

# 2025

OFFICE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

YEAR IN REVIEW



# 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

## OFFICE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

### MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

2025 was a significant year for the Office of Cultural Affairs, marked by a wide range of public programs, expanded services for our creative community, and new tools that make cultural resources more accessible across the city. It also saw continued progress on the restoration of the Loews Theater, one of Jersey City's most cherished cultural landmarks. This year, we launched our award-winning Cultural Affairs website, designed to streamline services and give constituents clearer pathways to permits, grants, resources, and event opportunities. We also released comprehensive reporting for the Arts and Culture Trust Fund, highlighting the Fund's continued impact on local artists and organizations throughout Jersey City.

Throughout the year, Cultural Affairs assisted in more than 400 events that celebrated the diversity of our city, ranging from large public festivals and cultural heritage celebrations to parades and flag raisings. These efforts reflect our ongoing commitment to supporting the arts ecosystem, uplifting community voices, and ensuring that culture thrives in every neighborhood.

As we move into 2026, Jersey City prepares for new administration and major moments on both the global and national stage. Cultural Affairs is planning for the arrival of the FIFA World Cup, the largest global sporting event, as well as America250 commemorations that will honor our nation's history and recognize Jersey City's place within it. The year ahead brings meaningful opportunities for cultural visibility, civic pride, and collaboration, and we remain dedicated to strengthening partnerships, enhancing support for artists and organizations, and ensuring that every community continues to feel seen and celebrated through the arts.





# 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

## OFFICE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

### MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS CONTINUED:



Key initiatives currently shaping Jersey City's cultural landscape:

- **Restoration of the Loews Jersey Theater:** Cultural Affairs maintains an online resource that keeps residents informed about the ongoing restoration of the Loews. The page is updated regularly with images and progress reports. The theater is scheduled to reopen in late 2026.
- **New Website Launch:** Earlier this year, Cultural Affairs launched a new user-friendly website designed to better serve residents, artists, and visitors. Since its debut, the website has received multiple state and national awards\* for design and public service.
- **Global Cultural Tourism Promotion:** Cultural Affairs continued to elevate Jersey City's cultural tourism profile through targeted advertising campaigns, participation in an inbound travel trade show, and strengthened collaborations with regional and statewide tourism partners.
- **Arts and Culture Trust Fund Grants:** Cultural Affairs has administered three rounds of Arts and Culture Trust Fund grants, distributing \$4 million to support local artists and arts organizations and strengthen the long-term sustainability of Jersey City's arts ecosystem.
- **FIFA World Cup Community Programming:** In preparation for Jersey City's role on the global stage during the 2026 FIFA World Cup, Cultural Affairs launched community-based programs to engage and excite the public. The kickoff event, the Jersey City Cup, welcomed hundreds of youth and three local soccer leagues to compete for the championship, building momentum and community pride ahead of the international tournament.

**Read on to learn more about the programs and initiatives currently underway at the Office of Cultural Affairs.**

\*1. Davey Awards - Category: Website Redesign - [Gold Award](#)

2. W3 Awards - Category: General Websites, Arts & Culture - [Silver Award](#)

3. WebAwards - Category: Website Redesign, Arts Industry - Outstanding [Website Award](#)



# CITY HALL EVENTS

## A selection of 2025 events include:

- 45 Flag Raisings, with 41 cultural programs held as part of this year's flag raisings
- State of the City Address
- 30th Anniversary of the Martin Luther King Oratory Competition
- Ramadan - over 200 served
- Celebration of Muslim Heritage Month
- Celebration of Lesbian Visibility Day
- Taste of Culture - 10 countries represented
- Bel Canto offered a free open-air opera on the steps of City Hall
- 7th anniversary of Sisterhood with General Santos City hosted by PAFCOM
- Hindu Heritage Month
- K-Fest: Chuseok Korean Festival



# CITY WIDE

## A selection of 2025 events include:

- Jersey City Cup, Celebrating one year until World Cup 2026
- JC Clean up
- Jersey City Tourism promotion at Pokémon Go Fest / Liberty State Park / Approximately 30k+ attendees
- Fleet Week
- July 4th Celebration
- 5th annual Crosswalk repainting event
- Jersey City LGBTQ+ EXPO at the Bethune Center
- The first JC Fit EXPO
- 9/11- 24 years
- The 36th Anniversary celebration of JCAST Produced by The Creative Side



# EVENT PERMIT OFFICE



The Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA) plays an essential role in supporting special events and strengthening community engagement, with event permitting serving as one of its primary functions.

OCA works closely with event organizers to guide them through the permitting process, helping ensure that City spaces are used safely and effectively for public events. In 2025, the OCA reviewed and approved 367 permit applications for a diverse range of activities including festivals, parades, farmers markets, block parties, park gatherings, and religious processions.

## 2025 PERMITTED EVENTS

- **EVENTS - 73**
- **CITY EVENTS - 30**
- **PARK EVENTS - 123**
- **PARADES - 40**
- **FESTIVALS - 81**
- **FARMERS MARKET - 9**
- **BLOCK PARTIES - 9**
- **FLEA MARKETS - 2**





# JERSEY CITY MURAL ARTS PROGRAM

JCMAP continued to produce murals throughout Jersey City, with projects on St Paul's Avenue (Mustart), PS#12 & PS#40 (Cekis), St Peter's University (Jenna Morell), JC Ice Rink (Queen Andrea), Williams Ave & Westside (Rorschach Collective), and Westside & Clendenny (Danielle Mastrion).

JCMAP started a relationship with the nonprofit organization New City Parks, which expands our opportunities to work with local muralists as well as introducing more public art to our local schools and students.

The office created a searchable file of available international muralists, searchable by skill, style, and expense.

Jersey City's Youth Mural Arts Program celebrated the 11th anniversary with an Art Exhibition and the Documentary premiere of "Discover the Artist Within" at Mana Contemporary.

This year marked a new direction for our Youth program, through the program's collaboration with Mana Contemporary, where students interacted with professional artists in their studios, benefiting from useful opportunities including internships, residencies and mentorships. This program also promotes interdisciplinary art history education and provides opportunities for young artists to engage in the processes inherent in producing public art.

Students completed over a dozen murals as part of the program on Newark Avenue outside of Mana Contemporary.

For a more detailed overview of the 2025 Jersey City Mural Arts Program, please [CLICK HERE](#)



# BETHUNE CENTER

The Mary McLeod Bethune Life Center, situated in the heart of Jersey City's Greenville neighborhood, has grown into a lively center for creativity and community spirit. It provides residents and visitors with a distinctive place to explore cultural arts, fitness, wellness, and educational programs. Committed to celebrating Jersey City's rich heritage, the center also works to build connections among people from all backgrounds. Its inviting atmosphere welcomes adults, seniors, and families. Beyond its programs, the Bethune Center strengthens the community by offering space for meetings, workshops, training sessions, and classes, along with rental areas for private events and expos.

In 2025, the center focused its efforts on the arts—spanning music, dance, visual art, comedy, spoken word, theater, and film groups. The main objective was to expand the reach of programming by offering a wide range of cultural experiences to communities. By serving as a creative hub for such a vibrant and diverse population, the Center continues to grow in ways we never could have envisioned when we began this journey in 2013.

## 2025 BETHUNE CENTER HIGHLIGHTS

- VALENTINE POP-UP SHOP
- BETHUNE INDIE FILM NIGHT
- OPEN MIC NIGHT
- JERSEY CITY BLACK COMIC CON
- JERSEY CITY'S LGBTQ+ EXPO
- JCAST 2025
- AUTUMN FEST IN THE PARK



For a more detailed overview of the Bethune Center, please [CLICK HERE](#).







## 4<sup>TH</sup> OF JULY CELEBRATION

Jersey City's annual Fourth of July Celebration returned stronger than ever in 2025, welcoming an estimated 200,000 residents and visitors to the Hudson River waterfront. As New Jersey's largest and most eagerly awaited Independence Day event, the festival brought together families, neighbors, and visitors from across the tri-state area for a lively day of culture, community, and summer fun.

Festivities ran from noon to 10pm and featured the well-loved Jersey City Night Market leading more than 60 vendors along Marin Boulevard and Christopher Columbus Drive. Over 58 food vendors and 28 non-food vendors offered an array of delicious dishes, handcrafted items, specialty goods, and one-of-a-kind souvenirs. The celebration also included three DJ stages, two beer gardens hosted by 902 Brewing, and a Kids' Zone with hands-on activities and bounce castles.

The day concluded with a breathtaking fireworks display by world-renowned Fireworks by Grucci, launched over the Hudson River. Set against the New York City skyline, the show provided a dramatic finale visible across the waterfront, serving as a shared moment of reflection and celebration for everyone in attendance.

The Fourth of July Celebration continues to be a signature Jersey City event, demonstrating the power of arts, culture, and public programming to bring communities together and create memorable experiences for all ages.



# SUMMER IN THE CITY

## Highlights

This summer, the Office of Cultural Affairs delivered a wide range of programs for the community. Prioritizing free public events, the season included 18 live music performances and 21 outdoor film screenings at multiple venues.

### Summerfest Liberty State Park Concert Series

- Now in its 50th year, this is New Jersey's longest-running free concert series.
- Presented in collaboration with the Jersey City Free Public Library
- Featured 12 performances showcasing a variety of musical talent
- Introduced 6 new bands to the lineup

### Berry Lane Park Concert Series

- Included 6 performances representing genres such as Motown, Pop, Jazz, Soul, Funk, Urban R&B, Urban Bachata, R&B from the '70s to today, Neo Soul, and spoken-word poetry
- Made possible through support from the Friends of Berry Lane Park

### Movies in the Park

- Over the summer, **21 films were shown**, representing a broad range of genres including **animation, comedy, fantasy, action, and drama**.
- The series attracted **4,000 community members**, with **6–7 screenings each month** on average.

These events were created to bring people together, offer enjoyable entertainment, and strengthen community connections through shared music and movie experiences.





# POET LAUREATE MELIDA RODAS



2025

Melida Rodas has a long history of collaborating with local organizations on creative projects that celebrate the community. She also co-founded Greenville Arts Crossroads, a grassroots poetry and arts organization that connects, uplifts, and inspires creative talent in Hudson County. In 2023, her impactful work earned her a Jersey City Woman of Action Award. "The Jersey City Arts Council is thrilled to present Melida Rodas as the next poet laureate. We are confident that Melida will use this position to continue and expand her dedication to innovative projects that promote the art of poetry in the Jersey City community and beyond," adds Jersey City Arts Council Board member Jeff Dessources.

## Year in Review 2025

Over the past year, Poet Laureate Melida Rodas has led an extraordinary range of creative, educational, and community initiatives as Founder, Interdisciplinary Curator, and Creative Director of the Jersey City Poetry Festival (. org) advancing poetry's reach across disciplines and audiences.

- Led creative, educational, and community initiatives as Founder, Interdisciplinary Curator, and Creative Director of the Jersey City Poetry Festival, a 501(c)(3) with year-round programming and an annual festival.

- Expanded poetry's reach through major collaborations, including:
  - International Color and Light Festival
  - Revolution NJ's 250th Anniversary commemoration
  - Cross-city artistic exchanges between Jersey City, New York, and West Hollywood
- Blended poetry with music and visual art in performances with:
  - New Jersey Symphony
  - JCTC's Global Gala
  - Projection-mapping showcases
- Represented Jersey City as a guest poet, speaker, and judge at civic and cultural events, including City Hall ceremonies and university programs.
- Supported arts education by serving as:
  - Guest Judge for the Martin Luther King Oratory Contest
  - Judge for New Jersey Poetry Out Loud
  - Creative collaborator with City Kidz Playhouse, mentoring young writers
- Amplified diverse literary voices through editorial work with Her Story Oratory Play, 100 Words Magazine, and Mid-Wave Chapbook.
- Advanced eco-poetry education and interdisciplinary art projects in galleries, schools, and public spaces.
- Led community initiatives such as the Jersey City Art and Culture Trust Fund Q&A and the Beyond the Cloud Youth Poetry & Music Showcase.
- Earned several notable honors, including:
  - Inaugural Distinguished Alum Award, NJCU
  - "SHERO" Award, Jersey City Women's Advisory Committee
  - Induction into the Bayonne High School Hall of Fame
  - Guest Speaker at the Women of Action Awards Ceremony

For more information on Melida Rodas, please [CLICK HERE](#)



# ARTS & CULTURE TRUST FUND



The Arts & Culture Trust Fund is dedicated to supporting arts organizations and individual artists who enrich Jersey City's cultural landscape, enhance community wellbeing, and contribute to the local economy. It also aims to expand access to arts education, particularly for our youth.

In 2025, its fourth year of operation, the Trust Fund awarded a total of \$1,134,809 in grant funding. Program/Arts Education grants totaled \$561,619, and Operating grants totaled \$455,850, with the maximum award increased to \$30,000.

The Fund is governed by the Arts & Culture Trust Fund Committee, a diverse body of community representatives from each of Jersey City's Wards. It is administered by the Jersey City Office of Cultural Affairs. Each year, an independent grant review panel evaluates applications and provides funding recommendations to the Committee, ensuring a fair and transparent process.



## AVERAGE AWARD AMOUNT

- \$7,910 (Program and Arts Ed Grants) for a total of 71 grantees
- \$21,707 (General Operating Grants) for a total of 21 grantees
- \$5,000 (Artist fellowships administered by the Jersey City Arts Council) for 20 Individual Artists

**56** Program Grant Awards  
**15** Arts Education Awards  
**21** Operating Grant Awards  
**20** Fellowship Grant Awards

## 2025 COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Ward A** Melida Rodas

**Ward B** Lisa Bellan-Boyer

**Ward C** Ann Marley

**Ward D** Sandy Martiny

**Ward E** Nobuki Takamen

**Ward F** Elizabeth Lorenzo-Phillips

**Mayors Rep** Joe Harkins

**Councilwoman** Mira Prinz-Arey (Non-Voting)

**Office of Cultural Affairs** Migdalia Pagan Milano (Non-Voting)

**JC Arts Council** Amy Elise (Non-Voting)

**JCACTF Administrator** Sarah Martinez (Non-Voting)



## SUPPORT FOR APPLICANTS

3 Hybrid in-person Zoom trainings

1 In-person Ward A training and outreach

Step by step webinar available online

Accessibility training session

Captioning and ASL interpreted training sessions

Applications available in multiple languages

Computer access for applicants at all JCFPL Library branches with extended time



# ARTS & CULTURE TRUST FUND

## **PROGRAM GRANT AWARDS**

Area of Refuge \$17,500  
Ariel Rivka Dance \$8,750  
Art Wall JC \$4,375  
Barrow Mansion \$2,500  
Bradley Frizzell \$2,574  
Chris Colonnese \$1,305  
Church of St Paul and Incarnation \$2,500  
Community for Urban Dance and Art \$13,125  
Curious Matter \$8,750  
Dancing Tony Productions 2,500  
Farms in the Heights \$15,200  
Gardenship \$11,250  
Giselle Bellas / Sabor \$17,500  
Gold Carson Sanchez \$8,750  
Golden Door Int'l Film Fest \$5,213  
Gotta Go Gaming Hub \$8,750  
Historic Downtown SID \$8,750  
Hudson West Fest \$13,125  
IMUR Art \$7,500  
Japanese Cultural League of JC \$3,500  
JC Crafting Circle \$8,750

## **PROGRAM GRANT AWARDS CONTD.**

JC Fab Lab \$3,625  
JC Police Athletic League \$8,750  
Jersey City Ballet Theater \$4,325  
JC Free Public Library Foundation \$17,500  
Ladies Wine & Design JC \$13,125  
Levitate Creative Services \$8,750  
Liberty Science Center \$11,250  
Mariana Rodriguez Morete \$10,800  
McGinley Square Partnership SID \$4,875  
Meagan Woods \$8,750  
Mise En Place Project \$4,375  
Monumental Baptist Church \$1,250  
Natallia Basava \$5,000  
Neighbors Studio \$13,125  
Newark Public Radio \$3,500  
NGNRD \$8,750

New Jersey Symphony \$8,750  
NonLinear Knitting Studio \$4,375  
North River Sing \$4,375  
Saint Peter's University \$12,863  
Segunda Quimbamba Folkloric Center \$4,375  
SocietyX \$8,750  
Sound Society \$8,750  
St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church \$5,000  
The Anti-Violence Coalition \$13,125  
The Sound Calendar \$8,750  
The Statuary \$13,125  
TongYan Chinese School \$5,000  
Undead Arts \$13,125  
Urban Inspire \$4,375  
V Productions & Management \$8,032  
Washington Park Association \$2,500  
WAYE Small Press \$13,125  
Whole Spectrum Autism \$8,750  
Xinyi Dance Studio \$2,000

## **ARTS EDUCATION AWARDS**

Braata Productions \$17,500  
Brian Wiseman \$1,606.25  
City Kidz Playhouse \$8,750  
Cocoon Recording Studio \$8,750  
Future Arts Leaders \$2,550  
Give Chances \$13,125  
JC Print Room \$17,500  
Jersey City Art School \$4,375  
Kenia Rosete Dance \$8,750  
NXGN Foundation \$8,750  
Panache Art Studio \$6,150  
Punk Cat Press \$2,250  
Shehnaaz Dance Academy \$8,750  
VAMP \$2,500  
Youth Foundation of Jersey City \$1,250

## **OPERATING GRANT AWARDS**

Art House Productions \$30,000  
Arts 14C \$30,000

Conservatory of Fine Arts \$7,500  
Con Vivo Music \$24,600  
Deep space Gallery \$18,750  
Educational Arts Team \$30,000  
JC Film Group-Sip Studios \$18,750  
JC Theatre Center \$30,000  
JC Writers \$12,500  
MeenMoves \$12,500  
Monira Foundation \$25,000  
Nimbus Dance Works \$30,000  
Pro Arts Jersey City \$12,500  
Riverview Jazz \$30,000  
SMUSH Gallery \$18,750  
Speranza Theatre \$18,750  
Styles House Youth Center \$12,500  
Surati for Performing Arts \$25,000  
The Curtain \$18,750  
The Kennedy Dancers \$25,000  
Victory Hall / Drawing Rooms \$25,000

## **INDIVIDUAL FELLOWSHIP AWARDS**

Alex Megaro  
Alisson Wood  
Alon Nechushtan  
HAMEWS  
Jin Jung  
Josh Urso  
Justin Garcia  
Larissa Belcic  
May Bukowski  
Natasha Dzurny @TechnoChic  
Noah Elijah Woodard  
Rene Saheb  
Rujuta Rao  
Ryan Joseph  
Shannon Pulusan  
Stella Chang  
Umbreen Butt  
Victor Velazquez  
Winard Harper  
Zenzali Lael