International cultural exchange is fundamental to a healthy and progressive civil society. By fostering diversity and respect for different cultures, cultural exchange builds a bulwark against growing xenophobia, racism, nationalism, and the authoritarianism of this troubled historical moment. Unfortunately, at this time when cultural exchange is more essential than ever, international exchange is in crisis; over the last decade financial support has been dramatically cut while there has been a massive increase in the costs and complexity of working across borders. Artist Residency programs concerned with promoting civil society in the U.S. and the intersection of culture and of justice issues urgently need to prioritize cultural exchange and the international movement of artists.

Key Ideas & Definitions

**Visa:** In most situations, except for study or research visits, foreign artists need a work visa in order to be paid for their work in the U.S. Getting a work visa typically costs thousands of dollars and can take months to obtain, and even the most renowned artists can be denied.

**USCIS:** US Citizenship & Immigration Service (formerly “The INS”) determines an artist’s visa eligibility through an extensive “petition” process, typically requiring substantial legal assistance. After thousands of dollars of fees and months of work, many legitimate artists with contracted engagements in the U.S. are still found ineligible for visas.

**DOS:** Department of State adjudicates an artist’s potential ineligibility at an interview at a U.S. embassy. Artists are frequently denied visas because a consular officer subjectively believes an artist is not a “real” artist, or that they will illegally emigrate. The “Travel Ban,” and “Extreme Vetting,” have created new hurdles, especially for artists from the Global South.

**Action Steps for Artists Residency Programs**

1. Commit to developing or prioritizing international cultural mobility and exchange projects. Build these into ongoing programs to integrate the international with the national and the local.

2. Prioritize supporting projects that feature artists from regions and countries that lack resources to support costs of international travel and touring.

3. Proactively and collaboratively work with other partners to help rebuild the international cultural exchange sector in the US locally, nationally and internationally.

4 Advocate to your funding and philanthropy partners the need and value of international cultural exchange.

5. Leverage your influence locally and nationally to advocate for progressive reform of the bureaucratic burdens that inhibit international cultural projects.
Cultural Mobility Sessions:

- October 14: Grantmakers in the Arts Conference, Denver, CO
  *International Cultural Exchange, Mobility, and the Future of U.S. Civil Society*

- October 29: Alliance of Artists Communities Conference, St Paul, MN
  *International Cultural Exchange, Mobility, and the Future of U.S. Civil Society*

- November 13: CEC ArtsLink Assembly, NYC, NY
  *International Cultural Exchange, Mobility, and the Future of U.S. Civil Society*

- January 12: Association of Performing Arts Professionals Conference, NYC, NY
  *Global Priorities: Funders, Presenters, and International Cultural Exchange*

Artists Mobility Resources

- Tamizdat ([www.tamizdat.org](http://www.tamizdat.org)) provides pro bono legal assistance to the international performing arts community.

- Artists From Abroad ([www.artistsfromabroad.org](http://www.artistsfromabroad.org)) is the definitive online resource for U.S. artist visa information.

- On the Move ([www.on-the-move.org](http://www.on-the-move.org)) is a network of national artist mobility information sources, primarily in Europe.

Panelists for October 29th Alliance of Artists Communities panel:

*International Cultural Exchange, Mobility and the Future of U.S. Civil Society*

- **Matthew Covey**, Executive Director, Tamizdat, NYC
- **Simon Dove**, Executive Director, CEC ArtsLink, NYC
- **Rachmi Diyah Larasati**, Associate Professor, University of Minnesota
- **MeghaRalapati**, Residency Manager, Hyde Park Arts Center, Chicago.
- **Margaret Shiu**, Founder, Bamboo Curtain Studio, Taipei

"What is happening to the world lies, at the moment, just outside the realm of common human understanding. It is the writers, the poets, the artists, the singers, the filmmakers who can make the connections, who can find the ways of bringing it into the realm of common understanding. Who can translate cash-flow charts and scintillating boardroom speeches into real stories about real people with real lives. Stories about what it’s like to lose your home, your land, your job, your dignity, your past, and your future to an invisible force. To someone or something you can't see. You can’t hate. You can't even imagine." — Arundhati Roy

*For more information please contact Boo Froebel at boo@tamizdat.org*