

July 21, 2026

Memorandum**Date:** July 14, 2026**To:** Honorable Chairman Anthony Rodriguez
and Members, Board of County Commissioners**From:** Daniella Levine Cava
Mayor

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daniella Levine Cava".

Subject: Mayoral Appointment - Director of the Department of Cultural Affairs
RECEIVED BY CLERK
 Clerk of the Court & Comptroller
 Miami-Dade County, Florida
FILED FOR RECORD

2:34 pm, 07/14/2026

CLERK OF THE BOARD

Pursuant to the authority vested in me under Section 2.02(C) of the Miami-Dade County Home Rule Charter, I hereby appoint Ashlee K. Thomas as Director of the Department of Cultural Affairs, effective immediately. This appointment is the result of a national recruitment search for a permanent director and is being presented in accordance with the Board Rules of Procedure.

As a Miami native with deep ties to the local community, a strong understanding of the County's cultural infrastructure, and more than 25 years of experience across the arts, nonprofit leadership, and public administration, Ashlee has the skill, knowledge, and vision to build coalitions and turn ideas into action, with the support of our community. In fact, throughout the recruitment process, Ashlee was consistently nominated and enthusiastically supported for this role, reflecting the credibility and confidence she has built across the arts and culture community.

Ashlee has most recently demonstrated her administrative acumen as Interim Director of Cultural Affairs since September 2025 and Deputy Director since November 2023. During that time, she has reduced department-wide spending, implemented financial savings, and led public engagement efforts related to the long-awaited Coconut Grove Playhouse Project, resulting in a recent approval to begin Phase 2. Prior to joining the County, Ashlee served as President of Miami Urban Contemporary Experience (MUCE), an arts production organization she led for eight years, where she oversaw programming, fundraising, and operations, while managing teams and delivering large-scale cultural events. Her broader background as a performing artist, educator, and creative leader provides a practitioner-informed understanding of the needs of artists and nonprofit organizations. Overall, Ashlee brings a powerful combination of continuity, execution, and trust across Miami-Dade's cultural ecosystem.

Ashlee holds a baccalaureate degree in business marketing from Florida State University, a master's degree in public administration from Florida International University, and a master's in fine arts from New York University. Her resume is attached for your reference.

With her strong support from the community and proven experience, I am confident in Ashlee's steady leadership and her ability as permanent director to navigate shifting funding environments, maintain forward momentum, and elevate Miami and our talented artists on the local and global stage. Please join me in congratulating Ashlee on this formal appointment.

Attachment

c: Geri Bonzon-Keenan, County Attorney
 Jess McCarty, First Assistant County Attorney
 Office of the Mayor Senior Staff
 Department Directors
 Yinka Majekodunmi, Commission Auditor
 Christina Cicilia, Office of Policy and Budgetary Affairs
 Basia Pruna, Director, Clerk of the Board
 Eugene Love, Agenda Coordinator

MDC001

Core strengths include:

- strategy and development for small & midsize nonprofit
- Write and Manage grant awards
- Administering low-cost/high-value cultural experiences
- Team building & fostering future leadership
- creative event planning for public private partnerships
- Directing, Writing, Stage Management, basic tech
- talent development towards professional track
- cultural facility creation & management

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

MIAMI DADE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS – Miami, FL

The Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs support Miami-Dade County’s more than 1,000 nonprofit cultural organizations as well as thousands of resident artists through grants, technical assistance, public information and interactive community planning. The Department directs the Art in Public Places program and serves its board, the Art in Public Places Trust, commissioning, curating, maintaining and promoting the County’s art collection. The Department also manages, programs and operates the Marshall L. Davis Sr. African Heritage Cultural Arts Center, Dennis C. Moss Cultural Arts Center, Joseph Caleb Auditorium, and Miami-Dade County Auditorium, all dedicated to presenting and supporting excellence in the arts for the entire community.

INTERIM DIRECTOR Sept '25 - present

Director’s responsibilities: directing, through subordinate levels of professional and support staff, the budgetary and financial strategies and components of the Department’s work, overseeing the four main divisions of the Department. Represent the county in all cultural affairs matter with the office of the Mayor, Board of County Commission and other public and private entities in the absence of Department Director.

- Direct the development and maintenance of the Department’s strategic business plan and the analysis of goals and objectives of the Department; ensure programs and services are aligned with community cultural needs and requirements; analyzes departmental operations and develops improved and/or new policies, procedures and plans to improve overall effectiveness; makes recommendations concerning pertinent legislative matters
- Oversee the coordination of cultural affairs operations and activities with other County departments, senior County management and elected officials
- Manage an ongoing interactive public planning process; identifies key issues and needs; develops coalitions of diverse organizations and individuals to implement cultural affairs projects; initiates special projects and model programs to address areas of priority attention or opportunity
- Oversee board meetings of the Department’s advisory boards (Cultural Affairs Council, Art in Public Places Trust and Tourist Development Council) and grants program panels and develop procedures for effective operations of citizen volunteer boards and panels
- Represent the Department on boards, task forces and committees involved in issues related to cultural affairs
- Review and analyze current Department programs, services and initiatives and make recommendations to improve accessibility, equity and effectiveness
- Develop and direct evaluation and monitoring processes pertaining to cultural affairs organizations and activities; advises constituents on administrative and program management issues and solutions to problems
- Provide oversight regarding hiring, discipline and promotion of subordinates; evaluates and rates employee performance; authorizes leave and overtime; exercises authority for departmental personnel actions consistent with collective bargaining agreements, county personnel rules and other applicable rules and regulations.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR Nov '23 – Aug '25

Deputy responsibilities: directing, through subordinate levels of professional and support staff, the budgetary and financial strategies and components of the Department’s work, overseeing the four main divisions of the Department. Represent the county in all cultural affairs matter with the office of the Mayor, Board of County Commission and other public and private entities in the absence of Department Director.

- Supported the development of the Department’s strategic business plan and the analysis of goals and objectives of the Department; ensures that programs and services are equitable and aligned with community cultural needs and requirements; analyzes departmental operations and develops improved and/or new policies, procedures and plans to improve overall effectiveness; makes recommendations concerning pertinent legislative matters
- Assisted the Department Director in coordinating cultural affairs operations and activities with other County

departments, senior County management and elected officials

- Managed an ongoing interactive public planning process; identifies key issues and needs; develops coalitions of diverse organizations and individuals to implement cultural affairs projects; initiates special projects and model programs to address areas of priority attention or opportunity
- Attended board meetings of the Department's advisory boards (Cultural Affairs Council, Art in Public Places Trust and Tourist Development Council) and grants program panels and develops procedures for effective operations of citizen volunteer boards and panels
- Represented the Department on boards, task forces and committees involved in issues related to cultural affairs
- Reviewed and analyzed current Department programs, services and initiatives and makes recommendations to improve accessibility, equity and effectiveness
- Developed and directs evaluation and monitoring processes pertaining to cultural affairs organizations and activities; advises constituents on administrative and program management issues and solutions to problems
- Assisted the Department Director with decisions regarding hiring, discipline and promotion of subordinates; evaluates and rates employee performance; authorizes leave and overtime; exercises authority for departmental personnel actions consistent with collective bargaining agreements, county personnel rules and other applicable rules and regulations.

MIAMI URBAN CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE (MUCE) – Miami, FL

Award-winning Arts production company committed to diversifying the artistic landscape of the western world. Pop-up Art Exhibitions, Cultural Festivals, and programming; bringing niched-heritage experiences to corporate & municipal clients.

PRESIDENT May '15 – Oct '23

President's responsibilities: Lead development strategist for programming, growth and development of company. Pitch on behalf of company, create/manage contracts, grant writer, financial settlements, budgeting, supervisor, transform company vision into tangible results.

- Created, implemented and managed the annual strategic plan for the company
- Acquired & retained clients to maintain annual operational target of \$500,000
- Company Grant Writer; awarded over \$300k in grant support since 2015
- Supervised a team of 32 administrative and production contractors; led weekly production meetings
- Managed financial settlements, budget, payments, corporate taxes, and strategies on opportunities for growth
- Served as the face and voice of the company, present and pitch on behalf of the organization
- Cultivated new relationships with government officials and corporate clients
- Served as Festival Director for contract city festivals with budgets of \$150K
- Explored and submit for RFP, cultural bids, and Business competitions for the company; awarded \$300K
- Operated the MUCE Campus, a 30K sq ft cultural facility: rentals, maintenance, community gallery, eventspace

ARTS EDUCATOR May '16 – Oct '23

Responsibilities: Create content for performances, program activities, instruct & perform at various creative events.

- Programmed (4) 1hr long performances for Universe of Stories, North Miami Public Library (110 students)
- Director, Writer of (3) 1hr long performances for Universe of Stories, North Miami Public Library (110 students)
- Tour guide & activities programmer for the SBCCDC Pop-Up Art Exhibit & Cultural Day (300 Campers)
- Host & Activities programmer for Uptown Avenue 7 Arts & Culture festival (800 students)

ENLIGHTENED THEATER – Los Angeles, CA

An international performance company promoting self awareness & artistic excellence

FOUNDER, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR Oct 2010 – Jan 2013

Founder responsibilities: *Choreography, instruction, creative direction of performances & education programs*

- International Guest Dance Teacher: Australia (Fintona School for Girls), Guyana (Secondary College), Haiti (Haiti United Partnership), Trinidad (University of Trinidad)
- Produced & Directed international piece, "Wombman" in Los Angeles, CA & Melbourne, Australia
- Selected for the prestigious Highways Performance Space summer series in Los Angeles, CA
- Created & Facilitated leadership workshops for young & aspiring artists interested in activism & social change
- Produced & Directed: Ordered Chaos (2010), The Women's Collective (2011), "Wombman" (2012)
- Choreographer for GRAMMY nominated, Licenciado Cantinas, starring Enrique Burnbury (2012)
- Principal Actress, Geico Commercial (2010)
- Choreographer for the award Winning, For Colored Girls... produced by Alexia Robins Studio, Los Angels (2010)

Provided subsidized arts workshop for (28) at-risk youth at Compton Community Center through year

CONTRA-TIEMPO URBAN LATIN DANCE THEATER – Los Angeles, CA

A Los Angeles based; activist dance company dedicated to transforming the world through dance.

CO-DIRECTOR SUMMER ARTS ACADEMY, PERFORMER.....Nov. 2009 - Oct 2012

Created the first Summer youth program for CONTRA-TIEMPO, serving as location scout, enrollment manager & outreach coordinator whilst fulfilling duties as a performer and educator for the company.

- Created a new stream of revenue of \$30K and summer employment for 8 company members
- Secured summer academy location; negotiated contract and rates for rental
- Formulated dance curriculum with an emphasis on history, social activism, and community development appropriate for youth aged, 5-15
- Managed schedules for 8 employees; facilitated training workshops (curriculum, classroom management)
- Served as touring performer and arts educator: NYC, MN, MT, AZ, NC, CA

AFRICAN HERITAGE CULTURAL ARTS CENTER, MIAMI DADE COUNTY CULTURAL AFFAIRS – Miami, FL

The mission: to provide quality training in performing/visual arts and explore the artistic heritage of the African Diaspora.

THEATER MANAGERMay '06 – July '07

Theater Manager responsibilities: Develop young talent for magnet theater programs. Maintain youth theater company attendance. Direct & Produce shows. Maintain Black box theater. Bring positive awareness to the center that increases attendance and retention.

- Created all curriculum for theater program. Upon approval of director, executed coursework in all classrooms
- Re-established the African Heritage Youth Theater (AHYT) increasing enrollment 25-member troupe
- Produced 2 mainstage Youth Performances (Aesop's fables, Aladdin) and 2 student showcases
- Created theater excursion program that allowed students to attend 6 theater field trips per year
- Managed marketing for the theater program (brochures, fliers, playbills)
- Coordinated parent-teacher meetings that inspired fundraising and sustained enrollment

EDUCATION

New York University – Master in Fine Arts, 2023

Musical Theater Writing

Florida International University – Masters in Public Administration, 2016

Honors Graduate, Pi Alpha Alpha

Florida State University - Bachelor of Science, 2006

Business Marketing, Bright Future Scholar

National Pan-Hellenic Council, President * Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Treasurer

Delta Sigma Pi Business Fraternity, Pledge Event Coordinator

New World School of the Arts, Associate of Arts, 2002

Musical Theater: basic acting, classical theater, movement for the stage, theater tech
Auditioning, dance, tap, pantomime, Camera Acting, Lighting, Sound, Voice, Script writing, Improvisation

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority · Delta Sigma Pi Fraternity · New World School of the Arts Alumni Association
FSU Alumni Association · Burning Spear ·

PERFORMANCE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

US: Los Angeles, San Diego, Washington DC, NYC, NC, TX, MT, MN, AZ, GA
Int'l: Australia, S. Korea, Panama, Cuba, Guyana, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Trinidad