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Mayor names cultural affairs chief for L.A.

Olga Garay, a New York-based independent producer and performing arts consultant, will develop a "cultural master plan."

By Diane Haithman, Times Staff Writer

Pending the approval of the City Council, Mayor Villaraigosa has named Olga Garay to head the city's Department of Cultural Affairs.

Most recently, Garay, 54, has been a New York-based independent producer and performing arts consultant. She is working with the Lincoln Center Festival in Manhattan to present Spanish-language theater. She is also involved in strategic planning for New York's Museo del Barrio and other arts groups.



Olga Garay

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In an interview Monday, Garay, whose family emigrated from Cuba to Florida when she was 8, said the luxury of having once overseen arts grants for a wealthy foundation did not deter her from seeking the job of overseeing L.A.'s more modest \$9.9-million cultural affairs budget.

However, she added that the mayor's commitment to increasing cultural funding was part

Before turning to producing and consulting, she served for eight years as program director for the arts at the Doris Duke Foundation, one of the country's largest arts donors with \$1.8 billion in assets. More than \$145 million in grants was awarded during her tenure.

Garay would succeed Margie Reese, who stepped down as general manager of cultural affairs last summer to take a position coordinating arts and cultural grant-making in West Africa for the Ford Foundation. Karen Constine has been serving as interim general

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of the package. "I was insistent that money was one of the key issues that I needed to talk about with the mayor," she said. "And in my meeting with him, I didn't have to say a word — the first words out of his mouth were: 'I know, I know, we're underperforming.' He was really committed to giving priority to this department, to having someone come in and really galvanize it."

Garay said her previous positions, including assistant director of the Miami-Dade County Cultural Affairs Council and director of cultural affairs at Miami Dade College, have required her to work with tight budgets. And she added of her foundation work: "It wasn't, 'I'm up in this ivory tower, thinking big thoughts.' It was, 'How do we put this money into the arts sector in the smartest and most direct fashion?'"

Garay also said she was pleased that the mayor had earmarked \$250,000 to develop a "cultural master plan." It really is a tremendous gift to be able to walk into an institution that says, 'We want you to deploy this money to engage the entire community,' " she said.

Adolfo Nodal, a former cultural affairs manager who serves as acting chair of the Cultural Affairs Commission, an advisory group to the city department, hailed Garay's appointment. "She has incredible amounts of energy and lots of experience. The support of the arts in the city is going to grow exponentially with her at the helm."

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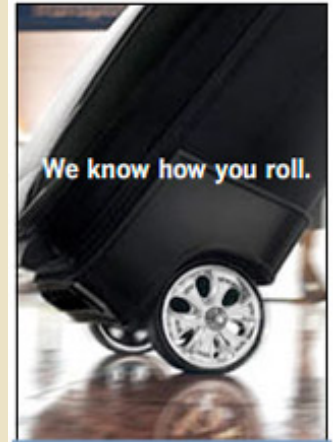
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