of board members will be women or non-binary people and at least 40% will be BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color).

For more than a year, community partners Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, Arts Cleveland, and the Arts and Culture Action Committee, with support from the Cleveland Foundation and the George Gund Foundation, have led the planning for a new organization that would serve the entire creative sector: artists, nonprofits and creative businesses.

Cuyahoga Arts & Culture will remain a separate entity focused on funding nonprofits – an independent political subdivision of the State of Ohio with grantmaking authority – and will have representation on the Assembly for the Arts board.

After nearly 20 years in service of Cuyahoga County's creative economy, Arts Cleveland will cease operations concurrent with the launch of the new alliance, as will the Arts and Culture Action Committee. The current Arts Cleveland staff will support Assembly for the Arts' operations.

Johnson, a native Clevelander who grew up in Hough and Glenville and attended University School, is known to be a powerful convener, effective collaborator and an extremely gifted fundraiser. Most recently, he has served as the Executive Director of Newark Arts. Over the course of his nearly five years there, he has tripled both the fundraising and staff size of the organization, transforming it into a vibrant force for change in the Newark community. Johnson raised the national profile of Newark, now ranked among America's top ten arts vibrant communities by the National Center for Arts Research.

"After nearly 20 years in New Jersey, I'm excited to return home to Cleveland to lead this new organization," Johnson said. "Assembly for the Arts will be one voice, representative of the diversity of

our region, that lifts up the arts in Northeast Ohio. Though this effort builds on decades of work, there has never been a greater need to support artists, nonprofits and creative businesses in Northeast Ohio as we begin recovery from the pandemic and seek a stronger future for the entire sector. My vision for Assembly for the Arts is that it will advocate for artists and arts organizations, shape transformational policies, and prioritize racial equity in the movement to lift our community through the power of arts and culture.”

Chinenye Nkemere, a member of the Assembly for the Arts Planning Committee and Board, said Johnson’s experience as a convener and collaborator will be important for Assembly for the Arts’ work. “Assembly has an ambitious agenda to be equitable, inclusive and represent all voices in our community. It will require listening and seeking out and bringing together divergent points of view,” Nkemere said. “We look forward to having Jeremy lead this work to create a more racially equitable and active arts community.”

Jill Paulsen, Executive Director of Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, said the new organization comes at a critical time for the sector. “The pandemic has been devastating on the creative economy in Cuyahoga County, and it has exposed how much our community counts on arts and culture for quality of life and as an economic engine. By working together, we can do so much more – just as we demonstrated when we united to secure \$4.5-million in CARES Act relief for the arts and culture sector. As we look for new sources of funding, Assembly will provide the structure for a new level of collaboration and shared commitment to a vision for our arts sector. I’m excited to have a new partner in this vital work,” she said.

Kelly Falcone-Hall, a member of the Arts Cleveland board and President and CEO of the Western Reserve Historical Society, noted that the formation of Assembly for the Arts builds on Cleveland’s legacy of innovative support for arts and culture. Arts Cleveland led the efforts to secure public support for arts and culture more than 15 years ago. “The creative economy, inclusive of nonprofits, artists, and for-profit arts enterprises, is a significant economic driver in greater Cleveland, having an annual economic impact of \$9.1 billion, which includes 62,500 jobs and \$3.3 billion in labor income. We need to support everyone from the smallest to the largest organizations if this sector is to thrive. Building on the work of Arts Cleveland, Assembly is well positioned to support individuals and organizations of all sizes, no matter if they are starting out or are well established,” she said.

Fred Bidwell, chair of the Arts and Culture Action Committee, which will fold into Assembly for the Arts along with Arts Cleveland, said having the sector unified in its advocacy efforts will allow the region to maintain the strong and diverse arts and culture offerings that are a hallmark of the region. “We can accomplish so much more by working together to move our sector forward,” Bidwell said. “We are grateful to the support of the Cleveland Foundation and Gund Foundation to support the planning work that helped us deliver on our vision of a truly new way of transforming Greater Cleveland’s arts community.”

About Assembly for the Arts

Assembly for the Arts is a 501(c)3 nonprofit and 501(c)4 advocacy organization with a focus on advocacy and cultural policy, racial equity initiatives, research, marketing that elevates the region, and services for nonprofits, artists, and creative businesses. It is governed by a volunteer board with a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion. More than 50% of Assembly for the Arts board members are women or non-binary people and more than 40% are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color). For more than a year, community partners Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, Arts Cleveland, and the Arts and Culture Action Committee, with support from the Cleveland Foundation and the George Gund Foundation, have led the planning for a new organization to serve the entire creative sector. Learn more at assemblycycle.org.