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At Van Alen Institute, we believe design can
transform cities, landscapes, and regions to
improve people's lives.

Urban Design Forum and Van Alen Institute Launch *Neighborhoods Now*

NYC communities hard-hit by pandemic and major design firms to collaborate on reopening strategies

(June 16, 2020—New York City)—In New York City and across the country, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected communities of color. This crisis threatens to shutter small businesses and expand the racial wealth gap in neighborhoods that already lack access to resources and capital as a result of long-term structural inequity and racism. In response, and in a move to channel the talent of New York's top design firms into these communities' recovery, the Urban Design Forum and Van Alen Institute today launched *Neighborhoods Now*.

Neighborhoods Now connects four neighborhoods hard-hit by the pandemic — represented by leading local organizations — with more than twenty design firms in the Urban Design Forum and Van Alen's collective network. In **Bed-Stuy, Jackson Heights, Kingsbridge, and Washington Heights**, these working groups will collaborate through August 2020 to develop safe and effective reopening strategies. As the city reopens on a broader scale, this initiative provides the opportunity for experimentation and innovation at the neighborhood level. Each working group will develop tailored solutions for shared gathering spaces in those neighborhoods, which may include restaurants, storefronts, civic and cultural organizations, parks, and streets.

Community partners

- Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn: [Bed-Stuy Gateway BID](#) and [Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation](#)
- Jackson Heights, Queens: [82nd Street BID](#)
- Kingsbridge, Bronx: [Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition](#)
- Washington Heights, Manhattan: [Community League of the Heights](#)

Coordinating design firms

- [Arup](#)
- [COOKFOX](#)
- [KPF](#)
- [Moody Nolan](#)
- Volunteer Architects Limited ([ARO](#), [LTL Architects](#), [MOS](#), [nARCHITECTS](#), [SO-IL](#), [WorkAC](#))

Supporting firms

Abruzzo Bodziak Architects; Architensions; Barker Associates Architecture Office; Bednark Studio Inc.; Brandt : Haferd; Bureau V; Büro Koray Duman;

Frederick Tang Architecture; Fried Frank; Future Expansion Architects; Gensler; Grimshaw; Jaklitsch / Gardner Architects; James Corner Field Operations; Kalos Eidos; Lea Architecture; Michael K. Chen Architecture; MNLA; New Affiliates; Office of Architecture; Office of Tangible Space; Only If Architecture; Overlay Office; PARC Office; Partner & Partners; Perkins and Will; Scalar Architecture PC; Silman; Smith & Sauer; Some People Studio; Space 4 Architecture; Stantec; Studio Cadena; Studio Fōr; Studio Libeskind; W Architecture; WIP Studio; Woods Bagot; Worrell/Yeung

The outcome will be a set of design recommendations, prototypes, and installations empowering communities to respond to their immediate needs, while contributing to the city-wide strategy on pandemic response. Recommendations will address how to reconfigure businesses to protect workers and customers; how to outfit community parks and gardens for social distancing; how to navigate permitting for sidewalk or parking lane temporary uses; or how to repurpose vacant spaces as places for convening, culture, and healing.

“Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition is excited to be partnering with the Urban Design Forum and Van Alen Institute on the *Neighborhoods Now* initiative that is supporting local businesses and organizations to re-open safely. The Bronx has been the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic and these services are critical to helping our community recover,” said **Sandra Lobo, Executive Director, Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition**, one of *Neighborhood Now*'s community partners.

“During this unprecedented time, Moody Nolan has a continued commitment to use design and our voice as vehicles for positive change. As New York City begins the reopening process, we are optimistic about the ways our involvement in the *Neighborhoods Now* program will impact some of the city's most vulnerable communities. This moment in history also opens the door for dialogue on the critical need for organizations to implement real diversity throughout its ranks and distribution of contracts,” said **Latoya Kamdang, senior associate and director of New York operations for Moody Nolan**, one of *Neighborhood Now*'s coordinating firms.

The initiative will be bookended by two programs open to the public:

Neighborhoods Now Kickoff

Friday, June 26, 9–11 am

Zoom ([register here](#))

This kick-off session will bring the *Neighborhood Now* working groups together with the general public to learn about the practical considerations of reopening. A range of experts will present perspectives from the fields of public health,

economic development, material science, and other professions to inform the working groups' process.

Expert speakers include:

- Luisa Borrell, CUNY
- Melissa Fleischut, New York State Restaurant Association
- Alison Mears, Healthy Materials Lab, New School
- Andrea Batista Schlesinger, HR&A Advisors
- Barika Williams, Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development

Neighborhoods Now Share-Out

Late summer, date TBA

In this concluding summit, each working group will share back their outcomes with other neighborhood organizations, city leaders, and the public. Details to come.

About Urban Design Forum

Urban Design Forum mobilizes civic leaders to confront the defining issues facing New York City's built environment. We are an independent membership organization that empowers professionals of diverse backgrounds, industries and perspectives to shape a better future for all New Yorkers. We investigate complex challenges in the built environment, study alternative approaches from cities around the world, and advance progressive strategies to build a more dynamic and democratic city.

See all work at urbandesignforum.org.

About Van Alen Institute

Van Alen Institute envisions a world where cities, landscapes and regions support every human being's full potential. To achieve this, we help communities build social and physical resilience through inclusive design. Building on 125 years of experience, we collaborate with communities, scholars, policymakers, and professionals on local and global initiatives that rigorously investigate the most pressing social, cultural, and ecological challenges of tomorrow.

With a core belief in an interdisciplinary approach to design, the Van Alen team has backgrounds in urban planning, public health, civic advocacy, community engagement, and arts and culture.

See all work at vanalen.org.