

CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

Date: April 9, 2025

To: The Mayor
The City Council

From: Matthew W. Szabo, City Administrative Officer *Malaike Billups for*

Subject: **INNOVATION FUND RECOMMENDATION – WATTS TOWERS ART CENTER CAMPUS VIRTUAL ACCESSIBILITY EXPERIENCE**

RECOMMENDATION

The Office of the City Administrative Officer recommends that this committee note and file this report.

SUMMARY

The Innovation and Performance Commission (IPC) approved funding in the amount of \$200,000 from the Innovation Fund (IF) for the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) – Watts Towers Arts Center Campus Virtual Accessibility Experience pilot. As with all IPC recommendations, this report presents the proposal that DCA submitted and the IPC approved, along with the information necessary to implement the idea as presented. However, since all IPC items are discretionary expenditures, in deference to the extraordinary budget constraints outlined in the Third (Mid-Year) Financial Status Report, this Office does not recommend funding the proposal as presented at this time.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The following is a summary of DCA's Innovation Fund proposal, including the department's estimate of the benefits and costs of implementing the proposal:

Watts Towers Arts Center Campus (WTACC) stewards a legacy of art, activism, and service to the community through its impressive array of programs taking place on its campus and surrounding communities. DCA would like to expand access to the wider public, removing any geographical or physical limitations that would limit access to all that WTACC has to offer. This pilot aims to build awareness of, and engagement with, this extraordinary and iconic cultural asset and, when complete, will serve as a complementary digital experience fully integrated with the renovated campus using high quality digital media documentation (photo, video, audio, drone footage, digital renderings) of the Watts Towers, the Campus' multiple galleries, 30+ works of public art, and works of Public Art in the Community to create an immersive, interactive “virtual tour” experience accessible online for remote visitors.

WTACC consists of the Watts Towers Arts Center (WTAC), the Charles Mingus Youth Arts Center (CMYAC), the Garden Studio Gallery, and a vast array of art in its gallery spaces as

well as public art, including works in the Watts Towers State Historic Park. This arts education institution, which is the only official tourist destination site in Watts. DCA plans to engage a creative technologist as a consultant to work on program design and implementation. The project will be iterative with the program unfolding in multiple phases, beginning with a discovery and planning phase in the fall of 2023. Implementation phases will be timed to coincide with the renovation of the Watts Towers Arts Center Campus as follows:

- Research and Planning
 - RFP for Consultant
 - Consultant Retained
 - Initial Technology Proposal and Project Milestones
- Project Kickoff
 - Phase 1: Watts Towers
 - Phase 2: Watts Towers Arts Center
 - Phase 3: Charles Mingus Youth Arts Center
 - Phase 4: Garden Studio Gallery
 - Phase 5: Watts Towers Resource Center

The project is planned as part of the ongoing celebration of the Centennial Anniversary of the Watts Towers of Simon Rodia. The timing of this project is essential as the campus prepares to fully re-open and in anticipation of the 2028 Olympics. This initiative will provide DCA with the opportunity to collaborate with the multiple City stakeholders involved in the renovation process including: the General Services Department (GSD), Recreation and Parks (RAP), Information Technology Agency (ITA), LA CityView 35, Council District 15, and the Mayor's Office.

The IPC recommended \$200,000 for the DCA – Watts Towers Arts Center Campus Virtual Accessibility Experience pilot. The funds would be used to document the entire campus over the course of three years resulting in the creation of a platform that highlights the work of hundreds of local artists, past, present and future, who make the Campus a creative hub and further uplift the community as well as provide a fully-integrated complementary digital experience that will increase access and deepen visitor engagement into the future. Once a vendor has been selected, DCA will develop a project plan that integrates a social media and communications component, committed to a transparent, participatory process that engages the community. The project launch will include a social media, marketing and press outreach component with a live, in-person program at WTACC.

If the item is approved by this Committee, DCA should return to the IPC, present any changes to the scope of work and provide updates to the IPC.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The recommendation to note and file this report will have no financial impact.

If the Council approves an allocation of \$200,000 to DCA for the Watts Towers Arts Center Campus Virtual Accessibility Experience pilot, it would reduce the remaining Innovation Fund Balance, which is currently \$2,768,922.75. Savings from the Innovation Fund Balance may be used to address the current city-wide financial crisis and the overspending in the 2024-2025 fiscal year. Additionally, funding this program may incur unfunded and ongoing costs.

FINANCIAL POLICIES STATEMENT

The recommendation in this report complies with the City's Financial Policies.

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