



August 16, 2021

MOCA's NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Funding Fact Sheet

You may have seen some recent news regarding a small protest movement by activists critical of the Museum of Chinese in America's plans for a permanent home in Chinatown. We want you to be armed with the facts—and to hear what is actually happening directly from MOCA. Please do not hesitate to let us know if you have any questions on the information below. Thank you, as always, for your partnership and support. The Board and Staff of the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) would like to present the following fact sheet:

What is with the recent criticism of MOCA?

A small network of affiliated community activist groups has mounted a campaign against jail construction and economic development in Chinatown. They see MOCA's recent stabilization and steadily growing profile as a byproduct of neighborhood investment they oppose.

The groups have picketed MOCA and MOCA board members' businesses, in addition to pressuring artists to boycott MOCA exhibits.

Why has this small group of activists targeted MOCA?

MOCA's critics falsely and erroneously claim that the museum's multi-year application and awarded funds from the Department of Cultural Affairs process—allowing MOCA to finally move toward owning its building—is payment for supporting the City's proposal for a new jail in Chinatown.

With displacement and gentrification occurring in nearly every neighborhood across New York City, it is not uncommon for self-serving, misguided, myopic, and self-proclaimed community activists to opportunistically produce sound bites and social media fodder through blaming community institutions that work hard to elevate their programming and upgrade their facilities and infrastructure.

Successful fundraising efforts by MOCA to secure a permanent home after 41 years of renting space have made the museum a prime target for those activists who aggressively attempt to cast MOCA's expansion plan as a driver of community displacement.

Why support MOCA locally and nationally especially in the current anti-AAPI climate?

MOCA is critically important as a destination for its local community and national visitorship to access over 85,000 items in the largest collection of Chinese American artifacts and oral histories and experience its purposeful and rich exhibits.

MOCA works tirelessly to contribute the untold stories in the making of America told from the Chinese American lens.

MOCA sees its work as an allied effort to expeditiously broaden the American narrative to be more inclusive overall.

Despite over 250 years of Chinese in America, Chinese Americans and Asian Americans have consistently remained “foreign” in public perception.

A permanent home for MOCA is not only vital for the redefinition of the American narrative but is also a symbolic sign of the permanence of Chinese Americans in U.S. history.

MOCA has consistently advocated for greater equity in funding for arts and cultural organizations.

What does MOCA have to do with the City’s jail proposal?

Nothing. MOCA has always publicly (on record) and unalterably opposed jail construction in Chinatown.

MOCA’s grant application to the Department of Cultural Affairs started in 2015. The City approved the funding through the Department of Cultural Affairs grant process. Unfortunately, the City unilaterally placed MOCA’s funding on a list of community investments across the city designed to offset the local effects of jail development. We wish the City had not helped to create the false impression that our grant was in any way tied to jail development. We asked the City to separate MOCA from this list and reiterate that MOCA applied for funds through the Department of Cultural Affairs process—akin to all museums seeking City funds.

While MOCA has steadfastly opposed jail construction in Chinatown, it would be wildly irresponsible of MOCA as one of the more notable community cultural and historical institutions to reject vital City funding awarded through the Department of Cultural Affairs process just because MOCA disagrees with City Hall regarding the jail. MOCA, with its critical mission and presentation of an unknown history, deserves funding to secure a permanent home that tells its narratives and convenes community.

If MOCA or any other cultural institution were to adopt the viewpoint of the critics and refuse public funding when it did not agree with every dollar of the City’s \$90 billion annual budget, cultural institutions across the city would not exist.

What is the relationship between the Chu family and MOCA?

Jonathan Chu is an active and highly supportive MOCA board member, as well as a community advocate, business owner, long-time economic contributor, public servant, and volunteer to several not-for-profit efforts.

How is MOCA tied to Jing Fong’s closure?

MOCA is not tied to Jing Fong in any way. MOCA had nothing to do with Jing Fong’s decision to close its operations on Elizabeth Street.

Why has some of the news coverage and social media been so negative?

While MOCA's reopening received widespread positive media coverage, these self-proclaimed community activists have taken to social media and have relied on several allied community news outlets to spread false and malicious lies. This sort of campaign is not unique to MOCA, as cultural institutions, high-profile museums, and various other businesses are often wrongfully targeted by small but vocal groups of opposition. When attacking MOCA for their benefit, these critics also attack MOCA's mission and the community it supports.

Enough is enough. MOCA's small team of 12 full-time staff members and its volunteer Board will not let these vicious and false attacks distract it or affect its mission-critical work.

What's MOCA doing to address the critics?

MOCA has held numerous listening sessions and engaged community groups and individuals on this topic over the last three years. We have shared our stance, our grant process, our history, our positions, and detailed plans for Museum programming and education vital to the future of our community.

The critics of MOCA are not interested in dialogue or any reasonable resolution. Short of refusing every City dollar awarded to MOCA, their targeting of MOCA is entirely disconnected from any strategic plan for neighborhood opportunity, growth, or empowerment. To the critics, MOCA is a sign of community success that runs antithetical to the critics' misguided and myopic worldview. Their critiques are general statements of a global political aim, which are neither credible nor genuine. Their statements are made in bad faith.

How will the criticism affect MOCA in the short and long term?

MOCA's reopening received the largest, most high-profile media coverage in the Museum's history. While the criticism has hurt many of us on a personal level, it has no doubt helped raise our profile and strengthen our ability to provide the critical programming so key to our mission at this difficult time in our history.

Criticism is speech, and we live in a country where the freedom of this speech is and will be cherished and respected. If such criticism is constructive and valid, we will continue to listen and remain respectful. However, baseless attacks by selfish, misguided and myopic community activists are an attack on our Museum, our mission and the broader Chinese-American community. MOCA will not be distracted nor discouraged. MOCA will also continue to record the current dynamics in the community as it is first and foremost MOCA's job to record and remember. Involvement in these difficult conversations is always a byproduct of success especially with cultural institutions so intertwined with a community's history and future.

What can we do as MOCA supporters to help?

Share these facts!

MOCA is a not-for-profit organization.

MOCA has a small full-time team of 12 professionals committed to the urgent redefinition of the American story to be more inclusive of narratives like Chinese American journeys.

More than 50,000+ visitors walk through MOCA's doors each year; MOCA has a 2,000,000+ social media reach.

MOCA partners with more than 150 organizations, including schools, parent groups, scholars, advocacy organizations, artist collectives, corporate ERGs, and other art and cultural institutions.

MOCA has a free admission policy for all.

MOCA has the largest professional collections of Chinese American history in the world.

MOCA is a local, national, and global resource.