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For June 30, 2016

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This Pass Might Help Get More Toddlers Into New York City's Museums

The Cool Culture pass helps low-income families introduce their children to cultural institutions



(David Arpi via Flickr)



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By [Danny Lewis](#)
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New York City is home to some of the world's finest art museums, but many low-income families don't frequent them. Even for those who live just around the corner from museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Museum Of Modern Art, it can be hard for families to justify spending the set or suggested entry fee if they are working hard just to make rent and put enough food on the table. On a more institutionalized level, many also can't shake the feeling that these museums aren't meant for their families, especially if they never went to museums as a child themselves, [Erin Egan Rodriguez writes for *The Lo-Down New York*](#).

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However, one non-profit organization is working to help introduce tens of thousands of New York City's toddlers to art at a young age by giving out cards granting them and their families free access to many of the city's museums and cultural institutions.

Every year, Cool Culture offers 50,000 "Cool Culture Cards" to preschoolers and kindergartners throughout New York City. Typically offered through public and charter schools that serve low-income communities, the cards allow the holder and up to four other people free entry to [90 of the city's top cultural institutions](#), such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, the New York Botanical Gardens and the Cooper Hewitt-Smithsonian Design Museum.

"We want all families regardless of ethnicity or income to be able to access the rich culture in New York City," said Candice Anderson, Cool Culture's executive director [tells Julianne Welby for WNYC News](#).



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Marlow White, an East Harlem resident who got a Cool Culture pass for his daughter through her pre-K program says that there are generational barriers in place that can deter people from introducing their children to museums. "I think it can be challenging sometimes for folks, especially folks of color," White tells Welby. "Even though my family and my parents were wonderful people, nobody gave them that, so they couldn't give that to me."

Cool Culture has been offering these passes for several years, but it isn't the only group trying to bridge the gap between low-income families and museums. The Association of Children's Museums and the Institute of Museums and Library Services runs a nationwide program called [Museums for All](#) that offers reduced admission for families that qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, [Eileen Cunniffe wrote for *Nonprofit Quarterly*](#) in January.

In recent years, museums in cities like Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles have either joined up with Museums for All or begun offering similar programs to their communities as well.

"I think as long as we have a community within the museum that reflects those that live around the museum in its entirety, that is great," Chicago Children's Museum spokesperson Twania Brewster told [Brianna Gurciullo for the *Chicago Tribune*](#). "Whether or not that lifts our [visitor] numbers to soaring heights — that's not the goal. Our goal is to have a really diverse and amazing space."

As [studies have shown](#), introducing children to museums at an early age can help create culturally aware adults. Breaking down financial and cultural barriers to getting kids from low-income communities to museums won't happen overnight. But programs like these can help break this cycle.