

***Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning
presents JCAL TALKS***

***A Free Online Speaker Series
with Queens Thought Leaders***

***First guest: Melva M. Miller, CEO
Association for a Better New York***



January 19, 2021 (New York) – In February 2021, Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning introduces **JCAL Talks**, a new speaker series spotlighting Queens-based thought leaders in arts and culture, education and politics, and civic and community life. The inaugural **JCAL Talks** guest will be **Melva M. Miller**, Chief Executive Officer of the Association for a Better New York (ABNY), a native of Southeast Queens and long a borough champion. Set for **Tuesday, February 16, 7pm** and presented as a 60-minute live-stream to JCAL’s YouTube and Facebook platforms, Ms. Miller will be in conversation with JCAL Interim Executive Director **Leonard Jacobs**, followed by a curated Q&A.



For Immediate Release

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“Queens has always produced more than its fair share of thought leaders and influencers,” Jacobs noted. “At a time when our city is being re-energized by social justice and change, JCAL wishes to celebrate the great American tradition of public discourse and community building. We’re honored that Melva Miller—who embodies the pride and promise of our borough—shares this vision and will be the inaugural guest for **JCAL Talks**.”

“We’ve welcomed Ms. Miller to JCAL many times, from her tenure as Executive Director of the Sutphin BID to her years as Deputy Queens Borough President,” added JCAL Interim Artistic Director Courtney Ffrench. “But she’s also special to JCAL due of her faith in the power of creative expression—her love of music, dance and arts education. For us, she defines ‘thought leader.’”

“I’m delighted to be the inaugural speaker for **JCAL Talks**,” commented Miller, who joined ABNY in 2018 and was named CEO last August. “I was raised, and still live in Southeast Queens, so Queens in very much a part of my identity. Certainly, all five boroughs are critical to New York City’s vitality, especially as we emerge from the pandemic. Yet there’s no question that Queens remains especially vital to our City’s overall economic, social and cultural recovery.”

JCAL Talks, one of several new JCAL programs premiering during Black History Month, engages the diverse spectrum of thought leaders who live in, represent and originate from Queens. **JCAL Talks** will amplify their voices and perspectives, and align with JCAL’s “Community First, Digital First” season. A biography for Ms. Miller follows.

About JCAL

Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning (JCAL), founded in 1972, is a multidisciplinary arts center based in the diverse community of Southeast Queens. Our mission is devoted to offering quality visual, performing, and literary arts, and to providing accessible education programs to encourage participation in the arts. JCAL’s offices and arts spaces are open in strict accordance with state and local COVID-19 guidelines. Operating hours by appointment: Monday to Friday, 10am to 6pm, and galleries on Saturdays; closed major holidays. For additional information, call JCAL at 718-658-7400 or visit www.JCAL.org.



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Biography for Melva M. Miller

Melva M. Miller, the Association for a Better New York's first Chief Executive Officer, works with the Board of Directors to ensure the overall success of the organization through economic development, long-term planning, stakeholder engagement, strategic partnerships, and the expansion and evolution of ABNY's membership. Prior to this role, Ms. Miller led the organization's Census initiative for an accurate count of New York where she supported and supplemented the 2020 census efforts by the US Census Bureau, State and City of New York, and in coordination with community-based organizations in an effort to help New York City and State achieve the most accurate census count possible.

A resident of South East Queens, Ms. Miller has dedicated her life to community development through equitable economic growth, creative organizing and inclusive stakeholder participation. Ms. Miller started her community work in 1993 when she began working with children using the arts as a tool to promote civic responsibility while fostering positive imagery of youth in her community. Through this work, Ms. Miller used dance, music and artistic expression as a conduit for community empowerment, collective consciousness and individual pride. She then sought to supplement her tacit community development knowledge with evidenced-based practice and attended the Hunter College School of Social Work where she earned a Master's degree in Community Organization and Planning, and received the school's Dorothy North McNeal Award for achievement in Community Organization.

Upon graduation, Ms. Miller quickly put her formal organizing training to work and became the founding Executive Director of the Sutphin Boulevard Business Improvement District (BID). While leading this community based not-for-profit organization, she created and administered programs that served as catalysts for economic revitalization along Sutphin Boulevard in downtown Jamaica, Queens. During her tenure, she was charged with providing supplemental sanitation and security services throughout the district while advocating for the growth of local small businesses. She also implemented marketing strategies to boost local economic development and enhanced neighborhood quality of life for local businesses and residents by building partnerships and local and regional coalitions. While at the BID, she also served as Project Director of the Downtown Jamaica Cultural District formed to support to the artistic development of downtown Jamaica through marketing, brand identity, cultural development, public space utilization and real estate initiatives.

July of 2007, Ms. Miller joined the Office of the Queens Borough President to serve as key advisor on, and provide assistance to, small businesses throughout Queens, and to develop a borough-wide workforce development strategy to support the borough's under and unemployed populations. June of 2008, she was promoted to Director of Economic Development and among her new responsibilities, implemented a \$13 million capital improvement program designed to encourage economic growth and sustainability in commercial corridors throughout Queens. In February of 2015, Ms. Miller was appointed to the post of Deputy Queens Borough President charged with serving as second in-command in New York City government's highest executive office in Queens county, representing over 2.3 million residents and managing over 150 employees. In addition to this role, she continued as the Economic Development Director creating and implementing a borough-wide strategy to enhance the Borough's economic growth through the creation of comprehensive neighborhood initiatives that promoted commercial growth, good paying jobs, and quality of life improvements throughout 107 Queens neighborhoods. Ms. Miller's achievements include the creation of the Jamaica NOW Action Plan, a \$153 million stakeholder-driven strategy to increase quality employment, economic diversity and financial security in downtown Jamaica, and led the Western Queens Tech Strategic Plan, an initiative that produced a five-year \$300,000 planning initiative that produced a blueprint for equitable growth of the Long Island City and Astoria tech ecosystem.



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Ms. Miller holds a Bachelor's degree from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a Master's degree in Social Work from Hunter College School of Social Work, and recently received a second Master's Degree in Philosophy from The Graduate Center at the City University of New York. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Social Welfare program at CUNY's Graduate Center. Ms. Miller has been on the Board of Directors of the New York City Economic Development Corporation since 2009 and also serves on the Boards of Habitat for Humanity New York City and Greater Jamaica Development Corporation.