

Op-Ed Submission 5.21.14
A CALL FOR A BOSTON SPRING:
Arts for an Urban Renaissance

The arts and cultural convening -- *Making Greater Boston Greater* -- recently hosted at the Strand Theatre was a breath of fresh air. We commend Barbara Lewis of the Trotter Institute at UMASS Boston and the Boston Foundation for partnering to organize an artful forum with a social conscience.

The convening had the feel of a "Boston Spring," reflecting a surge of new urban energies combined with the empowering attitude of artists already working with youth and families in underserved communities to expand access and opportunity. The diverse voices signaled a welcome mind shift from a "me" to a "we" culture with a "can do" approach to solving problems together.

This Convening set the stage for a more open and authentic dialogue about envisioning and shaping the future of a 21st century city that embraces creativity and racial/ethnic diversity as its greatest assets. Boston has just elected a new Mayor who says he wants to do just this, and who has created a cabinet level position to help make it happen.

The creation of this position was a bold and smart move, and we encourage Mayor Walsh to move forward to build on the spirit of openness, inclusion and creativity exhibited at this cultural convening, and to invite the community of artists, activists, educators and social service providers that generated that spirit, to work with him to make a *Greater Boston greater*.

This is call for a Boston Spring! A high stakes moment, that calls for visionary leadership and demands real change. In a city that benefits from an abundance of resources, yet strains from the persistent and widening social disparities, we need a sea change in priorities and approach that take head on, our most difficult and most extraordinary opportunities of the 21st century.

No easy task but If not now, when? And if not us, who? We are confident that the arts can help break new ground to tap into the entrepreneurship, wisdom and resilience that our diverse communities offer. Embedding arts and culture into the design and implementation of the city's key social and economic initiatives creates a magnetic core of innovation.

We hope to work with the Mayor and his team to coalesce a series of cross sector convenings, to achieve the following overarching goals:

1. Define a shared vision for a more inclusive and equitable city with desired social and economic impacts.
2. Support learning and leadership that reaches across culture, class and sector to identify common cause.
3. Generate an action agenda for positive community change -- the strategies, innovation, resources, continued public dialogue, and collective action needed to make Greater Boston greater!

Last year we became "Boston Strong," showing our true character as a city in response to a crisis. Let us rise to the occasion again, now, to become a "Boston Spring," proactively advancing an urban renaissance inspired by our revolutionary roots, shared humanity, and the pursuit of freedom and justice for *all of its citizens*. *Count us in!*

Libbie Shufro

Former President and CEO, Boston Center for the Arts

Jacqui Lindsay

Founder and President, Innovation by Design